

## HENRY JAMES'S IRONICAL DRAMA OF PERCEPTION IN "THE BEAST IN THE JUNGLE"

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When we see the world of Henry James's creation, we are provided with a variety of impressions and experiences, through which we may perceive his moral vision. The reality is presented very subjectively, since his moral vision is reflected in decisions and emotions arising out of the personality of each character, placed in certain testing circumstances. Therefore, the reality he presents us tends to be difficult to measure and objectify, sometimes hard for us to immerse ourselves in. However, James is conscious of his readers in the development of his fictitious world, no matter how individualistic and unique each character's world or experience is. Though there is, he says, "the least obligation to *like* . . . a particular kind of writing,"<sup>1</sup> the reader is given an important role; he respects the reader in the status of the writer's partner in making the representation succeed. He discusses the relationship between the writer and the reader as follows:

In every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters. When he makes him ill, that is, makes him indifferent, he does no work; the writer does all. When he makes him well, that is, makes him interested, then the reader does quite the labour. In making such a deduction as I have just indicated, the reader would be doing but his share of the task; the grand point is to get him to make it. I hold that there is a way. It is perhaps a secret; but until it is found out, I think that the art of story-telling cannot be said to have approached perfection.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, he believes that the success of fiction depends on both the writer's

techniques and the reader's perception.

We might wonder how James objectifies the subjective world of consciousness and shares its value with the reader. The analysis of points of view and other narrative techniques will serve to explore how he connects his fictitious world with the reader's interpretations. In this paper we will discuss how Henry James gives one form of art to the subjective world of consciousness in "The Beast in the Jungle."

"The Beast in the Jungle," written in 1901, is a story about a man haunted by fear that something will happen to him. John Marcher, the protagonist, is obsessed with the fear, envisioning it as "a crouching beast in the jungle,"<sup>3</sup> and eventually keeps himself from seeing the unlikelihood. At the end of the story his career "resolves itself into a great negative adventure."<sup>4</sup> The plot is centered on his changing process as "the blinded seeker,"<sup>5</sup> which brings upon him the destiny of having been "*the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened" (311). This singleness of action and details gives a compressed unity to the whole story; in almost every thought and development in the story, there inheres the irony of a man who blindly waits for something only to find nothingness in life.

This underlying irony is intertwined with ironical differences in recognition among John Marcher, May Bartram, and the narrator. The story seems to be designed for us readers to perceive gradually the differences through the development of the story: like a subtly-made detective story, Marcher's case is first represented to us as a riddle and then reveals its ironical differences resulting from varied points of view. Inspiring our intellectual curiosity, the narrative voice gives us clues one by one, letting us know what we ought to see in a manner quite unlike the way Marcher envisions things. As Henry James says in his preface to the New York Edition, he holds "the subject of this elaborated fantasy . . . a successful thing only as its motive

may seem to the reader to stand out sharp."<sup>6</sup> Appealing to the reader for active participation in Marcher's experience of "the blinded seeker," Henry James employs different narrative techniques to heighten the effect of the underlying irony and suspense in the story.

First of all, characterization of the protagonist serves as one source of the underlying irony. As we see the process of Marcher's experience, we realize the ironical difference between what he supposes himself to be and what he actually is. One of the significant features of his characterization is that he considers himself as "a man of feeling" (287). It is evident from the beginning of the story that he is characterized as a very sensitive man: he has been haunted by apprehensions that something will happen to him, and has actually lived with growing conviction of it day by day. We first touch his private secret when May Bartram meets him again at Weatherend after ten years' absence and surprises him by recalling to his memory the confidence he shared with her before:

"You said you had had from your earliest time, as the deepest thing within you, the sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen to you, that you had in your bones the foreboding and the conviction of, and that would perhaps overwhelm you." (282)

It is noteworthy that we start our adventure into Marcher's experience not with his confession but with May's words, and that the story starts with his rediscovery of his obsession from memory, not with the scene where he revealed his secret to May. Marcher himself has completely forgotten that he revealed his private apprehension to May. Even in this incident we cannot help doubting if he is in reality "a man of feeling" as he supposes himself to be.

There is another feature of his characterization which indicates an ironical

difference between his reality and his self-estimation. Marcher compares his life to “a tiger-hunt” (287). He adopts the image because his life of waiting for the beast to come is too dangerous for any woman to get involved with. However, in reality he himself is far from a tiger-hunter; the way he holds himself in readiness for his beast is contrary to that of a tiger-hunter or a “seeker.” His attitude toward his apprehension for the future is passive, like that of an inactive recipient viewing events that he has no control or influence over: it lacks strong intention, energy, and passion for game. In other words, his passion and energy do not go outward but accumulate inwardly to make him blind to anything else. He says to May:

“It hasn’t yet come. Only, you know, it isn’t anything I’m to *do*, to achieve in the world, to be distinguished or admired for. . . .”

“ . . . [it is] to wait for—to have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life . . .” (283)

Contrary to his self-estimation as a tiger-hunter, the narrative voice describes his attention as “a hump on one’s back” (287) and tells us that he believes waiting and watching in silence is his best manner of vigil for facing his beast. His passive attitude of waiting that requires no action of violence or courage leads him to obsession and blindness to reality, and eventually to self-deceiving egotism. While reading the first two sections, we recognize his incapacity for anything, much less such a dramatic fate as he anticipates: he is too blind, too timid to see anything beside what he thinks will happen to him in the future.

We can see his egotism and blindness to reality clearly and objectively through his relationship with May. Through the whole story he always takes, if May gives: his selfish adventure is based on her devotion to their vigil, devotion he never really recognizes or values until the end. The story begins

with their reunion after ten years' absence, as we have seen. It is she that fills up the gap and supplies the missing link. She is not willing to take the initiative but is forced to because "the fact of his having so breathed his secret had unaccountably faded from him" (282).

Her knowledge of the secret of his life and sympathy for him are appreciated in his unconscious and self-centered calculation. He finds her knowledge "a new luxury to him" (282), and feels he can "profit" (282) by "it [her knowledge] to the utmost" (286). The following image vividly represents how much her knowledge means to Marcher himself and at the same time implies to us another meaning—his selfish taking:

. . . for our gentleman [Marcher] this [her knowledge] was marked, quite as marked as that the fortunate cause of it was just the buried treasure of her knowledge. 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. (285)

The fact of her knowing the secret of his life tempers "the asperity" (286) of it. Gradually and naturally he takes her support for granted as if she could also profit from the vigil for his beast. What he appreciates most is her being "his kind, wise keeper" (288); she actually preserves his appearance in the eyes of cold society by helping him to pass for an ordinary man.

Besides May's devotion, both his self-estimation of having been decently unselfish and feeling self-righteous generosity regarding May serve to escalate his egotism and obsession with his beast. Ironically he is not conscious of these qualities at all, but we readers are. The point is emphasized by the narrative voice as follows:

*Our point is accordingly that he valued this character [of being the most disinterested person in the world] quite sufficiently to measure his*

present danger of letting it lapse, against which he promised himself to be much on his guard. He was quite ready, none the less, to be selfish just a little, since, surely, no more charming occasion for it had come to him. "Just a little," in a word, was just as much as Miss Bartram, taking one day with another, would let him. He never would be in the least coercive, and he would keep well before him the lines on which consideration for her—the very highest—ought to proceed. (286) [Italics mine]

This self-complacent justification for his dependence on May leads him to rationalize about why he has no idea of marrying her: "His conviction, his apprehension, his obsession, in short, was not a condition he could invite a woman to share" (287). He thinks he is watching how far he should involve her, but in reality he is doing so not for her sake but for his own; he merely satisfies his conscience. As Krishna Baldev Vaid points out, "this is a veneer beneath which his egotism still lives."<sup>7</sup> Thus, Marcher tempers qualms of conscience toward May and, in a way, prides himself on his ability to guard against egotism without any awareness of his debt to her. He never knows that it is not he but she who makes sacrifices for their "real truth."

However, on the other hand, we readers see through his veneer of self-justification by ironical line-breaks of the narrative voice in the following passage:

He had kept up, *he felt*, and very decently on the whole, his consciousness of the importance of not being selfish, and it was true that he had never sinned in that direction without promptly enough trying to press the scales the other way. He often repaired his fault . . . by inviting his friend to accompany him to the opera; and it not infrequently thus happened that, to show he didn't wish her to have but one sort of food for her mind, he was the cause of her appearing there with him a dozen nights in the month. It even happened that, seeing her home at such times, he occasionally went in with her to finish, as he called it, the evening, and, the better to make his point, sat down to the frugal but

always careful little supper that awaited his pleasure. His point was made, *he thought*, by his not eternally insisting with her on himself . . . . (292) [Italics mine]

Reading the above passage, we cannot help realizing that "the scales" slant to May without any sign of leaning back to him as he envisions. She is "unremunerated" (288). In a word, she is "a part of the daily bread" (289) to keep him alive both in society and in his obsession. To be sure he repeatedly asks her how he can repay her, but he neither repays her devotion nor realizes its value; instead he satisfies his conscience by taking her to the opera.

Thus, both his obsession with his beast and self-righteous conviction of being unselfish escalate his egotism and make him blind to May's devotion. These features of his characterization underlie irony and lead Marcher to his tragical and ironical end, giving us different clues to seeing the differences in perception.

Along with Marcher's characterization of "the blinded seeker," the process of his experience itself contributes to the success of irony. As we have noted, he was reminded of his obsession with his apprehension by May. Her revelation begins "to taste sweet to him" (281) and seems to him "a new luxury to him" (282). It is because he has been given a sympathetic view by her, which he has never had from anyone else. Moreover, his expectation for the future seems to exceed fear, since he supposes himself completely subject to his beast and expects something dramatic to happen. May suggests it is something "to suffer" (283), but he says:

"Well, [it is] . . . to wait for—to have to meet, to face, to see suddenly break out in my life; possibly destroying all further consciousness, possibly annihilating me; possibly, on the other hand, only altering everything, striking at the root of all my world and leaving me to the consequences, however they shape themselves."(283)

He thinks of it as “natural” and “unmistakable” (283). Moreover, he denies her question of whether it might be the expectation of falling in love: he says to May, “Of course what’s in store for me may be no more than that [falling in love]. The only thing is . . . that I think that if it had been that, I should by this time know” (283). Thus, he expects something more than the love he has experienced. Taking advantage of May’s devotion as his partner in the vigil and protector against the cold society, he has not the least idea of marrying her. Any emotional involvement with a woman is the last thing for him to do in his life.

Once the obsession revives in his memory, it has spellbinding power over Marcher, like long forgotten “buried treasure”:<sup>8</sup>

The exquisite luck of having again just stumbled on the spot [of the buried treasure] made him indifferent to any other question; he would doubtless have devoted more time to the odd accident of his lapse of memory if he had not been moved to devote so much to the sweetness, the comfort, as he felt, for the future, that this accident itself had helped to keep fresh. (285)

His great expectation for the future and May’s support indulge him in his passive state toward the beast and make him blind to reality: he does not live in reality or the present, but in his vision of an unidentified future. As a result, there is “the difference between the forms” he maintains for society and “the detachment that reigned beneath them” (288): he wears “a mask painted with the social simper, out of the eye-holes of which there looked eyes of an expression not in the least matching the other features” (288). Thus, his obsession unconsciously but naturally makes him very detached from reality. The mask covers both reality and his egotism.

The narrative voice gives us an objective angle, by which we see Marcher’s subjective world covered with the mask:



It was only May Bartram who had, and she achieved, by an art indescribable, the feat of at once—or perhaps it was only alternately—meeting the eyes from in front and mingling her own vision, as from over his shoulder, with their peep through the apertures. (288)

May's better position for a sight of the matter<sup>9</sup> enables us to see a part of her vision that Marcher is totally blind to. As James says in his *Notebooks*, she is, "though unexpressedly, *lucid*."<sup>10</sup> Though not provided with insight to see her whole vision, we can conceive some suspicion of Marcher's appearance.

It is on her birthday that there occurs a change in his attitude toward life, which subsequently moves him out of his utter ignorance. As the narrative voice itself emphasizes:

It [her birthday] was all to have made, none the less, as *I have said*, a date; as came out in the fact that 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 results. (292) [*Italics mine*]

What actually happens then between Marcher and May is that he takes up the subject of his apprehension for his unidentified future for the first time since their first visit to Weatherend and conceives suspicion that she might know something unknown to him. Henry James uses the metaphor of a beast in this scene to describe this significant change in Marcher's obsession. To point out its importance to readers, he capitalizes the word "beast"<sup>11</sup> as follows:

Marcher softly groaned as with a gasp, half spent, at the face, more uncovered just then than it had been for a long while, of the imagination always with them. It had always had its incalculable moments of glaring out, quite as with the very eyes of the very *Beast*, and, used as he was to them; they could still draw from him the tribute of a sign that rose from the depths of his being. All that they had thought, first and last, rolled over him; the past seemed to have been reduced to mere barren

speculation. (291) [*Italics mine*]

The uncovered face implies that his real face has been covered with the mask. In this passage the Beast connotes more than the simile James uses in other parts of the story to figure Marcher's obsession. It takes on reality, or something substantial for his reality. However, it does not spring at him yet; it as yet peers through his mask of blindness and agitates him.

Out of utter indulgence to his obsession, he finds his sense of danger growing and begins to perceive more. May's silence, or hesitation to clarify her knowledge, makes him realize "the abyss" (293) between them. For him this is the first time to recognize the difference in knowledge between them; he has supposed her standing on the same level of awareness. Now he no longer enjoys the bliss of ignorance.

It is ironical that we readers, as well as May, have seen "the abyss." To create this ironical situation, James manipulates the technique of presenting staggered times of entry into awareness—Marcher's awareness, May's, and the reader's. As Martha Banta points out, he makes "those who enter into knowledge at early points . . . hold on to the accumulating levels of perception that come later to the more laggard."<sup>12</sup> We readers begin to conceive suspicion about Marcher's beast and the gap in knowledge between Marcher and May after the Weatherend episode. Moreover, we see Marcher's attitude toward the beast through two points of view—Marcher's and that of the narrative voice. While seeing things through Marcher's limited view and enjoying suspense about solving the riddle of his life, we hear the narrative voice telling us how we should see Marcher's experience in a manner quite unlike the way Marcher himself envisions. Those two points of view—those of the subjective and the objectively critical—"not only alternate swiftly and with almost unnoticed transitions, they are often presented simultaneously."<sup>13</sup> Then, they create such an ironical situation as

the scene of May's birthday. In this scene, Marcher only starts to suspect how far May is advanced in knowledge, but we readers are almost convinced that May has already realized his fate.

Marcher does not immediately take any actions to measure "the abyss" or to discover what she knows, which he supposed something "too bad to tell him" (294). What happens to him is that surprises begin in his consciousness. Before her birthday, he indulged himself in utter blindness to reality and his egotism, but now the sense of his surprises suggests to us a sign of his awakening to reality. These surprises arise from his first recognition of the lapse of the period: the period "gave him . . . almost the only positive surprise his career . . . had yet offered him" (295). Moreover, he sees the lapse of the period when he finds her "suddenly looking much older to him than he had ever thought of her being" (295). Ironically Marcher finally realizes that he is also subject to the passage of time and that there is not much time left, allocated to his waiting for the Beast; until then his obsession and blindness to reality seemed to detach him from ordinary time sequence. Moreover, this surprise brings about other surprises in his consciousness one after another and pushes him, as well as us, toward the final recognition.

In the fourth section, we perceive something important and terrible that Marcher is to perceive later. This scene, which is played out against the background of Marcher's confusion, is one of the climaxes: here with May, we perceive Marcher's fatal failure. While seeing Marcher remain blank in the presence of what she tries to communicate to him, we can see his failure to grasp his only opportunity to escape the Beast.

This is one of the scenes where we seem to be urged by James to participate actively in the story so as to recognize the very ironical situation surrounding Marcher. Except for the opening scene at Weatherend in the first section, this is the only scene provided with some kind of setting, which attracts us in a strange way unlike the other sections. It starts with a

description of the setting as May presents herself to Marcher who is nervous and fearful. May appears "in that long, fresh light of waning April days which affects us often with a sadness sharper than the greyest hours of autumn". (296). We find her sitting without a fire and forming "a smooth and ultimate look, an air of knowing, in its immaculate order and its cold, meaningless cheer, that it would never see a fire again" (296). With Marcher, we see some authority in her over the whole situation, like that of a keeper of the riddle. She is represented as "the picture of a serene, exquisite, but impenetrable sphinx" (297), and as "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" (297). With the perfection of her household care, he perceives that she has nothing more to do, as the following passage shows:

She was "out of it," to his vision; her work was over; she communicated with him as across some gulf, or from some island of rest that she had already reached, and it made him feel strangely abandoned. (297)

We readers, who have been recognizing the gulf widening earlier than Marcher, see the situation at a different angle, while feeling sympathy toward him. When Marcher asks her to clarify her knowledge, we see with the help of the narrative voice that the silences and the strange cold light from her eyes imply more than her words:

... she was to do, in a few minutes, something stranger yet—though even of this he was to take the full measure but afterwards— and the note of it was already in the air. It was, for the matter of that, one of the signs that her eyes were having again such a high flicker of their prime. (298)

The light from her eyes seems a signal for a climax; it embodies her unspoken appeal to him at the ironical climax, when she rises from her chair with an effort against weakness:

... the cold charm in her eyes had spread, as she hovered before him, to all the rest of her person, so that it was, for the minute, almost like a recovery of youth. ... he could only take her as she showed—as capable still of helping him. (299)

We perceive some force in her manner to appeal to Marcher, whereas Marcher himself is too obsessed with the pursuit of her knowledge to realize that her movement is virtual statement. After this moment she stands close to him, “as if still full of the unspoken” (300):

Her movement might have been for some finer emphasis of what she was at once hesitating and deciding to say. ... It had become suddenly, from her movement and attitude, beautiful and vivid to him that she had something more to give him; her wasted face delicately shone with it, and it glittered, almost as with the white lustre of silver, in her expression. She was right, incontestably, for what he saw in her face was the truth, and strangely, without consequence, ... she appeared to present it as inordinately soft. (300–01)

This is the moment she tries to communicate her love to him without any words, presenting the chance for him to escape “the sounded void of his life” (311). However, he cannot perceive her unspoken offer. All he does is wait anxiously for her spoken answer to his question. Then his chance of escape from the Beast is gone with the closing of her eyes.

We have to wait for Marcher’s final recognition to identify her unspoken offer. Yet Marcher’s questions and the description of May’s attitude by the narrative voice help us see that part of her feelings that Marcher is blind to, and at the same time enable her to skirt revealing “the truth.” All the clues to her love are made noticeable one by one but they do not fall into place until Marcher’s final recognition at May’s grave. This technique keeps the suspense until the end and continues to give us the excitement of solving the riddle.

Thus, Marcher falls a victim to his own egotism and blindness, or to the ironical gap in perception. The effect of this irony is all the more heightened for his desperate and blind pursuit for her knowledge: ignorance, he believes, is more fearful than knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Ironically there appears a wide difference between what he expects and what May tries to give. Marcher waits for something "rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible," whereas May presents something "inordinately soft." He expects to see glaring eyes of the Beast, whereas she stares at him with cold eyes. He is waiting for the sudden spring of the Beast, whereas she diminishes the distance between them "with her gliding step" (300).

In the following scene, May, whose physical condition is critical, appears again with an air of wishing "to leave their affair in order" (303). This is the last time for her to appear to him, or to us: she dies soon after this scene. "With the perfect straightness of a sibyl" (303), she confirms for him that it has come and tells him not to pursue the riddle of his life further, whereas Marcher insists on further pursuit up to the point of his own recognition. The following dialogue between them seems to serve as foreground of the later climax, the final recognition of the void of his life:

"I [Marcher] believe you; but I can't begin to pretend I understand. *Nothing*, for me, is past; nothing *will* pass until I pass myself, which I pray my stars may be as soon as possible. Say, however," . . . "that I've eaten my cake, as you contend, to the last crumb—how can the thing I've never felt at all be the thing I was marked out to feel?"

She met him . . . less directly, but she met him unperturbed. "You take your 'feelings' for granted. You were to suffer your fate. That was not necessarily to know it."

"How in the world—when what is such knowledge but suffering?"

She looked up at him a while, in silence. "No—you don't understand."

"I suffer," said John Marcher.

"Don't, don't!"

"How can I help at least *that*?"

"*Don't!*" May Bartram repeated. (304-05)

Thus she repeatedly and strongly insists on the difference between his knowing his fate and suffering it: she in a way denies "the power in him to learn" (307). We can assume that May's strong insistence and Marcher's objection project the ironical disparity in their images of his fate: May has already recognized his fate and tries to keep him from the recognition, whereas Marcher can neither understand it nor stand the lack of recognition. From this point he starts his pursuit for what he has missed and reaches the horror of final recognition in the end.

His pursuit of what he has missed undergoes several changes from his passive attitude toward the Beast, after both May and the Beast are gone:

The change from his old sense to his new was absolute and final: 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. (307)

To win back "the lost stuff of consciousness" becomes "his one motive" (307) to live. The Beast is no longer in the future; it is in the past. Therefore, the direction of his obsession shifts from future to past. Moreover, his obsession takes on activity with desperation: while he waited for the Beast, he was completely passive and had no control over his life. Now he makes his obsession "so much his passion that none other, to compare with it, seemed ever to have touched him" (307). "The lost stuff of consciousness became thus for him as a strayed or stolen child to an unappeasable father: he hunted it up and down very much as if he were knocking at doors and inquiring of the police" (307).

With desperation and determination he sets out seeking "the lost stuff of consciousness." Yet his obsession with his past develops in such a way that his efforts and enthusiasm are consumed in vain.<sup>15</sup> Ironically his wandering ends up by finding no relief, and "with time and distance" "the barely discriminated slab in the London suburb" becomes "his one witness of a past glory" (308). Returning to May's grave, he feels as if he had wandered "from the circumference to the centre of his desert" (308). It is not scenes of romantic interest, of superlative sanctity, but May's grave that comes to be "a positive resource" of his life (308); "this garden of death gave him the few square feet of earth on which he could still most live" (309). It is paradoxical and ironical that he realizes after May's death how much he has depended on her.

However, here comes another ironical twist of his life. It is ironical because the final recognition of his blindness and reality comes to him not "on the wings of experience," but with "the disrespect of chance, the insolence of an accident" (311). He expected that he would "come round of himself to the light," but the narrative voice tells us, "the light" comes to him with "the merest chance—the turn, as he afterwards felt, of a hair" (309). Moreover, he gains it not within his life but "*outside* of his life" (311), and, what is more ironical, from a stranger. As for the role of the stranger, Allen Tate points out as follows:

The stranger . . . could better be described as a *deus ex machina*—a device for ending an action by means of a force outside it; here it serves to render scenically, for the eye and ear, what had otherwise been a reported insight of Marcher's.<sup>16</sup>

If Marcher had achieved the final recognition with his own efforts, he would not have suffered so much shock but would rather have felt some kind of redemption. That would have spoiled the whole drama of irony James has



composed for readers. Shock and horror of waking better fit the end of the blinded seeker's great negative adventure than the sense of redemption. Therefore, the stranger seems to be placed as a device for heightening irony and suspense rather than merely as a *deus ex machina*.

Seeing the stranger, Marcher is stricken with mixed feelings of shock, envy, and pity: the sight of "the image scarred passion" (310) leads him to compare himself with the stranger and to witness something missing in himself. That is passion, the grief of love. The recognition of the lack of passion leads him to a series of recognitions, with the illumination blazing to the zenith in his consciousness. He realizes what he missed is May: that is "the answer to all the past" (311).

Now, with Marcher, we readers see everything fall together. Finally he realizes "the blindness he had cherished" (311) and his fate of being "*the* man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened." Then he understands that on her birthday May was giving him a chance of escape from the Beast: to love her, enjoying the full sense of life. Never having the insight to see her love, he thought of her "but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use" (311). Eventually the Beast "had sprung as he didn't guess" (311).

Thus, he undergoes "this horror of waking" (312). Now he knows what knowledge is. When he indulged himself in his blindness and egotism, May's knowledge of the secret of his life tasted "sweet to him." But now when he acquired knowledge, it is "belated and bitter" (312). It is paradoxical that recognition of not having lived gives him "something of the taste of life" (312).

Seeing Marcher's horror of waking, we readers see that all the unsettled questions raised from the beginning have fallen into place: "He had failed, with the last exactitude, of all he was to fail of" (312). And he suffers "an abject anticlimax" (295) that he has been most afraid of. James makes this climax that of the ironical gap in perception, since Marcher's sudden and

painful recognition seems to us assuring and natural rather than surprising and unexpected: it has the effect of appeasing our intellectual curiosity, making everything intelligible to us. The more pain and shock Marcher suffers from the final recognition, the more striking to us the irony of his negative adventure is.

To symbolize this moment of both Marcher's and our recognition of reality, James places "the lurking Beast" (312) in Marcher's consciousness to intensify our impressions and provide us with a larger vision of his life than Marcher himself. Perceiving the Beast near at hand in "his hallucination," Marcher "flung himself, on his face, on the tomb" (312). He "instinctively" (312) does so to avoid the Beast. At the moment of its leap "[h]is eyes darkened" (312) and he eventually does not see, subconsciously shrinks from seeing, the Beast's leap. However, we see the moment of the Beast jumping at Marcher with our mind's eye open and realize the nothingness of his life more objectively and strikingly than Marcher himself. To be sure, Marcher comes to perceive more and be "a man of feeling" at the end, but our perception still goes beyond his. Ironically, though naturally as well, we are better placed to see the reality of Marcher's life and the irony of "the man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened." Thus, giving us a larger vision of Marcher's life, James adds the finishing touch to the ironical drama of perception.

#### Notes

- 1 Henry James, "Gustave Flaubert" (1893), excerpted in *Theory of Fiction: Henry James*, ed. James E. Miller, Jr. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 320-21.
- 2 Henry James, "The Novels of George Eliot" (1866), excerpted in *Theory of Fiction*, p. 321.
- 3 Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle" (1901), *Tales of Henry James*, ed.

- Christof Wegelin ("Norton Critical Edition"; New York: W. W. Norton, 1984), p. 287. Subsequent references to the story will be from this edition; hereafter, all page numbers will be given in the text.
- 4 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 247.
  - 5 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 247
  - 6 Henry James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 246.
  - 7 Krishna Baldev Vaid, "The Beast in the Jungle," *Technique in the Tales of Henry James* (1964), excerpted in *Tales of Henry James*, p. 476.
  - 8 In the text, "the buried treasure" means his apprehension about the future itself, as well as May's knowledge of it, since Marcher assumes that her knowledge is identified with his apprehension.
  - 9 We can also observe her better position for a view of the matter in the following passage: "He allowed for himself, but she, exactly, allowed still more; partly because, better placed for a sight of the matter, she traced his unhappy perversion through portions of its course into which he could scarce follow it. He knew how he felt, but, besides knowing that, she knew how he *looked* as well . . ." (288).
  - 10 Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. F. O. Matthiessen and Kenneth B. Murdock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 311.
  - 11 There are two other passages where James capitalizes the word "beast." One is where Marcher is sunk in speculation over what he could have done in May's lifetime and whether he ought to have done something. He finds a substantial and unforeseen sense of privation and feels at a loss about what is left for him after both May and the Beast are gone: "He couldn't have made it known she was watching him, for that would have published the superstition of the Beast. This was what closed his mouth now—now that the Jungle had been threshed to vacancy and that the Beast had stolen away. It sounded too foolish and too flat; the difference for him in this particular, the extinction in his life of the element of suspense, was such in fact as to surprise him" (306). The other appears at the very end of the story, at Marcher's final recognition: "But the bitterness suddenly sickened him, and it was as if, horribly, he saw, in the truth, in the cruelty of his image, what had been appointed and done. He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise,

- huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him. His eyes darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, on his face, on the tomb” (312).
- 12 Martha Banta, *Henry James and the Occult: the Great Extension* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), p. 198.
- 13 L. C. Knights, “Henry James and the Trapped Spectator,” from *Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies*, ed. Edward Stone (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1961), p. 244.
- 14 When Marcher visits May and anxiously asks for her knowledge, he says to May: “This . . . is why I appeal to you. I’m only afraid of ignorance now—I’m not afraid of knowledge” (299).
- 15 As Krishna Baldev Vaid points out, “Had it [knowledge] come by his own effort of thought—a course perhaps equally open to the author—the point of John Marcher’s ‘great negative adventure’ would have been somewhat blunted, though his lot would have been somewhat redeemed.” (*Tales of Henry James*, pp. 479–80).
- 16 Allen Tate, “Three Commentaries: Poe, James, and Joyce,” from *Henry James: Seven Stories and Studies*, p. 254.