



The Beast in the Jungle

Henry James

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Henry James, the master of psychological literature, is at it again disturbing readers with the story of a man who feels he might be missing something important in life -- a man who also has a secret, the unstated in his life now which will affect the future. The woman who loves him says it's "the sense of being kept for something rare and strange..." A complex and meaningful novella.

The Beast in the Jungle Details

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From Reader Review *The Beast in the Jungle* for online ebook

Anna At A Wondrous Bookshelf says

Oh, how scared I was to read Henry James. In fact, I have always been so put off by the fear of his difficult English that when I finally gave in I chose a novella. *The Beast in the Jungle* is perhaps one of the saddest books I've read. After you get used to the difficult prose--and by that I mean having to re-read a sentence several times. The story itself is extremely sad. I was also quite shocked at how relevant this story is to this day.

This is the story of John Marcher, the protagonist, and May Bartram. John and May had once met many years ago in Italy and he had revealed to her this great secret. Years later when both meet in England, Marcher realized that they had met in Italy. The great secret that Marcher reveals is that he has always had the feeling that something "rare and strange, and terrible" was to happen to him. Bartram and Mercher then start a long and intimate relationship.

Interesting and insightful look at men who spend their lives in selfish ways and only able to receive but never to return love and attention. This is not an easy read, but definitely a worthy one. I'm a fan.

Felisberto says

Leitura de Outono ou primavera?

De tão simples, a sua leitura consome-nos lentamente na agonia supersticiosa de se esperar por algo maior - existe algo maior que o amor, que uma vida ou história partilhada?

Neste livro, a Fera foi estando sorrateiramente à espreita nas descrições e nos diálogos raramente exaltados, até que, intensamente, nos assalta nos capítulos finais.

Para ler, reler e recomendar!

Lady Jane says

This is truly an unforgettable psychological portrait. John Marcher, the protagonist, is re-acquainted with May Bartram, a woman he knew ten years earlier, who remembers his odd secret-- Marcher is seized with the belief that his life is to be defined by some catastrophic or spectacular event, lying in wait for him like a "beast in the jungle." Miss Bartram is stupefied by this, but does nothing to make him think that she thinks him odd for such a belief. In fact, she takes him very seriously and promises to stand by him and wait with him for this catastrophe to occur.

Thus, Miss Bartram decides to take a flat nearby in London, and to spend her days with Marcher curiously awaiting what fate has in stall for John. Of course Marcher is a self-centered egoist, believing that he is precluded from marrying so that he does not subject his wife to his "spectacular fate". The saddest part of the story is that as he sits idly by and allows the best years of his life to pass, he takes May down as well, until the denouement wherein he learns that the great misfortune of his life was to throw it away, and to ignore the love of a good woman, based upon his preposterous sense of foreboding.

This is the perfect example of a man who ruins his life by being extremely careful and fearful of "the bad things that might occur if he marries...." He abstained from marrying the woman who eventually turned out to be his life partner, just because he was too afraid about the treacherous events that he wrongly predicted for himself. That Miss Bartram would be willing to waste her life with him with no guarantees of anything is even more tragic. Marcher's behaviour, in its very essence, is an extreme case of egotism and childishness, while Miss Bartram is a deep, poetic, mature, and intelligent woman. My question is, then, what does she find in Marcher? Why does she sacrifice her life for him? These are questions that yet need to be answered. What initially began as a trivial interest in Marcher and his silly occurrences turned into a fixation, perhaps love for him. As he takes her with him, she can no longer escape and is immersed in his world. She becomes the victim of his downfall and ignorance.

It is a beautiful and haunting tale of egotism, fear of the unknown, and unrequited love. Henry James invented Marcher as a way to show us the mirror. After all, don't we all fear the unknown to a certain extent? Marcher is a man frozen by his fears and a sense of impending disaster, and the moral of the story teaches us all that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

Mike Puma says

Briefly; it's a novella after all.

Apparently, enough time had lapsed after reading Proustitute's fine review and Lee's (perhaps, due to the good news of his new daughter) and Jesse's, that I'd completely forgotten the story/novella's subtext. All well and good. What remained was seeing three reviews for a short Henry James title, and it was a short title I was in need of; I will catch up on my 2013 reading goal, I will dammit. So, when I started reading this story, it wasn't long before I was thinking: this guy's gay—he may not admit to it, or feel able to act on it, but there can be no doubt, this guy's gay. And all I really expected was a nice evening with James' cozy, beautiful language.

Proustitute mentioned an interesting essay by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick from *Epistemology of the Closet*; it's worth checking out, if you're interested—academic, uninspired, but worthwhile. [here](#). My advice, read the essay after reading the novella and keep a good dictionary at hand.

Four stars, which I might revisit and revise upwardly, but dammit, I'm holding back because the story pursued a path I thought predictable.

S. says

What a lovely little novella!

Nothing I would expect with a title like this.

Sometimes - many times - the true beasts lie within us. Impalpable, unconscious, but always somewhat tormenting.

Gerasimos says

The concept was interesting and I enjoyed how unlikable both of the characters were, but, in the end, the stiff, over-done writing made the prose extremely difficult to read. I wouldn't have finished it if I didn't have to read it for school.

Carmo says

Uma boa surpresa. Esta minha primeira leitura de **Henry James** é uma história do que fica pelo caminho; das palavras que não dizemos, dos gestos que não fazemos, ou porque não descortinamos o que nos está à frente do nariz, ou porque achamos que podemos sempre adiar.

Até que um dia é tarde demais.

As últimas páginas são um auto-exame intenso, desfiam dor e reflectem aquela sensação de impotência e frustração que se tem quando se percebe que se teve tudo nas mãos e tudo se deixou escapar.

Casey Merritt says

This is a story that is essentially about nothing. I don't mean to say that all stories are somehow about nothing, I quite literally mean that this story is about nothing. It has a frame of course, because then it would not be a story, but the frame is that it is about a man, Marcher, who does nothing with his life. He believes that some great catastrophe will happen to him, and to avoid it he essentially stops living life. He feels passionate about nothing, and while he loves himself a great deal he abuses that love by locking it away. Marcher has a companion through out this ordeal, May Bartram, she states that she knows his secret. Miss Bartram uses Marcher, she watches his life go by waiting for the event to come. This story is long and tedious at best, and incredibly disappointing any other way. James male characters all seem similar after a while, they are often self-centered voyeurs looking in at other people enjoying their lives, but Marcher differs in that he is trying to look into to his own misery trying to find a reason he lives such an unfulfilled life.

Claudia says

<http://amulherqueamalivros.blogs.sapo...>

Jim Leckband says

"A bird in the hand is worth two beasts in the jungle" is what John Marcher finally realizes at the tomb of May Bartram.

Roy Lotz says

The reason I opened this book was because I needed a break from *Swann's Way*. Proust's writing, however beautiful, is tiring; and so I decided that a change would be in order. At the very least, I figured, I would be rejuvenated from the break, and able to plunge back into Proust's masterpiece, recharged. I could not possibly have picked a worse book for this task.

James' sentences, though falling short of Proustian proportions, are no easier on the brain. Remember that old cell-phone game, *Snake*? You know—the one where you control a pixelated line and go around eating little bits of food, gradually expanding in size, trying not to run into yourself? This is exactly like James' writing. The sentences stretch out over the page (or the Kindle screen, if you're like me) coiling around themselves, almost tripping in the process, and end up going nowhere. To use another analogy, reading James' is like running on a treadmill. You're tired, yet you're right where you started.

Case in point:

What determined the speech that startled him in the course of their encounter scarcely matters, being probably but some words spoken by himself quite without intention—spoken as they lingered and slowly moved together after their renewal of acquaintance.

(That's the opening sentence.)

I'm being slightly unfair—but only slightly. In fact, considering that this story is about a man who wastes his life waiting, perhaps this style of writing is exactly apposite. The writing mirrors John's inner struggle: folding back on itself—filled with indeterminate words and phrases—vacancies waiting to be filled by some new piece of information—frustratingly stationary, yet maddeningly twisted.

So what are we to make of this story anyhow? Is it merely an autobiographical exercise on Henry's part? Venting his frustration at a lonely life? If so, it wouldn't be worth much to read—that is, unless you're interested in Henry James as a person.

Well, I'm not very interested in Henry James as a person, yet I still found this little tale intriguing. *The Beast in the Jungle*—like *Death in Venice* and *The Metamorphosis*—is more of a parable than a novel. And like those other two works, James manages to get at something fundamental. How many of us are waiting for something? Maybe it's for the 'right' career, the 'right' girl, the 'right' idea—the inward sense of some empty void that reality will one day fill—a confused pattern in one's thoughts waiting to resolve itself into a coherent picture. James' point (and the point of many far less eloquent self-help "experts") is that you should look to what you already have, and appreciate it. Or at least that's what I thought this story was about.

Proustitute says

James is my second favorite writer, after Proust, of course. *The Beast in the Jungle* is probably his most masterful tale—novella or short story, you decide—and it's one that I've read at least ten times. While many of my readings have been colored by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's now canonical essay "The Beast in the

Closet," this time around I read James's tale from an entirely new perspective.

And to me that's the most marvelous thing about writers like James: one never encounters the same text; one always finds new entry points, threads, and cadences that were lost on the first (or tenth) reading. James's work is always lucid and at the same time ambiguous, tapping into the ebb and flow of our psychological mindsets; I suppose it's no wonder that our own psychological states while reading would blind us to the many other complex ideas and structures with which James is working with such laudable skill.

The Beast in the Jungle is the tale of John Marcher, a narrative that pits existential and phenomenological questions of being against the ineluctable nature of language, speech, and what is unnameable. While Marcher is sure that something monstrous is going to happen to him, thus remaining hypervigilant through his entire life in wait for what he calls the beast, James is quick to show how the underlying narcissism that pervades our suffering—and which can blind us to the suffering of others—still courts a desire to be understood, acknowledged, and ultimately known. The analytic relationship between Marcher and May Bartram is one of the most beguiling and yet touching of these sorts of relationships in James's fiction, perhaps because the sense of intimacy and the threat of the beast are interwoven in a way that causes the textual rhythm to literally pulsate at times (e.g., see the famous ending lines).

If you are a writer and you've never read this, I honestly have no idea what sort of company you've been keeping. Not only is *The Beast in the Jungle* one of the very best examples of the short story, but it is also an investigation into the same representational inquiries with which we all deal when trying to nail down words for things that are simply unnameable. And if you're a reader who has never read this: what on earth are you waiting for?

Natalie Monroe says

The writing's so dense, I might as well be reading a brick wall.

I like the last few pages, but that's it.

Brian says

**** SPOILER ALERT **** (But please, before reading this review, invest the time in reading James's short story. You will be glad you did, regardless of whether you return to read the following)

In one of the best reviews I've ever read of a piece of fiction (Note: **any** review, not just a Goodreads review), friend Aubrey pens in her opening thoughts on *Infinite Jest*: "Real life is a pain. Real life is a bitch." Note the double use of the word "real", for it isn't just life that is a pain and a bitch, it's life that is *real*.

Forget the Socratic maxim that the unexamined life is not worth living, it is the *unexperienced* life, Real Life, that isn't worth living. If you are reading this review, you didn't get to Goodreads by accident, and you certainly didn't click on this review of a Henry James novella for kicks. You are a lover of the written word, of literature, story writ of conflict that exists as a telling of the human condition. And how do we approach

these tales of conflict, stories often with unhappy endings, of humans suffering? Why do we keep coming back for more, sifting these stories through our own filters of pain? Because this is all we have. Let's face it, as lovers of literature, poetry, biographies and plays we are invested in exploring, experiencing and living the human condition. Without our own daily commitment to living the personal story we find ourselves in, these written words would be meaningless. Real life is a pain. Real life is a bitch. Yes.

This masterful short piece by James, a literary exposition of the importance of engaging in Real Life, is presented in a manner both very accessible and opaque. After reading this story twice in succession, I fully understand how GR friend Proustite claims to find new ways of approaching the text after a dozen readings. Here is the opening sentence of the story. Friendly reader, do me a kindness and read it three or four times as I did before continuing with this review:

"What determined the speech that startled him in the course of their encounter scarcely matters, being probably but some words spoken by himself without intention - spoken as they lingered and slowly moved together after their renewal of acquaintance."

If you've read this story at least once, I hope that this opening sentence resounds with hidden meaning and is as haunting to you as it was to me. "What determined the speech that startled him ... scarcely matters" - that is a falsehood. It *does* matter. The protagonist Marcher needs more meaning, more self examination into those compass points in his life that go uncharted. For what truly is the Beast that awaits us in the Jungle? For Marcher it is some unknown, unspeakable rare and strange terror that will happen to him, and presumably ruin his life. But by creating the traps in his life to snare the tiger, he neglected the asp. You see, Marcher, the Beast isn't the tragic event. It's the loss of a life not lived, of not investing in the You, even with full knowledge that it could yield real pain while living alongside the potential of bearing the fruit of real joy. James deftly shows us that the unexperienced life has the capacity to give us the pain without ever experiencing the joy.

It is clear where James's feelings lie on the answer to Hamlet's existential question. Yes, it is nobler to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Give us a healthy dose of that fortune so outrageous. We are ready to take our chances. Fire when ready.

Lee says

Read the eBook version on my iPhone accompanied by the 133 BPM heart monitor heartbeat of my unborn daughter as my wife a few feet from me dozed after umpteenth hours of slow labor. Decided to read it because the hardback book I'm reading isn't backlit and they've dimmed the lights in our room. This was, therefore, a first read distracted by several nurses, a kindly midwife wearing a lightweight welder-like face visor, and an anesthesiologist. Not exactly read with morning coffee, or while libambulating, or even relaxing in bed. First impressions nevertheless: I haven't read much Henry James. He's rarely read these days, I feel. Of all the so-called major canonical writers, writer friends never bring him up as an influence or even suggest him as someone to read. After reading this, 1) it's clear he's great and 2) it's also clear why folks don't tend to jump up/down about him. In this one, at least, he suggests a setting and a scene, and then the world recedes, replaced by language. Reminded me of William Gass without the fun, Ben Marcus without the word substitutions and weird breath pathologies, and Poe without much story. The language's role seems less to clarify than to obfuscate reality, which fits this one that's all about withholding Marcher's secret dealio known only by his old lady friend Bartrum. Like Pavel in *Fathers and Sons*, once again, a more or less 19th century bachelor is described as queer and gay (I wonder if these descriptions established the contemporary

terms or pre-date them). Maybe this is a metafictional tale about the storytelling technique of withholding. Or maybe it's simply about closeted dudes and their faithful beards. Or maybe it's about unrequited/undeclared love and a fear of solitude when one's platonic friend's moved on. All these most likely are in play, and more, since as Monsieur Proustitute's review mentions, this text requires re-reading, mostly because of how the sentences thicket and squirm and unfurl and flow and eddy and force a sleep-deprived distracted 21st century reader on the labor and delivery ward of "the nation's first hospital" to dream off about a movie he half-remembers but that he may have simply dreamed about while in grad school about a futuristic dystopia involving UFOs set in a Midwest where no one reads Henry James . . . Anyway, I need to read more Henry James. I see why no one reads him anymore but I also see why, especially for fans of exposition and summarized dramatization, reading him can't hurt. (Note: the goodreads free eBook functionality thingy worked well on my phone, although it did accidentally add to my profile a giant quote I tried to bookmark and it added HJ as one of my favorite authors.)

Nickolas the Kid says

Με το "Το στρ?ψιμο της β?δας" ο Χ?νρι Τζ?ιμς με ε?χε οδηγ?σει πριν χρ?νια στο κ?ντρο του ερ?βους των ανθρωπ?νων φ?βων.

Με το "Το θηρ?ο στην ζο?γκλα" μου χ?ρισε μια καινο?ργια αναγνωστικ? εμπειρ?α... Μια μυσταγωγικ? εμπειρ?α που περν?ει μ?σα απ? δαιδαλ?δη μονοπ?τια, τα οπο?α διακλαδ?νονται συνεχ?ς μ?χρι να οδηγ?σουν στην αποκ?λυψη!

?να μυστικ? συνδ?ει τον Τζον Μ?ρτσερ και την Μάη Μπ?ρτραμ. ?να βαθ? μυστικ? το οπο?ο πεισματικ? αρνε?ται να μας αποκαλ?ψει ο συγγραφ?ας καθ' ?λη την δι?ρκεια της ιστορ?ας. Ο ?ντρας και η γυνα?κα συναντιο?νται τυχα?α μετ? απ? 10 χρ?νια και θυμο?νται την πρ?τη τους συν?ντηση στην Ρ?μη. Ο Τζ?ιμς, σαν ουδ?τερος παρατηρητ?ς, περιγρ?φει την σχ?ση του ζευγαριο? εντελ?ς αποστασιοποιημ?νος. Δεν δομε? κατ? τον γνωστ? τρ?πο τους χαρακτ?ρες, αντιθ?τως αφ?νει τον αναγν?στη να "δουλ?ψει" π?νω σε αυτο?ς...

Ο Τζον περιμ?νει το Θηρ?ο που τον πλησι?ζει αγριεμ?νο.

Η Μάη ε?ναι αποφασισμ?νη να τον προστατ?ψει. ?μως ο ?διος δεν ξ?ρει αν πραγματικ? χρει?ζεται την βο?θεια της...

Το τ?λος της ιστορ?ας ε?ναι συγκλονιστικ?. Ο Τζον θα κατανο?σει ?λα αυτ? τα οπο?α αγνοο?σε και ?λα αυτ? που δεν τον ?φηνε ο εγωισμ?ς του να δει. ?μως η λ?τρωση που ?λπιζε δεν θα ?ρθει ποτ?!

Τι ε?ναι η αγ?πη;

Π?σο επηρε?ζει την ζω? μας ο εγωισμ?ς;

Π?σο κοντ? μας ελοχε?ει το Θηρ?ο;

Ποια ε?ναι η προσωπικ? μας ζο?γκλα;

5/5 για μια υποδειγματικ? νουβ?λα εν?ς μεγ?λου συγγραφ?α.

ΥΓ: Νομ?ζω πως ο Αλ?ν Ρεν? πρ?πει να επηρε?στηκε απ? το συγκεκριμ?νο βιβλ?ο ?ταν ?φτιαχνε την ταιν?α "Π?ρσι στο Μ?ριενμπαντ", δι?τι προσωπικ? βρ?κε πολλ?ς ομοι?τητες στους χαρακτ?ρες.

ΥΓ2: Αρκετ? ενδιαφ?ρον και ουσιαστικ? το επ?μετρο του βιβλ?ου

Stephen P says

Sharing can be considered, moral, ethical noble. One exception is the sharing of an identity. Yet it can be accomplished in such a way that sets the two sharing it apart, above others. Their lives can be molded, hardened in a kiln, and for them provide a life's meaning as long as no else knows. As long through the years they maintain their investment and invisibility; appear to others as cloaked in the same ordinariness as the passing throngs.

The shared trope of James' *Beast In The Jungle*, is John Marcher's premonition, wrung taut, that a beast does reside in him and that at some point, within moments, a moment, further down the road, will appear and do horrible harm to him. Being left haunted, mucked in an existence of continual dread, stands him closer to true existence. Certainly to May Bartram. They form a life, Platonic, close, hovered around this. May ramps up the suspense over the years by leaking out she knows of what this beast within Marcher may be.

Who is to determine what is meaningful? Who is to determine what is the sum of sacrifice if it not only conjures meaning but staves off aloneness? Who is to determine what is the arid sum and when it needs to be paid?

James takes this intrigue by parsing the psychological threads in nuanced weaving, in eloquent style, to burn beneath the wording - I know, I looked and now have my aching hand wrapped and bandaged-until what is congealed is the masterful questioning of what is existence, time, meaning, identity, life beyond our own constrictions.

Ana Lúcia says

Noventa e uma páginas que sabem a muito mais.

A história de um segredo antigo, confessado há muito tempo a uma mulher.

A história de duas vidas que seguem lado a lado, dependem uma da outra, mas nunca se entrelaçam.

"O mais estranho era que o passado, tendo oferecido tanto, não tivesse oferecido um pouco mais. Olhavam um para o outro com a sensação de oportunidade perdida. O tempo presente seria muito melhor se o passado, na longínqua distância, numa terra estranha, não tivesse sido tão estupidamente avaro."

Todos temos em nós uma fera, prestes a saltar na selva...descobri-la e vivê-la é o segredo da própria vida.

Andrei Tama? says

Rela?ia dintre titlu ?i con?inut este de-a dreptul echivoc?.

Nuvela are o puternic? înc?rc?tur? de ambiguitate, via?a fiind reprezentat? ca o metafor? care ajunge, în final, s? capete dimensiuni hiperbolice.

Sobrietatea lui Henry James în abordarea acestui subiect mi se pare îns? for?at?. Reali?tii ?i naturali?tii deopotriv? ar trebui s? ia contact cu lucrurile concrete, dac? hot?r?sc s? r?mân? împ?mânteni?i în sobrietatea lor. Nu po?i s? vorbe?ti despre o tr?ire intens? -?i mai mult: durabil?!- cu stilul în care îi vorbe?ti unui sindicalist de problemele tale de la locul de munc?.

Carla says

Henry James consegue transformar a obsessão partilhada de uma vida numa fascinante (ainda que triste...) viagem para o leitor. Terei todo o prazer em acompanhar Mr. Henry James em mais viagens...
