# PERFORMING SEXUALITY

Now I would like to turn to texts where I depict, by extending the binary logic of metaphysical thinking, the naturalization of the homosexual in the position of the cultural Other. Born around the turn of the 20th century; these texts foreground homosexuality in a radical way by making the homosexual visible.

Although it is possible, as I have already pointed out, to detect a certain parallelism between the texts performing gender on the one hand and those performing sexuality on the other, there is one fundamental difference, which concerns the normative presuppositions informing gender and sexual perfor*mance* and perfor*mativity*. As I argued in the earlier chapters, the social script replayed in the perfor*mance* of womanhood was the construction of woman as object-other-body, while new subjectivities were being constructed by way of radical perfor*mative* processes. But the construction of the gay person into object-other-body was a little different: this in itself already represented a form of resistance—one against the all pervasive invisibility of the homosexual that characterized earlier texts. The trajectory of gender performativity spans from perfor*mances* of gender compliance (replaying the heterocentric patriarchal scripts) to radical perfor*mative* revisions of gender normativity. But the model made up of these two stages—normative perfor*mance* of object-other-body, perfor*mative* construction of woman as subject-agent—cannot be applied exactly to sexuality: in these latter cases invisibility constitutes the script of normative perfor*mance*, and visibility constitutes the background making possible new perfor*mative* constructions (even if, indeed, the gay person is objectified and otherized into spectacle). Ultimately, this second stage is to be followed by a third, where the gay person is constructed as subject and agent, one who sees, speaks, and acts.

An additional point must be emphasized in connection with the objectification and otherization of the subordinated elements of metaphysical binaries of man/woman and homosexual/heterosexual: a comparable disenfranchisement lies at the bottom of woman's construction as object-other-body and the naturalization of gay persons as otherized objects. Given the fact that the "Cartesian gesture," as Shoshana Felman rightly claims, is symptomatic of oppressive order (*Claims* 54), these metaphysical binaries are indeed expressive of power relations. Although the visibility attained by both (after centuries of in-

visibility) in the 19th century can be considered a major step away from disempowerment, their construction into the objectified other can by no means be taken as a mode of empowerment. But visibility is a precondition to the subsequent inclusion of the homosexual into the category of the human, one endowed with subjecthood and agency. This too will happen, in the 20th century, as the homosexual claims entitlement to a speaking-seeing-acting subjecthood and realizes it through radical perfor*mative* processes.

Given the similar disenfranchisement that lies beneath the construction of these oppressed groups, it would seem to make sense to discuss the construction of black and gay persons as otherized objects in terms of how social scripts are performed or not performed. While I consider the joint treatment of constructions of the gendered, raced, and sexualized subject theoretically justified, in this book I focus primarily on the constructions of gendered and sexualized subjects, leaving the issues of race, itself the topic of extensive scholarship, for later work. I do discuss, however, all three inflections in my last chapter, where I write about the simultaneous negotiation of these three categories in instances of passing.

Already Beauvoir extended the notion of the culturally Other from women to blacks (and Jews), insisting that similar processes stabilized woman and "the Negro" as object, and similar processes halted their aspirations to subjecthood (xxix, xxxv).[4] Feminist critics have detected similar tendencies in the oppression of groups defined as Others, marked, objectified, and seen to be, as Iris Marion Young puts it, "locked in their bodies" (148). In a like manner, queer theorists have insisted on the intersection of the multiple axes of gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and regionality in producing discursive identities which will resist the hierarchies and binaries of the earlier models (see *Gender Trouble* 3). Recently postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for example, have joined feminist and queer critics in applying the concept of radical othering to all culturally imperialized and subaltern groups; during this process of othering, the Western white heterosexual male deprives those he considers Others of the possibility of selfhood, and turns them into abject, in the Kristevian sense. Indeed, women, homosexuals, and blacks satisfy the criteria of abjecthood in threatening borders, in exhibiting a strong corporeality, and in being expunged from the symbolic order (*Powers*). In a paradoxical way, this abjecthood is a necessary requirement of both the self-construction of the hegemonic groups as having power and the reconstruction of the otherized groups as subjects. For on the one hand, the members of hegemonic groups can only construct themselves as autonomous subjects against those

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[4] A comparable objectivization of woman as other has been observed by Péter Dávidházi in Hungarian literature („Az idegen nő"). Writing about the 19th century poet János Arany, Dávidházi makes the startling claim that this otherwise very restrained and shy poet allows himself to see women as erotic objects in one case only: when they are "foreign," when woman is the racial other, primarily Gypsy or Jewish.

deprived of subjecthood, and, on the other hand, the individual must abject itself from the maternal in order to claim selfhood. Abjecthood is, furthermore, necessary for the subaltern groups to claim agency: for here too it is only through subjection and subjectivation that subjectivity can come about.

### The new kid on the block of binary thinking: conceptualizing the homosexual

It was at the end of the 19th century that the issue of homosexuality, the passion that dared not speak its name, came to be discussed, if only in the most cautious and coded language: around the 1890s gay characters started to figure in American and European fiction, if in the most covert and subtle ways only. In these decades, as Foucault points out, "homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy and 'naturality' be acknowledged" (*History* 101). Indeed, homosexuality was being conceptualized when "the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized" (43). Of course, the claim that homosexuality was conceptualized at the end of the 19th century does not exclude the earlier existence of homosexuality. Indeed, we know that the Greeks practiced homosexuality, but still did not think of themselves in terms of difference. Before the 19th century people did not see themselves as defined by their sexual habits (see Belsey, *Poststructuralism* 55). We could even say that homosexuality came about through a performative process: the act of naming homosexuality was exactly what brought it into being; the speech act of categorizing created and constituted that which it referred to. As such, homosexuality serves an important example of how discourses are not just "signifying elements that refer to contents or representations," as Foucault puts it, but "practices that systematically form the object of which they speak" (*Archeology* 49).

The conceptualization of homosexuality coincides, as Sedgwick has demonstrated (*Epistemology* 48ff), with the appearance of some major works, among them, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (*Death in Venice*, 1911), Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1922–31), and Herman Melville's "Billy Budd" (1924), which together lay the foundations of what we know as the homosexual canon today. It is perhaps not incidental that this new concept, attempting to bring about visibility for the homosexual, constructs the gay person, primarily man as yet, in the object position, the position occupied by the woman until just about that moment.

Several reasons could be cited for this objectification of the homosexual. One, it did not seem possible to imagine love and desire outside the heterosexual context. This is why the asymmetry and hierarchization of heterosexual rela-

tionships gets embedded in the perception of homosexual relationships too: any bond defined by desire is imaginable only to the degree it reproduces the heterosexual relationship. As such, one of the two persons involved had to be feminized, or perceived as feminine, in relationships between men (this was the fairy), just like somebody had to be masculinized in relationships between women (this would be the butch in butch-femme relationships). So, independent of the genders of those involved, the person desired was to be the "woman" in the object position, while the desiring person was to be the "man" in the subject position. In this framework of compulsory heterosexuality, the object position has a necessarily feminizing effect, while the subject position a maculinizing effect. Two, the dichotomizing of relationships of desire into heterosexuality and homosexuality, extended along the logic of binary thinking to sexuality, will not only establish a hierarchy between them by naturalizing one and pathologizing the other, but will put one in the unmarked position and the other into the marked. In this way, then, homosexuality will inherit some of the conceptual markers of the female gender—such as the one objectivized, otherized, spectacularized, and corporealized—taking over the place of the woman as object-other-spectacle-body. Even the label *gay*, originally used to refer to the female prostitute, the sexual object *par excellence*, was now adopted as a euphemistic code to the homosexual (man) (see George Chauncey 14). Three, sexuality and gender were ultimately understood as codepedent, allowing for the direct adoption of gender binaries in the conceptualization of homosexuality. For example, queerness was not a sexual marker originally, but meant a preference for female gender conventions by men (see Chauncey 13).

Herman Melville's "Billy Budd," the American work of the four foundational texts which came out in the 1890s, complies with just about all the marks of the objectification detailed above. Billy is described as the "signal object" of the sailors' attention, drawing a "sort of honest homage" from his associates (9). He is the "Handsome Sailor," who "seemed to accept the spontaneous homage of his shipmates" "with the off-hand unaffectedness of natural regality" (8). The other sailors are attracted to him, calling him "Baby Budd" (9), and shower him with their loving attention:

> they all love him. Some of 'em do his washing, darn his old trousers for him; the carpenter is at odd times making a pretty little chest of drawers for him. Anybody will do anything for Billy Budd; and it's the happy family here. (12)

Billy Budd is presented in terms of both masculine and feminine features: "happily endowed with the gayety of high health, youth, and a free heart" (14) and blessed with both "strength and beauty," not only did he have a "superb figure," "he was also more or less of a mighty boxer or wrestler," and "tales of his prowess were recited" (9). Billy is corporealized to the extreme: inspired to be

imagined not just naked but as a nude—a state with implicit feminization as well as Hellenization: "a fine specimen of the genus homo, who in the nude might have posed for a statue of young Adam before the Fall" (54). Indeed, with his similarity to a Greek statue evoked, Billy's homosexualization seems complete: "he showed in face that humane look of reposeful good nature which the Greek sculptor in some instances gave to his heroic strong man, Hercules" (15). Of "significant personal beauty" (39), "the rose-tan in his cheek" (39), "the dimple in his dyed cheek," his supple joints, and his dancing yellow curls (40) all seem to make this man a sexual object desired by everyone, including Claggart, the master-at-arms. It is Claggart whose gaze is most sexual and who wants to own Billy. Claggart's jealousy "but intensifie[s] his passion," which now assumes "various secret forms within him" (40). Being unable, as a stutterer, to defend himself of Claggart's accusation, Billy strikes Claggart dead, for which act he must be punished: "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!" (60). Billy, therefore, unites all the significant elements of the concept of homosexuality: he is the object of attention and desire, the beautiful object of the gaze, the body offering pleasure to the viewer, as well as the site of an unrevealable secret and a punishable crime, in this case, treason, murder, and execution. However, as Sedgwick has pointed out, there is another homosexual in the text, the closeted one, in the form of Claggart (*Epistemology*). Both homosexual and homophobic, informed by passion as well as fear, Claggart assigns another position to Billy, who is now not just an object but also a subject, the agent provoking the homophobia of Claggart. Desire and phobia, as well as repression and knowledge (the recognition of homosexual desire) will be hopelessly intertwined in the new concept of homosexuality here. So Billy's homosexualization is all but complete. For it is really a particular kind of undecidability (between the object and subject positions) that lies at the core of Melville's conceptualization of homosexuality, coming about, not in the least, from the interaction between markers of gender and sexuality I described earlier. Probably not even the objectivized-spectacularized-corporealized Billy could fully give up his gender and its concomitant subjecthood.

Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, to cite a near-contemporary piece, albeit from England, constructs the concept along similar lines, except here Dorian Gray is ultimately deprived of his selfhood (see Jeffrey Nunokawa). Already at the beginning of the novel Dorian is shown as a model and a sitter, having little control over his self and becoming an object gazed at and acted upon by another person. The (art) objectifying power of the gaze developed for the woman—the successive yoking of woman with beauty, beauty with gaze, gaze with art object—is now transferred to a beautiful man, who will be feminized and thereby homosexualized. Step by step Dorian recognizes this objectification, of first being looked at, then slowly being absorbed by another man's attention and turned into an art object, only to lose mastery. Indeed, Dorian is threatened by the

enormity of Basil Hallward's attraction: as object of his passion, he is afraid of losing himself. He too is constructed as a beautiful person, feminized in the object position:

> he was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. (23)

While Hallward paints his portrait, Lord Henry turns Dorian into the object of his conversations with the painter, mentioning the "rebellious curls," "the "finely-chiselled nostrils," and "scarlet lips" of this "wonderful creation" (28). Dorian uses words women use; he is jealous, makes scenes, and becomes manipulative ("he tore his hand away, and, flinging himself on the divan, he buried his face in the cushions"), but always has his way. His feminization is rounded off by his construction into the "Hellenic ideal" (25), which reference is joined by those that make him into a feminized object. Moreover, Dorian will become a concrete object: a picture, in his case, the spectacularized object *par excellence*, reified and exhibitable. In short, his feminization and objectification will successfully perform his homosexualization.

### The resisting narrative: homosexual subtext beneath the heterosexual text (Henry James, 'The Beast in the Jungle,' 'In the Cage')

Henry James offers some of the most convincing examples for how homosexual identity is being discursively produced as object of attention and desire. In James, this production happens in the subtext, one that is in tension with the text. Homosexuality is perfor*matively* brought about in the subtext, while heterosexuality's perfor*mance* happens in the text. This tension makes for a double narrative, where the text resists homosexual interpretation, but the underwriting, the coded subtext, insists on such a gay reading. Ultimately, the narrative will resist either interpretation as "true" or "proper"; the reader will have to carry out a performative as well as—for lack of a better term—presuppositional interpretation, by taking into account the separate directions into which the text and the subtext will point.

I would like to discuss such performative and presuppositional aspects of two texts here, "The Beast in the Jungle" and "In the Cage," as examples of the two kinds of performativity—homosexuality produced by radical perfor*mative* process in the subtext and the perfor*mance* of heterosexuality (against the gay subtext) that goes on in the text—which account for this resisting narrative, to appropriate Judith Fetterley's apt term (*Resisting Reader*).

## Perfor*mative* (homo)sexuality:
## Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle"

The accepted reading of "The Beast in the Jungle" claims that the unusual tie between John Marcher and May Bartram is one engineered by heterosexuality. The attraction between them does not flower into a relationship; they let the years pass without "doing" anything. Indeed, nothing "happens" through the twenty years spanned by the plot but talking. The favorite pastime of the man and the woman is to discuss the secret the two of them share, which is really the man's secret.

> 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. (490)

A typical James hero, Marcher is haunted by the feeling that life will just pass by; that the thing he so dreaded, had the foreboding of, will not happen. Finally, after the woman's death, he admits to himself that his life has been unlived. But it is already too late, the woman is dead, and the possibility of realizing their passion is now locked in her grave.

This is the heterosexual reading. But the homosexual interpretation of "The Beast" is, I think, more exciting theory-wise. It was Sedgwick who first drew attention to "The Beast" as an example for "queer performativity" (*Epistemology* 195–212). Detecting the all-pervasive presence of homosexual panic, Sedgwick identified the last scene, the one in the cemetery, as offering the key to the gay plot. In Sedgwick's reading, Marcher's epiphany is triggered by seeing another man's face and detecting in his pain the privilege of having loved someone. But Marcher's pain is not necessarily the result of recognizing in the man a person who was himself a lover, but one who Marcher himself might have loved. In other words, his shock might have come from recognizing the missed opportunity of his own homosexual passion.

In the following I will offer a related yet different angle when approaching the text from a performative perspective, and connect its recent revisionary readings with the performative and the presupposition.

Let me go back to the plot again to see how and where the narrative resists heterosexual interpretation. This is, indeed, the story of the peculiar relationship between Marcher and May, built solely around a strange feeling the man has had about himself and which he then shares with the woman. It is a secret that is not only not ever revealed, but not even clearly described. Called "the deepest thing" within him, it is described as a "sense of being kept for something rare and strange, possibly prodigious and terrible, that was sooner or later to happen" to him (490), something he is "merely to suffer" (491). It is "a monstrous" thing

(517) that he has in his "bones the foreboding and conviction of," something would perhaps "overwhelm" him (490). Their friendship is anchored in their incessant conversations, going on for some twenty years, about "it": "the real truth" (498), "the secret of his life" (499), something never defined, never revealed, only in terms of how it becomes the object of discussion and the "substance" of a friendship (much like the woman's subjectivity is reified as illness and as such becomes the topic of the conversations in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*).[5] James, whose "antipatriarchal significance," to use Donatella Izzo's phrase, otherwise rests on centering his works on women (13), now puts sexuality, a man's secret in the center, making a comparable spectacle of it. Marcher knows no more about himself than the woman: the two are allies in "intimate community" (503) as they watch together, and with much interest, the spectacle of this void substance, Marcher's secret. It is really their conversations that keep the secret alive; without their continuous inspection and self-inspection, the man would have "lived away from it" (488) and the secret would have "unaccountably faded from him" (489). It was something deeply confidential (489), making the man "embarrassed" (489), something hard to understand and something that "hasn't yet come" (491). It is something to "wait for," it is "dangerous" and might make him "merely to suffer," "strange" yet "familiar"—like falling in love (491); when it comes, it will be "natural" and "unmistakable": "*the* thing" (492; emphasis in original).

All along the woman is his only audience: a person without her own story, the embodiment of feminine submissiveness, a listener but never a talker. Interestingly, this feminine silence seems to be operative whether the story is given a straight or a gay reading: whether the woman's story is suppressed because Marcher failed to recognize his heterosexual love for the woman or whether it was his obsession with his closeted gay desire that annulled her story. In either case, while man confirms his own subjectivity, the woman is ignored and sidestepped. Yet, as Izzo argues, this is not the end of the story: May turns her silence, including the silence over John's secret, into a form of power—an authority "derived from a knowledge that is not shared" (233).

A "passion that *might* have been": this is how James discusses the subject of the piece when he was but contemplating it in his notebooks in 1895 ("Passages" 537). It is made clear in the story that the relationship between May

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[5] A comparable objectification of a young man can be found in another James story, "The Author of *Beltraffio*," where the son of the protagonist Mark Ambient (who was actually modeled on a famous contemporary gay artist, John Addington Symonds [see Hugh Stevens, "Introduction" 4]), Dolcino, is presented as a person of angelic beauty: "He's so beautiful—so fascinating. He's like a little work of art" (42). Dolcino's elegant attire, consisting of a velvet suit with knee breeches and colorful silk stockings reminiscent of Oscar Wilde, is given detailed description too. On the transformation of the beautiful young man into an aesthetic object, see Leland Monk's essay, "A Terrible Beauty of Born."

and John was not tinted by heterosexual desire: neither was she "making any claim on him" (488), nor could he ever traverse the "thick cold mist" (524) between them. In fact, it is the (false) impression they give as a heterosexual couple that, she says, "covers [his] tracks more than anything" (501). This "appearance" (500) "saves" him because it makes him "indistinguishable from other men" (501). Never seriously interested in women—"marrying was out of the question" (497)—the man welcomes May as a "mask" (499) he can wear in society. "You help me," he comes to realize, "to pass for a man like another" (507). "That's it," she answers, "[i]t's all that concerns me—to help you to pass for a man like another" (507).

To us, readers in the late 20th and early 21st century, all this seems to make perfect sense. The secrecy, the ongoing hesitancy, the insistent uncertainty and caution—it is all very revealing, revealing of a man who is constructing himself into the homosexual for just about the first time, or one of the first times. It is the gay subject that is being performatively produced here by relying on certain conventions, or, more precisely, by evoking the absence of certain conventions. For what James suggests is that in the context of heterosexual norms, the lack of desire, as well as the preoccupation of the man with his secret, counts as homosexuality—in a way similar to baseball, where, as Searle points out, "certain movements by certain men constitute the Dodgers' beating the Giants 3 to 2 in eleven innings" (*Speech Acts* 51). In the text the performative works to produce the subject.

Any instructor who has assigned "The Beast in the Jungle" for class knows the problems students have in putting together all these hints. It is a very difficult text, of course, but what they keep asking is: where in the text, where exactly does James say Marcher's secret is his latent homosexuality? This is where the concept of the performative comes handy. For what suggests a gay reading is not a particular set of references to homosexuality (although there are several of those too, as I tried to point out above), rather, it is the way gay identity is being performatively constructed: out of omission, silence, evasion, or the various forms of the secret that cannot be revealed (where the possibility is lacking, not the will). What James does here, putting metaphysical absence for where there used to be metaphysical center, is a technique usually ascribed to postmodern fiction. But James, unlike his postmodern successors, creates this absence himself, carving out, as it were, the space around the secret, purposely making its content absence, blank, and turning it into an empty signifier, the ultimate catachresis. Much like the empty signifier in Poe's "The Purloined Letter," here too the signifier is devoid of its signified, thereby problematizing the process of reference, or, to use Izzo's phrase, making the story revolve around "the *impossibility of denotation*" (239; emphasis in original).

Since no model for the discussion of homosexuality existed that might have served as the basis of performative iteration, James's figure of omission becomes

the empty signifier of homosexuality. The framing power of silence will link it with the discourse of homosexuality. During their discussions, Bartram and Marcher recall their previous meetings, always discussing their shared secret, the man's sense of some unknown power approaching. During subsequent encounters this recalling immediately reestablishes the frame of the unknowable secret. In other words, both the past event and the frame are being recalled. They are always back to where they started, so to speak.

During this process, the obsession with the secret grows, performatively, into the secret. In a different context, William James describes this process as follows:

> *we need only in cold blood* ACT *as if the thing in question were real, and keep acting as if it were real, and it will infallibly end by growing into such a connection with our life that it will become real.* It will become so knit with habit and emotion that our interests in it will be those which characterize belief. (*Principles* 321; emphasis in original)

Indeed, "The Beast" seems to illustrate this very process: the process of acting as if the secret were real, have this secret "knit with habit and emotion" until all the characters involved start believing in it. And the secret has been performatively, discursively constructed.

"The Beast," then, was born in a situation when homosexuality was just becoming part of the discourse, of all that was knowable, thinkable, and speakable—in other words, the episteme. In fact, James participated in creating an epistemic situation that allowed homosexuality to be talked about. James chose to speak about homosexuality in coded narratives, making, thereby, the secrecy and the necessary codedness part of the meaning of this new concept. Homosexuality, one could say, is mediated in his texts by its being wrapped in secrecy, by finding a formula that both hides (coding) and reveals (breaking the code). James's ambivalence between secrecy and revelation corresponds, as Eric Savoy convincingly argues, to the simultaneous "affiliation with and cautious distancing from" gay writers like Walt Whitman and homosexuals he knew personally, such as Oscar Wilde and John Addington Symonds (8). James's own homosexual panic subsided, however, over the years, just at the time when emerging gay discourse made homosexuality as well as homophobia visible. His early dismissive response to Whitman, for example, changed to admiration right at the time when, as Sedgwick points out, references to *Leaves of Grass* "functioned as badges of homosexual recognition, were the currency of a new community" (*Between Men* 206). So James's embracing of Whitman as the greatest of American poets, as testified by Edith Wharton (*Backward* 186), coincided with the contemporary conceptualization of gay identity.

The cultural presupposition that resides in the context of this enigmatic text can be formulated as follows: 'homosexuality cannot/is not to be talked about; it

is sinful, it is shameful, it is a stigma to be kept in secret.' All this in the larger cultural frame of homophobia. The performative both complies with and defies the presupposition, creating a tension between message posed and message presupposed. Indeed, homosexuality is a secret, and it will not be revealed, yet at the same time, of course, it is being revealed—revealed by its own hiding: the meaning of the secret is its unrevealabilty. As Sedgwick has pointed out, James's fascination with the unsaid and the unsayable was elevated to an aesthetic principle (*Epistemology* 201–212). In one of her later books Sedgwick discusses the affect of shame and the related fact of stigma in James's queer performativity (*Touching* 61). The note of shame and stigma is quite apparent in "The Beast" as well in the sense that James makes it part of the context, or presupposition, allowing both to become parts of performative identity.

The revisionary interpretation of "The Beast" as the dramatization of the secret of homosexuality (as opposed to the dramatization of the story of the man unable to assert his love for a woman) has not come about because of changes in James's text (like the discovery of new manuscript pages, for example), but because our common ground assumptions have changed. New interpretations have indeed been provoked by our changed perspective—the radically altered context of reception with relation to the context into which the text was originally written. This instance corresponds to Wittgenstein's deepest kind of certainty resulting from the impossibility of doubting—until our grounds are challenged (*On Certainty* § 420); this might go together with the experiencing of a kind of conversion (§578). This is exactly what happened with regards to homosexuality, I think: the concept has gained a general currency to the degree that in our epistemic situation gayness has become part of our discourse. Therefore, we tend to read the code of James's "The Beast" as performing homosexuality.

James's text is unusual in the respect that there seems to be a discrepancy, an aporia, between the explicitly narrated heterosexual story and the hidden story, the subtext, present only in James's unconscious perhaps, but one which overwrites the explicit narrative. Employing two narrative positions he presents two subject positions for Marcher. The (heterosexual) "cover story" is not the same as the narrated story, the gay subtext; James's narrative voice indeed subverts the narrated story. The aporia consists not only in undecidability, but also in the fact that it is impossible to tell apart what is said and what is implied; furthermore, what is implied seems to come about without authorial intention. This untying of intention from meaning is extremely important, for here we have a case of meaning unintended by the author, which seems to refute the position of intention-based semantics and speech act theory. Not only does James violate the various maxims of Grice's "Cooperative Principle"—such as the maxim of manner ("Avoid obscurity of expression," "Avoid ambiguity" ["Logic and Conversation" 46]) and "BLATANTLY fail to fulfill" the maxims (49), but offers of

conversational implicature which is not "capable of being worked out" (50). Furthermore, his ambiguities and obscurities might not even be "deliberate" (55).

Without markers of intentionality, the meaning is retroactively revised in a direction most probably unintended by James himself. The dialogue between text and context, the given and the created, the posed and the presupposed seems to legitimately produce a gay interpretation today.

### The perfor*mance* of (hetero)sexuality:<br>Henry James, "In the Cage"

The other text from James, "In the Cage" presents a telegraphist whose main preoccupation is to put together the details of the lives of the people whose telegraphs she is sending off. She is constructing her own [William] Jamesian "*living* reality" (*Principles* 297; emphasis in original) out of the details she reads in the telegraphs. She can do this because she possesses what [William] James requires from the person constructing his or her own living reality: passion and will to do so. "*[A]s thinkers with emotional reaction, we give what seems to us a still higher degree of reality to whatever things we select and emphasize and turn to it* WITH A WILL" (297; emphasis in original). Such a passionately and emotionally constructed reality is by necessity "*the ultimate of ultimates for our belief*" (297; emphasis in original). In such cases, as [William] James repeatedly emphasizes, the mind—which "looks at the object and consents to its existence"—"*makes* the objects real" (320; emphasis in original). The telegraphist is "certain" that her reading is correct in the sense Wittgenstein describes a deeper sense of certainty one has about propositions that one has not even thought of doubting (*On Certainty* §§ 159, 398). Her belief is then characterized by an absence of doubt; she has not learned to question either her assumptions or activities.

While as a telegraphist she is ciphering the texts, as a person tuned to the rich and famous, she is also trying to decipher them. This deciphering proves to be a fictioning rather: the narrative again resists heterosexual interpretation by proving the telegraphist wrong about every detail. The relationship she assumes to be a secret heterosexual romance is presented to the reader as a cover-up rather, and the pain on the Captain's face is not from love but from anxiety over being found out and blackmailed. The woman's fictioning of the telegraphs is then prompted by misperception and assumptions pre-existing the texts; her reading is based on her presuppositions concerning the compulsory heterosexuality of love and the assumption that any secret has to somehow relate to illicit heterosexual romance. Her perspective determines what she sees; as such, the text convincingly demonstrates the thesis of Mihály Szegedy-Maszák concerning the fact that point of view is not part of the narrated world, but

provides its border or limit rather (see „*A regény, amint írja önmagát*" 19). As in many other James pieces, for some time at least the reader only knows as much as the protagonist; only later in the text are certain clues planted. These cautious clues involve, as Hugh Stevens points out, references to London's gay subculture, the Wilde trials, the Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889–90, involving liaisons between members of the aristocracy and telegraph boys, and stories of blackmail attending the criminalization of homosexual acts ("Queer Henry" 131). By planting these clues, a very different set of frame assumptions emerges, as James seems to be manipulating his readers to construct a gay reading of the plot. The act of sending off telegraphs is put into the context of the telegraph boys catering to the sexual needs of rich Londoners: by virtue of its iterability, one sign takes on characteristics of the same sign occurring in an earlier context, radically determining the meaning of the later sign.

Indeed, what is inexpressible in James's "In the Cage" is part of the subtext in the form of presuppositions, of common knowledge shared by contemporary readers. These presuppositions planted in the context could be formulated as: 'a secret and a criminal act, punished when revealed, homosexuality is all around.' Therefore, homosexuality is to remain a secret—which it does for the telegraphist (who does not approach the text with these presuppositions)—but for the reader, who is alerted by James's references to contemporary gay subculture, homosexuality is being revealed. In this text too we can detect the performative's compliance with the presupposition as well as its defiance of the presupposition: homosexuality is presented as a secret, not be revealed, yet James makes every effort that the dialogue between text and context reveal the secret.

Similar to the two general forms of performative constructions described earlier in this chapter, the performative-discursive construction of sexual identity in the two James pieces can be understood as either expressive perfor*mance* or ontological perfor*mative*. In other words, here too sexual identity either conforms to an iterable and citational model—where a configuration pre-existing the text is being repeated—or is purely self-referential and self-producing, with a subjectivity created while the referent is produced in the discursive perfor*mative* act. The two texts by James seem to successfully illustrate the two ways discourse partakes in constructing sexualized subjectivity.

The elaborate performance of the protagonists in "In the Cage," creating the illusion of an illicit heterosexual romance, falls into the category of theatrical performance. In his perfor*mance* of heterosexuality that goes on in the text, the captain stages himself as heterosexual while delivering the cultural presentation of passing, passing as heterosexual, that is. What is being evoked in this dramatic perfor*mance* is not some "essence" of heterosexuality, but its narrative script, equally familiar to the main characters, their audience (the telegraphist), and their readers. Indeed, all three parties of this perfor*mance* seem to willingly participate in the evocation of the citational model of heterosexuality, thereby contribute to

sustaining it as a cultural norm. Fictional character and fictional audience, as well as actual reader will be accomplices in sustaining heterosexuality by ironically reproducing in repetition the norms that socially regulate it.

The other piece, "The Beast in the Jungle," presents a new form of sexuality, of the gay man, performed while discursively producing the subject itself. The discursive construction of this sexuality does not follow a normative script (as it did in the case of the telegraphist); neither is it being performed by a subject that pre-exists the act. Rather, the speaker is produced in and by discourse, during the perfor*mative* process of the purely self-referential speech act, which, in a *mise en abyme* fashion, brings about a new referent that had no previous existence. The perfor*mative* here enacts homosexuality and sub-sequently produces it as the secret which cannot be named. Such a discursive construction of identity does not recall, or read, prior scripts and norms of identity, but subverts them by disregarding the scripts that sustain the hegemonic norms of heterosexuality. The self-producing speech act involves agency and intentionality to a greater degree: the subject produces itself by confronting and breaking down existing norms. The subject's authority shows itself in this confrontation: in the extent of the difference between this perfor*mative* and the prior perfor*mances* of social norms.

The revisionary readings of these pieces depend on the readers' ability to identify the perfor*mance* and perfor*mative* processes in the texts. Writer and reader of "In the Cage" must share certain assumptions, presuppositions, concerning an existing reality and its evocation through the cited model of heterosexuality. Such a common cultural ground will allow the reader to identify the discrepancies between this model and its ironic perfor*mance*. In the case of "The Beast" the writer specifically demands that the reader read the text, not paradigms, and suspend normative expectations (of reading the plot in terms of heterosexual desire). Instead, a perfor*mative* reading will discursively create the homosexual subject around the empty signifier, devoid of reference.

Both readings are creative; both demand a shared knowledge of cultural models to be used in the perfor*mance* and an understanding of self-producing and self-creating perfor*mative* processes. Both readings involve readerly perfor*mance* as well as perfor*mativity*.

* * *

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the following points.

One, not only does the performative help explain discursive processes of subjectivity in literary texts, but also processes of reading and interpretation. Extended to the reading process, the performative will shed light on how new interpretations of literary texts can come about. Most conspicuously, it can be a

helpful tool in understanding the upsurge of revisionist interpretations of the literary canon, American in particular, over the past decades.

Two, James's "In the Cage" is an example for mimetic or citational performance going on in the text; it presents subjectivity as discursively produced by hailing ideologies—through the replaying of existing scripts, in this case the script of "compulsory heterosexuality." Its function is to hide the homosexual planted in the subtext and evoked only by suggestion. "The Beast" on the other hand, produces a new discursive subject, the homosexual, in a performative manner. Preceding the conceptualization of gay identity, this performative process cannot refer to any citable model; rather, it performs a new entity, the identity, recently conceptualized, of the gay man. This construction seems to go on in the subtext too, but here the text evoking heterosexuality is weakened by James's insistence on keeping the heterosexual plot only on the level of evocation too.

Three, the difference between perfor*mance* and perfor*mativity* parallels the different ways presuppositions provoke a dialogue with the performative in general. Multiple and revisionary readings of texts can also be explained by this interaction between presuppositions and performative processes, or by the different presuppositions readers bring to texts in different reading situations.

Four, both are resisting narratives in that both stories show forth a subtext that overwrites the interpretation triggered by the text.