

Epistemology of the jungle: Progressive-era sexuality and the nature of the beast.

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In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick argues that the discourse of sexuality shifted at the end of the nineteenth century from an emphasis on sexual acts to sexual identities. Sedgwick builds upon Foucault's famous declaration that the “species” of the homosexual was born at that moment. But Sedgwick and others working on histories of sexuality in the United States have elided what Lundblad identifies as the *discourse of the jungle*: Darwinist-Freudian constructions of “the human” and “the animal” that redefine various behaviors in relation to animal instincts. This discourse helps to explain why the discourse of sexuality shifted at the turn of the century, once heterosexuality was naturalized in the name of reproduction. Questions about human sexuality were soon framed within an evolutionary epistemology that was fundamentally new, but still in transition, at that time. After tracing the genealogy of the jungle through Darwin, Kipling, and Freud, Lundblad focuses on alternative constructions of the relationship between animality and sexuality that are revealed in Progressive-Era texts. These representations of “the beast” often seem to reinforce but actually resist the Darwinist-Freudian jungle, despite reigning critical interpretations by Sedgwick and others. Lundblad draws upon animality studies to reveal how Henry James's “The Beast in the Jungle,” as a foundational example, reads rather differently in light of sexual histories of the beast that are crucial but often overlooked in studies of U.S. literature and culture.

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