The Thematic Function and Interpreting by Cultural Codes: The Case of “The Beast in the Jungle”

I

In *Textual Power*, Robert Scholes offers an account of thematizing that provides an instructive contrast to the one I have developed in the preceding chapter, because the two accounts raise the question of when the generalizing movement of thematizing should appropriately stop. As I noted in the introduction, and as my discussions of Browning, Lardner, Orwell, and Austen implicitly indicate, my approach to character and progression leads its practitioner to be concerned with drawing a circle around the thematic functions of characters, with being able to say not only “these are the appropriate generalizations, and these are not” but also “just this much generalizing and no more.” Scholes represents a perhaps more widely held view—in any case, he presents himself as describing current institutional practices. Scholes not only enlists under the banner of thematizing but becomes a gung-ho recruiting officer: “interpretation proper,” he asserts “is the thematizing of a text.” Furthermore, since for him thematizing is the practice of generalizing from textual particulars to cultural codes, the habit of broadening the thematic range of such particulars is to be cultivated: in this way, the text’s connection to multiple—and more widely encompassing—codes is revealed, and in that revelation the interpreter will also uncover the grail of contemporary criticism—the ideology of the text.

Scholes illustrates his method with Interchapter VII from Hemingway’s *In Our Time*:

While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you’ll only keep me from getting killed I’ll do anything you say. I believe in you and I’ll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus.
Chapter Two

The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody.

Scholes works by finding oppositions in the text—trench against Villa Rossa; Jesus against the girl—and then connecting these oppositions to the larger cultural entities of which they may be seen as instances. Trench and Villa are tokens of the greater cultural types, War and Love, whose iconography has been charted through countless images of Mars and Venus, and been embodied in countless literary characters. What is important in connecting Interchapter VII to this great cultural code or topos is that Hemingway has brought the icon down into the muck as far as he can. Venus is a hooker and Mars is a boy blubbing at the bottom of a trench. (P. 34)

Scholes's thematic interpretation (a phrase, we might note in passing, which would strike him as a redundancy) continues for another page and we will look at its principles in detail later, but for our present purposes the point is clear: the generalizing move of thematizing reaches its end only after one reaches a cultural code that is both basic and broad.

With this view of thematizing and its implicit challenge to what I have said so far as a backdrop, I want to turn to James's "The Beast in the Jungle," a narrative which, I shall argue, goes very far in the restriction of the thematic function of its protagonist. I shall then take up the challenge Scholes offers and the broader question that challenge presents: when does thematizing appropriately stop? The answer to that question, I shall argue, depends less on any abstract rule than on the particular relation between the mimetic and thematic functions of character established by the progression of individual works.

II

James's treatment of John Marcher is a natural focus for questions about the relation between the mimetic and thematic functions of character because that treatment poses in an especially suggestive way the problem of the relation between character as individual and character as embodiment of an idea. On the one hand, Marcher and what happens to him are, if not unique, then at least highly unusual, but on the other hand, he seems to represent an attitude toward
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life—waiting for it to happen—that makes him a very representative figure. To understand the relations between these components more fully, it will again be useful to start by examining the progression of the narrative. I will give special emphasis to four points of the novella: section I, where Marcher becomes reacquainted with May Bartram; section II, where Marcher discovers that May's knowledge of his special fate exceeds his own; section IV, where Marcher fails to understand May's offer and thus misses the chance to escape his fate; and section VI, where Marcher learns the truth about his life.

One of the most striking features of the tale is the narrowness of James's focus: Marcher and May are the only characters given any substantial attention, and despite the fact that the narrative traces the lives of Marcher and May from their thirties until their deaths, James gives them each only a few attributes. Section I of the narrative, recounted primarily but not exclusively with Marcher as the center of consciousness, begins with a sentence that establishes a tension between the narrator and the authorial audience: "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." The sentence raises numerous questions: not only about who "they" and "him" are and what the speech was, but also why he was startled, what the significance of his being startled is, and whether it has any connection with the renewal of their acquaintance. The startled response suggests an instability, but the dominant effect of the sentence is to establish the tension. James, of course, quickly resolves this tension as he moves the narrative back a few hours and recounts the meeting of Marcher and May at Weatherend that led to the "speech that startled him." Given that quick resolution, we might well wonder why James begins with this local tension.

This beginning allows James not only to employ the dramatic method that he favors but also to guide our interest, our suspense in that drama in a rather pointed way. Unlike Marcher, we do not worry that the ensuing "sketch of a fresh start" (p. 67) with May will fail to develop into a larger picture. We wonder instead just what the nature of the particular startling utterance will be. This orientation to the "sketch" heightens our interest in both the previous acquaintance and present meeting of Marcher and May: as we learn about the less-than-startling past and somewhat bumbling present, we invest both with more significance because we regard them as a prelude to the startling speech. Furthermore, although this opening sentence leaves us willing to accept Marcher's interpretation that the cause of the start-
tling speech is unimportant, we are also alerted to look for that cause. Thus, when May "saves the situation" (p. 67), a number of effects are created. First, Marcher's egoism is highlighted: the cause of the speech that startled him is not as he supposes in something he said but rather in May's own decision to "suppl[y] the link" (p. 67). Marcher's egoism on this occasion also suggests the reason why he told May his secret ten years before and why he then forgot that he did. Regardless of whether the egoism fully explains this behavior, the behavior itself further emphasizes the trait. This awareness in turn complicates the instabilities of the situation brought about by May's eventual promise to "watch with" Marcher.

The first global instability established at this point in the narrative is whether anything will happen to Marcher: will he be right about his expectation of the "coming catastrophe," and if so, what will that catastrophe be? The second instability raised at this point stems from May's involvement in Marcher's sense of his fate: what difference will her decision to wait make for Marcher and what difference will it make for her? Indeed, this instability is given further importance in the narrative by the simple fact that James chooses to begin at this juncture. We are not being told the whole of Marcher's life but rather that part of it that began with May's decision to wait with him. Like Marcher's egoism, this element of the narrative contributes to the third major instability: what will be the progress of the relationship between Marcher and May? This instability takes on even greater interest in light of Marcher's dismissal of May's suggestion that the grand fate he envisions for himself is to fall in love. Considering the three instabilities all at once, we can see that as James brings Marcher and May together he establishes—and begins to intertwine—two directions for the narrative movement: outward from May and Marcher to the "coming catastrophe" and inward to the relationship between Marcher and May itself.

Section II adds a new instability to the progression, one that interacts with the previous instabilities to tighten the intertwining of the inward and outward directions of the narrative. In addition, James's technique introduces a significant tension into the narrative, one that is not fully resolved until its final paragraphs. At the end of the first section, May had asked Marcher whether he was afraid of what was in store for him—indeed she had asked him three times before he answered that he didn't know but that she could tell him herself if she watched with him. At the end of this section, May can answer her question: "You're not afraid." Her continuation of her thought, however, signifies that she now has a new relation to Marcher's impending fate even as it complicates both Marcher's and the audience's
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relation to it. “But it isn’t . . . the end of our watch. That is, it isn’t the end of yours. You’ve everything still to see.’ Marcher correctly infers that she has already seen something he has not. “You know something I don’t.” “You know what’s to happen’ (p. 88). “You know, and you’re afraid to tell me. It’s so bad that you’re afraid I’ll find out.” May, for her part, has the last word in the scene: “You’ll never find out” (p. 89).

This conversation complicates the progression in numerous ways. First, it gives a new twist to Marcher’s obsession: not only does he wait now, he eagerly wants to know what May knows—and this desire will continue to drive him even after her death. Second, the conversation alters Marcher and May’s relationship: although in one respect she continues as Marcher’s subordinate, supportive watcher, in another sense she has become his superior. She is now in a position to use or not use her superior knowledge as she deems best. It is from that position that she gives the narrative its next major development in section IV. Third, the conversation creates a tension of unequal knowledge between the narrator and the authorial audience. The narrator does leave Marcher’s vision in section II, but what he tells us about May and what he shows of her consciousness is hardly full disclosure:

So, while they grew older together, she did watch with him, and so she let this association give shape and colour to her own existence. Beneath her forms as well detachment had learned to sit and behaviour had become for her, in the social sense, a false account of herself. There was but one account of her that would have been true all the while, and that she could give, directly, to nobody, least of all to John Marcher. Her whole attitude was a virtual statement but the perception of that only seemed destined to take its place for him as one of the many things necessarily crowded out of his consciousness. (Pp. 82–83)

Although we may suspect that the content of her virtual statement concerns her feelings about Marcher, we cannot yet be entirely sure what those feelings are. Furthermore, even if we knew for sure what they were, we would not know what May—and the narrator—know about Marcher’s coming fate. But this minimal disclosure does remind us that we could—if the narrator once again exercised the option of entering May’s consciousness, this time to show her reflecting on her knowledge. We read on in part to find out what May knows and to discover whether Marcher himself will ever find out. Thus, at the end of section II, we find Marcher still looking outward toward the beast, May now looking only at Marcher himself, and ourselves looking in both directions but with a greater interest and concern for the relation
between the outward and the inward. What will May's knowledge, whatever it is, mean for their relationship? Section IV provides the answer, as it also resolves some of the tension and further complicates the instabilities.

Pressed by Marcher to tell him what she knows, May tries to use that knowledge to have him avert his peculiar fate. Afraid that he has been mistaken, worried that he will have been “sold” (p. 97), Marcher seeks reassurance: “I haven’t lived with a vain imagination, in the most besotted illusion? I haven’t waited but to see the door shut in my face?” (p. 105). May at first provides that reassurance and then attempts to alter his perception of their situation, by in effect getting him to stop looking outward toward the beast and to start looking inward at the two of them and especially at her as someone other than a fellow-watcher.

“However the case stands that isn’t the truth. Whatever the reality, it is a reality. The door isn’t shut. The door’s open.”

“Then something’s to come?”

She waited once again, always with her cold, sweet eyes on him. “It’s never too late.” She had, with her gliding step, diminished the distance between them, and she stood nearer to him, close to him, a minute, as if still full of the unspoken. . . . 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 luster of silver, in her expression. . . . [T]hey continued for some minutes silent, her face shining at him, her contact imponderably pressing, and his stare all kind, but all expectant. The end, none the less, was that what he had expected failed to sound. Something else took place instead, which seemed to consist at first in the mere closing of her eyes. She gave way at the same instant to a slow, fine shudder, and though he remained staring . . . she turned off and regained her chair. It was the end of what she had been intending, but it left him thinking only of that. (Pp. 105–6)

When May tells him, upon leaving the room a few minutes later in the company of her nurse, that what has happened was “what was to” (p. 107), we can recognize that Marcher’s failure even to see her offer—to move his eyes inward, as it were—constitutes the springing of the Beast. Yet we still do not know everything that May and the narrator seem to know. She is acting out of some hope here, not out of confident knowledge that he will fail to see what she means. Just as some but not all of the tension is removed, so too some but not all of the instabilities are resolved. The narrative has now given answers to two of the three major questions raised at the end of the first sec-
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Marcher has been both right and wrong in his expectation of some catastrophe: there is no Beast external to him but there is one of his own making that causes him to miss his chance for a life beyond his waiting and looking outward. May’s decision to wait with Marcher has given him his chance to escape his fate, but he has been too blind to see it. It has given her something to live for but it has also exacted a great toll upon her—she has loved without return and she has been unable even to get Marcher to see the extent of that love.

In effect, the outward-facing instability has now been subsumed by the inward-facing one. With May’s death shortly after this scene, Marcher faces new thoughts about his relationship to her: “how few were the rights, as they were called in such cases, that he had to put forward, and how odd it might even seem that their intimacy shouldn’t have given him more of them. The stupidest fourth cousin had more, even though she had been nothing in such a person’s life” (p. 114). At this point, however, he still looks outward and only indirectly moves toward clarifying his “rights” toward, his understanding of, and his feeling for May, as he tries to discover what she knew that he did not. He comes to accept the idea that the Beast had sprung, and devotes himself to discovering what it was and how it affected him.

The remaining instabilities and tensions are simultaneously resolved in section VI, when Marcher, through his observation of the true mourner, is finally able to see outside himself, and thus articulate for himself his failure with life in general and May in particular. Marcher and the authorial audience now finally come to know what May knew and had indirectly tried to tell him: “he had been the man of his time, the man, to whom nothing on earth was to have happened” (p. 125); “the escape would have been to love her” (p. 126). The insight does bring new knowledge to Marcher, but the knowledge comes too late to enable him to change the established pattern of his whole life:

This horror of waking—this was knowledge, knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze. Through them, none the less, he tried to fix it and hold it; he kept it there before him so that he might feel the pain. That at least, belated and bitter, had something of the taste of life. 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 eye darkened—it was close; and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, on his face, on the tomb. (Pp. 126–27)
This ending provides the appropriate final twist to Marcher's story because the hallucination reenacts the Beast's springing in his life—the Beast is not external but of his own making—and because Marcher's reaction to it is in keeping with his life. Just as he is not capable of maintaining the feelings evoked by his "horror of waking," he is not capable of dealing with the hallucination. He turns, as he has always been turning since the day at Weatherend on which the narrative opened, to May. But this time his turning ends with a parody of an embrace as he flings himself face down on her tomb.

Although James's portrait of Marcher is restricted to just a few salient attributes, he does give us a sufficiently deep and coherent portrait for Marcher to have a significant mimetic function. In addition to his obsession with being singled out and his virtually boundless egoism, his main attributes are an active imagination and a desire to discover the truth of things. The obsession and egoism are apparent on every page, the imagination shows itself in the very first section as Marcher is able to penetrate "to a kind of truth [about May] that the others were too stupid for" (p. 63), and the desire for the truth is evident in the quest he commits himself to after May's death. What is striking, however, about these attributes is that they all serve Marcher's obsession with being singled out: the obsession is made possible by the egoism and the imagination, and it takes much of its direction in the narrative after section two from his desire to know the truth—indeed, after May's death it is what enables him to go on living.

If this account is accurate, then we have here an analogue in the mimetic component to what we saw in the thematic component of Winston Smith in 1984. Just as the different thematic functions of Winston's character contribute to one central thematic point of the narrative, so too do the different traits of Marcher contribute to a central trait of his character—his obsession with being singled out. In this respect, Marcher is different from the Duke of Ferrara, Winston, Whitey the barber, and Elizabeth Bennet: all five characters have a recognizable mimetic function and thus appear to be coherent selves, but only Marcher can be adequately described by reference to one central trait. More generally, he is rare among protagonists of realistic fiction in that his mimetic component can be adequately described in a single statement: he is the man who fails to live by waiting for life to come to him.

Viewing Marcher's mimetic component this way allows us to supplement Wayne Booth's explanation of one very striking feature of the narrative. Booth argues that James's handling of the center of consciousness narration allows him both to make Marcher's egoism plain
and, by having the reader travel with Marcher, to generate sympathy for him. Now we can also say that the response is a result of James's ability to make the egoism subordinate to the more central matter of the obsession, a trait which does not preclude sympathy the way egoism does. Thus, even as the authorial audience remains acutely aware of Marcher's deficiencies, we remain at least partly sympathetic to him throughout the narrative, and find the suffering brought on by his final illumination to be moving in a way that we associate with tragedy.

What happens in the mimetic sphere is mirrored in the thematic sphere: this obsession is the only attribute that the progression converts into a function—demonstrating the regrettable consequences of waiting for life to come to you. The thematic dimensions corresponding to the attributes of egoism, imagination, and desire for truth, like Elizabeth's attributes of feeling deeply and speaking quickly and like all the Duke of Ferrara's attributes, are not individually crucial in any of the turns taken by the progression. Instead, although James takes a negative attitude toward Marcher's egoism and a positive attitude toward the imagination and the desire for truth, he always gives us these attributes in the service of the obsession, and consequently, that attribute is always crucial to the progression, as we can see by reflecting again on those points of the narrative we examined most closely. When May agrees to wait with him, Marcher in effect looks past her and outward toward the Beast. When May's knowledge outstrips his, he can still think only of what his fate will be. When May makes her offer, he cannot recognize it, because he cannot understand how she can be referring to anything but the outward-looking instability, and of course he cannot understand that because he is obsessed. When Marcher experiences his illumination, he is in effect first realizing that he has been obsessed and then realizing the consequences of that obsession.

If this analysis is accurate, then James has effected what I believe is a rare fusion of the mimetic and thematic functions of the protagonist. Not only is neither function subordinated to the other but the line between them becomes blurred: to be Marcher is to be this obsessed man and to be this obsessed man is to fail to live. The relation between the mimetic and thematic functions here is different from that relation in the case of Elizabeth Bennet, precisely because of the narrowness of James's portrait. Although our concern with Elizabeth as a possible person merges with our concern for the ideas she comes to represent, the very multiplicity of her traits and thematic functions works against the degree—and finally, the kind—of fusion we have here. Elizabeth's thematic functions do not fully define her character,
and her mimetic component is not just the other side of any single thematic function. By making Marcher a character with a central trait, by orchestrating the progression around the influence of that trait on Marcher's actions, and by guiding our judgments of those actions, James makes the mimetic and thematic functions of the character virtually interchangeable.

The one aspect of the synthetic component that becomes prominent in the narrative supports this fusion, though it does so by reinforcing the thematic function. Like Austen in *Pride and Prejudice*, James seeks to keep the synthetic components of his characters in the background—with one exception: he expects the authorial audience to recognize the way that their names call attention to their constructed status, a recognition that emphasizes the thematic function of the characters even as it encapsulates their mimetic portraits. "May" connotes both the sense of possibility and the sense of new life in the spring, both of which the inexorably marching Marcher misses, and thus, in effect dooms himself to live at winter's end. To be Marcher is to be obsessed with the next season and therefore perpetually dormant.

Another way of expressing the point about Marcher's mimetic and thematic functions is to notice the consequences of the narrative's resolution for the two functions. During Marcher's moments of illumination, the narrative reaches its mimetic high point, and everything that happens is perfectly consonant with Marcher's mimetic function: his imagination and desire for truth, acted upon by the true mourner's ravaged look, enable him finally to look inward, to understand and articulate for himself how egoistic he has been, how he has consequently deluded himself, how May had lived while he has failed to and how he has missed the opportunity she offered. Indeed, his truthful review of his life is so painful that it leads his imagination finally to the horrible hallucination of the springing of the Beast, whom he is appropriately unable to face. At the same time, the scene effectively concludes the development of Marcher's thematic function for, as noted above, it is only here that the authorial audience's knowledge of Marcher catches up with May's and the narrator's. Consequently, when he articulates for himself what his life has been, Marcher also finishes articulating its meaning for us: "It was the truth, vivid and monstrous, that all the while he had waited the wait itself was his portion" (p. 125). Finally, the closing action of the narrative, the imagined springing of the Beast and Marcher's failure to meet it, dramatically enacts the consequences of a life that has been missed. In short, the resolution scene simultaneously brings the two functions to their high points, as the strokes developing one also
serve to develop the other. Again the result is the fusion of the functions.

III

In order to appreciate the differences between Scholes's view of thematizing and the one underlying my discussion so far, we should at least sketch some of the things that Scholes's principles would lead him to say about James's narrative. The principles are revealed in Scholes's four-step process of interpretation, a process that he summarizes as the production of text-upon-text. "The first things to look for are repetitions and oppositions that emerge at the obvious or manifest level of the text" (p. 32). Then, "the next step is the crucial one. To accomplish it we must ask what these oppositions 'represent,' or as our institutional vocabulary usually phrases it, what they 'symbolize'" (p. 33); in other words, this step "involves connecting the singular oppositions of the text to the generalized oppositions that structure our cultural system of values" (p. 33). Third, "the act of interpretation involves both making the cultural connection (seeing the resemblance [between the text and the general cultural code it participates in]) and understanding the unique quality of this particular version of the larger instance (that is, noting the difference)" (p. 34). Fourth, to reach the "ultimate interpretation" we "must move from noting the cultural codes invoked to understanding the attitude taken toward those codes by the maker of this text" (p. 34).

The central opposition in "The Beast" is that between Marcher and May, and the force of the opposition becomes clearer if we give more attention to their names than I have done above. The May/Marcher opposition contains others: woman/man; spring/winter; possibility/predetermination; life/death. The central repetition of the narrative is the springing of the Beast, and this repetition yields further oppositions within the similarity of Marcher's creation of the Beast: reality/illusion; ignorance/knowledge; spring/fall; escape/doom; life/death. Furthermore, the oppositions of the characters can be mapped on to the oppositions of the repetition: May represents reality, knowledge, and escape (as well as spring and life), while Marcher represents illusion, ignorance, and doom (as well as fall, winter, and death). These oppositions, not surprisingly, link the story with numerous general cultural codes. The opposition between appearance and reality links the story with a general code about the opposition between the truth about one's self and one's romantic perception of oneself. The opposition between escape (or possibility) and predetermination (or doom) links the story with a general Western theological code.
about the opposition between free will and predestination. The op­
positions between escape (or possibility) and predetermination (or
doom) and between life and death link the story with a cultural code
about the full life versus the empty one. For the sake of clarity, I will
pursue only this last link in steps three and four, but I will return to
the issue of multiple codes after the illustration.

In our own day we quickly encapsulate the values of the code
about the full life by invoking—and keeping current—an expression
such as “it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved
at all” (the sneaky appeal of the cynical popular advice, “if you
can’t be with the one you love, love the one you’re with,” derives in
large measure from its carrying along some values of this code). In
nineteenth-century literature, the code is probably given its most
forceful expression in Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (1842):

I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me and alone; . . .

(ll. 6–9)

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little . . .

(ll. 23–26)

Though much is taken, much abides; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved heaven and earth, that which we are, we are:
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

(ll. 65–70)

James himself gives direct expression to his own belief in the values
of this code when in The Ambassadors, a work published in the same
year as “The Beast,” he creates Strether’s famous injunction to little
Billham: “Live all you can: it’s a mistake not to. It doesn’t so much
matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you
haven’t had that what have you had?” In his Preface to the New York
Edition, James underlines the importance he placed upon this value
by identifying Strether’s speech to Billham as the germ of the whole
novel. In the terms of this code, Marcher is a severely reduced, in­
verted version of Ulysses, an unwily version of the Homeric original
seeking false adventures among the leisured upper-class. Rather than drinking life to the lees, this genteel warrior idly waits for it to be served to him; when he does finally experience "something of the taste of life," its "bitterness . . . sickened him" (p. 126); his peculiar striving then leads him to find something illusory and, when he finds it, he yields. May, by contrast, is a Penelope transforming herself into a more genuine Ulysses, because in her waiting she lives. She has suffered greatly, both with him she loved and alone; she has finally had to yield before finding what she has been seeking, but she has remained strong in will throughout her watching with Marcher.

James's attitude toward Marcher is made plain through the very inversion of the ideal represented by Ulysses, through Marcher's being a negative example of what Strether tells Billham. At the same time, the sympathy James nevertheless generates for Marcher suggests that James may have been worried that his own choice to spend so many hours of his life writing may have been a choice for the empty rather than the full life.\textsuperscript{10}

Scholes no doubt could execute the method more elegantly, and if comprehensiveness rather than contrast were my goal, I would attempt to carry out its last two steps for other textual oppositions as well. But I believe that this application has done its necessary job of illustrating the important difference between his broad thematizing and my more restricted kind. Before discussing that difference further, I should explain why the difference between his multiple thematic generalizations and my single one does not offer grounds for significant debate, while the difference in the degree of generalization does. The difference between the multiple and the single arises largely out of our different projects: Scholes wants to interpret the whole text, and he believes that all interpretation is thematizing, so he is concerned with all the ways that the text invites thematizing. I want to understand the thematic function of the protagonist, and so my discussion of thematizing is more narrow, less concerned with the all the sources of thematic assertion in narrative. I do of course claim to speak of the whole by speaking of progression, and in that way I can acknowledge the existence and the relative importance of thematic assertions arising out of other elements of the text. In other words, I would not claim that the only theme in the whole narrative is the one associated with Marcher's thematic function—May has thematic functions as well, and the action itself, as Michael Coulson Berthold points out, does play upon the theme of "too late."\textsuperscript{11} My claim instead is that the progression puts Marcher's thematic function at the center of the whole text. The thematic functions of May's character
(e.g., representing a life of active commitment) are subordinated by the progression to Marcher's, and the idea of "too late" is a natural corollary of Marcher's thematic function.

In general, my extended attention to the thematic functions of characters is not meant to imply that the attributes of characters and the roles they play in narrative progression are the only sources of a narrative's thematic statements. Such statements can arise out of the action itself—if, for example, all characters regardless of their attributes meet the same fate, then the implied thematic statement about the kind of world in which they live is not carried by the characters themselves. Thematic statements can also arise independently of character and action, as in the narrative commentary of, say, Tom Jones or Vanity Fair, where the narrator not only does the usual job of reinforcing the thematic points made by character and action but goes beyond them to independent assertions. At the same time, of course, the extended attention I give to the thematic functions of character is meant to recognize that character is typically a very important source of a narrative's thematic component. I shall return to the issue of multiple thematic assertions after I examine my differences with Scholes over the appropriate methods of thematic generalizing.

Despite the ultimate differences between Scholes's semiotic framework and my rhetorical one, those frameworks share enough for our differences over the degree of thematic generalization to be genuine disagreements. Both frameworks want to account for what Scholes calls reading, interpretation, and criticism, that is, a first-order understanding of the text, a second-order understanding of the claims on the reader the text makes, and an evaluation of those claims. More succinctly, both frameworks are concerned with the way texts work on readers and the way readers may exercise power over texts. What we have are two sometimes converging, sometimes diverging ways of achieving these common goals. We can therefore examine which of the two diverging ways is more likely to lead to those goals.

What, then, would be the objection to interpreting Interchapter VII as a story of Mars and Venus brought down in the muck, or to seeing Marcher as an inverted Ulysses among the leisured class? Note that Levin's arguments against thematic leaping do not have the same force when applied to Scholes's method, because that method does not claim that the text is really only about the themes of the general cultural code: it insists instead on accounting for the particulars of the text as a unique version of a pattern found in the general cultural code. Note further that the distortions Levin finds inevitable with thematicizing are not readily apparent here. Scholes's approach does not restrict him to finding only a "central theme," and the various token-
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type fits between the individual story or character and the general cultural codes are plausible, if not invariably compelling. Without issuing a critical interdiction on interpreting texts in light of such cultural codes, on what grounds can one object?

The ground I choose is that provided by the consequences of reading for progression. Most generally, my objection is that readings that follow Scholes's principles typically lose precision and comprehensiveness as they gain generality. This loss results from both the method itself and its purpose of relating the text to the most general cultural codes. Let us look at the methodological issues first. To assume that the path to interpretation is to be found by dividing the text's forest of particulars into pairs of oppositions is to assume that the second-order understanding is not closely related to the first—or in other words, it is to assume that the experience of reading, of following the progression, has little to do with interpretation. Consequently, the dynamics resulting from the temporal process of reading do not figure in interpretation, and in that way the method fails to be comprehensive: though one cannot point to them in the same way one can point to say, a character's name, the dynamics of a text's movement are as much a part of it as the binary oppositions Scholes makes central. Both are elements that must be inferred from the literal surface of the text.

The second and third methodological problems of Scholes's system are also related to its neglect of progression as an influence on interpretation. His system precludes the possibility that there can be connections between paired textual elements other than the oppositional or repetitive; and it invites the equation of textual elements that are not given equal weight in the text. All three problems are evident in his interpretation of Interchapter VII of *In Our Time*. We have already seen that Scholes works by finding oppositions in the text—trench against Villa Rossa; Jesus against the girl—and then connecting these oppositions to such large cultural types as Mars and Venus. More particularly, Scholes says that he would keep a class discussion of the interchapter going until "some of the following features emerged: that the story takes place in two locations, trench and Villa Rossa; that the soldier in the trench promises Jesus, in prayer, that he will tell about him, and that he breaks that promise first at the Villa Rossa and then for ever after" (p. 33). Furthermore, the thematic oppositions in the story are built upon the basic opposition between trench and Villa. In each place, we are told or can infer that the soldier "lay very flat and sweated." In each place, we are told or can infer that he speaks in "intimate, personal terms" to someone—Jesus first and then the girl (p. 33). From here, as we have seen, Scholes connects
the oppositions to broader cultural codes about love and war, Mars and Venus, sacred and profane love.

If, however, we look at the progression of the interchapter, the text does not divide so neatly into two equal and oppositional halves according to the difference in the setting. The first sentence describing the bombardment and the soldier's anxiety introduces the major instability. "While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here." His making the promise to Jesus adds a new instability because the promise under such pressure raises a question about its fulfillment. Then, immediately after this complication, the first instability is removed: "I believe in you and I'll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved up the line." We are left then with the instability of the promise.

So far this analysis is not incompatible with anything that Scholes has said. From this point, however, the analyses diverge significantly. Concerned with opposition rather than progression, Scholes breaks the story sharply in two, concludes that the soldier "breaks the promise first at the Villa Rossa," and in effect assigns no function to the sentence describing the day between the shelling and the trip to the Villa Rossa ("We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet"). His only comment about it is that the shift to the "we" is a significant alteration of the point of view that may move one from reading to interpretation. In reading for progression, this shift and the whole sentence are very significant because together they signal the beginning of the resolution. Since the soldier has promised to tell "everyone," since he spends the next day in the trench not alone but as part of a "we," and since the day is "hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet," the sentence not only emphasizes the absence of the shelling but also reveals that the soldier fails to fulfill his promise. Thus, the promise and the breaking of the promise both occur in the trench; the neatness of the oppositions that Scholes's interpretation is built upon comes at the expense of the textual details. Furthermore, the adjective "cheerful" emphasizes the soldier's radically different psychological state; the day is hot and muggy but he is not lying down and sweating and praying with all the anxiety of someone who is in fear of losing his life. Yesterday's experience does not touch today's mood, just as yesterday's promise does not affect today's behavior.

Once we understand this last description of the soldier in the trench as the beginning of the resolution, we are better able to understand the relation between trench and Villa Rossa. It is not, as
Scholes's reading would have it that the soldier goes there and breaks his promise; instead he goes there because he has already broken his promise. Indeed, the very speed with which he has forgotten the promise causes us to reflect back on the fear that induced it and recognize it to be as prominent as the promise itself. The shift of setting from trench to Villa Rossa works as a very powerful way to signal how far (both physically and spiritually) and how quickly ("the next night") the soldier has traveled since experiencing that fear and responding with his prayer-promise. Thus, the villa is not put in direct opposition to the trench but is made to function as a very telling marker of the soldier's distance from the events of two days ago. Once the instability has been resolved to this extent, the last sentence can effectively provide both completeness and closure; the authorial audience is very willing to believe "he never told anybody."

I want to stress here that although I am reading for progression while Scholes reads for oppositions, and thus use different categories of analysis, both of us claim to base the validity of our findings on their ability to account for the whole text. Consequently, Scholes himself would have to acknowledge that his neglect of the sentence about the day after the shelling seriously damages his case. The problem is not just that he does not account for it, but also that he cannot account for it without disrupting the neatness of the oppositions upon which his whole interpretation is based.

The fourth problem with Scholes's system arises less from its methodological procedures than from its purpose of getting at the general cultural code. This problem, in other words, has less to do with his neglect of progression and more to do with his treatment of character. Because Scholes wants to get to those cultural codes and because he assumes that interpretation proper is thematizing, the model privileges the propositional elements of the narrative and subordinates or ignores the emotional, affective element. Regarding the soldier as Mars, the traitless prostitute as Venus ("Venus is a hooker, and Mars is a boy blubbering at the bottom of a trench" [p. 34]), Marcher as an inverted Ulysses, May as Penelope-becoming-Ulysses, and so on is a kind of thematizing that foregrounds the synthetic component at the expense of the mimetic for the purpose of making the greatest claims for the thematic. In a sense, this thematizing makes all narrative aspire to the condition of allegory.

Again part of the difficulty with this procedure is that it creates too wide a gulf between reading and interpretation. Just as the system denies the importance of the temporal dynamics of the text, so too it denies the importance of the mimetic involvement many texts offer us. And again to interpret mimetically developed characters
through the lenses of the general cultural codes that Scholes so favors is to fail to do justice to their complexity. The token will correspond to the type but not in every respect. When we regard Marcher as an inverted Ulysses, for example, we do not account for his repeated failed attempts to combat his own self-centeredness in his relations with May. When we regard the soldier as Mars blubbering at the bottom of a trench, we lose sight of the understated portrayal of his quick shift from fear to callousness that is the main source of the story's effect.

My point here is not that the soldier has no thematic function. On the contrary, the very broad strokes of his characterization indicate that he is a representative rather than individualized figure. Hemingway uses his representativeness to offer a study in the psychology of the infantryman, a study which invites thematic generalizing but also restricts the degree and kind of that generalizing. Hemingway's typical understated style means that much of the effect is carried by the inferences we are required to make as we register, first, the soldier's fear and his flight to religion, then his apparent indifference to those very intense feelings. The nuances of the progression indicate that the thematic point is neither "there are no atheists in foxholes," nor "foxhole conversions don't take," but something more like "war in the trenches alternately induces both extreme fear and extreme callousness toward the person you were while you were afraid."

More generally, the point here is that the mimetic function of characters will act as a kind of weight which resists the high-flying generalizing that Scholes prizes so greatly. The question of where to stop in the generalization of the thematic function is answered for every narrative by the way in which the progression guides the interaction of the mimetic and the thematic functions of character. There are of course narratives that restrict the mimetic function in order to develop the thematic and to invite broad generalization (we call many of these narratives allegories). Frequently, however, the progression will develop mimetic and thematic functions simultaneously, and if I am right about "The Beast in the Jungle," it may occasionally even fuse them, but to the extent that it asks us to take the mimetic function seriously, the progression will work against the allegorizing implicit in Scholes's system. We can see Marcher as equally mimetic and thematic, but it is hard to take him seriously as a mimetic character when we are told that he is really a version of Ulysses.

This position does not mean that Scholes's interpretations are worthless or unhelpful. It does, however, mean that they are more limited than Scholes thinks. It also means that the link through character to the general cultural codes ought to be considered as an ex-
trapolation of the thematic function proceeding by analogy rather than as an interpretation uncovering the basic codes of the text. If the text were working by those codes in the way that Scholes claims, the fit between type and token would be tighter, and the mimetic function would not have any significant force. Marcher may be like an inverted Ulysses, but to delete the preposition is to delete that part of the progression that insists he is a possible person. The analogies between the thematic functions of the characters and the general cultural types and codes they resemble can be highly illuminating, as I think they are in Scholes's discussion of Interchapter VII, but such illumination should not blind us to their status as analogies rather than identities.