

LITERATURE

HAWTHORNE'S PERSPECTIVAL PERVERSITY: WHAT IF "WAKEFIELD" WERE (ABOUT) A WOMAN?; OR, *CREDO QUIA ABSURDUM*¹

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ABSTRACT

Although "Wakefield" opens as a leisurely mnemonic act, it turns into an intensely emotional affair. However, the stance of moral indignation and, indeed, condemnation adopted in many readings of this classic tale seems to be a monological trap, an interpretive ride along *Einbahnstrasse*. The present close re-reading draws on the combined appreciation of perversity as (i) formal figuration in which the bearings of the original are reversed, (ii) attitudinal disposition to proceed against the weight of evidence (the so-called 'being stubborn in error'). Building on this logic, the paper offers a transcriptive anti-type response to Hawthorne's title. It is meant as a detour of understanding and a reclamation of a seemingly obvious relational and denotative proposition. Inasmuch as "Wakefield" is a distinctive rhetorical performance, foundationally a story about story-telling, its title can be naturalized as identifying the story-teller. Even if this does not come across as *lucius ordo*, it is argued that the order of re-appropriative and be-longing signification is that of Mrs. rather than – as is commonly believed – that of Mr. Wakefield. Informed by object permanence and a peculiar looking bias, "Wakefield" proves to be her-tale rather than his-story. As a secret sharer and a would be-speaking gaze, the wife turns out to be a structural and existential pivot of the narrative. More broadly, Mrs. Wakefield can be appreciated as coarticulator of a ventriloquistic logos and choreographer of a telescopic parallax vision. Unintentional challenge to both the heresy of paraphrase and the aesthetics of astonishment, this is ultimately to proffer a radical Shakespearean/Kantian re-cognition that in certain spheres there obtains nothing absolutely 'moral' or 'immoral', and it is only a particular perspectival discourse that may make it so.

Keywords: narrative framing – phenomenology – female gaze – motivated irrationality – Prodigal Son – Penelope

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*[So] fixed a gaze, that ... the visible
world seemed to vanish, leaving only
him and her.*
(Hawthorne [1850] 1983c: 171-172)

*For a woman to be called a Jezebel
is every bit as bad as for a man to be
called Ahab.*
(Henson 2009: 9)

Nobody needs convincing that it makes a world of difference whether one leaves another for a day, a week, a month or presumably/apparently *ad aeternum*, which is to say ‘forever’. “Wakefield” is an exceedingly poignant story about an unwarranted and potentially interminable aorist transaction of marital severance and separation, one that happens overwhelmingly at the expense of the wife. This “sketch of singular power” (Poe [1842] 1984a: 574) may be a disturbing experience to read on account of how the ignoble husband is not really subjected to any sustained pressure and how in the end he is not in any way punished for his transgression. What is more, he is not even really made to feel properly guilty and apologetic (let alone repentant) and the wife’s anguish and trauma are not adequately (let alone fully) acknowledged.

The wedded couple lived in London. The man, under pretence of going a journey, took lodgings in the next street to his own house, and there, unheard of by his wife ... dwelt upwards of twenty years. ... [A]fter so great a gap in his matrimonial felicity ... he entered the door one evening, quietly, as from a day’s absence, and became a loving spouse till death.

(Hawthorne [1835] 1982a: 298)²

As author Daniel Stern (1996: 65) transcribes the story’s non-ethical dimension, it is admittedly one of the “cruellest” and “ugliest” narratives on record. As such, it seems to excite conversational indignation across the board.³ In simplest terms, the self-congratulatory ease with which readers can rectify for them-

² All further references to the text of “Wakefield” are to this edition and are henceforth cited parenthetically (in the footnotes by page number only).

³ Meindl (1996: 21) talks of “insensitive grotesque”, Petty (1979: 507) of “neglect” and “heartlessness”, Newman (1979: 317) of “the horror of isolating humanity”, Leverenz (1993: 114) of “deviance and marital irresponsibility”, Bendixen (2010: 63) of “violation of the marriage bond”, Baym (2005: 119) of “egotism and its associated cold-heartedness”. As Herman Melville ([1857] 1984a: 905) diagnoses it in an unrelated con-text, this kind of torrent of uniformly condemnatory criticism is a perfectly predictable breakout within an overdetermined conventional value-grid of “indignation against a husband, who, without assigning a cause, could deliberately abandon the wife of his bosom”.

selves the ostensible underempathic shortcomings – finally, the frustrated sense of common justice – goes some way towards explaining the story's hold on popular imagination and its enduring resonance. Not a little surprisingly the *Gespenst* of affective fallacy haunts also Jorge Luis Borges' well-known and well-respected essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Argentinean maestro of the short-story genre intimates that while he was deeply impressed with many passages of *The scarlet letter*, none of them moved him to quite the same extent as the minimalist bulk of "Wakefield". He contemplates its plot as "horrible", "nightmarish", "atrocious" and "lamentable"; and concludes that the sheer magnitude of the protagonist's ignominious perfidy condemns him as though by writ of attainder straight to the wrath and vengeance of the Furies (Borges [1949/1964] 2000a: 53; 56-57).⁴

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For a figure irreplaceably central to the story, Mrs. Wakefield comes across strangely prevalued and pre-empted. On the first reading, she appears grotesquely "muffled", "placid", and "settled" ("Wakefield", 295, 296). In terms of storyline, we are led to believe that after the shell-shock of an utterly unex-

⁴ Along with Roger Chillingworth and Pap Finn, Wakefield (sometimes perceived as a cruel transcription of Rip Van Winkle) ranks as one of the most obvious whipping-boys in classic American fiction. Hamilton (2004: 120) is not alone in suggesting that as a scoundrel to his fingertips Wakefield deserves at least "a good solid bump" from his wife. As far as the 'normative' responses concerning right and wrong, good and evil, pleasure and pain are concerned, Paul Auster in his postmodern variation on the story supplies the comeuppance or, literally, the missing touch: "You! she says to him. You! / Before he has a chance to say a word, she ... begins pounding [him] ... accusing him of one foul crime after another ... [A]s the onslaught continues, he begins to welcome each new blow as just punishment" (Auster 1990a: 195-196). In his influential study *City of words*, Tanner (1971: 30) contends that although "Wakefield" is set in London both the tale and the moral are "profoundly" American. More generally, as Giles (2001: 164) points out, it is widely accepted that Hawthorne's fictions cannot be properly understood outside the framework of "particular contexts endemic to American culture". The present reading implicitly takes issue with these views.

While this paper is unambiguously slanted towards the semiotics, propaedeutics and finally the heroics of existential healing rather than existential (let alone literal) killing, it is probably fair to acknowledge that Hawthorne does not actually articulate the conventional 'and they lived happily-ever-after'. Since the ultimate span of time between "he entered the door" and the follow-up "[he] became a loving spouse till death" – which is to say the ultimate imaginable period of grace – is not in any way so much as hinted at, to vengeance-thirsty readers the last sentence may very well open a door to a particularly 'strong curtain': a gory Medea/Agamemnon-like ending, one executed with Torquemada-like intent and severity. In other words, behind the door which Wakefield enters at the very end with the apparently earnest desire to become a devoted husband for the rest of his life, there could wait/lurk – courtesy of Frank R. Stockton (1882) – as likely a perfectly amiable lady as a perfectly ferocious tiger.

pected abandonment she recovers in a mere short couple of weeks. “[H]er heart is sad, perhaps, but quiet” is a disposition befitting a foil, or a Lacanian *pas-tout*, rather than a properly *fühlende Seele* (“Wakefield”, 295). The combined forced impassiveness, self-censoring marginalization and declarative blunt under-meaning of the wife – “our business is with the husband” (“Wakefield”, 292) – is inherently suspect and, therefore, suggestive. One might want to apply here the pseudo-Freudian insight, as popularized by James Joyce ([1922] 1986: 156), that a true literary genius makes no blunders since the seeming errors are intentional and are in fact offered as portals of recognition and discovery. On this logic, the overall design of Hawthorne’s tale can be appreciated as ‘intentioned’ by Mrs. Wakefield’s ostensibly self-subversive slippage into blandness, secondariness and silence. A case of how less may prove more, of darkness-as-light and ultimately of blindness-as-insight, the paucity of especially emotional data pertaining to the wife looms not only as the crucial investigative thematic data but presents itself as a *pas-se-partout* to the structure, motivation and purpose of the narrative. By virtue of being distributed conspicuously mute and absent from the main stream of action for the greater part of the narrative, Mrs. Wakefield draws conspicuous attention to herself. The dialogic Socratic-Phaedrusean gesture of veiling proves to be a classic gesture of unveiling here. An element of Hawthorne’s larger discourse of divergent impulses and double-edged effects, this distribution emerges as an instance, spectacle or more correctly pantomime, of (self) enactment and (self) disclosure by (self) effacement. As an unmarked, nongendered signifier, the titular designation allows for a resolute *mundus reversus* rearticulation. Applying, as suggested paradigmatically by Edgar Allan Poe’s notorious purloined letter, the formula of the excessively obvious, the obtrusively self-evident clue placed before the eyes of the whole world, “Wakefield” can be read as a missive that has been turned like a (French) glove inside out, redirected and resealed.⁵

Even though we do not know anything at all about the narrator – it is a transparent, unthematized and nonreferential entity, no more than a supposed person – we are very likely to accept it is a *man*, especially since the immediate

⁵ Also, it may be useful to recall here Ralph Waldo Emerson’s venture ([1836] 1983a: 34) into the optics and aesthetics of controlled disruption and discomfort, a peculiar (perverse) camera-obscura exercise: “Turn the eyes upside down, by looking at the landscape through your legs, and how agreeable is the picture, though you have seen it any time these twenty years!”. Less dramatically, Hawthorne’s own narrative voiceover advises the readers midway through “Wakefield” to cast their eyes exactly “in the opposite direction” (296). Cf. Kenneth Burke’s classic notion of perspective by incongruity in the sense of ‘planned’ incongruity. Since, at any time, it is exceedingly difficult to see beyond the current orientations and codifications, we should take courage and turn our world, both verbally and conceptually, deliberately “upside down” so as to ‘re-see’ our distribution and bearings in it (Spigelman 2004: 90).

story is *about* a man.⁶ It is commonplace to point out that in human history both the 'I' and the 'eye' of the text, its vertical as well as its horizontal dynamic and dimension, have been predominantly and on the whole unproblematically naturalized as male, as a bland hand-me-down or presumptive one-size-fits-all 'normalcy'. A matter equally of broad cultural scripts and institutional frameworks, of entrenched cognitive pathways, of epistemic and behavioural patterns, both the creator and the spectator have been androcentrically (ultimately phallogocentrically) presumed to be men.⁷ In her by-now-classic essay on how theories of fiction tend to exclude women writers by design, Baym (1981: 139) notes that since the literary act has been traditionally perceived as a self-begetting attempt by the author to 'father' oneself, then all acts of writing by women are definitionally both perverse and absurd. As such they are condescendingly, and admittedly logically enough, destined to fail.

A compound risk involved in any nominal interactional communication, Mrs. Wakefield would have been well (self-) advised that in the early nineteenth century to write freely and boldly as a woman, to engage and indulge as a pronounced begetter in *écriture féminine*, would have been tantamount to sentimentally throwing oneself testimonially helplessly open.⁸ Rather than exposing herself as I-

⁶ To borrow from Virginia Woolf's classic of feminism and multivocal narrative construction ([1929] 2005: 99), the pronounced declarative 'I' in Hawthorne's tale is to most practical intents and purposes as shapeless as "mist". Meanwhile, the recent internet audio-version of "Wakefield" by LibriVox – a project dedicated to acoustical liberation of books in the public domain – is as a matter of course recorded in a male voice. Against this proposition, cf. Kosofsky Sedgwick's unapologetically subversive, specific (Proustian) argument from her *Epistemology of the closet* ([1990] 2008: 248) that a woman reader may be precisely "the intended consumer"; and not just any woman reader but someone in the position of the narrator or the author.

⁷ "[T]he so-called male gaze defines the sensory as well as the philosophical point of view of the art piece, and decides the aesthetic and erotic value as well" (Persin 1997: 146). While in the annals of world literature there have been of course a great many memorable, larger-than-life heroines, they do not as a rule get to tell their stories in strictly speaking their own voice and from their own unmediated vantage point. Basically, this argument is about self-representation in words that would allow for woman's individuating voice as a psychologically credible and existentially viable literate subject and agency, as well as for *parler-femme* in a larger cultural sense. Rather than having to under- or over-perform as a kind of 'accursed poet' (*poète maudit*), the woman in the literary work and the woman writing the literary work ought to have the right to be the same person, cf. Adrienne Rich ([1971] 1982: 359). Hawthorne identifies the gist of the problem in *The Blithedale romance* ([1852] 1983a: 737) where he has the principal female character denounce "the injustice which the world did to women, and equally to itself, by not allowing them ... their natural utterance in public", something that might be called "a fair and suitable position" (Hawthorne [1850] 1983c: 260).

⁸ Sentimentality – regarded as a form of inadequacy and deficiency – being the hermeneutic 'club' that patriarchy wields over the woman (Rajan 2009: 44). It is still today that explicit references to gender can in themselves speak volumes. "Rarely has a male writer received

woman, the key witness of her stigmatic jettisoned condition – in her subaltern case a pathetic second order of limitation – Hawthorne’s wife can be recuperatively reconceived as displacing a forlorn ‘I’ with a perverse ‘eye’. This gambit is arguably the only way to naturalize such unnatural or preternatural *in medias res* rhapsodic (in)voluntary asides, nonnarrative colloquialisms and breathtaking scopophilic exclamations as – “Now for a scene!” (“Wakefield”, 295).

The *pragmatique traductive* assumed to have been emplotted here is that of interdiscursive transvestism informed by prosopopeic restitution. What issues forth thereby is a case of literally coextensive substitutional poetics, a combined Freudian/Lacanian act of displacement and condensation. Instead of exciting the customary desultory and impractical Didonian lamentations, remonstrations, denunciations and disavowals, a presumed female actant can be contemplated as pantographically reduplicating and in effect taking artfully over a first-person male narration, the available/allowable mode of authority. Writing in ‘white ink’ is an expedient that can give articulation to an otherwise untenable atavistic agenda, one’s own-most jouissance, which is to say the defaced and devoiced female text.⁹ In this sense, Mrs. Wakefield’s peculiar disposition is naturalizable not only as displacement but also as sublimation. It is effected by adopting and adapting the manner of a culturally sanctioned normative other (in this case a detached male raconteur and, critically, his privileged license to publicize) in order to be able to entertain/retain one’s inaccessible as well as discursively ‘forbidden’ most significant other. This plot resembles in essence the territorial dynamic of what de Certeau calls the ‘art’ of the disadvantaged; here, more technically, of the dis-art-iculated. At bottom, it is no more than a modern transcription of the ancient, *inter alia* Homeric, trickster lore. “[It is] a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. ... It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance ... it is a maneuver ‘within the enemy’s field of vision’”.¹⁰ More generally, the practice of everyday life is at some basic

criticism which describes ‘masculine interest’ as inherently incriminating; for women writers, on the other hand, there exists always the risk that their work will be considered ‘feminine’ in the negative sense” (Sukenick 1988: 41).

⁹ For a perfectly conventional impacted-grief response see Joyce Carol Oates’ recent *A widow’s story*, an extensive memoir that opens with the dirge-like “[When m]y husband died, my life collapsed”, and that ends with the *kommos*-like “[O]n the first anniversary of her husband’s death the widow should think ‘I kept myself alive’” (Oates 2011: 2, 416). Cf. Louise Erdrich’s ironic epigrammatic observation ([1984] 2009: 273) that “a woman is supposed to cry”. To complete a double digression, for an unconventional conventional response cf. Stefan Zweig’s classic novella *Letter from an unknown woman* (1922).

¹⁰ In her perverse classic laugh of the Medusa, Cixous ([1976] 1997: 356-362) contemplates this proposition specifically from the gendered perspective: “Flying is woman’s gesture ... finding, when desired, narrow passageways, hidden crossovers ... jumbling the order of space, disorienting it”. (This is the context in which Cixous applies the metaphor of ‘white ink’, by the way.)

level about phenomenological constructedness and existential mastery of places through sight: “[A] panoptic practice proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and include them within [one’s] scope of vision” (de Certeau [1984] 1988: 36-37).¹¹

It is Hawthorne’s narrative voice (discourse) and active narrative presence (stance, posture) that are largely responsible for the intricacies and ambiguities of his fictions. Quite routinely, besides semantic uncertainties, embedded, phrase- and clause-filled sentences, prolix and highly stylized diction, we have to contend here with all kinds of importunities (narratorial interventions, self-questioning, exhortations, declarations of ignorance); with ellipsis, prolepsis and clashing personal pronouns; with shifts in tense, mode and point of view. While narrative-framing is an extradiegetic ploy and as such creates or safeguards distance, (re)telling through the dramatically speaking-I and especially through the directly seeing-eye draws attention to itself. It creates of itself focus, immediacy and excitement. With no clear foreground–background contrast, the text of “Wakefield” is in a manner and course of telling framed as a male skeleton with a female gaze, if not exactly a fully rounded female body, behind it. Prefigured by the cautious-audacious, private-public authorial self-fashioning in the prefaces to Hawthorne’s major fictions, the mildly disengaged, manifestly male narration gives here im-perceptibly way to an intensely extravagant and partial female agenda. This is accompanied by the governing presence of the so-called emotional punctuation: the total of some thirty autofigurative and interactive question marks and exclamation points on record. Hawthorne’s narrative can be ultimately identified by a rather rarely cited androgynous line from Whitman’s “Song of myself” ([1855] 1982a: 224): “My voice is the wife’s voice”; or by Flaubert’s famous apocryphal bravura: “Mme Bovary, *c’est moi!*”, for that matter.¹²

¹¹ Cf. the modern(ist) phenomenological poetic insistence that “the mind / Is the eye” and that “this landscape of the mind / Is a landscape ... of the eye” (Stevens [1943] 1977a: 305).

¹² Notwithstanding his envious and peevish impatience with the female reformers and especially with the popular women authors of the day, Hawthorne’s sympathetic interest in the creative potential of the other sex (as represented for him most personally and most vividly by Margaret Fuller or by Fanny Fern [Sara Payson Willis]) is well known. Baym (1982: 62) goes so far as to posit that the question of woman is “*the* determining motive” in Hawthorne’s entire oeuvre. On a personal note, in 1820 the future author revealed in a letter that he wished he had been a girl, forever “pinned” to the mother’s apron (Hawthorne 2002: 27). His college-mate Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (quoted in Herbert [2004: 74]) said that talking to him was “like talking to a woman”. Also, later in life Hawthorne would confide in one of his friends: “I think I prefer a daughter to a son; there is something so especially piquant in having helped to create a future woman” (Hawthorne 1985: 25).

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The opening of Hawthorne's tale appears to be a guileless exercise in received nonconfrontational configuration and attestation. It addresses itself to a conventional horizon of expectations and a familiar nexus of associations. It evinces a comfortable temporal distance, a specifiable topographic circumscription, as well as a believable cultural textuality. The idea is to engender story-telling credibility and to enhance story-telling efficacy. With a nod to the text's alleged source, with a sense of guidance and proleptic inevitability, this whole voluble delivery distills a predictable 'compulsory' last sentence. The final passage can be seen, in fact, as "Wakefield's" purple patch. It formulates a stentorian communiqué of incontestable, magisterial applicability. This particular piece of rhetoric reads nearly like a non-adjudicatory evaluative statement, a proposition that is supposed to be true by definition:

Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world, individuals are so nicely adjusted to a system, and systems to one another, and to a whole, that, by stepping aside for a moment, a man exposes himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe.
(*"Wakefield"*, 298)

The closing communiqué builds on the earlier gnomic "It is perilous to make a chasm in human affections" and on the more brooding, quasi-sacerdotal "Would Time but await the close of our favorite follies, we should be young men, all of us, and till Doom's Day" (*"Wakefield"*, 293, 297).¹³ Concurrently, as a silver lining of sorts, the narrative deploys the etiquette of relaxed contemplation characteristic of a local interpretive community, a manner that is both patronizing and magnanimous. This approach depends on tacit, implicitly male, self-affirmative conversational complicity, urbane connivance and a wink-wink/nudge-nudge rapport between the narrator and the narratee. It communicates as a well-rehearsed protocol that comes close to persiflage: "We know ... that of none us would ... yet feel as if some others might" (*"Wakefield"*, 290).

However, no sooner does the story get under way than a subterranean voice announces its presence and establishes a running dis-continuous parallel. It is a lingering heuristic lyricizing query (anything but a straightforward question) posed at the beginning of the third paragraph – "What sort of a man was Wake-

¹³ This is a rather obvious conventional public display of quasi-religious sublime feelings. The sermonizing that by stepping aside even for a brief moment one exposes oneself to the fearful risk of losing one's place forever proves to be a pathetically missed point and a deconstructive cenotaph of sorts. Rather than delegating the protagonist to the ninth circle of Dante's hell, the preceding paragraph effortlessly admits him, after all, back home after his seemingly impossibly long and notorious absence.

field?" – that first introduces not merely a different tonality but a different sensibility. It is a moment that provides for a reconfiguration from noncommittal male-voiced conventionality to personal eccentricity, from statementality to suggestivity, from *récit premier* to a hypophoric intratextual phantasy. This is effected as a *récit secondaire* by an-other, intradiegetic or parenthetical character-narrator.¹⁴ This is how Hawthorne's twice-told tale entertains and eventually reveals its decentred, disfigured or veiled, true central consciousness. It is a plot that not only exposes a palimpsestic counter-text, but articulates a veritable counter-discourse.¹⁵

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While "Wakefield" is realistic enough – despite its challenging logistics, the story does not contravene in any way verisimilitude, the laws of motion and the behaviour of matter – contextual specificity is anything but an essential coordinate here. Even though the narrative is strictly speaking about flaneuristic sauntering down the pavement and exploratory voyeuristic rambling along the footwalk, there is no argot, no frippery, no Knickerbockerian razzle-dazzle of a particular historical *polis*. An act of deliberate narrative divestiture, the setting is not in any way thematized. And it is not pictured as a seat of high or low engagement and entertainment, either.¹⁶ As far as Wakefield's wife's (any man's wife's) agenda is concerned, it is actually congenially functional that instead of urban attractions, addictions and possible dissolute carnivalesque pleasures there should obtain a sense of undifferentiated ennui and stultification. "He was in the bustle of the city ... but the crowd swept by, and saw him not" – "that busy and selfish London" ("Wakefield", 296). At the same time, the text is rife

¹⁴ For a superb example of controlled ventriloquism, self-censorship and narrative framing cf. Hawthorne's Swiftian sketch "Chiefly about war-matter", published in 1862. It is a devious quasi-journalistic piece structured as a dialogue or more properly tug-of-war between an anonymous anti-war author and a pro-war editor.

¹⁵ "Wakefield" undermines, albeit ever so subtly, its ostensible conventionality from the start when having announced itself as a 'found text' it deconstructs the formula into a near-impossible binocular disparity, a quasi-androgynous double bind: "In some old magazine or newspaper, I recollect a story" (290; emphasis added). Rather surprisingly, this fairly transparent piece of intentional misinformation has created something of a historicist myth around "Wakefield". Perry (1978: 613) argues for example that Hawthorne must have come across the supposed original "in one of the eighty odd volumes of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, ... for in the years before he wrote 'Wakefield' he read widely in these and other eighteenth-century volumes". Wright, for her part (2007: 231), is satisfied that "Wakefield" follows an account in William King's *Political and literary anecdotes of his own times* (1818). In terms of literary self-reflexivity and intertextuality, a more rewarding if obvious clue is Oliver Goldsmith's *The vicar of Wakefield* (1766), a prime example of the genre of family survival.

¹⁶ "It would be vain searching for him there" (292). Evidently, Wakefield is a denizen of 'somewhere-else'.

with quotidian markers of crowdedness, situatedness and givenness drawn overwhelmingly from the idiom of the *oikos*: houseness and homeness. In this regard, the impression is nearly of metonymic congestion or accretive overkill. Our attention is drawn to doors, windows, ceiling, floor, hearth, fireside, parlour, chamber, bed, closet, clothes, etc. This is how, to pastiche one of John Donne's best known sonnets ([1609] 1998: 206), Hawthorne's text communicates as a miniature world made cunningly of distinctively signifying prime elements.¹⁷

In very broad terms, "Wakefield" validates the following well-established recognition concerning human bearings: "We constantly orient our bodies with respect to containers – rooms, beds, buildings. We spend an inordinate amount of time putting things in and taking things out" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 36). Hawthorne's narrative in a literal sense hinges in its compositional entirety on the allocation and affordance of the door. This focalizing image and enabling pivotal prop gets invoked explicitly as many as seven times in the course of this barely seven-page sketch.¹⁸ The front door is first seen being closed, only to be immediately perceived from the same vantage as being thrust partly open.¹⁹ In fact, the logistics of the story is predicated on the combined logic of *terminus a quo* and *terminus ad quem*; on how after the door has closed apparently by itself at the beginning the same door (with its defunctionalized silenced knocker now) inexplicably opens by itself again at the very end. This key liminal trope appears to be conceptualized and seems to be actually deployed here not as a Rubicon, but much rather as a Sesame Door. With no phantom limb involved, it is the wife's prolonged stare that animates the swing of the door after it has closed behind her spouse. More realistically as well as more importantly, given that in the wake of

¹⁷ Anything but a heap of broken images – it is, in fact, a lure rather than a blur – this constitutive spectrum includes also household minions: a maid-servant and a foot-boy. "Wakefield" does not really "tremble" – as Reynolds (1989: 122) would have it – "on the edge of being a dreary portrait of shattered domesticity".

¹⁸ In more sense than one, Hawthorne's narrative is a real estate story, with the abiding notion of a house-hold about it. It is of some ultimate significance that Wakefield should have "beheld *his home every day*" (290; emphasis added). This dynamic of touching with the eye/I is a protocol of cultivating an unbroken intentional relatedness to one's life-world as a profoundly me-meaningful phenomenological and existential end in itself.

¹⁹ Critically, Hawthorne employs this dynamic also at the very outset of "Young Goodman Brown". The scene happens to be of relevance for the overall logic of "Wakefield" as well. "[The husband] came forth, at sunset, into the street ... but put his head back, after crossing the threshold, to exchange a parting kiss with his wife [who afterwards] thrust her own pretty head into the street" – "[B]eing about to turn the corner ... [he] looked back, and saw the head of [the wife] still peeping after him" (Hawthorne [1835] 1982h: 276). Thresholds are prominent fixtures in all of Hawthorne's novels and in many of his tales, discernible and appreciable also in the guise of authorial preambles, prefaces and introductions as well as metafictional asides, reflections and commentaries.

the husband's potentially cataclysmic desertion the ceiling does not cave in on the jettisoned wife and the house-pipes are evidently kept by her working, the fact that the critical household fixture, the fulcrum and calculus of most practical domestic affairs, the front door, is left precariously unattended (also at night) can be only explained by a conscious design, and/or unbounded subconscious desire of wanting to make it possible for the errant man – quietly, as from a day's absence and without the use of a key, too – to effortlessly and unobtrusively pass in again *ad libitum*, i.e., at his absolute discretion and leisure.

Pretty soon, it emerges in "Wakefield" that the only viable framework and meaningful rhetoric is statutory matrimoniality, including nodal matrilocality. It is a condition not only dependent on but actually directly deriving from the very first sentence from the wife. Also, against a possible multiple and flexible social referentiality befitting a metropolitan gentleman, Mr. Wakefield proves to be a carrier of no other personal identity and no other legitimacy than that of a husband, householder, homer, dweller and lodger.²⁰ Furthermore, with the emotive designation, or perhaps idealized projection, of "a loving spouse till death" as a metonymic transcription of the conjugal liturgical vow 'till death do us part' ("Wakefield", 290), the indispensable transactional premise of the tale (the real silver lining there) is that both parties should refrain from entering any alternative intimate relationships during their protracted hiatus; no matter how improbable individual readers may consider it to be.

While it is generally acknowledged that Hawthorne knew quite well what he was up to in his fictions, it might look at first that "Wakefield" does not represent textual governance at its best. It might appear that the author is not really sure what he is doing with the story, that the narrative is introverted, incomplete, indecisive, befuddled and underspecified (see e.g., Harris 1988: 28; Piacentino 1997: 71, 77). However, rather than a case of structural lapses, blind spots, inconsistencies and missed opportunities, the text not only orchestrates a functional variable internal focalization but turns out to be a remarkable tour de force of transvocalization. Mrs. Wakefield resolutely deconstructs or demoralizes (in the most ordinary sense of the notion) her husband's story, as the ostensible male narrator proceeds languidly with the construction of his conventionally moralistic tale. Between abstraction and ebullience the text features predictable impassive *amicus curiae* condemnation on the one hand and illocutionary personal application on the other hand. The formulaic pronouncement of the doom to which the husband's first mis-step will presumably inevitably eventually condemn him is almost instantly followed, for example, by an exultation

²⁰ Though not – significantly – that of a parent, which would of course slant the story toward a self-apparently different nexus of coordinates, allegiances and responsibilities. Correspondingly, it is a key recognition for the present analysis that Mrs. Wakefield should project (embrace/admit) no other functional identity than that of a wife.

over a highly fortuitous narrow escape. It is a condition appreciable as a recourse away from formally derivative towards authenticating existential articulation, “towards the personal discourse which develops in us, and which, indeed, we are” (Merleau-Ponty 1963: 57-58). Hawthorne’s most distinctive technique proves to be free direct speech: “Stay ...! Would you go ...? Then step ...!” Additionally, the pervasive visual modality turns the narrative into a see-saw interplay of contrapuntal positionalities whereby things tend to be revealed “at a glance”, in a blink of an eye (“Wakefield”, 298; 296). However, this is all applied more in terms of stop-start performativity, spectatability and iterability than strictly speaking reportability, i.e., the singulative facts of the case.²¹ In effect, we are offered a paradoxical non-narrative narrative here, a riveting spectatorial story without properly speaking a story to speak of.²²

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Nominally a tale about hiding, “Wakefield” is steeped in masquerade, camouflage, disguise, twists and turns, quid pro quo and doubling. Also, it is couched in overwrought style and archaic diction. As is well known, in his early twenties Nathaniel Hawthorne [*sic*] altered his family name by adding a ‘w’ to it, and his writing is shot through with the motifs of composite, secret and divided identities.²³ As the author would reassure himself in the introduction to his most famous work: “It is scarcely decorous ... to speak all, even where we speak impersonally” – “we may prate of the circumstances that lie around us, and even of ourself [*sic*], but still keep the inmost Me behind its veil” (Hawthorne [1850] 1983c: 121).²⁴

²¹ Mrs. Wakefield seems to be aware that there is likely to obtain, as for example Doane (1991: 27) notes it, “a certain excessiveness, a difficulty associated with women who appropriate the gaze”. This is where the wife is trying to make sure that her focalization of the missing husband does not parapractically run away with, or ahead, of her. The anticipation of the eventual “happy event” is on two occasions energetically self-disciplined and deferred. Characteristically, this obtains with a double twist, as a fairly transparent praeteritic rhetorical trick: “Wakefield! whither are you going?” (293) – “Alas, what a mistake!” (297). Also, the event in question is bracketed by a popular quasi-editorial deprecatory epistemological interjection “[only] supposing it to be such—” (298).

²² What applies here is the difference between “narrative of events” and “narrative of words” (cf. Genette 1980: 164-165). Following this distinction, “Wakefield” can be classified as a story of (gaze-powered) voice rather than a conventional story of plot.

²³ By virtue of appearance and pronunciation, the letter ‘W’ bespeaks by itself doubleness: a double ‘v’ and ‘you’. Although Hawthorne’s own heraldic ‘w’-gesture is usually read as an attempt to distance himself from his troubled family history, it is worth considering in passing a possible relevance of the fact that his first American forefather William arrived in the New World with John Winthrop and had originally come from Wigeastle, Wilton, in Wiltshire.

²⁴ Hawthorne was so good at keeping secrets that his wife would learn only after his death that prior to *The scarlet letter* he had published at his own expense an unsuccessful early novel

In itself, the rueful “Would that I had a folio to write, instead of an article of a dozen pages!” (“Wakefield”, 295) communicates as a remarkable lyrical and metafictional aside, one that may bring to mind Edgar Allan Poe’s frustrated amorous longing and woe. Given the recognition that when a particular subject ‘forcibly’ affects the mind then time is well spent thinking about it (“Wakefield”, 290), there is no reason why Hawthorne’s narrator might not volunteer – as advertised by the impassioned narrative voice of *Moby-Dick*, for instance – to dip into a Vesuvius’ crater of an inkstand and write up with abandon an entire ream of paper. Preambled by the nonnegotiable declarative memory of the “outline is all that I remember” (“Wakefield”, 290), the arbitrary and non-normative measure of no more than a dozen pages (there obtains no such *differentia specifica*, of course) is clearly self-imposed. Presumably, it is a measure deemed safe to write oneself into the writing without giving oneself away, i.e., without spilling the homemade ink, read: beans.

*

Hope is an attitude that cannot be learned, willed, induced or compelled by verbal, mechanical or medical intervention. Also, it is not to be confused with common or naïve happy-go-lucky Panglossian optimism. As Daniélou (1958: 341) argues curtly, optimism is ‘easy’. It entails no more than simplistically supposing that everything is somehow going to work out in the end. Hope is a state/slant of mind as well as of being that either obtains (essentially of its own accord) or it does not. When it does, it is necessarily outside-, future-, and other-oriented; though it is typically cultivated as an intimately private and covert pursuit. While in ordinary situations most people absolutely hate to wait, be it in line or being put for whatever reason and however briefly on hold, under extraordinary circumstances people’s waiting forbearance can be absolutely phenomenal (the degree and amount of patience as a measure of need). A liberal extension of the faith of Abraham, hoping-against-all-hope is a uniquely human gift of potentially infinite durability. Transcribable in more contemporary parlance as confirmation bias, motivated irrationality, volitional ignorance, magical (wishful) thinking, saving or vital lie,²⁵ the stance entails a denial of the consen-

and then did his utmost to suppress it. Wineapple (2001: 14) believes that “concealment was Hawthorne’s keynote”. According to Porte (1991: 137), the discourse of veils and screens is Hawthorne’s “most familiar idiom”. The single most concise and persuasive textual support of the founding argument of the present paper is the following rhetorical question from “My kinsman, Major Molineux” (Hawthorne [1832] 1982b: 83): “May not one man have several voices ...?”. Elsewhere, the writer openly champions “the ventriloquist, with his mysterious tongues” – along with “the thaumaturgist, too, with his miraculous transformations” (Hawthorne ([1852] 1983a: 802).

²⁵ “*Lebenslüge*, literally ‘life lies’, means in effect a life of self-deception” – “it seems to be lies

sual world as it is commonly known and a projection of not infrequently radically alternative reality. Illustrated emblematically by such innately antagonistic systemic pairs as alchemy vs. chemistry, phrenology vs. neurology, or creationism vs. evolutionary history, the irrational may be unproblematically invited to replace the rational, regardless of what everybody else may ever choose to say or think about the validity and realizability of the proposition in question. The more something is not possible, the more in our heart of hearts we are capable of believing that it precisely and emphatically is.

As far as “Wakefield” is concerned, a vast majority of grown-ups may be trusted to concede that under some such circumstances most husbands – most simply put – “would never return” (Making of America Project [1913] 2010: 421). Moreover, a broader commonsensical acknowledgment has it that somewhere out-there, well beyond the back-of-beyond, there exists a realm from which no traveller can be ever expected to come back.²⁶ However, there is really no remoteness into which hopefulness may not reach out and intervene, by refusing to accept not only finitude but demise and oblivion as such. Most typically, as Hawthorne observes in an earlier story ([1832] 1982g: 63), it may prove exceedingly “difficult to be convinced of the death of one whom we have deemed another self”. The beginning of Zora Neale Hurston’s classic modern novel *Their eyes were watching God* extends a pronounced gendered perspective that can be usefully related to the present argument:

Ships at a distance have every man’s wish on board. For some ... they sail forever on the horizon ... never landing until the Watcher[s] turn [their] eyes away in resignation, [their] dreams mocked to death by Time. That is the life of men.

Now, women forget all those things they don’t want to remember, and remember everything they don’t want to forget. *The dream is the truth*. Then they act and do things accordingly.

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead.

(Hurston [1937] 2006: 1; emphasis added)

Accordingly, one might say, even after Mr. Wakefield’s personal estate has been settled and his name dismissed from public memory, i.e., when all others have given him up for dead, his wife – hardly a mad woman in the attic, Titania, or a lady of situations – is not prepared to accept that she is a widow.²⁷ She does not

that make life bearable; but it could also be translated colloquially as ‘life story’” (editors’ note in Simmel [1908] 2009: 309).

²⁶ A popular commonsensical reading of “Wakefield” is that (i) the wife is “quite certain that, after twenty years of her husband’s absence, she is a widow” (Frank and Mueller-Vollmer 2000: 327); (ii) even if the egregious husband were to return “[his] reconciliation with his widowed wife and his recovery of self are left in doubt” (Nigro 1984: 87).

²⁷ From the vantage of this paper the single most important element of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s

sport any pathetic frippery or trimmings and does not entertain any other social or poetic codifications of mourning. She does not fall into retromania, a compulsive exaggeration, does not become a self-flagellating anchoress, jaundiced misanthrope or dysfunctional depressive. In the literal sense of Schopenhauerian *Wille* vs. *Vorstellung*, we actually see her triumph over popular negative iconography when without recourse to necromancy she manages to suppress an especially poignant and possibly devastating elegiac event in consciousness: a hypnagogic image of one's wedded spouse in a coffin ("Wakefield", 292).²⁸

Hope, a sense that the particular narrative (fiction) we choose to believe *must* be true, finds its most ready expression in prayer, a self-verifying modus of repetition, both humbling and edifying, both ordinary and sublime. The one unambiguous fixture of general urban topography and of cultural lore in "Wakefield", its sole macro-structural marker, turns out to be a church. A textual distribution suggestive of systematicity rather than of accidentality, the church gets invoked twice squarely in the middle of the story. In more sense than one it composes its golden or portmanteau section. In a sequence that is dramatized rather than narrativized, the wife duplicates the last(ing) image of the husband enframed at the outset by the door when we see her project herself into the portal of a church. The only thing we ever learn Mrs. Wakefield does in the course of her Penelopean twenty years is when she is pictured as an acquiescent devotee with a prayer-book in her hand – "proceeding to yonder church" ("Wakefield", 296).²⁹ The inescapable impression is not only of intention-in-action but of both purposive and purposeful procedural routine. As befits ongoing affirma-

biography is probably the fact that in the wake of his father's death Nathaniel's mother unusually for the times never remarried and – barely 28 – withdrew into seclusion in her own home for forty years, as though a-waiting.

²⁸ Reflective of the story's ventriloquistic logos, the intimate insight concerning the "doubts whether she is a widow" (292) is resolutely superscripted over the introductory extradiegetic assumption that the wife might have resigned herself to autumnal husbandlessness (290). In trying to restore the conventionality of the story, Paul Auster (1990a: 209) cannot but (un-intentionally?) turn completely counterfactual and misattributive at this juncture: "One day Wakefield walks down his old street and sees his house decked out in mourning. It's his own funeral, and his wife has become a lonely widow".

As indicated at various points here, "Wakefield" is predicated on a certain specific unreality – "having a great deal more to do with the clouds overhead, than with any portion of the actual soil" – "essentially a day-dream, and yet a fact" (cf. Hawthorne [1851] 1983b: 353; [1852] 1983a: 634). Whatever the ultimate verdict on the ontological modality of the tale, its plot depends on the apparently absurd and seemingly interminable twenty years for the central idea of both compositional and thematic non-negotiable deliberateness. Totally coincidentally, in a reflection on "the im-possible", a contemporary literary philosopher posits: "Why twenty years? ... It is long for a pleasure or for a suffering, or for a suffering at the edge of pleasure, or the opposite, and yet it is *indisputable*" (Derrida 2001: 15; emphasis added).

²⁹ To buttress in passing the pivotal argument of this paper, the above overt bookish-readerly trope leads logically (in)directly to a (covert) creative-writerly trope.

tion, this *mise-en-scene* is staged on a weekday, most likely in the middle of the day, too. To make the moment explicit, in the subsequent move we see the wife ritualistically as well as committedly opening her prayer-book, when in the wake of a short disruption (without any indication of either doubt or chagrin) she determinedly navigates into the unrestrictedly commodious, high-vaulted architecture of meditation, consolation and hope – her spiritual and existential pabulum.³⁰

It bears pointing out that after we are told in the first paragraph what will have happened, the church *Inszenierung* constitutes the only strand of action that adds any significantly new element to the plot. With the radiance of a fully intentional choice the sequence produces in the best Joycean manner an intensely situational, emotional effect and a highly general, ideational one. It seems only right that the only encounter between the spouses during their long-drawn separation should take place right outside the house of prayer frequented by the wife. Although it is something of a false climax, in itself inconsequential for the immediate course of events, it is appreciable as a unique moment of natural supplementarity, of inter-passivity and extended instantiation. Hoping and praying for the return of the missing husband agrees rather well with the sublime Homeric conceit of the irreproachably “chaste bosom” and the equally commendable ideal of the “true wife” (“Wakefield”, 292, 293). In a crystalline magnetic moment of pantomime slow motion, the vignette orchestrates, re-conducts and re-performs a wedding march and a wedding ceremony. It is something of a dramatic character grouping complete with spectators and on-lookers. Its implied function is to sentimentalize a restitution of the contractual nuptial bond, i.e., the wed-lock. When the two figures are inexplicably brought magically into contact in front of the local temple of Hymen “[t]heir hands touch; ... they stand, face to face, staring into each other’s eyes” – this is how the man meets his wife (“Wakefield”, 296).³¹ A rare moment of narrative extravaganza and a metonymic surplus of meaning, this enchanting covenantal *pas de deux* is footnoted with a characteristically awkward pre-consummatory haptic bundling when with the piquant suggestiveness of the amatory first time “the pressure of the crowd forces her bosom against his shoulder” (“Wakefield”, 296).³²

³⁰ To complete the picture, Hawthorne supplies a congenial image at the end of his last published novel ([1860] 1983d: 1235) – “a female ... kneeling [down], just beneath the great central Eye, in the very spot ... whence prayers should ascend ... [her] upturned face ... invisible, behind a veil or mask”.

³¹ It is tempting to underscore the impact of this scene with an adaptation of an earlier ritualistic pantomime vignette: “He holds out his hand, she gives her own, and meets his ... kiss” (292).

³² Theatricality of the scene notwithstanding, it is not surprising that (even) under its displaced impact Wakefield should grow “wild” in the face, should throw himself upon the bed and then should “cr[y] out passionately” (296). A page later, the wife’s bosom is actually in-

Part of the broader discourse of cultivating one's identity through the stories one may be prepared to divulge in public, intense hope will eventually need an outside manifestation, which is to say a verbalization of being, an essential talking-listening cure in its own right.³³ In this sense, the implied presence of directly addressable reader is fundamental to the composition and constitution, the phenomenological and existential anaideic well-being of "Wakefield"/Wakefield. As Hawthorne ([1851] 1982d: 1152) expounds his motivation in the preface to the third edition of *Twice-told tales*, the author's musings ought not to be looked upon as conversations of a secluded person with his/her own mind and heart, an exclusive rapport with a sympathetic jury of one. Much rather, they ought to be appreciated as an attempt by that person to open a quilting intercourse with the world at large.

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Given the present palimpsestic purchase of a thrice-told tale, the last paragraph of "Wakefield" seems to be a diminuendo of aftertastes. In what reads like a purely casual line, we are nonetheless offered a critically important corrective there. We are advised, namely, that only a portion of the narrative may lend itself after all to a conventionally communicable homiletic application and consumption within the common horizon of expectations, in terms of *interpretatio predestinata*. As we look analeptically over our shoulder, we realize that the opening extradiegetic sweeping designation of "as remarkable a freak as may be found in the whole list of human oddities" ("Wakefield", 290) is in fact almost instantaneously recategorized by a mildly patronizing and apologetic review. It is tendered in a well-practiced idiom of collectedness and restraint from excessive spousal expectations and, arguably even more importantly, from possible future expostulations and recriminations.

scribed "full into [the husband's] face" (297). The ultimate dimension of remarriage is the subject matter of Hawthorne's pseudo-gothic story "The wedding-knell" ([1836] 1982f: 359): "Forgive; and be forgiven. Yes; it is evening with us now; ... But let us join our hands before the altar, as lovers, ... who meet again ... to be married of Eternity". In a tongue-and-cheek manner, Hawthorne suggests elsewhere ([1863] 2009: 194) that on a special red-letter day, the 25th wedding anniversary, all married couples ought to get remarried in order to "legalize and mutually appropriate that corporeal growth of which both parties have individually come into possession since they were [first] pronounced one flesh".

³³ It is a dynamic Hawthorne exposes at the close of *The Blithedale romance* ([1852] 1983a: 848-849): "I have concealed [something] all along, and never meant to let the least whisper of it escape ... It is an absurd thing ... But it rises in my throat; so let it come". Emerson ([1841] 1983b: 448), identifies the general human need of expression as "this necessity to be published" – "[in] love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labor, in games, we study to utter [sooner or later] our painful secret[s]".

He was now in the meridian of life; his matrimonial affections, never violent, were sobered into a calm, habitual sentiment; of all husbands, he was likely to be the most constant, because a certain sluggishness would keep his heart at rest ... intellectual, but not actively so ...

(“Wakefield”, 291)

Although the introductory part is choreographed as a largesse, a noncommittal open gesture – “We are free to shape our own idea” – the rest of the paragraph makes clear that the focalizing is intimately intradiegetic and direct.

Only the wife of his bosom *might have* ... [been] aware of a quiet ... disposition to craft ... keeping of petty secrets, hardly worth revealing—and, lastly, of what she called a little strangeness, sometimes, in the good man.

(“Wakefield”, 291; emphasis added)

Even though the story seems to invite subsequently an element of extratextual imaginative free-play, the narrative never becomes a view from nowhere. As Auerbach (1989: 16) points out, when the storytelling voice and the storytelling presence are situated inside rather than outside the story, how s/he knows what s/he knows becomes unavoidably part of the story as well. In terms of overall spatial organization, it is instructive that just as we see the husband stepping halfway through the foundational paragraph over the threshold, as we watch him closing the door and expect to sally forth in a fade-out into the street, the narrative draws us back for the remainder of this magnetically protracted paragraph to the inside again.

A transaction both epistemic and pragmatic, every gaze doubles back to reveal, be it explicitly or implicitly, the gazer. Technically, leaving the house and bidding routinely adieu to the wife the husband is being typically looked at from a definable and predictable vantage point. However, in an optical turnstile manner, and without any appreciable attentional control at that, he is in un-reality being expertly scanned, circumscriptively watched over from all angles, from all sides and heights. This is a special Archimedean prerogative and clandestine (dis-) pleasure of the agency known variously as the Angel of the house, *Über-Frau* or more ponderously as the tutelary Queen of the household Empire. Before the time of acute gender (over-)sensitivity, Henry James was at liberty to un-amusedly observe that it is peculiar for a woman “to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look out at you in a certain way”. It may well turn out to be a glance one shall “never forget” (James [1884] 1984a: 354; [1892] 1984b: 258). Hawthorne’s farewell scene not only bespeaks the importance of scopic economy and primacy of perception as such but much more specifically and critically, in a complementary pseudo-Lacanian and pseudo-Foucauldian sense, it highlights the inescapable tension behind the regime of the female gaze:

She ... *interrogates* him ... by a look.

(“Wakefield”, 291; emphasis added)

As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (quoted in Stearns 2006: 44) observed in his essay on *Twice-told tales* – not unlikely on a veiled personal note – the face looking out from the pages of Nathaniel Hawthorne’s fictions wears now a pleasant smile and now a shade of sadness. Sometimes, however, “it glares wildly at you with a strange and painful expression”.³⁴ The leave-taking scene in “Wakefield” may initially come across as casual and indulgent. Nonetheless, by means of a well-practiced look, in effect a fixative photographic take, it produces a discerning head-to-toe appraisal and an itemizing, quasi-archival dispassionate registration.

His equipment is a drab great-coat, a hat covered with an oil-cloth, top-boots, an umbrella in one hand and a small portmanteau in the other.

(“Wakefield”, 291)

This soundless eye-opening synecdochic vignette is both a projection of the normative demands of the social world on the individual and an illustration of the basic modality of the patronizing and appropriating gaze. It depends on the searching and computational reflex that proceeds contiguously and smoothly from part to part, spatializing and quantifying, noting the texture, the colour and the curve, not only passing an *ad hoc* aesthetic judgment, but stressing sheer to-be looked-at-ness, which is to say the body’s contractual status as an object to be legitimately superviewed and supervised.³⁵ D. H. Lawrence ([1923] 1965: 87) proposes to classify what in evolutionary psychology is known as the instinct of mate-retention as a rather “terrible” phenomenon. Any woman is susceptible to becoming thereby a disciplinary “would-be-loving demon”. She may not even know it. It is just that she cannot help it. In effect, she simply does it.³⁶

³⁴ With the eyes – to borrow a particularly congenial simile from Henry James ([1898] 1958: 250) – “like a chamber of justice”.

³⁵ Cf. Spurr (1993: 23) and Mulvey (1990: 38). In one of his most popular stories, Edgar Allan Poe ([1843] 1984e: 555, 559) dramatizes the recognition that even in a plot of a seemingly perfect crime it is impossible to quell the all-seeing eye of the significant other, for the simple reason that the eye is intimately informed and is actually incessantly powered by the beating of the heart. Also, Poe employs the conceit of the ever-watchful eye in his well-known story about an indestructible one-eyed cat, a significant animal-other that (in)directly stands in for the wife and is destined to forever haunt the profligate husband with the justly accusatory “eye of fire” (Poe [1843] 1984c: 606).

³⁶ Almost casually, in one of his rare socially engaged, pseudo-feminist novels Henry James ([1886] 2009b: 43) happens to describe the ‘all-over’ head-to-foot predatory and colonizing female gaze: “It was this glance that was the beginning ... it was this quick survey, omitting nothing, [the gaze] that ... took possession”.

To repeat, while “Wakefield” designedly leaves out a whole range of variables and determinants, in certain respects, notwithstanding its near-claustrophobic nonnegotiable limits and shorthand manner, it is committed to perfectly referential, itemizing descriptive residue and tends to dwell on sometimes extraordinarily specific and recondite visual details. Only seemingly a random drift, this is where the narrative reveals most directly its feminine slant. “[If] the gynocentric gaze is different in its aim and function from the masculine gaze, then the contextual information pick-up of the female may very well be different from that of the male” (Duran 1991: 255). “Wakefield” proves acutely receptive of sartorial particulars, movement of the hands, placement of the feet, and – probably most emblematic of the female sensibility, superior visual memory and heightened retinal sensitivity – of the minutiae of bodily, especially facial, topography of aging. To transcribe (pervert) a classic feminist claim, a panoptic connoisseur may be assumed to (p)reside within the consciousness of all women.

A telling-gaze in competition with conventional story-telling, the agency that sees becomes as relevant as the agency that speaks. Vitaly, it is the leave-taking juncture that establishes the perspectival dynamic. In-congruously a vizeer, in an exquisitely nuanced passage Mrs. Wakefield detects an aperture and a “vision” – like the inexhaustible flame of the philosophical candle: long afterwards, slowly and quietly – “recurs, and flickers” (“Wakefield”, 292). The gaze that sees the husband out of the house is actually both scrutinizing and, with an understandable quickening of narrative pace and a greater urgency of meaning, vigilant and unpretendedly protective. This recognition goes, incidentally, some way towards answering Sigmund Freud’s notoriously troubled reflection concerning the in-tensions of the feminine psyche: “What does a woman [really] want?” (or, confessedly much more importantly, does *not* want, for that matter).³⁷ In “Wakefield”, there obtains a metaleptic moment that gives voice to the combined over-anxious nurturer and accuser, one unwilling to acknowledge the off-spring’s physical separateness and possible existential autonomy:

We must hurry after him, ere he lose his individuality ... Let us follow close at his heels, therefore, until ... we find him comfortably established by the fireside of a small apartment, ... [the] good fortune.

(“Wakefield”, 292)

³⁷ “The great question that has never been answered and which I have not been able to answer, despite my thirty years of research into the feminine soul, is ‘What does a woman want?’” (Sigmund Freud, quoted in Felman [1993: 2]). “Die große Frage, die ich Trotz meines dreißigjährigen Studiums der weiblichen Seele nicht zu beantworten vermag, lautet: ‚Was will eine Frau *eigentlich*?’” (Sigmund Freud, quoted in Voß [2007:1]; emphasis added).

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Crucial to his whole artistic enterprise, Nathaniel Hawthorne was given to looking at reality from various angles. Often, he has both his protagonists and his narrators “climbing hills, peeking through windows and curtains, ascending [trees,] towers, and churches to gain a better perspective” (Bunge 1993: 5; Schiff 1992: 56).³⁸ The single most protracted transaction of field-independent character visualization in “Wakefield” (of the renegade husband) – walking along a street but looking inward and bending his head as if unwilling to display his full front to the world – is reminiscent of the telescopic aerial close-up in the earlier “Sights from a steeple”: “[T]here is now but a single passenger ... bending his eyes upon the pavement, and sometimes raising them to throw a glance before him” (Hawthorne [1831] 1982e: 43). While, moralistically considered, an impassable gulf may be supposed to divide Wakefield’s rented lodgings from his original domicile, it is a matter of both spatial expediency and of structural necessity, of inherent Aristotelian dramatic causality, that he should be straight away detected as having taken lodgings just around the corner, in the street contiguous to, i.e., actually physically touching, his own. In a quasi-mathematical sense, it is a function of ineffable rotundal transposition and abiding relational proximity rather than of displacement *sensu stricto*.

When after the departure of her husband Mrs. Wakefield reappears for the first time *in propria persona*, she is seen framed Jezebel-like by a front window, with the embossed face unambiguously “turned towards the head of the street” (“Wakefield”, 294). Her general perceptual bearings are later confirmed by how she would, significantly without being turned into a pillar of salt, “glance [back] along the street” (“Wakefield”, 296). Insofar as the husband looms as a figure in the mouth-like doorway (Theo-door), the wife looms pre-eminently as a figure in the eye-like window (Eyes-abel).³⁹ A logical reversal of Benjamin Franklin’s logistically similar Silence Dogood underwriting scenario, the wife’s first quasi-phenomenological and existential priority is to dis-quietly keep alive the idea and the image of the no-good, un-dead husband, the spouse who in her mind’s ear “keep[s] saying—‘I shall soon go back!’ ... saying so for twenty years” (“Wakefield”, 297).

³⁸ Cf. Anthony Trollope’s appreciation (quoted in Giles [2001: 166]) of Hawthorne’s peculiar “delight in looking round corners, and in seeing how places and things may be approached by other than the direct and obvious route”.

³⁹ Cf. Dilworth’s useful reminder (1999: 258n) that windows are both “to see and to be seen through”; besides, to be framed by a window is to appear figuratively/symbolically “beyond change”.

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To emphasize: “Wakefield” is anything but a passive or ephemeral tale. And it does not dwell on the past, either. Although hope is grounded in forbearance and awaiting, Hawthorne’s narrative entertains ventriloquistically an engaged, dynamic modality of hope. In terms of Stephen Pepper’s classic conceptualization of perceptual dynamics, this is where the text develops an accelerative drive and projects an appetitive, near-consummatory field of observability. By fits and starts, in bursts of near-hypnotic focalization, Mrs. Wakefield comes paradoxically alive in her formally withdrawn or sidelined presence. Even though there can obviously obtain here no insight into and therefore no real sense of the experiencing-mind, in defiance of the reductive parable of Lot’s Wife, the text implicitly reconstitutes an absorptive, ‘irrational’ emotional life, a pseudo-Jamesian excitement within unexcitement. It can be argued that it is actually right upon the husband’s removing himself as a seemingly unrecoverable trace to the new location, *alio loco*, that the wife reclaims her exclusive intimate rights. This is her phenomenal re-visionary trump card, her incitement premium or fore-pleasure: “No mortal eye but mine has traced thee” (“Wakefield”, 292).⁴⁰ A couple of times, the action takes on the guise of intensely motivated perception. In a functionally foreshortened perspective, there opens a wake-field between the eye of a looking subject and a moving object. It appears to be circumscribed, metaphorically and phenomenologically speaking, “in the very focus of a lighted lantern” (“Wakefield”, 292).⁴¹ With a sense of configurational object permanence this tropological mapping develops cumulatively a panoptic supervision. Despite the brevity of the text, despite its dissociative pull and paratactic economy, the impression is not just of circumambient registration but of penetrating surveillance. This is how right after the escapee bolts in his new quarters the door behind him we may become privy to his throwing himself upon the bed and then waking up

⁴⁰ To put a postmodern spin on it, this conceit may be appreciated not just as (aesthetic) voyeuristic *Vorlust* – courtesy of Sigmund Freud – but as elemental reverie of veritable masturbatory pleasure. As Blake Morrison puts it bluntly (1999: 217): “Every Jill must have her Jack, and if that’s not possible, she has as much right to jill-off to her material as he has to jack-off to his”. Mrs. Wakefield invites here comparison with Walt Whitman’s transcription ([1855] 1982a: 197-198) of how many a lonesome woman hides “aft the blinds of the window” and looks surreptitiously out with her “unseen hand” passing over a man’s naked body, “descend[ing] tremblingly from ... temples and ribs”.

⁴¹ There obtains something like a trance of observation here, accompanied in a synaesthetic manner by the sound of “footsteps that seemed to tread behind his own, distinct from the multitudinous tramp around him; and ... a voice shouting his name” (292). The general impression is that “[even] among a thousand ... atoms of mortality, her eye must have detected him” (294). It may actually appear as if in a massive plot of escape-and-pursuit a legion of expert busybodies were shadowing the truant husband and acting as a chorus of rapporteurs were regularly debriefing the wife of the whole affair.

(being 'waked') in the middle of the night. However sketchy the overall account, the ability to transcend locked doors – "gaz[ing] after him" ("Wakefield", 296) – precludes, which is to say predeconstructs, any supposition of a closeted life, secret sin, gothic *corpus horrendous*, or some execrable hidden design on the part of the absentee spouse, something that might awaken gustatory distaste or dismissive horror in the reader.

The fore-tell-ability of the story's course once it gets under way seems to be predicated on Mrs. Wakefield's choice to fashion it in her mind('s eye) on some fundamental diegetic level. Even though the husband is not exactly Prince Charming, the wife instinctively, (self-)protectively, disempowers him from philandering or playing the field, so to speak, by imagining him attired in a downgrading paltry garb. It is a code and idiom poignantly at odds with the customary, studiously neat, gentleman's outfit in brown. The husband's new habiliment or rather dis-investiture is a beggarly Odyssean disguise procured from a used clothes peddler, topped with a burlesque wig of reddish hair, a fool's cap of sorts.⁴² This is how the fugitive man is left with hardly any characteristics and attributes to attract anybody as a gentleman. The vulture-sharp spousal eye will further awaken the bittersweet recognition of withering on the vine. It is a castrative projection of how the relentless passage of time makes the apostate man wrinkled, meagre, and generally lusterless. Within the larger reappropriative and belonging scheme, Mrs. Wakefield insulates, which is to say re-secures, her reckless partner from the Circean-Calypsean outer world by holding him phenomenologically in abeyance, as it were.⁴³ Before long her anchoring gaze brackets and subtends him as a kind of licensed somnambulist trespasser in residence, consigned to haunt around their marital house, the one inevitable peratologic centre of the universe: the story's *point de capiton*. The all-important irreplaceable proviso, in effect an interdiction, is that the wretched turncoat remain faithful to his wife, with all the affection of which his heart is assumedly all the while still perfectly capable ("Wakefield", 295).⁴⁴

⁴² This sequence begins with the highly suggestive "We may suppose ..." (294). In spirit, it reads nearly like any characteristic postmodern sleight of hand with its emphasis on sheer madeness: "I do everything, ... I *make* everything. I alone" (Nabokov [1928] 1968: 54). It is in this sense that "[t]he Wakefield invented by this narrator is more like a 'humour' character ... than like a romantic protagonist" (Dunne 1995: 149). Additionally, a reddish wig on a man can be perceived as a cross-gender vaudeville marker. As such, it may be read as a nod to the 'perverse' systemic modality of the whole tale.

⁴³ This is to extend the point made earlier about "Wakefield's" intentionally misplaced concreteness, its de-enticing projection of city life. From the early-twentieth century essay "How to manage a husband" one may learn that "the woman knows perfectly well that if she does not watch sharply, her husband's prodigality will be taken advantage of" ([Anonymous] 1902: 603).

⁴⁴ Even though the self-exiled husband is perfectly localizable, it is important to recognize that his new place is presented as no more than a temporary expedient. It is never referred to as

Not only can the narrator's periscopic gaze penetrate the interior of the husband's new lodgings, but it can also excess the lineaments of his personal inner space. It is the immediate *raison d'être* of the story to proffer a conception of the man's character. The (manifest narrator's) original impression of perplexity in this regard – “purest originality, unexampled” (“Wakefield”, 290) – comes to be dominated by (the wife's) positive certainty. Hawthorne might be drawing here on the popular folk wisdom that at first wives just fancy that they may know even their most remote, secretive and refractory husbands inside-out by having a uniquely privileged access to their minds, and then at length they become self-convinced that they actually do, ultimately in terms of prescience and foreknowledge. This is supposed to obtain by virtue of fixed and ongoing internal focalization, however scanty the verifiable intelligence and however few the real clues. Adumbrating, as it were, the (un)natural proclivity of the female telegraphist in Henry James' cryptic romance “In the cage” – the compulsive filtration “just of what was *not* on the face”, a reflex amounting to fantasizing personal secrets of others (James [1898] 1958: 212) – we are given to understand that if not for its limited format, the thrust of Hawthorne's narrative might have been to “trace out [the husband's] heart and intellect, separately, and in unison” (“Wakefield”, 297).⁴⁵ However, this is where the story likewise ends up revealing a self-serving circumscriptive bias. It does not engage, broach or even indicate any larger transferential phenomena pertinent to the meaning and value of human relationships and of life at large. The intense and at times direct second-person focalization offers in this regard neither any probing evaluative insights nor does it take up any particularized issues, ideas, concerns or conceits.⁴⁶

'home' and we never actually see Wakefield 'living' there. In other words, there is no outsourcing the feeling of home-making and of at-homeness away from home here.

⁴⁵ According to Henry James ([1898] 1958: 179), this is where the cleverness of men ends and where the cleverness of women properly begins. Cf. Ring Lardner's (not so) humorous fictional illustration: “[My husband] is the most secretive person I ever knew. I believe he even keeps things from me! Not very many, though. ... I should have been a lawyer or a detective, the way I can worm things out” (Lardner 1929a: 318); or Arthur Miller's even more straightforward wifely claim ([1949] 1958: 60): “I tell you, I know every thought in [my husband's] mind”. Indeed, to pastiche further James (1958: 212, 227), there could be traced with women an overweeing “perpetual flood of ‘How much *I* know—how much *I* know!’”, (self-) admittedly transcribable as a dopamine “harmless pleasure of knowing: I know, I know, I know!”.

⁴⁶ Such as sense of freedom, possibility, purpose, fulfillment, integrity, honesty, respect, trust, mutuality, compassion, constraint, failure, resentment, contempt, malice, revenge, old age or jealousy.

To point out a very specific strong misperception, while “Wakefield” is all about matrimoniality and domesticity, it is not about obsessive jealousy, of the kind choreographed in Alain Robbe-Grillet's classic *La jalousie* (1957), for example. Morbid jealousy manifested through intimate stalking as a possible motivation and explanation (mate-retention from vigilance to violence) is disqualified in Hawthorne's tale by the inexorable idiom of statistics:

Instrumentally, so to speak, Mrs. Wakefield's agenda is committed instead to the rhetoric of trivialization of the husband's mind and to the deparicularization and designification of his possible motives. The strategy is to surreptitiously de-excite the entire affair so that there be no need to raise any dramatic hue and cry over it.⁴⁷ The opening notion of "vagary" – fantastic or eccentric action or piece of conduct – is casually substituted by "frolic" – a prank – and is eventually transcribed as "whim-wham" – frivolous or trivial (any) thing ("Wakefield", 290, 293, 294). The earliest direct look into the husband's mind introduces the wife's critical, fundamental, anticipatory supposition. This is what first reveals her intimate self-persuasion, her entrenched (un)justified true belief; which is to say her self-constituted 'ownmost' truth. Even though realistically the whole case depends at the basic level of material practicalities on the order of things "previously bespoken",⁴⁸ on leaving home "[the man] himself, be it considered, has no suspicion of what is before him" ("Wakefield", 292). Absence of premeditation and deliberateness (legally considered: *mens rea*) is afterwards projected by confusion, happenstance and finally by a collapse into non-knowing.⁴⁹ "In the morning, he ... sets himself to consider what he really means to do" – "[b]ut this is a secret from himself" – "his brain [is] somewhat dizzy" – "he does not know it" – "[he is] wholly unaware" ("Wakefield", 293, 295). This is how the tale's popular focal point of interest, the disturbingly provocative motivation behind abandoning one's wedded spouse for twenty years, is relegated in effect to noncognitive pettiness, insignificance and ultimately harmlessness.⁵⁰ It is hard to agree that the defining feature of the text, its *mise en relief*, is that it "centers and centers on that nagging why", that it is obsessed with the question "But ... but ... why?" (Stern 1991: 45). It turns out that Wakefield's husbandly manner and bearing, his pseudo-Byronic loose and rambling modes, are hardly worth dwelling upon. Nowhere near the cavalier finesse of a Great Houdini, his comportment is quite comprehensively naturalized in the dismissible demotic terms of the

"During that [whole] period, he beheld his *home every day*, and [only] *frequently* the forlorn Mrs. Wakefield" (290; emphasis added). Besides, any supposition of jealousy would in itself incongruously cast at least a sliver or shadow of suspicion on the irrefragable and scatterless female oneness, transcribed here as the "decent" and "exemplary" wife – the "good lady" (294, 293, 292).

⁴⁷ At some fundamental level, Mrs. Wakefield's stubborn hope may depend on the following essentialist supposition: "When a man ... has been running free all day, what's the natural thing for him to do? Why, to come home [of course]" (Harte 1869: 365).

⁴⁸ An obvious double entendre, to be 'bespoken' refers primarily to being betrothed or plighted in marriage.

⁴⁹ *Actus non facit reum nisi mens sit rea* – the act does not make a person guilty unless the mind be guilty as well.

⁵⁰ It is also revealing enough that the husband's mind should be broadly diagnosed as "never feverish with riotous thoughts" (291).

stereotypical negative male ethos: self-absorption, pretense, dilettantism, vanity, vagueness, idle curiosity, reticence, forgetfulness, indolence, carelessness, lack of imagination, and general ineffectuality.⁵¹ This is all on a par with the self-indulgent childish silliness of biting off one's nose to spite one's face, a myopic prompting one may patronizingly choose to believe is nugatory – “indefinable, and perhaps non-existent” (“Wakefield”, 291).⁵²

From the wife's vantage, the single most important disclosure, or rather exposure, is when in the immediate wake of his displacement the wayward husband spreads helplessly his arms in an unfamiliar Procrustean bed and instinctively gathering, as if in naked shame, the bed-clothes about him resolves not to experience the wretchedness of the celibate “solitary waste” any more (“Wakefield”, 292-293).⁵³ However, even though there do not appear to be any hidden variables, even though the husband would consider it as no more than an interlude in the main business of his life, he keeps incomprehensibly putting off his return from one day to the next. It is a dilatory akratic distribution that renders time indeterminate and possibly interminable. “Not to-morrow—probably next week—pretty soon” (“Wakefield”, 295). By and by, the inexplicable self-embargo develops not so much a temporal limbo as a self-actualizing and self-justifying natural ‘train’.⁵⁴ Apparently a star-crossed dynamic without one's control, this particular circumstance is objectified in terms of a whole new system being inexorably put in place. It seems perversely appropriate, therefore, that the ongoing superscriptive apostrophizing commentary should alternate between pathos and bathos, between the augmentative and the diminutive, between the condescending and the soothing: “Poor Wakefield!” – “The ... nincompoop” – “Fool!” – “Poor man!” (“Wake-

⁵¹ However, contrary to what may be most readily expected in terms of negative male stereotyping, there is no indication that in the classic Rip-Van-Winklian mode Wakefield might be “naturally a thirsty soul”, a character of a “well-oiled” disposition (cf. Irving [1819] 1963a: 29, 34-35).

⁵² In “The imp of the perverse”, Poe ([1845] 1984d: 827) talks of a “primitive principle of human action, a paradoxical something, which we may call ... a *mobile* without motive, a motive not *motivirt*”.

⁵³ A paradoxical case of intra- rather than extra-diegetic voiceover, Wakefield is made later to apostrophize his “miserable” abstemious displaced embeddedness with the self-accusatory pseudo-Kierkegaardian/Conradian “Wakefield! Wakefield! You are mad!” (298). It is in this sense that “he was, we may figuratively say, always beside his wife” (296).

⁵⁴ As Poe ([1845] 1984d: 828) identifies this condition: “To-morrow arrives, and with it a more impatient anxiety to do our duty, but with this very increase of anxiety arrives, also, a nameless [and] unfathomable craving for delay”. By way of additional explanation, Hawthorne advises in general terms how some uncanny (un-homely) overpowering power – “an influence, beyond our control” – may lay a strong hand on every deed we perform and weave “an iron tissue of necessity” (295). It is also suggested that this development may be appreciated simply as a kind of habit “—for he is a man of habits” (293).

field", 292, 294, 295). Seemingly a case of performative self-contradiction, the overarching and in more sense than one all-embracing perspective is finally that of a perfect or inevitable Prufrockian/Chaplinesque candidate for redemptive re-adoption.⁵⁵ As is typical in plots of hiddenness and exposure, of transgression and accommodation, the graceless renegade is featured as a helpless waif in need of recuperation and protection, of pooling and hedging. "Go quietly ... be wise ... get thee home to good Mrs. Wakefield, and tell her the truth" ("Wakefield", 292).⁵⁶

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Interactionally, the gaze depends on notice-ability, i.e., the wakefulness of the other, as against the cul-de-sac of looking and being looked at by a dead man, being turned to stone (pillar of salt) before it. This taken-for-granted factor is actually a secret 'master', an unacknowledged blind spot in the otherwise formidably privileged script of the Benthamian utilitarian ergonomics and the Foucauldian politics of surveillance. Even the most elevated, asymmetrical, pene-

⁵⁵ Stephen Crane's classic *The red badge of courage* is not only about geographical displacement and existential disorientation but critically in the middle of its plot about literal lostness. Having overcome at the outset his mother's instinctive exhortative opposition – "Henry, don't you be a fool" – the son is seen standing in the doorway about to vaingloriously don the cloak of history-maker. However, instead of martial encouragement he hears a familiar over-protective admonition: "I don't want yeh to ever do anything ... yeh would be 'shamed to let me know ... Just think *as if I was a-watchin' yeh*. If yeh keep that in yer mind ... yeh'll come out about right. ... Watch out and *be a good boy*" (Crane [1895] 1984a: 84, 85; emphasis added). Realistically, the mother cannot be physically present on the battlefield to superintend her son's affairs. Nonetheless, at the lowest point in Henry's military career she appears there in the guise of a seemingly disembodied androgynous voice and miraculously succeeds in delivering the wayward son from his predicament. "Yeh seem t' be in a pretty bad way, boy" – "[The] voice took him firmly by the arm ... and assisted him ... like manipulating ... a child" – "Well, there's where your reg'ment is. An' now, ... boy, good luck t' yeh" (Crane [1895] 1984a: 153). Henry, who to all intents and purposes qualifies as a deserter and a liar to boot, benefits from an amazing prodigal-son reception. Less than wholly deservedly, he is indeed welcomed and accommodated as a poor ol' boy: "Come on, ... [we]'ll take keer 'a yeh" – "we'll have yeh fixed up in jest about a mint" (Crane 1984a: 155, 157). Prefigured by the mother's natural wanting for her boy to be "warm and comfortable", Henry Fleming (a vulnerable lemming) is (un)surprisingly offered in his re-subscriptive surrogate homely setting the best blanket, a canteen full of coffee, is quasi-ritualistically soused with water, is dressed and is as comfortably as possible put to sleep by the fire. "Upon his aching and swelling head ... [it all felt] like a tender woman's hand" (Crane 1984a: 85, 158).

⁵⁶ Cf. a typical doting, appropriative over-motherly confidence address: "I ain't going to hurt you, and I ain't going to tell on you, nuther. You just tell me your secret. ... Tell me all about it, now—that's a good boy" (Twain [1885] 2001: 73). Although Mrs. Wakefield is childless, in the course of the story she develops a soft motherly look about her. In response, as it were, to the husband's growing leanness and meagreness, the wife exudes the nurturing appeal of a "portly" female – a "well conditioned woman" (295, 296).

trating and diagnostic gaze depends in the end on co-presence and implies at least a modicum of mutuality and reciprocity. It implies some inevitable synaesthesia of intersubjectivity, correspondence and consonance. Most concisely put: “The face is always an interface” (Casarino 2002: 171). Be-holding engenders the dynamic and eventfulness of being at least to some degree submissively beholden. Something inevitably transpires not only at the targeted but also very much at the instigating end. What really matters in the reciprocal gaze is obviously mattering itself. “This mutual glance between persons, in distinction from the simple sight or observation of the other, signifies a ... unique union” (Simmel 1921: 358). The blatantly conventional parting at the outset of Hawthorne’s tale is appended with an unambiguous *vis-à-vis*, a co-accommodating face towards a face. With a nod to Gustav Freytag’s pyramidal logic, this unabashed eye-catching exposure may be identified as the tale’s real high point, a moment of pivotal resonance and meaning. With what Henry James would later call the *sentiment de la pose*,⁵⁷ the text projects a superscriptive image of the husband’s smiling visage (the face being always telegraphically a-head of the self) that positively signifies back upon the wife.

[L]ong afterwards, when she has been more years a widow than a wife, that *smile* recurs, and flickers across all her reminiscences of Wakefield’s visage. In her many musings, she surrounds the original *smile* with a multitude of fantasies ... [that] quiet and crafty *smile*.

(“Wakefield”, 292; emphasis added)

The face-to-face encounter, a space of intimacy wrested from the gaze of an other, is not only the passive perception of an appearance, but a projection, a circling from desire to reflection and from reflection to desire.

(Melchior-Bonnet 2002: 157)

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In Edith Wharton’s pseudo-fantastic story “The fullness of life” ([1893] 2001a: 20) the heroine commits herself to waiting for her less-than-perfect husband, even if this should literally take eternity. Flying in the face of conventional morality and common sense, the so-called public usability, the last we see of the wife in Wharton’s story is being perversely seated alone on the threshold, listening expectantly for the familiar creaking of the spouse’s boots on the front steps.⁵⁸ The ultimate fantasy in “Wakefield” is that after twenty

⁵⁷ See James ([1892] 1984b: 252).

⁵⁸ Similarly, one of the would-be widows in Hawthorne’s “The wives of the dead” ([1832] 1982g: 63) is portrayed straining her ears at night to catch a hopeful repetition of a familiar husbandly knock on the front door. Cf. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s all-embracing succinct re-

years – in retrospect, we are told, scarcely longer than a week – in terms of essential vs. accidental properties the remiss husband may in the eye of the beholder re-emerge the same man as ever. Crucially, since he apparently left without the shadow of a reason, there is no reason why at an unpremeditated Jacob's Ladder moment some sublime self-regulative idea may not take him by the hand and guide him out of his parapractic confusion and sophomoric lostness back to his own door; very specifically in order to "re-enter" ("Wakefield", 297). When the itinerant spouse does indeed repair to his original domicile, ascending the steps of the house which it is granted him to call still his own, this key event is not staged as a clandestine or gingerly postern affair. Though he is anything but an epic quest-and-battle hero, Wakefield arrives to a restorative prodigal son scenario. What issues forth here is a providential figuration capable of appealing to "the general sympathies of mankind". This is a way of completing a plot of eternal return, one that has "often recurred, always exciting wonder, but with a sense that [this particular time it] must be true" ("Wakefield", 290). Bereft of the original fugitive equipage and appurtenances, in evident expectancy and need of redress, the husband happens to be wet and cold while "his own hearth has a good fire to warm him, and his own [good] wife will run to fetch the coat and small-clothes ... kept carefully in the closet". This supra-logical script features also the indispensable assumption that the "dear woman" is going to clap her hands "for joy" on beholding her man again ("Wakefield", 295, 297).⁵⁹ Along the axis of its per-

flection ([1899] 1995: 228): "It is a woman's business to wait". For a Freudian transcription see Sherwood Anderson's story "Adventure" ([1919] 1999: 87-88), with its time-scheme of days running into weeks, weeks into months and months into years "as [she] waited and dreamed of her lover's return", whereby "nothing could have induced her to believe that [he] would not in the end return".

⁵⁹ It is possible to apply here in near-literal terms Honoré de Balzac's mock-transcription of the parable's ultimate practical usability ([1837-1843] 1971: 513): "So long as a prodigal son comes back home with two ears and honour intact, all is well!". A logic of second anonymity of sorts, while the wife consistently depreciates the husband in terms of his public visibility and social attractiveness, she comes up with at least two corrective quasi-asides on how he may, nonetheless, be "bearing, in his whole aspect, the hand-writing of no common fate, for such as have the skill to read it" (295); and how he could be perceived as a "remarkable" man after all (296).

While our business is designedly with Mrs. Wakefield, it is impossible not to address in some way Mr. Wakefield's agenda and his singular dis-stance, i.e., the nominal story. Immediately, the husband's daily routine could be explained in terms of a fairly typical school-boy anxiety, or only curiosity carried to the point of *reductio ad absurdum*, about what might be happening at a certain hour in the classroom from which one has been shamefacedly playing truant. Still, there is also a strong possibility to problematize Hawthorne's tale as a much more profound discourse: from a half comic and half tragic repetition compulsion to private ritual to phenomenological self-authentication and ongoing existential validation. In any case, it must be pointed out that "Wakefield" is not really a story about a

spectival distribution of space, the cross-diegetic scheme redoubles back upon itself, with the prosoponic I/eye of the story assuredly inside again, a-waiting in a state of wakefulness on the upstairs floor – with the flickering red blaze and the anticipatory Hestia glow radiating from the front windows.⁶⁰ Deictically, the wife is suitably repositioned. She is fittingly re-posed in the parlour of the house: its head-quarters, heart(h) and eye-tower all in one, the real *genius loci* of the story.⁶¹ From the outside we can catch only a glimpse of the returnee as he passes in.⁶² Proceeding as he literally does from darkness into light, with his head significantly up rather than down, this reterritorializing liminal passage is nonetheless long enough to provide for a unifying anaphoric recognition. It seems to be, in fact, a case of reinscriptive *anagnorisis*,

man who expropriates himself by abandoning his wife and home and who then vouchsafes to reappear after twenty years to shamelessly claim his former *Sitz im Leben*. To put a fine point on it, “Wakefield” is a story of *nostos* without *kleos*. Strictly factually speaking, it is a case of a man who one day leaves home and then without fail keeps coming back to it each and every day, albeit in his insubordinate subordination always only so far, as – figuratively speaking – do a great many perfectly sensible and respectable people. Even though Wakefield could be consequently appreciated in the rarefied terms of the Schellingian *schuldlose Schuldige* [the guiltless guilty], he does not really belong, as is sometimes argued, with the impossibly troubled larger-than-life likes of Oedipus, Faust, Cain or Absconditus. (As Harold Bloom notes in a general context [2007a: 12], deconstruction of the conventional discourse of heroism may well contribute to Nathaniel Hawthorne’s ultimate artistic legacy.) As indicated earlier, rather than exciting a literal stalking version of the Othello syndrome, for instance, Hawthorne seems to advertise through the immediate story of Wakefield the propaedeutic merits of perspectival reversal as such: “[He] gathers courage to pause and look ... [and] is perplexed with a sense of change about the familiar ... such as affects us all, when, after a separation of months or years, we again see [that] ... with which we were friends, of old” (294); cf. note 5.

As far as the main argument of this paper is concerned, the rhetoric of repetition and the everydayness of the husband’s routine synchronize neatly with the wife’s church-going scheme and constitute a twenty-year-long ongoing re-enactment, a Penelopean re-weaving, of the wife’s incorrigibly hopeful hyperbolic expectation.

⁶⁰ It is intriguing to note the parallel between the flickering flame inside the house (297) and the ongoing flicker of the husband’s parting visage inside the wife’s head (292). For the same imagery cf. the conclusion of Hawthorne’s “Night sketches”, a line that is offered by way of a moral: “He fears not to tread the dreary path before him, because his lantern, which was kindled at the fireside of his home, will light him back to that same fireside again” (Hawthorne [1837] 1982c: 554).

⁶¹ Gilbert and Gubar (2000: 88) note that nearly as a matter of course women have since time immemorial been described and imagined as houses. It is a point eroticized punningly by E. E. Cummings ([1925] 1994a: 16): “i like my body when it is with your / body ... / i like its hows”. As underscored by the last sequence above, Mrs. Wakefield is clearly a (head) house-keeper rather than a (menial and mean) gate-keeper.

⁶² A case of answered prayers in its own sublime and transformational right, there occurs a rather obvious correspondence, in fact a near-symmetrical copulative coupling, between the mid-point churchly “She passes in, ... opening” (296) and the final homely “The door opens. As he passes in ...” (298).

in the proper classical sense of knowing throughout rather than simply knowing again. Although the passage is nominally an evident *cursus dis-honorum*, in the disclosive embrasure of the door, as in a tableau vivant or in a cinematic frame, we perceive on the husband's face a familiar quizzical smile. We can quite easily recognize here the order of the Odyssean *sema ariphrades*, a uniquely personalizing slash in the flesh. In the mute eloquence of a focalizing and magnifying pause – a cognitive and contemplative retropping actuality – we are led to believe that years ago the same smile may have been a forgivable harmless precursor or un-intentional herald of it all. As a perfect conciliatory circular gesture, this is how we are reminded at the end that rather than some magisterial or formidable word, in the beginning was a spontaneous wordless smile as much as a lingering gaze.⁶³

The last sentence of the penultimate paragraph – “Well; a good night's rest to Wakefield” – parachutes the story to (un)dramatic landing in the exclusive zone of penumbral privacy, the conjugal bed-chamber, the ultimate sanctum sanctorum.⁶⁴ This is an added, thematic, reason why we cannot (may not, need not, should not really want to) penetrate any further; which is to say step across the threshold to follow at the heels of the prodigal coming inside. Anything but a bowdlerizing intervention, it is fair to propose that the tale does not require a postlude, run-on resultative ghost chapter. In the sense of being all-but-literally pulled up short by the text, Hawthorne is suspending the obligatoriness of the so-called obligatory scene here. Without any fear of the unsaid, in fact with the artistic triumph of the craft of omission, this is implying that the rest is Shakespearean silence. This is finally a way of saying that at, let alone beyond, a certain point there may be simply nothing to interpret any more.⁶⁵

⁶³ As Craig (2010: 55) points out, the human face can communicate volumes “without having to say anything, without uttering any actual expression”. To borrow from Jacques Derrida (see Dick and Ziering Kofman 2005: 68-69), one's peculiar way of smiling and one's peculiar way of looking have “no age”. Since one's smile and one's eyes remain effectively the same all of one's life they are the most genuine and reliable conduits of communication with the world as well as the most obvious “sites of recognition”.

⁶⁴ As the husband is suspended over the threshold (parapractic fresh-[w]hole), the unexpected, sado-masochistic illocutionary chastisement “Then step into your grave!” (298) seems to be in fact flirting with a submerged punning sexual metaphor. This proposition issues forth as *l'objet petit*, something “a man can put up” (297). Ultimately, the implied erection and protrusion of a wake-field tomb inscribes and invaginates the prodigal on his own perlocutionary terms back into the familiarity of the domestic pleasure-pit, read: the wife's womb.

⁶⁵ Cf. Andrei Codrescu's provocatively succinct appreciation (2004: 10) of Hawthorne's seemingly impossibly disturbing scenario of pathos and peripety: “He wanted to split, and he did it, and then he came back. Period, end of story”. Or, to perspectivally reverse the closing scene of a postmodern transcription of “Wakefield”, the man just walks through the door and from this moment on we are supposed to “know nothing” (Auster 1990a: 232).

“Wakefield” does not excite an infinitely sophisticatable deconstructivist “experience of affect that is essentially an abstraction, a space constructed out of movement that goes nowhere” (Davis 2007: 107). Although advertised as both an intriguing phenomenon and a weighty consideration to reflect upon, it is not essential to have read Charles Dickens’ great tale of the two greatest nineteenth-century bourgeois walled-in cities, Paris and London, to figure out that at night every one of the darkly cloistered houses harbours its oneiric intrasignificant insideness: its unique cache of intimate consolations, dispensations and consecrations.⁶⁶

At last Odysseus and Penelope
 Waken together. One bedpost of the bed
 Is the living trunk of an old olive tree
 And is their secret. ...
 Evergreen, atremble, and unsaid.

(Heaney 1991a: 36)⁶⁷

While it would be of course impossible to argue that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s fictions construct the “usual” boy-meets-girl kinds of plots (Bussaco 2009: 487), it is nonetheless tempting to conclude with an ahistorical and quasi-essentialist discordant reality principle, one that may obviate the formidable charges of misanthropy, misandry, and especially of misogyny. This proposition offers itself in the guise of the (un)didactic truth (not) universally acknowledged that the more certain things change, the more in their sublime simplicity they may be expected to remain in the end the same.⁶⁸ A stubborn (perverse) discourse of recollection,

⁶⁶ As Hawthorne demonstrates in *The scarlet letter* (1983c: 285-286), though years of estrangement and incommunicado tend to engender unforgiveness, the problem can be (un)surprisingly easily rectified: “‘Thou shalt forgive me!’ cried [she] ... With sudden and desperate tenderness, she threw her arms around him, and pressed his head against her bosom ... He would have released himself, but strove in vain ... ‘Wilt thou yet forgive me?’ she repeated, over and over again. ‘Wilt thou not frown?’” – “‘I do forgive you,’ ... replied [he], at length, ... ‘I freely forgive you now’”. This sequence can serve as a vindication of the otherwise seemingly impossibly challenging deconstructive proposition that “forgiveness must ... *do the impossible*, it must undergo the test and ordeal of its own impossibility in forgiving the unforgivable ... the possibility *of* the impossible” (Derrida 2002: 385-386).

⁶⁷ By its very nature, a true secret cannot be ‘properly’ (conventionally) revealed. And if it can be revealed then it is not really a secret, or – differently put – “one must distinguish between those quasi-secrets that can be revealed, such as state secrets or secret recipes, and another kind of more secret secret” (Miller 2001: 151-152). Hawthorne’s present no-secret, like Henry James’s exquisite figure embedded in an Arabesque carpet, is a rather delicate matter in the primal plan, one suggestively strung with pearls and “traceable or describable only for husbands and wives ... supremely united” (James [1896] 2009a: 18, 35-36).

⁶⁸ Cf. Melville ([1857] 1984a: 915): “The grand points of human nature are the same to-day [as] they were a thousand years ago. The only variability in them is in [a particular] expression, not in [a general] feature”. And as for the lingering and vexed question of common

repetition, redoubling and return, "Wakefield" is appreciable as a paradigmatic twice-told tale rather than an unexampled case of egregious estrangement, misadventure or misprision.⁶⁹

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Both the critics and the biographers of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow puzzle over why in 1840 Nathaniel Hawthorne should have so freely passed on to him a privately learnt enchanting anecdote of a young woman who gets separated from her beloved on the wedding day and then searches for him for the rest of her life to be incongruously reunited with him only at a very long last (Longfellow would use the anecdote for his highly successful epic *Evangeline*). Also, it is considered to be one of the most intriguing episodes of the Hawthorne–Melville literary friendship that in 1852 the former declined to write up the so-called Agatha story – discovered and offered by the latter – about a wife waiting for nearly twenty years and then unconditionally accepting a wayward husband. Both decisions may well have had to do with Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'perverse' artistic secret of having years earlier written a very similar tale already.

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justice, it is admittedly best to conclude that "there were probably small faults on both sides, more than balanced by large virtues, and one should not be hasty in judging" (Melville [1857] 1984a: 915).

⁶⁹ Though hardly a gesture of last resort, let alone a mere rhetorical flourish, a closing caveat seems in order here. The above proposition is obviously worth the aesthetic, intellectual and existential consideration – to pastiche the tautologically playful sardonic late Melville ([1857] 1984a: 913) – only of those to whom it may ever prove to be in any way worth considering in the first place.

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