

**THE ETHICS OF COVERT PLAYACTING: IN NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S  
"WAKEFIELD"**

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**ABSTRACT:** *"Wakefield" constructs the situation of theater within theater within theater where almost every character is playing the audience of another stage. The story offers three layers of stages where the husband (one stage), who is being watched by the narrator and the readers (another stage), is furtively watching Mrs. Wakefield, the only player (a third stage). Oddly, no one theater is conscious of the encircling one. Each renders the encircled theater in vulnerable conditions and undergoes what it consciously makes others unconsciously experience. The paper examines three key groups of characters to explore what Hawthorne tries to find out through vulnerability and theatrical watching. These are Wakefield, his wife, and the narrator and readers. I will also attempt to examine how the treatment of these two concepts are manifested in the two authors' handling of the narrative point of view. My objective is to reason that Hawthorne's notion of vulnerability and theatrical watching offers innovative observations.*

**KEYWORDS:** American Short Fiction, Hawthorne, Wakefield Stage, Audience, Vulnerability, Narrative Point of View.

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In his "Wakefield," Hawthorne presents much evidence to indicate that his protagonist is particularly vulnerable and that vulnerability provokes him to employ theatrical roles. At home, he is a marginal actor whose every move is dictated by his wife. Away from home, he produces a play where he is mainly an invisible actor and playwright, and an unrecognized spectator of his home, the stage on which he is supposed to be a major actor. In so doing, he presents new, multifaceted concepts of the conventions of actors, audience, play and stage. As a matter of fact, he problematizes the concept of actors traditionally aware of their audience or spectators to whom the actors present their roles aspiring to obtain the spectators' satisfaction. Moreover, he watches an alternative play caused by his own absenteeism. In a way, he observes his own absence and its effect on other characters. Ironically, he is an actor-audience in another play watched by furtive audiences, i. e. the narrator and the readers. Put in other words, "Wakefield" creates the condition of theater within theater within theater where almost every character is playing the audience of another stage. In other words, there are three layers of stages where the husband (one stage), who is being watched by the narrator and the readers (another stage), is furtively watching Mrs. Wakefield, the only player (a third stage). Ironically, no one theater is aware of the enclosing one. Each, however, renders the enclosed theater in vulnerable conditions and undergoes what it consciously makes others unconsciously live through. Above all, the vulnerability and acting of the various characters prompt readers to raise questions concerning man's place or lack of place in the world, man's social ties and moral responsibility for his own family as well as for himself.

In my paper, I will examine three major categories of characters to explore what Hawthorne tries to discover through vulnerability and theatrical watching, i.e. observation. These are

Wakefield, his wife, and the narrator and readers. I will also attempt to examine how the treatment of these two concepts are reflected in the two authors' handling of the narrative point of view. My goal is to argue that Hawthorne's concept of vulnerability and theatrical watching offers innovative observations.

Regarding the first category of characters, it can be assumed that it discloses the account of Howard Wakefield, whose life undergoes three major phases: the period preceding his self-banishment, his self-exclusion and his return.

In the first phase, Wakefield performs his responsibilities and his social duties as a husband and as a member in society in the best way possible. Wakefield's situation is not far removed from the context of the social interaction in our daily life that Erving Goffman compares to the traditional view of acting (Goffman 1959, 79-80). Wakefield does his best to maintain dramaturgical discipline in order to cope with or shun embarrassment, covers up falsity of the performance, and has an interest in maintaining the unity, soundness and persuasiveness of the family show. He also enjoys cooperating with teammates with whom he enters "into collusive intimacies and back-stage relaxation," to quote Goffman (1959, 206).

However, the benefits he attains because of his conforming to family life and society cost him dearly. His various skills are flawed. His intellect, thoughts, novelty and imagination are frozen while his behavior is taciturn. The following excerpt gives a clear image of his vulnerability reflected in the negative condition of his mind, imagination and conduct:

*He was intellectual, but not actively so; his mind occupied itself in long and lazy musings, that tended to no purpose, or had not vigor to attain it; his thoughts were seldom so energetic as to seize hold of words. Imagination, in the proper meaning of the term, made no part of Wakefield's gifts. With a cold, but not depraved nor wandering heart, and a mind never feverish with riotous thoughts, nor perplexed with originality, who could have anticipated that our friend would entitle himself to a foremost place among the doers of eccentric deeds? (Hawthorne, 1837 9).*

Following from his being matrimonially committed, and socially attached to others, Wakefield embodies a classical paradigm of Goffman's idea of "non-person," an individual who is present during the performance, but his role is usually so obvious that he is ignored by the performers and the audience and is treated as not present (1959, 132). Coincidentally, Goffman's concept of the "non-person" corresponds with Philip Wander's perception of the "Third Persona," which refers to a person or to people who, as Wander notices, are treated as "not present;" or worse, they are "rejected or negated" in the course of "the speech and/or the speaking situation" (Wander, 1984 208–209). This perception relates to the "First Persona" (the speaker and his intent) or the "I" in speech, and the "Second Persona," that is, the "you" in discourse, both of whom enjoy open channels of interaction and unrestricted options of associations and expressions. The "Third Persona," however, "the 'it' that is not present, is objectified in a way that 'you' and 'I' are not" (Wander, 209). As a result, Wakefield is in a position of grave weakness and fragility. In point of fact, he suffers from an extreme case of vulnerability which is linked to ontological ideas of "insecurity and powerlessness," to quote Kate Brown (2014, 373). Indeed, Wakefield is emotionally, psychologically, morally and socially wounded, injured, and harmed. Nonetheless, he is not aware of his condition and thinks he is a first persona playing the major role in his social script. Dominated by this belief, he starts a new role. The truth is that Wakefield's sense of vulnerability stimulates him to initiate practical steps that can shield him against inevitable jeopardy before harm becomes total, irreparable. According to Erinn Gilson, vulnerability "is most commonly considered a

precondition to hazard and harm.” (Gilson, 2014 16). Her implication is that being vulnerable is not the same as being harmed and vulnerability is something that compels vulnerable people to guard themselves from harm and damage. It thrusts them to want to put safety procedures in position so that they are not as greatly in harm’s way as they could have been without them. Vulnerable people are relentlessly on the trail of something that can shelter them from their condition of vulnerability, something that can turn their existence safer. It is in vulnerable people’s nature to curtail extent of vulnerability they go through and hunt for ways to detach themselves from it (Gilson, 2014 15).

Wakefield’s departure is, hence, not completely impetuous. In the outline Hawthorne provides, we are told, “The man, under pretense of going a journey, took lodgings in the next street to his own house, and there, unheard of by his wife or friends, and without the shadow of a reason for such self-banishment, dwelt upwards of twenty years” (6). The quote is of paramount significance. It points out that the decision to leave home has been made compliant with the free will of someone who is supposedly not a silenced persona. He acts as if he were a first persona who can enact a well-planned scheme analogous to a script. In line with it, he commits himself to self-exile where he desires that neither his wife nor friends hear about him. The word “pretense” keeps the theatrical image vibrant before our eyes. By trying to avoid his wife and friends and be away from his house, Wakefield seems to deem them accountable for his non-presence, negation and weakness in their social drama. This explains why he dismisses himself from their play with the view of perplexing “his good lady by a whole week’s absence” (10).

Once Wakefield settles in his new lodging, he realizes his scheme lacks real “consciousness of a purpose” (13), and indicates feeble-mindedness. After much thought, he upgrades his scheme. He is like a playwright-actor who writes and interprets his own script as he goes, fabricating the roles he conceives of, adding onto them, trying them on and eventually becoming them. Interestingly, Wakefield’s style is reminiscent of improvisation in theater, a method of live theatre in which the dramatic scenes are invented spontaneously. While it is used extensively in theatrical programs to coach actors, the technique is also used in other contexts as a tool to cultivate communication competencies, stimulate creative problem solving, and promote supportive teamwork abilities, achieve perception into a person's views, states of mind, and interactions. The endorsement of this technique entails spontaneity, creativity, and skills of flexibility and intuition (Dusya Vera and Mary Crossan 2004 733, 734). Indeed these benefits are well noticed in Wakefield’s conduct. He declares that the purpose of his project is “to know the progress of matters at home - how his exemplary wife will endure her widowhood, of a week; and, briefly, how the little sphere of creatures and circumstances, in which he was a central object, will be affected by his removal” (13). Wakefield’s allegedly renovated goal is meant to reaffirm his perception that he is a first persona whose presence at home is so central that his unexpected “removal” will shake the foundations of the lives of his wife, the maid servant and “the dirty little foot-boy” (14). Consistent with his plan, he should abandon his role as a central actor and become an absented actor. He, otherwise stated, wants to become mainly a covert audience, watching his own absence and the progress of the act of his teammates during the nonattendance of one major character. What Wakefield proposes is very far-reaching. Primarily, his launched script emphasizes his lack of self-consciousness. He does not realize that he is not a first persona. The words “object,” and “removed” signpost that he has been treated as a non-person, an alienated audience, and the third persona who cannot be engaged in discourse, be heard in public or voice disapproval. Additionally, instead of upgrading his situation, he detaches himself two removes from the stage of the real world. First, he segregates himself from his family life, the play where he plays a role, albeit negligible, that

is acknowledged by teammates and the social milieu, i. e. the audience. Second, he enacts an alternative script where he is a concealed audience, whose existence is accredited by no one. In this manner, he challenges the traditional relationship between actors and audiences. Conventionally, there are two types of acting that characterize the relationship between audience and actors: “presentational acting” and “representational acting.” In the former, an actor adopts an attitude that recognizes the audiences. He either directly addresses them, or resorts to situations signifying that the character or actor is aware of the audience's presence. That can be done through a particular use of language, through a general display of viewpoint or through special employment of looks, gestures or other signs (Keir Elam, 1980 90-91). With “representational acting,” on the other hand, the audience is thoughtfully unnoticed and considered as voyeurs (Colin Counsell, 1996 16-23). This does not connote that the actor is not mindful of the audience presence. In both forms, there is a dynamic relationship between the audience and actors. As part of this vigorous liaison, the audience is the recipient of the stimulating movements, gestures, and utterances of the actors. Subsequently, the audience sends energy and reactions to the actors. Thus, a sympathetic audience can advance the act of those on stage. The success of the latter is extremely dependent on the responsive audience.

Instead of fostering his relationship with his teammates or adopting the role of an alert audience, Wakefield promotes his secret play where his starring role is to be an invisible audience of another play thus degrading his situation. Like an actor, he changes his appearance, “buying a new wig, of reddish hair, and selecting sundry garments, in a fashion unlike his customary suit of brown” (15) for disguise and hides in the robust throng of Londoners. Now he becomes an obscure actor-audience who is reduced to less than a null actor. He is not treated as a non-person who endeavors to let his voice be heard. Rather, he treats himself as a non-person who voluntarily keeps himself as a voiceless victim. Wakefield, the negated third persona, is so contracted and disempowered that he does not even demand the recognition of being the marginalized other. He is the very audience that denies its own humanity and, in consequence, adopts a negative representation of the third persona. The threat to a third persona, for that reason, does not always lie not in the act of being negated or objectified by certain individuals or groups. Third personas are liable to endanger themselves by submitting to or promoting the first personas’ attempts to victimize them or by endorsing a certain mode of conduct that causes their self-victimization.

Another deficiency of watching is discerned in the fact that Wakefield turns it into a permanent status or medium that has no aspirations save the desire to find blemishes in others' performances. Worse still, he expresses an anticipated pleasure in spotting the suffering of his wife and friends in the wake of his departure. Undoubtedly, his plan reflects a narcissistic tendency that comes close to meanness and malice as he actually wishes to disturb his wife. Failing to see the cruelty and wickedness inherent in his plan, he blatantly insists on his growing determination to remain away from home until his wife is “frightened half to death” (16). On numerous occasions, he walks by his house, seeing her become paler and paler. One day while observing his own house, he sees a doctor going into his house and gets excited whether his wife will die. Even when he eventually returns home, he remains glued to his pattern of behavior:

*As he passes in, we have a parting glimpse of his visage, and recognize the crafty smile, which was the precursor of the little joke that he has ever since been playing off at his wife's expense. How unmercifully has he quizzed the poor woman! Well, a good night's rest to Wakefield! (22)*

Wakefield does not even really feel appropriately guilty and remorseful or repentant. He never adequately concedes the wife's agony and drama. This explains the tough irony with which the narrator ends this extract.

As such, Wakefield is placed within a context of a third persona associated with plain blackness, obscurity and evil and, thus, his storage of moral attitudes is deficient. More dangerous, his loss of ethical attitudes springs from rendering his wife and other subjects vulnerable by turning them into his actors without their knowledge or by depriving them of the power to give their prior consent to his theatrical adventures. Wakefield is accordingly a classical example of what troubles Thomas Couser morally. In the preface to his fascinating *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*, Couser is primarily concerned "with the ethics of representing vulnerable subjects," without their prior approval. These vulnerable people are "persons who are liable to exposure by someone with whom they are involved in an intimate or trust-based relationship, unable to represent themselves in writing, or unable to offer meaningful consent to their representation by someone else" (Couser xii, 2004). Wakefield, the negated third persona, not only objectifies himself but also makes people with whom he has close relationships vulnerable. He should have practiced stricter "ethical scrutiny," to borrow Couser's term.

It is very probable that Wakefield himself is a victim of vulnerability who victimizes others and depicts them as vulnerable people in an endeavor to rid himself of the sense of victimization. In harmony with this phenomenon, the victim plays the role of the victimizer to hide his own weaknesses (Shmuel Klitsner, 2013 41). The switch in roles reflects the complexity of the player's vulnerability. So, Wakefield's attempts to play the role of a first persona endorsing determination, power, and initiative have always been a mask to hide his weakness or vulnerability. By putting on a mask, he trusts he can obscure the nudity of his un-socialized existence, to use Goffman's terms (1959, 207), and hence he can save his show. The narrator, who takes upon himself the task of watching Wakefield, notices that after Wakefield steps outside his home, he is subject to fearful feelings and thoughts. Still living the role that he is a significant character, Wakefield believes he is followed and called and that his secret scheme is discovered. Once he is in the "back stage," however, Wakefield's mask is taken off and he is seen in the nakedness and vulnerability of the un-socialized existence, to use Goffman's terms (Goffman, 112-114). Wakefield is seen coping with his weakness, fragility and helplessness. He is to be pitied.

*Almost repenting of his frolic, or whatever it may be termed, Wakefield lies down betimes, and starting from his first nap, spreads forth his arms into the wide and solitary waste of the unaccustomed bed. "No," – thinks he, gathering the bedclothes about him, – "I will not sleep alone another night." (12-13)*

The quote implies that Wakefield is too weak to resume his declared role as first persona in quest of new play. It seems that communal and marital compliance have held him strongly. At home, he is a member of an acting team, even if marginal, but currently outside this team, he has no role. He cannot act at all. This explains why he views his new bed as strange and unwanted. Knowing this fact about him, the narrator, though he cannot be heard by Wakefield, warns him that if he does not return home, he will permanently lose his original role.

Despite his seemingly firm determination to return home, Wakefield remains caught in a maze of procrastination. As time passes on, Wakefield becomes more vulnerable and fragile and is on the verge of losing his individuality. The narrator is sure Wakefield has "lost the perception

of singularity in his conduct" (17), and that his chances to regain his previous life are unlikely to happen. Feeling sorry for Wakefield's constant postponements, the narrator apostrophizes him,

*Fool! It is in another world. Hitherto, he has put off his return from one particular day to another; henceforward, he leaves the precise time undetermined. Not tomorrow – probably next week – pretty soon. Poor man! The dead have nearly as much chance of revisiting their earthly homes as the self-banished Wakefield. (17)*

By comparing Wakefield's chances to revisit his home to a dead person's, the narrator hints at Wakefield's total loss of character and role.

One of the most prominent scenes, which exposes Wakefield's vulnerability and gives an impetus to the sense of acting, is perhaps his accidental meeting with his wife.

*Now for a scene! Amid the throng of a London street we distinguish a man, now waxing elderly, with few characteristics to attract careless observers, yet bearing, in his whole aspect, the handwriting of no common fate, for such as have the skill to read it. He is meagre; his low and narrow forehead is deeply wrinkled; his eyes, small and lusterless, sometimes wander apprehensively about him, but oftener seem to look inward. He bends his head, and moves with an indescribable obliquity of gait, as if unwilling to display his full front to the world. Watch him long enough to see what we have described, and you will allow that circumstances – which often produce remarkable men from nature's ordinary handiwork – have produced one such here. Next, leaving him to sidle along the foot walk, cast your eyes in the opposite direction, where a portly female, considerably in the wane of life, with a prayer-book in her hand, is proceeding to yonder church. She has the placid mien of settled widowhood. Her regrets have either died away, or have become so essential to her heart, that they would be poorly exchanged for joy. Just as the lean man and well-conditioned woman are passing, a slight obstruction occurs, and brings these two figures directly in contact. Their hands touch; the pressure of the crowd forces her bosom against his shoulder; they stand, face to face, staring into each other's eyes. After a ten years' separation, thus Wakefield meets his wife! (18-19)*

The scene is extremely theatrical: the stage is a London street, the audiences are the crowds of London, the narrator and the readers (also stage director), the actors are Wakefield and his wife, now two elderly people and the playwright is fate. The scene itself and the actors are insignificant and hardly attract the crowds. What makes it highly dramatic is that although the meeting of two people is coincidental, fate has schemed it so artistically that it can produce the most intense dramatic response. While the wife continues walking into church, after a short pause, Wakefield rushes to his apartment, where he recognizes that he is not part of the universe any longer despite the fact that he is in it. He has given up his rights and privileges as a living man before dying. Stated differently, Wakefield realizes that his role as a permanent audience has detached him from life altogether. In order to influence the world and be alive, he has to upgrade his role within the play of the world, i.e. together with his family and in presence of a real audience. Without prior notice, he returns to the original role and script and resumes life.

Mrs. Wakefield, the representative of the second type of characters, is supposed to be the ultimate, vulnerable, non-existent person. Paradoxically, she emerges as the only actual player around whom the stages of Wakefield and the narrator revolve. The toughest treatment comes

from her husband who has deserted for her twenty years without giving a damn to her feelings when he leaves, during his long absence or when he enters the door “quietly, as from a day’s absence” (6). But, the narrator tries to help her out of her vulnerability and objectification through condemning Wakefield’s harshness and through giving her the opportunity to disclose her theater, though dimly. Upon Wakefield’s return to his house, the narrator is shocked at Wakefield’s offensive treatment of his wife. He cannot understand how cruelly Wakefield has “quizzed the poor woman!” (22). Her major vulnerability stems from her being a silenced housewife subject to abuse and harm. From behind the curtains, Wakefield commits himself to watching his wife. To his bad luck, she has passed twice or thrice before his sight and he bumps into her one time.

She is also helpless because she is obviously unconscious that Wakefield is watching her and is robbed of any chance or competence where she can relate, consent or reject being watched or misrepresented by her husband.

Although she is placed at three or removes from the readers who together with the narrator know her through the lens of Wakefield, the subjective husband, they do have a real chance to objectively learn about her character, skills and attitudes especially her diagnosis of Wakefield’s character and conduct. More important, they find out that while Wakefield is preoccupied with watching her, she is a character who conducts a play full of actions. She continues to conduct her family theater that is innocent, agreeable and loaded with courteous feelings, ethical suffering and dignity. She displays a personality capable of contradictions. Even with her husband’s absence, and her suffering, misfortunes and difficulty, she obstinately fights to support herself and silently leads a normal life, as if her husband were present. Judged against her husband’s’ theatricality constricted introspection, absence of action and lack of moral attitudes, hers is associated with doing and with ethical conduct. She is a true example of what Michel Leiris calls the “*théâtre vécu*” (theater lived) where, unlike *théâtre joué* (theater played), the actors' utterances and external behaviors are an "acting out" of inner feelings, i.e. characters are transparent, the words faithfully correspond with the feelings, the outward expression with the inward consciousness and consequently people are real and authentic (1958, 94-95; quoted in Greenblatt in Davis ed. 1989, 434). This explains the ease with which she receives her absent husband, a response that is totally downplayed. Perhaps here the message of the narrator is placed. It is true that she cannot talk loudly and express herself, but the readers can see her and accredit her actions. In watching her in company with the readers the narrator strives to recognize the undervalued social voice, to give a stage for the objectified and vulnerable third persona to be emancipated and to achieve her “human potential,” to quote Wander’s words (1984, 205). If she represents theater, then theater suggests the advent of truth and authenticity, tolerance and forgiveness, and responsibility and dignity.

It might be said that the narrator is the most theatrical character in the story. He concurrently plays a contradicted and multiple net of roles, and endorses various opposed attitudes and judgments and therefore poses a challenge to the usual concept of acting, audience and vulnerability. As a character in the story, he functions as the engaged "audience" of Wakefield’s plays: the play Wakefield is leaving and the play he has written and is trying to produce. Since in the latter play Wakefield’s key role is to secretly watch the influence of his absence in the former play, the narrator is an invisible audience of this play enacted to watch Mrs. Wakefield. Simply put, the narrator is not an actual character who has actual ties with other story characters. He has followed and observed Wakefield like his shadow since the latter bade adieu to his wife until his return after twenty years. He has been Wakefield’s furtive, doubled

audience complicating and intensifying the sense of acting in the spirit of a play-within-the-play-within-the-play. Absurdly, the hierarchy in which the narrator is Wakefield's audience might be reversed. In the process of watching Wakefield's acting, the narrator grows into a good Fishian reader who develops responses with regard to the words or sentences as they supersede each other. Wakefield is the determiner of what reality is for the narrator. And so, when the narrator receives clues that Wakefield is changing his plans and is appalled by his own foolish behavior, the narrator changes his role, i.e. readjusts his performance by giving a proper response. This implies that the narrator's behavior is dictated by Wakefield and is thus an actor in Wakefield's script of which the latter is not aware. However, both Wakefield and the narrator readjust their responses only on the surface. Both are glued to their major role of playwriting and acting focused on watching and twisted towards their own conceptions.

The narrator's role as an actor raises a few points of controversy. Wakefield has been covertly watching his own wife, a person with whom he is involved in an intimate relationship but who gives the narrator, at two removes from the first play, to clandestinely and illegally observe two vulnerable people with whom he has no bonds at all. If Wakefield's enacted play is meant to check his own acting, does the narrator's viewing not entail the invasion of others' intimate lives and privacy without their awareness? Does he not treat them as non-persons, or vulnerable subjects? Besides, if Wakefield's theaters are ascribed to irrationality which causes him to descend onto the stage of the "real" life and become a secret audience, and a null character, isn't the narrator's condition of a poorer quality? He has been watching this idiocy, steered by this unrecognized character and spectator for twenty years, too. Does this imply that the world of acting represented by Wakefield and the narrator mark the triumph of character dissolution and evaporation, the durability of vulnerability, the conquest of inaction and procrastination, the defeat of responsibility, insignificance of time and the initiation of wicked conduct?

The answers to these questions lie in the narrator's theatrical skills and appeal. Unlike Wakefield, the narrator understands the risks of being an undercover audience in isolation from the stage. To avoid ending in the same fate of vanishing and nonexistence as Wakefield, he resorts to theatrical maneuvers and techniques. One such technique is the choice of unusual form of first person narrator. He contrives the story in such a way that he is a spectator so deep inside the story with the company of the readers witnessing the events in the spirit of "here and now" intensively manifested in the theater but so detached that he and the readers can maintain their objective judgments. Simultaneously, since he is the narrator, he produces to the readers his own interpretation of the Wakefields' acting. Thanks to his interpretation of the newspaper outline, to use Fish's description of the reader's experience, the narrator holds in his mind certain expectations, obtained by a continuous process of reading, or watching adjustments, which enable him to engineer the story that leads to Wakefield's self-banishment. This constitutes a big improvement in the narrator's process of growth into his role as actor and narrator. That is perhaps what Wolfgang Iser means by his concept of "gaps." By filling these "gaps," the reader makes the text his own experience, i.e. takes it into his "consciousness," by which Iser refers to "the point at which the author and reader converge" (Iser 1974, in Davis ed., 1986, 389).

When the narrator invites the readers at the outset of the story to join his task of closely watching the Wakefields, he does not cast them in the role of silent, collaborative companions or mere null, vulnerable co-spectators. Nor are they compelled to see the events of the story through a layer of plays conditioned by the narrator's viewpoint and, as a consequence, are deprived of any chance to have direct access to the events, learn about the characters and draw

their own conclusions. On the contrary, the narrator and the readers are portrayed as second personas, that is, the "you" in discourse, both of whom are blessed with unrestricted networks of communication and unhampered routes of links and expressions. The readers are the narrator's co-spectators who undergo the same experience from start to finish. Their watching, albeit theatrical, is reminiscent of a cinematic technique known as the "point of view shot" represented through the camera that exhibits what a character is viewing. According to Joseph V. Mascelli,

*A point-of-view shot is as close as an objective shot can approach a subjective shot—and still remain objective. The camera is positioned at the side of a subjective player—whose viewpoint is being depicted—so that the audience is given the impression they are standing cheek-to-cheek with the off-screen player. The viewer does not see the event through the player's eyes, as in a subjective shot in which the camera trades places with the screen player. He sees the event from the player's viewpoint, as if standing alongside him. Thus, the camera angle remains objective, since it is an unseen observer not involved in the action. (2005, 3-14)*

Of the usual merits that the use of the first person connotes one can list the sense of truth, intimacy, authentic perspective, and power that helps forge a personal connection with the readers. Yet these privileges do not send the readers or the narrator into fields where they lose their personal independence and ruling. As the above-mentioned extract emphasizes, the first person narrator technique affirms two elements attained with this cinematic technique: co-participation and objectivity.

As a spectator of Wakefield, the narrator attempts to establish a certain relationship with him by way of giving him advice and warnings. So perhaps the narrator does not intend to render him as much vulnerable and objectified as he endeavors to give him company, advice and help in the face of Wakefield's unawareness of his existence. His role in inspecting Wakefield, sustained by first person narration helps him display his own skill as an actor playing to the readers. As an actor playing to the crowds of readers and as their co-spectator, the narrator creates a bond of empathy with the readers and makes them feel they are party to a very momentous experience and *ergo* are willing to participate in it. As the story proceeds and the truths become known, the narrator gives various comments and ask many questions. At times, he sympathizes with Wakefield, warning him or giving him advice. When Wakefield, for example, hesitates in his decision to return home, the narrator remarks, "Poor man!" (17). During Mrs. Wakefield's illness following her husband's strange departure, he ironically comments, "Dear woman! Will she die?" (16). The result is that the readers are continuously aware of the narrator's manifestation in the story and of his judgements and beliefs. The readers are as surprised and bewildered as the narrator is and ask the same questions. Furthermore, the various moralizing sentences scattered throughout the story greatly empower the narrator. In the beginning, he avows that the rare episodes such as Wakefield's story are based on a "moral." Afterwards, he permeates the story with ethical expressions and rulings and concludes with a clear moral message.

Above and beyond, the name of the protagonist also adopted to be the title of the story strongly energizes the aspect of morality in concatenation with the dramaturgical nature of Hawthorne's "Wakefield." It is very likely that Hawthorne would have known about the medieval morality plays called the "Wakefield Cycle" or Towneley Mystery Plays - a series of mystery plays founded on the Bible acted in the town of Wakefield, and termed his character "Wakefield" owing to the play-like nature of the theater within theater within theater

highlighted in my article. (For more details about these plays, see Janette Dillon, 2006). It seems that the narrator hunts for producing a play where he and the readers are second personas, moralizing spectators, smart critics, experienced interpreters, veteran preachers and wise people witnessing a queer episode that owing to their sharp analysis would otherwise have remained inaccessible and have resisted clarification. This denotes that the narrator and his readers are playing to ever-growing circles of readers thus producing nonstop theaters within theaters. But the moment each layer of readers or audiences accept the narrator's invitation to "ramble with" him "throughout the twenty years of Wakefield's vagary," (6) are they not active co-participants in the immoral act of the narrator who stealthily watches people's intimate life without getting their approval?

It is not easy to answer this question. One might say that watching others without their knowledge is always unethical. The narrator, and behind him Hawthorne, seems to argue there are a number of considerations that determine the ethical nature of watching. Although the narrator and the readers have been only one-step away from Wakefield, they have not ventured to expose his intimate life and kept distance between them and Mrs. Wakefield. Nor have they put a threat to their sense of autonomy, privacy and ability to behave and move freely.

Unquestionably Hawthorne does not mean to hail the idea of the Panopticon, which Jeremy Bentham described as a power mechanism where all inmates of an institution are observed by one security guard with total disregard to the inmates being able to tell whether or not they are being viewed (1843, 39). Nor does he aim at establishing a community like George Orwell's *1984* in which the idea of the Panopticon was extended to incorporate the whole of society (Orwell 2004). On the contrary, like Michel Foucault (1995, 216), he is aware that watching people even if the purpose is to reform and discipline them is likely to deprive them of their freedom. Nevertheless one justification that Hawthorne appears to adopt is what Kevin Macnish calls "the consequentialist appeal to the greater good," (2011) an act that will yield a noble result or after-effect. Hawthorne's purpose has not been to watch the Wakefields and expose their intimate life and delicacies to the wide public. He does not offer to endorse the reasoning of the deontologists, which implies "the rights of the few may be overridden by the interests of the many" (Macnish, 2011). Far from that, there have been a few morals that all readers can benefit from. In inviting the readers to share his experience, the narrator along with readers presents himself to public scrutiny and therefore terminates the possibility where he can violate ethical codes without being seen or judged by readers. Long before the device of "selfies," a kind of first-person photography (Alexandra Georgakopoulou, 2016; 2: 300) was invented, the narrator has exploited it. Through it, he can not only turn the lens back on his as well as the readers' experiences and integrate their own presence and response into the experience of the instant, but can also place himself and the readers under the surveillance of ever widening groups of readers/public/audiences. Alternatively expressed, he has designed a device where the watchers are being watched.

Furthermore, he intends to convey the lesson that he has caused no harm to the Wakefields and has not limited their autonomy, privacy, their interaction with the world or the manner they wished to present themselves. Each character including the readers are given the freedom to shape situations and attitudes and aspire to attain their goals. Each character is encouraged to be a first persona, a playwright-spectator who is engaged in reading, interpreting and judging others' script and, as a result, has the freedom to confirm, admire or reject the other's theatrical scripts. This indicates that Hawthorne's characters/playwrights (the readers included) are not inert in the act of perception. This contest of playwrights challenges the predominance of the

text-oriented theories. The readers/actors can always contribute to and learn from the meaning of the text/performance. More important, they are challenged to produce their own interpretation of the story/ performance and propose it to other audience/readers. There is no better evidence than E. L. Doctorow, who accepted Hawthorne's challenge and wrote his own version of the short story. These readers/audiences not only watch the players, but they act like a jury. The members of this jury, in Donald N. McCloskey's words, want to act on "not what persuades a majority of a badly chosen jury but what persuades well educated participants in the conversations of our civilization and of our field" (McCloskey 1985, 46). In this perspective, "well educated" also means the attainment of moral principles that are obtained from others as well as personally acquired. McCloskey's notion of "the well-educated participants" suggests ideas similar to Fish's "interpretive communities." Fish maintains that the members of these "communities" belong to different groups of well-educated readers who adopt particular kinds of reading (Fish 1980, 404-408) - including the agreements and disagreements. Both Fish and McCloskey allude to well-educated readers and audiences of people capable of using specific defined procedures to judge others' interpretations, performances and deeds. This is perhaps Hawthorne's point and here the achievement of his short story is positioned.

In conclusion, it might be assumed that "Wakefield" creates the condition of theater within theater within theater where almost every character is playing the role of playwright-audience of another stage. To be more specific, the story presents three cycles of stages where the husband (one stage), who is being watched by the narrator and the readers (another stage), is furtively watching Mrs. Wakefield, the only player (a third stage). Each theater depicts the encircled theater in vulnerable settings. Ironically, it is not aware that it experiences what it intentionally causes others to unintentionally savor. These situations provoke readers to bring up questions vis-à-vis man's place or lack of place in the world, man's social ties and moral responsibility for his own family, himself, as well as for his fellow humans.

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