

TIME TRAVELERS

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Abstract: The two stories analyzed in the paper are "Rip Van Winkle" by Washington Irving and "Wakefield" by Nathaniel Hawthorne; they are taken here together on account of the "superficial resemblance" of the two heroes who absent themselves from their homes and families for twenty years (each). The basic idea is that each story yields more interpretive material when viewed in the context of the other than by itself/themselves, so that the differences between them are by no means ignored or avoided. Still, the basic pattern in both is man on the run and escape from and victimization by time.

Keywords: Rip, Wakefield, man on the run, escape from time, victimization

*"I am not quite sure that I entirely
comprehend my own meaning in some of these blasted allegories"
Nathaniel Hawthorne*

Two stories can be read together for a variety of reasons (one of them being a simple temporal succession accident), but our choice here is motivated by a superficial similitude (surprisingly ignored in the criticism we have come across so far) that, on closer scrutiny, brought out other resemblances (and differences, that might sometimes seem even more relevant than the twenty-year time loops in the lives of the main characters at the core of both stories). Still, our main point—as in other cases—is not necessarily that of a comparative effort, but rather the often endorsed idea that such parallel readings may provide more revealing insights into each of the stories than in their interpretations individually. So, let us first look at the two narratives as such.

Story one (1819):

About six years before the American Revolution or War of Independence, henpecked by his nameless wife (referred to as Dame Van Winkle), Rip Van Winkle goes hunting up the Kaatskill/Catskill mountains with his dog Wolf; as the sun was setting, Rip hears a voice calling his name, which he soon makes out as coming from a strange old fellow, short and squat-built, with a grizzled beard and in an antique dress, carrying a stout keg (of liquor, as he was going to discover soon) on his shoulder. He takes Rip to a hollow in the woods, like a small amphitheater (is this Rip's college?) where other such dwarfish, odd-looking, bearded, quaintly dressed personages (reminding Rip of the figures of an old Flemish painting—so he was more than some kind of hillbilly-- were playing at ninepins. This "most melancholy party of pleasure he had ever witnessed," the ninepin bowlers turn out to be the crewmen of Henry Hudson (the English adventurer who discovered and explored the river—Hudson ever since—for the East India Company in 1609 and abandoned on Hudson Bay by mutineers in 1611, when he died, passing from history into legend). Rip's awe and apprehension leaves him as he drinks from the "Hollands" gin and falls asleep, to wake up, without his being aware of it, only twenty years later, on a bright sunny morning, and find Wolf gone, his gun rusty, and himself stiff in the joints (see Wakefield), and his beard grown a foot long. Back in his village he finds himself in a new world, full of unknown faces, with children and dogs—his usual friends—that no longer recognize him, with his house gone to decay, "guarded" by a half-starved dog (with a query here as to how long dogs used to live in those days—or in tales, for that matter), with the familiar village inn replaced by a "Union

Hotel,” topped by a stars-and-stripes flag and the portrait of King George (the Third) metamorphosed into General Washington; it is “the flagon.../of gin from the keg/... that has addled my poor head sadly,” concluded Rip.

Then there is a new Rip Van Winkle in his place (his son), and a grandson from his daughter, and everything else is strange, as if “bewitched,” so Rip is at a loss to answer “a bilious looking fellow” who used a “Babylonish jargon,” as he confesses: “I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the King, God bless Him,” (*Makers...*, p.249) only to be immediately called “a Tory, a Tory, a spy.” He inquires about his former friends and companions at the inn, Nicholas Vedder, Brom Ductcher, Van Bummel, the schoolmaster, all of whom, he finds, are dead or gone from the village, so he finds himself “alone in the world”(an “Outcast of the Universe” in “Wakefield”?). While inquiring about himself he discovers that “that’s Rip Van Winkle yonder leaning against the tree” (*ibid.*, p.249) a rugged and lazy younger version of himself (i.e. his son) so “he doubled his own identity.” A drop of comfort comes with the news of his wife’s death, together with the surprise of his having been absent for “twenty long years.”(*ibid.*, p.250) His surprises over, he is accepted into this busier, more bustling, more “disputatious” new order, where he becomes a story, a legend to be told and retold by himself and others (including Diedrich Knickerbocker, as Washington Irving pretends—see *infra*).

Story two (1835):

The plot of “Wakefield” is completely unimportant (it is also uninteresting) as the author gives it away in one sentence at the beginning: “The man /Wakefield/, under pretence of going on a journey, took lodgings in the next street /in London/ to his own house, and there, unheard of by his wife or friends /if he had any/ and without a shadow of a reason for such self-banishment, dwelt upwards of twenty years.”(*Norton...*, p.1127) Indeed, this is a condensed version of the “entire” plot, by which the author intends to tell us that his meaning is not in the plot (just two main events, his “departure” and his return) of the story (an essay, or “article,” in fact), nor is it in the other compartments of the narrative: there are thus no other characters beside his nameless wife (whom he secretly observed at times and once even bumped into her in the street—unknown, in disguise, and older, see *infra*)—in a household that included a totally absent maid-servant and a “dirty little footboy”--, no neighbors, no friends, no relatives, no acquaintances, just the amorphous multitude of the big city; then the subject is just as flat as the plot, there is no real climax and no significant denouement, as two decades later Hawthorne’s (and our) hero, when his death was reckoned certain, his estate settled, his (one) name dismissed from memory, and his wife resigned to her matrimonial widowhood, returns home and enters the door one evening, quietly, as from a day’s absence...

The focus, in both stories, is obviously on the two time travelers, at whom we intend to have a closer look. In his author’s words, Rip was “one of those happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown ... and would rather starve for a penny than work for a pound.”(*Makers...*, p.245) Idle and careless therefore, he is a good-natured, kind neighbor, popular (with women, children, and dogs) and conciliating, patient and generous, disinterested and altruistic, of an obsequious, pliant and malleable temper; at the same time there is a meekness of spirit and a certain absent-mindedness about him. Having an “aversion to all kinds of profitable labor,” he is “ready to attend to anybody’s business but his own,” always assisting his neighbors and, once again,

being loved by wives, children, and dogs. As he likes fishing and hunting, he tends to forget about his own farm, which is “the worst-conditioned... in the neighborhood.” He also has his own seat on a bench before the small village inn, which is taken to be the club of the sages, philosophers, and other idle personages who like to tell stories and “deliberate upon public events some months after they had taken place.” (*ibid.*, p.246) These characters, as we have mentioned, included Nicholas Vedder, the patriarch and landlord of the inn and Derrick Van Bummel—the schoolmaster. Also, Rip was “naturally a thirsty soul,” otherwise—one tends to suspect—he wouldn’t have fallen asleep for twenty years and woken to experience a crisis of identity as he sees his son, the “ditto of himself”: “‘God knows,’ exclaimed he, at his wit’s end; ‘I’m not myself—I’m somebody else—that’s me yonder—so—that’s somebody else got into my shoes—I was myself last night, but I fell asleep on the mountain, and they’ve changed my gun, and every thing’s changed, and I’m changed, and I can’t tell what’s my name, or who I am.’”(*ibid.*, p.249)

Thus describing Rip Van Winkle, one cannot help looking into the biography of Washington Irving (1783-1859) to find that he was self-indulgent and pleasure-loving, who improvised an agreeable life for himself in New York (then a town of sixty-thousand inhabitants) and had no clear-cut ambition; he enjoyed social life (in America and Europe, between 1804-1806), theater-going and gay companionship. Probably, like Rip (interesting backward way of comparing author and his creation) he apparently refused to grow up and was interested in escape from time, also experiencing victimization by time. After the initial outline of the plot/subject (see *supra*), the intruding Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) asks the fundamental question: “What sort of a man was Wakefield?” (*Norton...*, p. 1128). Very much like Rip, Wakefield was “the surest to perform nothing to-day which should be remembered on the morrow” (*ibid.*)—a “remarkable freak” and a human oddity; a middle-aged “man-of-habits,” after “a ten years’ matrimony” he comes out as unimaginative and with an inactive mind, in fact a rather “feeble-minded man”: “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 as likely to be the most constant /bitter irony/, because a certain sluggishness would keep his heart at rest, wherever it might be placed. He was intellectual /readers know nothing of his job or occupation/, but not actively so; his mind occupied itself in long and lazy musings, that tended to no purpose, or had no vigor to attain it; his thoughts were seldom so energetic as to seize hold of words /*n.b.*). Imagination, in the proper meaning of the term, made no part of Wakefield’s gifts. With a cold, but not depraved or 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...”(*ibid.*); as he himself “has no suspicion of what is before him” (see his “poor brains” and “loose and rambling modes of thought”). Neither author nor (naturally) readers seem to be aware of his motivations for his folly or absurdity, but we are subtly led to know that his wife was aware of his quiet selfishness, his disposition to craft (a “crafty nincompoop”), a little strangeness in “the good man,” and, above all, a peculiar sort of vanity; vanity and foolishness (in case they are different) lie at the root of his “project”—he is overcome with curiosity about the effect of his disappearance, or he thinks himself so significant that his absence will increase his value (hence the idea of absence, not presence, as a mark of identity in both Wakefield and Rip.) If Rip sees another man “in his

shoes,” Wakefield becomes another man in disguise (a red hair wig and garments from a Jew’s old-clothes bag); but while Wakefield’s great “project” is to “perplex his good lady by a whole week’s absence” (*ibid.*, p.1129), Rip’s self-banishment is less deliberate, though it is the wife again he runs away from.

As to the wives, they seem to be as different as they can be, though the results are similar—even the same, i.e. the disappearance of their husbands for twenty years. Dame Van Winkle is a “terrible virago,” a “shrew” and a “termagant wife,” with a sharp “tongue that was incessantly going,” ironically described as “household eloquence”; more scholarly, the relationship between Rip and Dame Van Winkle has been described as the one between America and England (at the time of Independence). An even more sophisticated commentary comes from a recent critic (2004): “The presence of the shrew, rendered conspicuous and thereby deviant, salvages the community’s idealized sense of itself.”(Horowitz) On the other hand, “good Mrs Wakefield” is a decent and exemplary wife (which makes Wakefield’s desertion even more absurd or paradoxical), who, once again, aware of a “little strangeness” and a “harmless love of mystery” in her “good man” (irony on top of irony), finally gets resigned to her “autumnal widowhood.”

Having introduced the stories and their heroes, we could probably look at the texts as such and how they came into being. A piece of “trivia” first: the new American congress ratified the preliminary peace treaty on April 18, 1783, and Irving was born on April 19 of the same year, so he was named Washington in honor of the victor of Yorktown; now, when Washington Irving was six, his nurse accosted the President in a shop and Washington patted the head of the namesake; more than seventy years later he was to publish a monumental(ly dull) four-volume Life of George Washington. And another one: the Sketch-Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent. installments (1819-1820) were published serially by Cornelius Van Winkle; they were later expanded to thirty-two sketches and tales, the majority on English life and manners, but the most famous ones, “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” were set in America; “Rip...,” the “first American short story” was, in fact, the last of the sketches printed in the May 1819 first installment of The Sketch-Book... Like most of them, it was reportedly written while Irving was living in Birmingham, England, with his brother-in-law Henry Van Wart, so he drew on his memories and experiences of the Hudson Valley and blended them with Old World contributions (see *infra*).

All, or almost all of them, are extended anecdotes, showing Irving’s brisk sense of narrative, a sure eye for natural and social settings, and for (see *supra*) individualized characters. It may not be totally uninteresting to remind here that Irving goes to work for the American legation in Madrid, travels through and stays in other European countries, and returns to America after seventeen years abroad, where he finds himself a great public figure and tries to reenter American life. Is there a trace of envy in this passage from Melville, who, while writing about Hawthorne’s Mosses from an Old Manse also has this to say about Irving?—“But that graceful writer, who perhaps of all Americans has received the most plaudits from his own country for his productions—that very popular and amiable writer, however good and self-reliant in many things, perhaps owes his chief reputation to the self-acknowledged imitations /see *infra*, once more/ of a foreign model, and to the studious avoidance of all topics but smooth ones.” (Makers..., p.242)

Ever since, however, “Rip...” and “The Legend...” have been seen as new ways of using American materials and of redeeming the colonial past, while being involved in the very developing history of the country (to be compared with Cooper’s Leatherstocking, Melville’s own Ishamel, Twain’s Huck, and, later, with the Hemingway and Fitzgerald heroes). Rip in particular is seen as an allegorical figure representing the transition of the new nation from colony to independent nation, from colonial subjects (“petticoat government,” the “yoke of matrimony,” the “tyranny of Dame Van Winkle,” followed by “deliverance”) to Americans, whose identity is inchoate because their relation to past traditions and the newer institutions and forms of exchange is unsettled (see Horowitz). This crisis of identification is, as we have seen, quickly resolved by the incorporation of Rip’s fantastic narrative into the memory of the village, as it becomes part of the village/country lore; so the narrative frame of “Rip...” suggests Irving’s approach to the problem of cultural transmission; Peter Stuyvesant, the autocratic governor of New Amsterdam (1647-1664)—before its being New York—, or Peter Vanderdonk, descendant of Adriaen Van der Donk (1620-1655), who wrote a description of New Netherland published in Dutch in 1655, are real historical figures used in this tale or legend; and also real were the ironically used Waterloo Medal (liberally minted after the June 15, 1815 defeat of Napoleon) or the Queen Anne (1702-1714) farthings (tiny bronze coins worth a quarter of a penny); and just as real was Irving’s (and ours?) paradoxical fear and yearning in one’s experience.

An investigation that we can follow but tentatively is that of the many sources and imitations of “Rip Van Winkle.” And we can begin with Irving’s own final note to the story, where he mentions the emperor Frederick der Rothbart, i.e. Frederick Barbarosa (both meaning “redbeard”), Holy Roman Emperor of the twelfth century, an allusion that turns out to be a red herring, a disarming way of suggesting indebtedness to a German source while concealing the most specific source, the story of “Peter Klaus the Goatherd,” a German folktale in a collection by Johann Karl Christoph Nachtigal or J.C.C.N. Otmar (see H.A.Pochmann, “Irving’s German Sources in The Sketch-Book,” Studies in Philology, XXVII, July 1930, 477-507, cf. American Tradition..., p.239) This is the story of a goatherd of Sittendorf, at the foot of Mountain Kyffhauser/Kypphauser, who followed one of his goats (Mioritza—the ewelamb?) and encountered a lad who took him to a glade surrounded by rocky cliffs (an amphitheater?), where twelve grave, bearded and goodly paunched knights were playing at skittles (nine pins); Peter Klaus takes a draught from a pitcher and falls asleep; as he awakes he finds no dog and no goats and returns to Sittendorf: the people he meets are unknown to him, they stroked deliberately their chins (see “Rip...”) and Peter/Rip thus finds his beard was a foot long; back home he finds his house fallen to decay, guarded by an old worn-out dog that did not recognize him; women and children began to surround the strange old man, so he felt he should mention a couple of neighbors only to find that they are old and sick or gone; finally, a young woman, Maria, and her little girl and an even smaller boy in her arms, turn up and so Peter discovers to have been absent for twenty years on the Kyffhauser; he is finally heartily welcomed by the people of Sittendorf. By today’s standards this is plagiarism, but in Irving’s (and Melville’s) time the copyright law had not been passed.

But then there is the story of “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,” about seven early Christian youths who hid in a cave about 250 AD to escape persecution during the reign of

Roman emperor Decius (249-251) and slept for some two hundred years, till the reign of Theodosius, when they woke up; the story appeared in several Syriac sources and was retold by Symeon Metaphrastes in his Lives of the Saints, and by Gregory of Tours (538-594) and Paul of Deacon (720-799). Still, this story has its highest prominence in the Muslim world and is told in the Koran, as borrowed by Mohammed from the Christian traditions (Irving wrote a book titled Mahomet and His Successors, published in 1850, although finished much earlier). It may be worth noting that “The Seven Sleepers’ den” is mentioned in John Donne’s “The Good Morrow,” then in Thomas de Quincey’s Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and there is a poem “The Seven Sleepers of Ephesus” by Johann Wolfgang Goethe, translated into English by John Storer Cobb. And the references seem endless: an Anglo-Norman poem “Li set dormanz”; an ancient Jewish story about Honi M’agel and a carob tree which traditionally takes seventy years to mature, so Honi sleeps for seventy years; a Japanese popular version of Urashima Taro on a common motif; a third-century AD Chinese tale of Ranka; a third-century Diogenes Laertius story of sage Epimenides who slept in a cave for fifty-seven years; a story of King Muchukunda in Hinduism, who sleeps in a cave for a long time; an Orkney folktale of a drunken fiddler who meets and parties with Trolls and returns home after fifty years (Irving’s father was an Orcadian from the Island of Shapinsay and would have known the tale); the Irish story of Niamh and Oisín... Finally (for this section), “Rip Van Winkle” itself went through many dramatizations and adaptations (plays and short films at the end of the 19th-century), plus a number of early 20th-century films, three operas, the episode “Rip Van Flintstone” in The Flintstones cartoon series, at least one musical (Ferde Grofé’s Hudson River Suite); “Van Winkle” is the second section of “Powhatan’s Daughter” in The Bridge by Hart Crane (1899-1932), where the author presents him as his guide on a journey into the past through remembered schoolbook accounts of the Spanish conquistadors Francisco Pizarro (1485-1547) and Hernando Cortez (1471-1541):

“And Rip was slowly made aware that he,
Van Winkle, was not here nor there.
He awoke and swore he’d seen Broadway
a Catskill dairy chain in May--“

So the story itself is a great time-traveler in a number of centuries and languages and traditions. Which cannot be said about “Wakefield,” first published in the May 1835 issue (sixteen years’ distance from “Rip...”) of the New England Magazine and then included in Hawthorne’s Twice-Told Tales of 1837. But the author may be right in thinking that Wakefield “has left us much food for thought/almost as much as Rip?/, a portion of which shall lend its wisdom to a moral, and be shaped into a figure.” (Norton..., p.1132) And here is the moral: “Amid the seeming confusion of our mysterious world/see Rip’s world, too/, 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.” (ibid., pp.1132-1133)

As Malcolm Cowley noted (cf. Singularity, p.1) “most of Hawthorne’s stories are full of anguished confessions,” as his “dark romanticism” results in a dark psychological

complexity based on such themes as ancestral sin, guilt, and retribution; in fact his own life was defined by self-absorption and self-centeredness leading to an unbearable sense of his own separateness (see *supra* and *infra*). The Hawthorne trademark is that of exploring dark spaces in ordinary lives, (Melville praised his “great power of blackness”) like, in “Wakefield,” an ordinary man’s extraordinary caprice—if “caprice” could be called one’s decision to “absent himself” for twenty years from home and family. No surprise then that this was seen as the (pre-)modernist story of the alienated artist; Hawthorne’s rather more obscure theme is that an individual (a writer) can only understand and appreciate his life by looking at it from outside, by being separated from it; like many others of his stories, this is one of isolation and obsession. What we are looking at here is, again, the modernist problem of otherness, as you cannot view yourself as you view others; so, in order to understand yourself (did Wakefield?) you have to become an *other*. And the paradox of the moral is, as distinct from that of “Rip...,” that once an individual understands his life by viewing it from the outside, it is hard to re-enter it. And this is due not only to the time lapse between one decision and another, but also to the fact that in these stories of self and otherness, and time and change and identity, as one grows old one’s identity changes inside the same self, and thus one becomes a double an-other.

Hawthorne’s dark romanticism also comes from his romantic irony, that begins in the title (Oliver Goldsmith’s *The Vicar of Wakefield* –1766-- is about a man whose greatest joy was found at home with his wife and children) and ends (where else?) in the ending—the “Outcast of the Universe” being an earlier version of “Ah, Bartleby! Ah, humanity!” (1853); in fact, there is a double irony in this ambiguous ending, as the narrator never states how Mrs Wakefield receives her husband’s apology and explanation (if there were any) for his “little joke;” which was preceded by “No! Wakefield is no such fool”—as not to enter his home. And then there is the “quiet and crafty smile” with which he departs and returns from his “project” (itself an ironic concept), which consists in his not going back “until she be frightened half to death,” which certainly refers to some kind of revenge, but we do not know—neither does he—of her being a “shrew,” or “termagant wife” as in the other case. We can only conclude that Hawthorne’s great mastery is that of creating a story out of nothing for testing the powers on one’s (own) destructive imagination. Wakefield’s bizarre quest is for his own life as observed from outside, as opposed to Rip’s, which is, presumably, for the relationship between reality/history and myth; see how the river itself falls asleep (with its barks) and gets lost in the mountains: “He saw at a distance the Lordly Hundson, far, far below him, moving on its silent but majestic course, with the reflection of a purple cloud, or the sail of a lagging bark, here and there sleeping on its glassy bosom, and at last losing itself in the blue highlands.” (*Makers...*, p.246)

Thus reality and legend—or truth and history—seem to most powerfully attract the(se) writers’ imaginations, creative imaginations this time. In literature truth is not a question of rhetoric, but one of reading and understanding, as tales and stories are absolutely true in the way tales or stories are true—or fairy-tales, for that matter as, to a great extent, both our stories are—i.e. in their interpretations; and our two stories contain their own interpretations, either in the complex textual-critical apparatus of “Rip...,” or in the intriguing intrusions of the author in “Wakefield” (authorial intrusion, on second thoughts, becomes a dubious concept, as one talks about the author intruding in a creation of his own, so how can one be an

intruder—unless he is Rip or Wakefield—in his own construction/house?). “Rip...” is preceded by an epigraph and a prefatory note and completed, in the end, by a final “Note” and a Postscript. The epigraph seems to be (one cannot be too cautious) a quotation from The Ordinary, a play by English writer William Cartwright (1611-1643), a son of Ben Jonson:

“By Woden, God od Saxons,/or Odin, god of war and wisdom/
From whence comes Wensday /sic/ that is Wedensday/sic/,
Truth is a thing that ever I will keep
Unto thylke day in which I creep into thy sepulchre—“

So truth once, and truth twice—in the prefatory note, where we are told that the tale was “found among the papers of the late Diedrich Knickerbocker,” who wrote a “history of the province during the reign of the Dutch governors.” And then, “its chief merit is its scrupulous accuracy, which indeed was a little questioned on its first appearance, but has since been completely established; and it is now admitted into all historical /n.b./ collections, as a book of unquestionable authority...”/author-ity/ (Makers..., p.144) This all is tongue-in-cheek as Irving knew that most of his readers would remember with delight the wildly inaccurate Knickerbocker story, i.e. an elaborate hoax titled A History of New York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty of Diedrich Knickerbocker, with the public press carrying a note, in October 1809, that this gentleman, “not entirely in his right mind” had disappeared from his lodgings/like Rip? like Wakefield?/ and later gave notice he had a book that could help him settle his account. So the story has, in fact, two narrators, Geoffrey Crayon of the title, and Diedrich Knickerbocker of the preface (plus Irving, the real author, i.e. the third—or first?). This narrator—whoever he may be—is constantly obsessed with parentheses of the type “to tell the precise truth.” Moreover, we learn from the text of the story proper—last but five paragraph—that “it was a fact” that Peter Vanderdonk, descendant of the historian of that name (see supra) corroborated (i.e. that “the Kaatskill Mountains had long been haunted by strange beings”—“Hendrick Hudson and his crew of the Half-moon”/see supra/(ibid., p.250); it is “a chronicle of the old times”(ibid.). The tale “was observed... to vary on some points,” but “it at last settled down precisely/our emphases/ to the tale I have related...,” though “some always pretended to doubt the reality of it...”(ibid., p.251). In fact, in the prefatory note, in the final note, and in the postscript (should we also add the epigraph?) we are given other “tales” surrounding the main one, so we are no longer surprised to remember Irving himself saying that “I am always at a loss at how much to believe of my own stories.”

And Hawthorne is almost as truthful, as he begins with a similar convention: “In some old magazine or newspaper, I recollect a story, told as truth, of a man—let us call him Wakefield—who absented himself for a long time, from his wife.” (Norton..., p.1127) Very soon, in the prefatory outline, we learn that “Wakefield’s vagary” should be viewed with “a sense that the story must be true.”(ibid., p.1128) Then “glimpses of the truth... would come /to the hero/, but only for the moment.”(ibid., p.1132) The whole “adventure” is not only true, but also natural: “So much for the commencement of this long whim-wham... After the critical conception, and the stirring up of the man’s sluggish temperament to put it into practice, the whole matter evolves itself in a natural train.”(ibid., p.1130) And thus the

narrator, taking on the intrusive role (see *supra*) of a chorus-figure in Greek tragedy, sits with us throughout the story pontificating judgments, like this one, indicating the autobiographical bent: “Would Time but await the close of our favorite follies, we should be young men, all of us, and till Doom’s Day.”(*ibid.*, p.1132) Or: “Now for a scene!”—which is a meeting husband-wife, after ten years, with Wakefield aged and in disguise and Mrs Wakefield a portly female with a prayer book and “in settled widowhood” and “all the miserable strangeness of his life is revealed to him at a glance;”(*ibid.*, p.1131) and “he cries out, passionately—‘Wakefield! Wakefield! You are mad.’”

In 1960 Leslie Fiedler sees “the figure of Rip Van Winkle presiding over the birth of the American imagination/and he could have easily added that of Wakefield, or, anyway, Hawthorne/,” an imagination that was sustained by such elements as: man on the run (from family, from authority and government—Thoreau--, from Europe and European values, and, finally, from himself), a strategy of evasion, terror and Gothicism, escape from and victimization by time, sleep and waking, youth and age, ambiguity in one’s relation with nature, poetic view of reality, dream/and nightmare/...(See his *Love and Death in the American Novel*). So “time traveling—in this view, but not only—is a major component of the American (literary) imagination.

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