

## **Female Resistance on Domestic Violence in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wakefield***

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### **Abstract**

This research presents the study of female resistance on domestic violence in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Wakefield*. In this story, Hawthorne plays the female character who undergoes the form of domestic abuse within the family institution. His voice visible misogynistically, the female-oppressed is not only for keeping an authority, but also due to the failure to manage his marriage. In this study, the textual analysis is employed to explore the forms of domestic abuse by conducting close-reading (in-depth), identifying, grouping, and interpreting the related-words/clues/quotation of domestic violence on female. The results of analysis demonstrate that self-reliance of female character as vividly described by Hawthorne becomes a way of his female to fight against the domestic violence by male. In shorts, through his story, Hawthorne boldly enforces his female character triumphant as a way for resistance toward violence around her life.

**Keywords:** *violence, domestic, self-reliance, female, short story*

### **Introduction**

In learning literature offers many functions for readers. By using literature, readers can learn many aspects; for education purposes as a media for teaching (English) and building students' characters and critical thinking. Generally, the function of literature is not only for educational purposes, but this also can be used for giving entertainment as described through literary works, such as poems, stories, novels, songs, and drama. However, importantly, the genres of literature can positively inspire, motivate, and arouse the feelings and attitudes of its readers, because most of literature is derived from the folktales, social problem, and social phenomenon in the society. Ricardo (2019) says the literary genres can be a tool or media to convey messages, values, thoughts, ideas, or philosophy as well. Mathew Arnold says, 'media is literature in a hurry', he points out media holds true even today, but in literature have undergone a tremendous change. At the same vein, literature itself is a media, a tool for messaging, communication, and arts (Baker, 2014). Maharsi (2012: 1) as cited in Francesca Baker's words, literature itself is media, a tool for messaging, communication, and art, therefore the world of literature is nearly all facets of society lives or expresses various aspects of their life.

Furthermore, one form of literature genre is short story, which can deliver many aspects as has discussed above. Reading closely toward selected short story helps readers to explore what is being told from his/her stories, it is called as 'author conception'. By understanding it in-depth, what is exactly conception as being explored, physical elements, language, figure of speech, and supported by extrinsic elements as well, this lights readers for interpreting and understanding the narrowed-down to theme is being addressed or concerned on through his/her stories. As depicted in *Wakefield*, Hawthorne describes his female the form of female resistance on oppression within the marriage relationship.

### Conceptual

Conceptually, there are many views of literary critics in terms of resistance. meaning. Vinthagen and Johanson argue the idea of resistance closely relates how people act in their everyday lives or might undermine power. This is not easily recognized and typically, hidden, or disguised, individual. Everyday resistance is quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible" (2013, p. 2, 4). Thus, everyday resistance is a non-confrontational resistance and almost impossible to perceive because the resisting person does not show any signs of disobedience. This kind of resistance which operates on daily basis tends to weaken the foundation that supports the domination insidiously.

The word 'resistance' in the literature of resistance means endurance and durability', and in certain cultures the word resistance is defined as follows: "Resistance: resistance" (Moin, 2013, under the word resistance"), and under the word 'stability' is "sustainability: endurance, durability and strength. Although both words have the same meaning and there is no apparent difference between them, but reflection on the use of the word 'resistance' in the educational and genre genres suggests two different structures of two kinds of resistance literature in each of these genres. Resistance literature in the educational genre is the oldest application of resistance literature. Meanwhile, Husu mentions a symbolic struggle, which is "more than a clash of world views and definitions. For it to be effective, it must not challenge the dominant ideas" (2013, p. 23). Husu's idea is almost the same as the idea of Vinthagen and Johanson about everyday resistance. It is a kind of resistance without direct confrontation. She also proposes that the person who struggles against any form of domination should construct "a positive sense of self" (2013, p. 62) to encounter the negative or underestimating label or given identity. Feminists view that the problem of domination and resistance is triggered by the males "denial of their own vulnerability" that lead them to "project, displace, and localize it elsewhere" (Butler, Gambetti, and Sabsay, 2016, p. 4). In domestic household it is usually projected to the females by constructing a dependent, vulnerable, ineffective, emotional, or skillless females.

Moreover, Cohen and Taylor propose a “free area”, to escape from the dominating atmosphere. However, they also warn that the created free area might experience “mockery” and considered worthless by the dominating figures (2002, p. 117). In other words, the dominating figure does not appreciate the specific zone and its products constructed by the dominant party to exist as him/herself. In terms of “free area” proposed by Cohen and Taylor, Woolf, from feminist perspective, proposes what she calls “a room of one’s own”. It is a kind of personal space for women to be able to actualize herself. She states that “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (1977, p. 7). Suggesting that the private space suitable for women to actualize herself is in the literary area, she reminds that it needs certain supports to be able to exist and survive financial support and spatial support. According to Woolf: “Women have served all these centuries as looking glass possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size” (1977, p. 41). Thus, it is time for women to stop to be a looking glass, it is time to actualize themselves.

In the literature genres like short story often provides the problem of domination and resistance within the relationship of female to male, particularly domestic area. Analyzing the factors that trigger the wife’s resistance, the kind of resistance carried out by the wife and the impacts on the husband will enrich the knowledge on the female creative resistance and the male selfishness as occurred in the short story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Wakefield*.

## Research Method

This research is qualitative research with a textual analysis. Textual methods commonly conduct research activity to describe, interpret, and understand texts. These, all kinds of information can be gleaned from a text, reveal the literal meaning from assumption, symbolism, subtext, values, etc. This analysis is the most important method in literary studies to explore in-depth analysis of texts, such as novels, poems, stories or plays. Besides that, this places greater emphasis on the deliberately constructed elements of a text of literary works. According to Guba and Lincoln (in Moleong, 2005: 220), this content analysis is conducted by interpreting and making conclusions through identification the specific characteristics within texts objectively and systematically.

The main data of this research are quotations, sentences which highlight on female’s resistance under male oppression as practiced in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s, *Wakefield*. To conduct more detailed analysis, it is necessary to take the supporting ideas of other feminists like Simone de Beauvoir and Marry Wollstonecraft. Their ideas provide critical reviews to look at the portrait of female’s resistance in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tale.

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

Nathaniel Hawthorne, one of the famous and prolific authors in the American literature, has highlighted an issue of female oppressed in the public and domestic sphere as well. As depicted in Hawthorne's story, *Wakefield*, his voice visible misogynistically by using his female character Mrs. Wakefield who undergoes the form of oppression in the domestic abuse. Mrs. Wakefield is seen here as being actively oppressed by Wakefield (her husband) due to his failure to be an exemplary husband in society. Then oppression may result to keep dominant position and also as a tool for covering over weakness. However, Mrs. Wakefield epitomizes women's condition before mid-19th century when she is described as able to turn around her situation into becoming more dominant than man.

Hawthorne opens his female oppressed over Mrs. Wakefield through oppression in domestic area, which can be considered as a female oppressed by Wakefield's authority. Her husband, Wakefield who cannot be a precedent, then oppresses her for covering over his weakness. Under their family, the position of Wakefield indeed holds the authority over Mrs. Wakefield as the head of household. His authority has legitimized him to take his own desires. While, Mrs. Wakefield's position is under his determination by not allowing to criticize what he wants and will do. She is made to be obedient and silent by her husband. Wakefield's oppression is done through the form of marital delinquency. The marital delinquency appears in many forms such as physical violent, irresponsible, pressures and others. As Wakefield, he can be said as a husband who cannot bring the happiness for Mrs. Wakefield and also unable to manage his family or marriage properly. It can be seen how he cannot conduct his duties as husband;

Wakefield has absented himself from his wife for long time. The fact, thus abstractedly stated, is not very uncommon, nor without a proper distinction of circumstance [...] to be condemned as naughty. Howbeit, this though far from the most aggravated, is perhaps the strangest, instance on record of marital delinquency; and as remarkable a freak as may be found in the whole list of human oddities. (Wakefield, 107)

The above quotation is a part of oppression within a family. Indeed, there is no physical oppression done, but irresponsible treatment of husband within is part of oppression. The words; "Wakefield has absented himself from his wife for long time", indicates irresponsible, irresponsibility toward his wife. During his marriage, Wakefield never gives the financial, intentions and respect toward his wife. He only conducts what he wants by not considering his wife's feelings. The narrator said, this is a part of marital delinquency; "the strangest deed, instance on record of marital delinquency, and as remarkable a freak as may be found in the whole list of human oddities" (107). Kreps said, "Domestic area is known as a domain of husband [...] and the marriage and family institution could be considered as typical for oppression" (49), because he said through the

family and marriage are commonly oppression is done or the first place where oppression is done.

Besides that, Wakefield is typical husband who cannot create the romantic nuance; his communication seems to be monotone, clumsy and rough, or in other words "not commune". His inability to do that has made him not "cohabitation" at home; "during that period, he beheld his home every day, and frequently the forlorn Mrs. Wakefield" (108). For Mrs. Wakefield, her husband's treatments are very exasperated, because her marriage has made her much oppressed. As a wife, whatever the reasons she must accept and endure the irresponsible deeds of her husband; "how his exemplary wife will endure her widowhood of a week" (111). Normally, the marriage/family is established for the happiness between husband and wife. Marriage/family can also unite them and work together in facing the reality of life. Unlike her husband, his power is abused for oppressing her, as cited in Kreps's words "the marriage and family institution is abused as arena for oppression" (49).

Wakefield seems frustrated with his inability, but he does not want to acknowledge it. He still keeps his image as the head of household. Then he plans to isolate himself from the daily routines in his society. His isolation is a manifestation of his inability in managing his family. He assumes by isolating himself from society, particularly Mrs. Wakefield, will hide his weakness and extricate him from his family problem. This could be considered as "far-fetched" of husband, the narrator also affirms, it is "eccentric deeds" (108) as face – saving solution. He asserts that

He has informed Mrs. Wakefield that he is to take the night coach into the country. He tells her not expect him positively by the return coach nor to be alarmed should he tarry three or four days. (Wakefield, 109)

This passage clearly shows his "eccentric deeds" is only his beguiling tactic. He pretends of going for a journey is only far-fetched, but he is more concerned on the way for extricating him from his inability to be a precedent within a family; "he will take the night coach into the country." Meanwhile, Mrs. Wakefield herself is only made to accept it; "he tells her not expect him positively by the return coach." Understanding his characteristics, Wakefield is not only typical a bad-tempered, self-centered husband, but he also cannot value his emotional positively and rationally in facing the reality of life. His authority has permitted him to take his own desires by never caring of his wife.

Furthermore, Mrs. Wakefield's position a victim of her husband abusive when she is never given a chance at all to ask his purposes in making self-isolation. She also never knows why her husband wants to leave her and home. She only sees

Wakefield almost resolved to perplex his good lady [...] and she would fain inquire the length of Wakefield's journey, its objects, the probable time of his return, but indulgent to her harmless love of mystery. After the door has closed behind him, she perceives it thrust

open, and a vision of her husband's face, for this time, this little incident is dismissed without thought. (Wakefield, 110)

Through this description, her characteristic seems like a "weak woman", she is only passive by not bold critic her husband. She is mentally described as delicate creature who likes to suffer at any moment, because she is being under a compulsion of her husband's determination. She seems to lose the sense of intuition to criticize her husband's self – interest. It occurs because her situation under a compulsion of male's determination, which makes her passive and silent. When her husband goes out, she never gets the news where her husband is and she is also worried about her status "when all others have given him up for dead, she sometimes doubt whether she is a widow" (114).

Mrs. Wakefield epitomizes the women's position in society in general where she epitomizes the wife oppressed due to the failure of her husband to be exemplary husband within the family. Then she is oppressed by her husband unceasingly in order to conceal his inability/weakness as the head of household. His terrorization is used as a tool for keeping his dominance and self-image as a husband. Even though, her world is actively oppressed by her husband, she seems to realize it and also has a way for resisting that oppression. Hawthorne operates her resistance through the silence action in facing the eccentric deeds of Wakefield. Her initiative in doing that not only make Wakefield frustrated, but his dominance position is threatened. This quotation is a result of her silence action;

He was now in the meridian of life, his matrimonial affection, 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, whatever it might be placed. He was intellectual, but not actively so, his mind occupied itself in long and lazy musings, which ended to no purpose, or had not vigour to attain it: his thoughts were seldom so energetic as to seize hold of words. (Wakefield, 108)

Wakefield intentionally wants to give the effect of his isolation. His failure is signed by frustrating situation which makes him unable to control his emotion; "he was intellectual, but not actively so, his mind occupied itself in long and lazy musings, which ended to no purpose, or had not vigour to attain it; his thoughts were seldom so energetic as to seize hold of words." This is the frustration of Wakefield because Mrs. Wakefield only keeps silence by never responding toward her husband's isolation. She does not care of what he wants to do, "poor Wakefield, little knowest thou thine own insignificance in this great world" (110). The silence action of Mrs. Wakefield is a proof that she is able to give her husband a lesson, which has treated her roughly. Her silence action also proves that she still envision a new change which is considered by her never changing since her marriage. It indicates that she has learned from the ill-treatment, irresponsible of her husband in the past. Her silence action implicitly has

impressed upon man that woman is still able to be prudent even though under compulsion of man.

Another effect of her silence action is shown through Wakefield's characteristic; "he is equal characteristic of a feeble-minded man" (111). The narrator describes him "ere he lost his individuality" (111) when he is found establishing the fireside of a small apartment. They declare

He lose his individuality, and melt into the great mass of London life. It would be vain searching for him there. Let us follow close at his heels, therefore, until, after several superfluous turns and doublings, we find him comfortably established by the fireside of a small apartment, previously bespoke. (112)

Wakefield seems to be a brittle man who "lost his individual" when he cannot dominate Mrs. Wakefield through his isolation. It is seen how his "eccentric behaviour" in society which describes a frustrated man. The townspeople find him comfortably established by the fireside of a small apartment, previously bespoke and a dozen busybodies has been watching him. Through his behaviours are clearly described that Wakefield cannot control himself when he is unable to reach his purpose; "long since, it must be remarked, he had lost the perception of singularity in his conduct" (114). In addition, he is also described, "such are his loose and rambling modes of thought that he has taken this very singular step with the consciousness of a purpose, indeed, but without able to define it sufficiently for his own contemplation. The vagueness of the project, and the convulsive effort which he plunges into the execution of it, are equality characteristics of a feeble – minded man. Wakefield sifts his ideas, however, as minutely as he may, and finds himself curious to know the progress of matters at home" (111).

Hawthorne enforces Mrs. Wakefield's identity as a prudent and matured woman in facing her husband's oppression. As cited in the text, there are some of her characteristics that re-build her image in society such as "how his exemplary wife", "Mrs. Wakefield, the smart maid servant" and "she has the placid mien of settled widowhood". These characteristics are inserted in facing the oppression in her world. She is indeed described as exemplary wife, under oppression, and she still hopes that Wakefield will change his temper; "so essential to her heart, that they would be poorly exchanged for joy" (115).

Mrs. Wakefield epitomizes a wife in her society and she never wants to surrender on her condition. She still carries out her daily life in her society;

The sober widow, resuming her former faces, proceeds to church, but pauses in the portal and throws a perplexed glance along the street. She passes in, however, opening her prayer-book as she goes. (116)

This passage indicates that Mrs. Wakefield is never bothered on her husband oppression. It is seen how she is still able to socialize herself in society; "she goes to the Church" and she never be clumsy within society.

By understanding her temper, Mrs. Wakefield indicates that she is able to turn around her situation “Mrs. Wakefield, the smart maid servant” and “she has the placid mien of settled widowhood” (115).

Through Wakefield's realization, Hawthorne offers a commentary about the effect of marriage and love on the woman's sense of self. He suggests that marital delinquency can kill love. Readers learn that Mrs. Wakefield cannot accept his live only “sometimes” he has often imposed his “private will” on her. Even though, she knows that Wakefield loved her, but she realizes that he restricted her independence and identity which makes their love as “nonexistent” or “love nonflammable”. She realizes that love is not as strong a need as is “self-assertion”, which she suddenly recognizes as the strongest impulse of her being. Literary critic Nina Baym writes of the recurrence of this theme in Hawthorne's work; “as Hawthorne often insists, love is not a substitute for selfhood; indeed, selfhood is love's pre-condition” (89). Mrs. Wakefield could not really love her husband because he did not have a sense of his own identity; he did not know himself. Hawthorne seems to be saying that by squelching individual identity, especially in women, marriage can squelch love. Love can flourish only if both partners are free. This idea was quite radical at the turn of the century.

We can conclude that the story “informs and warns” that if an individual changes but the world around her remains constant, then self-oblivion and silence may result for a woman who dares to be different. Mrs. Wakefield who shows her silence action in facing her husband's oppression, implying that husband cannot comprehend the joy of a woman outside the confines of marriage. In fact, Hawthorne's readers at the time the story was first published may not have understood the irony of the ending. Millington notes “women in (Hawthorne's) day did not seek self-determination, did not question whether she had any identity outside of marriage” (34), but her action for giving a man's realization. She realizes she is alive; she can be free only in silence.

Hawthorne's fable seems to criticize the social phenomenon in his time. In his last words, Hawthorne asserts that

“Wakefield's unprecedented fate to retain his original share of human sympathies and to be still involved in human interests, while he had lost his reciprocal influence on them” (116) and [...] he has left us much food for thought, a portion of which shall lend its wisdom to a moral, and be shaped into a figure. 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 expresses himself to a fearful risk of losing his place forever. Like Wakefield, he may become, as it were, the Outcast of the Universe” (118).

This story unravels the protagonist as Mr. Wakefield shines light on the role of his wife. Significantly, she argues that Mrs. Wakefield continually refuses to give ‘power’ to the self-concerned needs of her husband. While he



physically leaves his home unannounced, it clear that Mr. Wakefield has not 'mentally', his marriage at any point in the story. Mr. Wakefield left because of his inability to capture his wife with his gaze, ultimately signaling his inability to control her. She suggests that by passing the home routinely during his absence, Mr. Wakefield hopes to see his wife affected by his "death". Mr. Wakefield is not satisfied because he does not absorb all Mrs. Wakefield's thoughts in depth. Through this, Hawthorne wants the reader to see with Mr. Wakefield's eyes, citing a moment when all attention is shifted to watching Mrs. Wakefield head to church. In frustration, Wakefield attempts to dominate the reader as well as Mrs. Wakefield. The key is that he is not successful in this attempt and is left wanting to be hidden and in control, but still yearning to be noticed. Mr. Wakefield does not know who he is, and needs someone to mirror his image for him. This final conclusion suggests that the struggle never ends.

### Conclusion

As has discussed before, this research explores the female oppressed by male in the domestic abuse. Hawthorne demonstrates his female character oppressed by male authority. Mrs Wakefield becomes victim of male' failure to be an exemplary within the family institution. Through his story, it seems misogynistically, but Hawthorne boldly depicts his female character to fight against her oppressive situation by refusing self-concerned needs of her husband during her marriage.

In shorts, Hawthorne succeeds in reinforcing his female's resistance toward domestic abusive. He shows how his female characters who appear to be weak, passive, and submissive are transformed into strong and daring individuals. The form of "self-reliance" of his female character' effort as a way for overcoming her oppressed situations under male authority. Hawthorne uses this instance to reinforce his female's resistance toward abusive in the domestic sphere.

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