



## THE ARTIST OF THE BEAUTIFUL- AN ODYSSEY TOWARDS SPIRITUALISM

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### ABSTRACT

Literature is the record of human experiences and feelings. The spirit of an age is well understood from the literary output of the age. Any creative writer or an artist has a spiritual bondage with his works. The beauty of Monalisa is enjoyed even today because of strokes of unearthly charm endowed to the sketch. If it were to be a mere play of paints and brushes, it could not satisfy the demands of the audience for these many years. In the same way a writer gives permanent endurance to his work, taking it away from the temporal restrictions, painting with the colors of imagination, and embellishing it with the buntings of spiritualism. Nathaniel Hawthorne is one such writer who wrote mainly on the themes dealing with matters above the materialistic concerns. The present story, *The Artist Of The Beautiful*, is about the artist, Warland, who moves away from normal society and tries to seek solace in the creation of a butterfly, which actually voices the purpose of his quest. His sojourn as a watch mechanic propels him towards the greater purpose, an odyssey towards spiritualism, making him understand the importance of unrestrained spiritual freedom. Hawthorne's craving for spiritual autonomy is read through the character of the protagonist. The present paper is a modest attempt to understand the spiritual integrity, the true philosophy of the writer.

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### INTRODUCTION

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) was an American novelist, Dark Romantic, and short story writer. His themes center on the inherent evil and sin of humanity, and his works often have moral messages and deep psychological complexity, loaded with symbolism and bordering on surrealism. His depictions of the past are a version of historical fiction used only as a vehicle to express common themes of ancestral sin, guilt and retribution. His four major romances were written between 1850 and 1860: *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and *The Marble Faun* (1860). Another novel-length romance, *Fanshawe*,. The short story collections of Hawthorne were published under titles *The Twice Told Tales*, *Mosses*

*from an Old Manse*, *The Snow Image and other Twice Told Tales*.

The fine thing in Hawthorne is that he cared for the deeper psychology, and that, in his way, he tried to become familiar with it. Of the American writers, he is the most original, the one least indebted to foreign models or literary precedents of any kind. Contemporary response to Hawthorne's work praised his sentimentality and moral purity while more modern evaluations focus on the dark psychological complexity.

The present paper is an attempt to understand the spiritual attachment of the writer, made explicit through the young artist (Warlando) in the short story *The Artist of The Beautiful*.

Owen Warland was a young watch mechanic. He was devoted to his profession in a

different way than usual mechanics do. His profession was driving force for his life, not simply for physical existence but for the spiritual longevity. The repair of the watches meant something more than mere adjustments of wheels and key for Warlando. Time, the eternal monarch, is the witness for every action that occurs in its hegemony. Peter Hovenden, the master of the young man was pragmatic and dogmatic in his perception and believed in the mathematical precision in the work. His equation,  $life = work + money$ , meant everything for him. The prosperity of man, he measured in terms of material success. Spiritual reality is above his comprehension. There existed a tussle between them, like one between body and soul. They are like two parallel lines which never meet, the two extremes, east and west directions in the same track. Hovenden remained a terrifying mystery for Warland and Warland an unsolved puzzle to Hovenden.

The apprenticeship under Hovenden did not influence in transforming the thinking of the young man. Warland remained a stranger to his master, firm in his inner circle. Robert Denforth, the black smith trusted his muscle more than anything else. He worked in a forge the toughest iron was bent with blows from his hammer. He was almost like a dictator training his army for any rebellion. Robert an example for animal strength, an incarnation of Hovenden's materialistic philosophy. He is the perfect example of scientific accuracy; standing true to Einstein's theory energy can neither be created nor destroyed, can only be transferred from one form to another, his muscle strength to hammer blows, which is seen in the transformation of iron into different shapes, a testimony for everything he has spent in terms of his energy. The achievement of Robert is proportion to his hammer beats. The energy in his muscle is a source of his achievement. The ultimate feeling of life in terms of Hovenden's definition is explained by Robert.

Warland was more an artist than a mechanic. His interest was vested in creating delicate shapes than mending a worn out watch. The delicate things were dearer to him than hard realities. The very look of reality made him panic. The sight of steam engine, the testimony of man's

energy to drive the forces to his commands, the invincible power of man in this universe, made him shiver with fear as it were a of symbol of demonic propensity. The delicate watch springs and minute wheels fascinated him as they obeyed his commands and can be carried to his world of fantastic. The domineering (physical) scientific conquests have no relevance in his empire. He did not value the physical achievement for material gains. Like a true Christian, he could perceive god in his heart.

Some have Me in their mouths, but little in their hearts. There are others who, being enlightened in their understanding and purified in their affection, always breathe after things eternal, are unwilling to hear of earthly things, and grieve to be subject to the necessities of nature; and such as these perceive what the Spirit of Truth speaketh in them. For it teacheth them to despise the things of the earth and to love heavenly things; to disregard the world.

(Thomas a Kempis - Of the Imitation of Christ Book 3 Ch. 4 v. 4)

The strength of realities of his master Hovenden, could not overthrow the feeling of fantastic reveries from Warland's heart. The feelings made him fly in the world of imagination; the wings of imagination took him high above these temporal demands and made him feel unique for himself. He was thrown into the stake of reality in the presence of his master. He drew into the shell to hide himself in the company of his master. Warland was categorized under incapable absurd youth. So Hovenden sneered at the sight of Warland assassinating the ingenuity of the later, making him feel helpless. Loneliness is an enemy anybody would like to fight with it. It is above the standard of a normal man to relish loneliness. If loneliness becomes dear to him, it is sure that he has no sympathizers. Though it is difficult to bear this in the beginning slowly he learns to relish.

Which is as poison in the beginning, but is like nectar in the end; that is declared to be "good" pleasure, born from the serenity of one's own mind. (*Bhagavad Gita* 18:37-38)

The feeling of love keeps any soul fresh. The soul dances to the tune of the soul mate that has the spell of the musician and can control the emotions of an agitated self. The therapy for any illness of heart is love. Warland though loved the abstractions, also loved Annie the daughter of his master. She was the source of energy for his fainting soul. His love was not the physical passion which was triggered towards sensuous pleasure. His love for unearthly and fantastic made him move above the standard of temporal reality, this love kept him alive to his human existence and the need for love which is essential in this world. The love of Annie is actually the earthly bondage which made him to value the human relations. Warland considered her a valuable possession he could afford to bear her only in dreams. She was one of the delicate intricacies which kept him enthusiastic towards life, in terms of physical existence and watered his hopes. She was a source of strength to him, but in reality, he trembled at very sight of her. His love instead of giving him strength made him to doubt himself.

Annie! dearest Annie! thou shouldst give firmness to my heart and hand, and not shake them thus; for if I strive to put the very spirit of beauty into form and give it motion, it is for thy sake alone. O throbbing heart, be quiet! If my labor be thus thwarted, there will come vague and unsatisfied dreams which will leave me spiritless to-morrow."

Warland's craving to invent something fantastic is interpreted differently. The worth of an object depends on the person who values it. A poet perceives the emotional attachment, a scientist the theoretical realities, a dictator the invincible strength, a lover the soul of his sweet heart, it all lies in the way how people perceive. The invention of Warland is viewed differently. Peter dismissed it as useless trash. Robert termed it as discovering perpetual motion.

"Folks do say that you are trying to discover the perpetual motion."

Annie with her womanish love could come near the spiritual inclination of Warland. She was able to appreciate the invention of as a piece with

exquisite quality attributing it the strength of spirituality.

"now that you are so taken up with the notion of putting spirit into machinery."

Robert was gifted to enjoy the normal realities. He had no mind to worry about something that is outside the physical existence. He was never puzzled to the realities above normal human comprehension. He as well never tried to reach unusual heights in his estimation. If man, like Robert, tries to justify only the physical existence satisfying only the physical demands, the traces of divinity and spiritualism vanish from this earth, the solution to the problems haunting the temporal world remain unsolved leaving the race in perplexity. The ignorance of Robert to estimate Warland of his actual merit by going into close quarters of the later is an example of an average individual's inability to think above the materialistic gains. Warland had no intension to impress Robert. The materialistic clarity temporarily dominates the strength of spiritual realization. The will power of Warland sometimes becomes meek, landing him in doubt.

"How strange it is," whispered Owen Warland to himself, leaning his head upon his hand, "that all my musings, my purposes, my passion for the beautiful, my consciousness of power to create it,—a finer, more ethereal power, of which this earthly giant can have no conception,—all, all, look so vain and idle whenever my path is crossed by Robert Danforth! He would drive me mad were I to meet him often. His hard, brute force darkens and confuses the spiritual element within me; but I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him.

The idea of Warland echoed the opinion of the great Indian sage Swami Vivekananda.

Beware of compromises. Hold on to your own principles in weal or woe and never adjust them to others' "fads" through the greed of getting supporters. Your Atman is the support of the universe—whose support do you stand in need of?

Robert is a symbol of Utilitarian philosophy. Warlendo standing at the extreme end, the icon of spiritual ideology. Neither of them had the humor to understand the other. The world is dominated by people like Robert, naturally his philosophy is considered to be the right one. Warlnd, does not have many supporters and hence, people like him have to veil themselves to protect their ingenuity. In the story *The Minister's Black Veil*, the common folk including his wife cannot understand the reason for the mister's seclusion. They in turn to create stories to taint his character. The reasons for Warland's preferred seclusion and the dream of fantastic creation is far above the reach of Robert and Peter. Hooper, in the story, *The Minister's Black Veil*, had no courage to convince people with his feeling. So he hid himself behind the veil, as Warland in the excuse of creating the fantastic. This provided them scope to introspect themselves and to evolve as complete individuals. Warland at the end gains confidence to face the world outside so decides to attend the party of Annie's wedding and present her a wedding gift. In *The Minister's Black Veil*, the minister could not muster courage to face the world so dies with the veil.

Materialism without the support of spiritualism or line of divinity is prone to crumble. Spiritualism without proper ideology is bound to produce the generation weak and susceptible to anarchy. The abstract nature is often viewed as lack of definiteness in path. The utilitarian ideology of course cannot answer all the demands of a humane being. The materialistic ideology twined with spirituality leads to tranquility. The peace obtained by such a state of mind remains undisturbed and helps in spreading the peace in the world being distressed with confusion. This philosophy helps to attain detachment towards the life controlling selfishness and ego the enemies of humanity, which keep him away from the divine.

Spiritual realization is far above the reach of a normal man who is too much attached to worldly possessions. Peter Hovenden's cynical approach towards Warland made the later move closer to his suppressed conscience making his the isolation dearer, thus the attachment to his faith became more fanatical than he actually thought of.

The world outside his understanding has become almost trash and lost relevance with his meaning of life. The creation of beautiful is actually a search for a companion who can remain without questioning him and fill the gap between him and the outside world. The invention of butterfly does not really give him any satisfaction, only the thought of it made him happier than the actual invention. Warland's feeling of love towards Annie is precious to him than really possessing her. Like the butterfly he would have lost the interest to her if he would have got her permanently. Annie who was credited with the angelic qualities in fact a normal individual. Warland was gifted with perceiving the life even in matter, the result is trying to create life out of dry watch spare parts. A poet tries to make his verse immortal by singing the lyrics of divinity, a painter and sculptor try to make their strokes immortal decorating them with divine charm, true artist tries to put life into his work by trying to get divine grace, taking it above the materialistic world. Warland tried to imitate the true spirit of a creative artist. The dissatisfaction, regarding perfection, is the prime quality of an artist, if the artist were to get satisfied, with his debut creation, his soul wouldn't crave for the more beautiful, putting an end to his creativity. The thought keeps him happy more than the reality, this zeal sustains in him the enthusiasm, striving for the better, keeping the artist alive in him. The wisdom of the artist is to embody his fancies in ever changing forms.

"The wise who knows the Self as bodiless within the bodies, as unchanging among changing things, as great and omnipresent, does never grieve". (*Katha Upanishad* 1.2.22-24)

Love, a divine quality, is a talisman which can take the materialistic realities above the earthly proportions and sanction the divine grace. Warland's love for the divine made him to move to the forest, away from the hum drum of normal life. The life of today is filled with tensions, stress leading to mental ailments. This stress filled life is making the man insane and help less, leaving him in cross roads, closing the doors of clarity. Thus blocking the ways for exit, making him prey to extreme conditions like suicide or throw him into the slavery

of bad habits. Warland who was intoxicated with spiritual idealism, was insulated him from external attractions. In Hindu mythology we have instances of sages, who have given up their attachments with worldly affairs and made their abodes in the forests. Even there are kings who left their kingdom, took the refugee in the lonely places. Lord Buddha, the Light of Asia, a king by birth left all the riches of his life and went in search of enlightenment. Warland practiced seclusion in his own way. He remained detached to mere materialistic gains and buried himself in the workshop not giving scope to anything that keeps him indulgent with materialistic passions. The world often terms something beyond its comprehension to be insanity, so the comments of Peter and Robert on Warland. The impossibility to remain insulated with the world made Warland to make an attempt to come in terms with life, which normal men believe, he made the butterfly as a wedding present to Annie. This trial of Warland failed, even the little hands of the child were hardened with the toughness of his father and grandfather, the cold pragmatic touch. The muscles of the child were strong enough to smash the former's dreams. The toil of Warland was changed into rubble in the hands of Robert's son, though his muscles have not developed to the proportion of his father's. The aborted accomplishment stand as a testimony to Warland's defeat over the materialistic concerns and his inability to impress the world outside him. Warland's desperate efforts to impress though ended in failure, have enlightened him with the fact that it is no use to convince others than to relish his seclusion. He turns towards himself that is the reason why he does not get worried when the butterfly gets smashed in the hands of the infant. The butterfly was only an external means to satisfy people like Peter, so its disappearance did not worry Warland. The stoic resilience towards his disappointment made him stiffer towards his aim. He expected this insult, only wanted to see it in person, so that he could become strong in his resolution. Warland understood the actual spirit of freedom, a freedom that allows him to remain tough to the external changes that distract him from his path.

Freedom is only possible to the being who is beyond all conditions, all laws, all bondages of cause and effect. In other words, the unchangeable alone can be free and, therefore, immortal." (Swami Vivekananda)

Warland's trail to move away from the materialistic world and come closer to spiritualism, in turn into the empire of god was possible only when he tried to satisfy an artist inside him who craved for the beautiful, true to Keats saying "*a thing of beauty is joy forever*". This takes him above the standards of normal individual and view the world differently. Not the beauty in terms of external appearance, but could move beyond it and perceive the absolute. The destruction of his life time achievement did not disturb him. He learnt to remain reluctant to external subjugation.

*And as for Owen Warland, he looked placidly at what seemed the ruin of his life's labor, and which was yet no ruin. He had caught a far other butterfly than this. When the artist rose high enough to achieve the beautiful, the symbol by which he made it perceptible to mortal senses became of little value in his eyes while his spirit possessed itself in the enjoyment of the reality.*

In a way Warland pronounced the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

"It is always for greater joy that you give up the lesser. This is practical religion—the attainment of freedom, renunciation. Renounce the lower so that you may get the higher. Renounce! Renounce! Sacrifice! Give up! Not for zero. Not for nothing, but to get the higher."

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