

A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Short Story

The Artist of The Beautiful a Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:

Its loveliness increases; it will never

Pass into nothingness; but still will keep

A bower quiet for us, and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. (John Keats: Endymion)

Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story **The Artist of The Beautiful** echoes the very sense of John Keats lines quoted from the poem Endymion. The protagonist, Owen Warland, in the story is a young mechanic, skilled in the art of mending watches, dwells in the world of fancy, creates a world where pragmatic and fastidious ideology has no place. He finds niche to his innocent sensitive conscience longing for complacent sense of satisfaction towards life. An ugly caterpillar metamorphoses into a beautiful butterfly, Warland takes this as cue to express his longing for refinement. God's creation is matchless this he gets to understand only when the infant crushes his invention to rubble. He then realizes that his world keeps him secure only till the time he resides with in the fort of romanticism and never tries to challenge the strength of pragmatism. His love for Annie is more beautiful to him than her real presence. The beauty is bound to fade over a period but the feeling that it arouses will be ever fresh in the heart. This he gets know through his experience. This realization transforms him into a votary capable of preaching sermons undauntedly which of course have the energy to hold him fast to his philosophy.

The present paper is an attempt to portray the literary talent of Hawthorne outside the constraints of his religious and more complex philosophy of evil and sin. The paper concentrates on the concept of beauty in an artistic perspective.

Key words: Beauty, joy, pragmatic, perspective

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) is an American novelist, Dark Romantic, and short story writer. His writings centre on the characteristic evil and sin of humanity. Though Hawthorne is not didactic in his tone his works are embossed with ethical and psychological contours humming the fine rhythm of life. The psychological fervour exhibited in his writings shows his deep concern for moral commitment towards the society. Hawthorne is hallmarked for the originality in text and the themes that he chose for his works. The dominance of puritan philosophy and his deep sense of ethical responsibility tend to divert the modern critics perspective in estimating the real contribution Hawthorne to American literature.

The short story is about a young watch mechanic Owen Warland. His devotion to his work is a point of appreciation and apprehension as well. A profession is a means of physical survival to any individual but for Warland it is real definition of life. The watch repair meant to him something more than mere adjustments of wheels and key. In the process of repairing watches, he tries to search the real meaning of life. He is constantly in tussle with pragmatic people like Peter Hovenden, the master of the young man, who is pedantic and dogmatic in perception adhering to the mathematical precision in work. Hovenden's equation of life = work + money. The abstract terms like beauty, contentment have no value in his world. The relationship between Warland and Hovenden is like the one between body and soul, two parallel lines which never intersect, the two margins, east and west directions in the same track.

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 presumed his muscle more than anything else. He worked in the forge the hardest iron is bent with his hammer blows. He was almost like an autocrat training his army for any mutiny. Robert an example for animal strength, an incarnation of Hovenden's materialistic philosophy. He is the perfect example of scientific precision; 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 conversion 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 Hoveden's definition is explained by

Robert. Warland worships beauty not the riotous physical power, so he remains an alien forever in their society. “. He drew into the shell to hide himself in the company of his master. Warland was categorized as incapable absurd youth. So Hovenden sneered at the sight of Warland assassinating the ingenuity of the latter, 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. (Hawthorne, 95)

Warland interest vests 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 which is the demonstration of man’s energy to drive the forces to his commands and defining the unconquerable power of man in this universe, made him shiver with fear as it were a of symbol of fiendish propensity. The fragile watch springs and minute wheels mesmerized him as they obeyed his commands and can be carried to his world of fantastic. The pragmatic ideology Hovenden did not really influence Warland, in fact it keeps him more attached to his love for beauty. “ 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 .” (Hawthorne, 95)

The intimidating (physical) scientific conquests have no relevance in his empire. He did not value the physical achievement for material gains. 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 feeling of love warms the troubled soul and relieves of the weight of distress. The inner conscience gets enthralled at the rhythm of beauty and casts the spell of a musician keeping the individual safe in the shore of contentment and gratification . Warland though loved the abstractions, also loved Annie the daughter of his master. She was the source of momentum for his fainting soul. His love was not the physical obsession which was triggered towards sensuous pleasure. His love for supernatural and fantastic made him move above the degree of

temporal reality, this love kept him alive in the world of reality which is very much essential in this world. The love of Annie is the mundane bondage that defined the meaning of human relations. Warland respects her for making him understand the beauty of love, but he could afford to bear her only in dreams. She was one of the graceful niceties which keeps him enthusiastic towards life, in terms of physical reality and source of his hopes. She was a reservoir of strength to him, but he trembled at very sight of her. His love for beauty is the pertinent power than his love towards Annie. The beauty of Annie is more appealing and the gush of enthusiasm that keeps him entertained in his dreams is far more appealing to him than her physical presence. "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 labour be thus thwarted, there will come vague and unsatisfied dreams which will leave me spiritless tomorrow." (Hawthorne, 96).

Owen's craving to invent something fantastic is understood inversely. The worth of an object depends on the person who values it. A poet identifies the emotional attachment, a scientist the hypothetical realities, a despot the impregnable strength, a lover the soul of his beloved, it all lies in the way how people perceive. The invention of Warland is viewed contrarily. 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." (Hawthorne, 95)

Annie with her womanish innocence could come near the aesthetic inclination of Warland. She appreciates the invention of as a piece with exquisite quality. "now that you are so taken up with the notion of putting spirit into machinery." (Hawthorne, 96)

Robert was gifted to enjoy the standard realities. He had no mind to worry about something that is outside the tangible existence. He is unaware of experiences that exist above the normal human comprehension. He as well never tried to reach unusual heights in his estimation. If man, like Robert, tries to justify the physical existence satisfying only the physical demands, the traces of love and beauty disappear from this earth, the key to the problems haunting the temporal world remain concealed leaving the race in bewilderment. The ignorance of Robert to estimate Warland of his actual merit by going into close quarters of the latter is an example of an average individual's inability to think above the avaricious gains. Warland had no intention to impress Robert. The selfish clarity temporarily dominates the strength of real love realization. Though the precision dawned due to these minor details is temporary it is actually

appears as a vector steered in proper direction making the ultimate enlightenment motionless. "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." (Hawthorne, 96). 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. Warland standing at the extreme end, the icon of spiritual ideology. Neither of them has the humour to understand the other. The world is dominated by people like Robert, naturally his philosophy is considered correct. Warland, does not have many allies and hence, people like him must veil themselves to safeguard their ingenuity. In the story **The Minister's Black Veil**, the common folk including parson's wife cannot identify the reason for his seclusion. They tend to create stories to corrupt his character. The reasons for Warland's preferred seclusion and the dream of fantastic creation is far above the reach of Robert or Peter. Hooper, in the story, **The Ministers' Black Veil**, like Warland had no nerve to convince them with his feeling. So, he had to conceal 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 assurance to face the world outside so chooses to attend the party of Annie's wedding and present her a wedding gift. This confides the source of his courage in the beauty of his creation and sanctions him a reason for claiming his right in the so-called society of pragmatic people which otherwise would question his association and does not mind expelling him.

Materialism without a proper taste for beauty would sound void and there is danger of man turning into a demon resulting in anarchy and chaos. The abstract nature is often viewed as lack of conviction in path. The philosophy which is backed by logic alone cannot answer all the disputes that human beings face. The materialistic ideology twined with love for beauty progresses towards tranquillity. The peace obtained by such a state of mind remains undisturbed and helps in spreading the peace in the world that is disturbed and vulnerable to

chaos. This philosophy helps to accomplish detachment towards the life operating selfishness and ego the enemies of civilization.

Spiritual consciousness is far above the reach of a conventional man who is too much conferred to worldly assets. Peter Hovenden's sceptical attitude towards Warland makes the later move closer to his forgotten conscience making the isolation dearer. The world outside his comprehension becomes almost junk and loses relevance with his meaning of life. The fabrication of beautiful is a search for an obliging and honest companion who is an admirer never proposing to question him, an apt surrogate to and fill the gap between him and the outside world. The invention of butterfly does not really give him any gratification, only the thought of it makes him happier than the genuine invention. Warland's feeling of love towards Annie is valuable to him than really acquiring her. Like the butterfly he would have lost the attention to her if he had got her permanently. Annie who was accredited with the angelic traits in fact is an ordinary personality. He loves the beauty of Annie which is not corrupted by the guile of her father the innocence keeps her serene which Warland worships.

Warland is blessed with sensing 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 memorable by singing the lyrics of divinity, a painter and sculptor try to make their strokes unforgettable decorating them with divine charm, true artist tries to put life into his work by trying to get celestial grace, taking it above the materialistic world. Warland tries 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 convinced, with his debut creation, his soul wouldn't desire for the betterment in his creativity his talent gets confined in a fixed boundary. The thought keeps him happy more than the certainty this zeal sustains in him the craving for betterment and inspires him towards models of exquisite standard. The wisdom of the artist is to embody his fancies in ever changing forms making each one of it standing as a testimony his genius. "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 is an amulet which protects the individual from the evil charm of the materialism and dissociates him from earthly attractions and sanction the divine grace. Warland's love for the beauty makes him constant wanderer leading him to move to the forest, away from the hum drum of normal life. The life today is filled with many confusions and constant distractions propelling man towards distress and dissatisfactions the prime symptoms of mental ailments.

This stress filled life is making the man insane and vulnerable. The individual is left with no choice but to become prey for mental agony. The thing of beauty is the only means to give solace to troubles souls. Warland inebriated with love for beautiful, insulates himself from external attractions. In Hindu mythology we have instances of sages, who have given up their attachments with sophisticated affairs and made their abodes in the forests. Even there were kings who left their kingdom, took their refugee in the deserted places. Lord Buddha, the Light of Asia, a king by birth left all the possessions of his life and went in exploration of enlightenment. Warland practiced isolation in his own way. He endured detachment to mere materialistic gains and buried himself in the workshop not giving scope to anything that keeps him tolerant with avaricious passions.

The world habitually terms something beyond its comprehension as lunacy, so are the interpretations of Peter and Robert on Warland . The impracticality to remain insulated with the world makes Warland to comes in terms with life. His trial to move towards the province of ordinary individuals is manipulated by his unearthly butterfly, but regrettably the little hands of the child were hard enough, with the hardiness of his father and grandfather, that he crashes with it in no time demonstrating the power of the unsympathetic pragmatic touch. The muscles of the child are intense enough to smash Warland's dreams. The labour of Warland changes into debris in the hands of Robert's son, although his muscles have not developed to the proportion of his father's. The aborted accomplishment stands as a witness to Warland 's triumph over the materialistic interests and his hopelessness to emphasize the world outside him. Warland 's detonating efforts to impress though end in failure, enlighten him with the fact that it is no use to convince the world of his love for beauty instead learn to enjoy the solitude as his right. He leans towards himself which is an enough reason to keep him indifferent towards disturbances that spoil his mental peace. The butterfly was only an external means to quench the enthusiasm of people like Peter, so its withdrawal does not worry Warland . The stoic resilience towards his disappointment makes him stick religiously towards his aim. He expects this insult and but only wants to see in person so that he could become strong in his resolution. Warland understands the actual spirit of freedom, a freedom that allows him to remain tough to his zeal and dedication towards the beautiful. Warland ideology stands true with the philosophy Swami Vivekananda in this context. " 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".

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 tries to satisfy an artist inside him who craved for the beautiful, true to Keats saying "a thing of beauty is joy for ever". This takes him above the standards of normal individual and allowing him to perceive the world differently. Not the beauty in terms of external manifestation but the real beauty that soothes tumultuous heart taking a step ahead and moving to perceive the absolute. "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. (Hawthorne, 96). It is apt to end the paper quoting Swami Vivekananda, as Warland showed stoic resilience towards adopting his ideology towards his love for the beautiful. He religiously adhered to his passion towards idealizing beauty. "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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