

The Artist's Predicament in Hawthorne's Story 'The Artist of the Beautiful'

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Abstract

The following is an attempt to explore the image of the artist in Nathaniel Hawthorne's story 'The Artist of the Beautiful'. It begins with giving a brief idea about the general conceptions held about the artist and the nature of his activities. The rest of the paper is devoted to showing the various manifestations of the story, particularly the appreciation and depreciation he/she encounters in daily life from individuals and community.

Initially, there is a need to justify the present attempt in reading a text that belongs to the nineteenth century with the concomitant amount of criticism written about it and its writer. The significance of the present reading lies in the great emphasis laid on the critical and aesthetic postulates emanating from the text. The study pays much attention to the critical dimensions associated with Owen's position in New England and the various moments of elation and setbacks he encounters. As a text exclusively devoted to pinpointing the position of the artist in society and the problematics of this relationship, Owen's final status is typical and representative in his continuous triumphs and frustrations, in moments of appraisal or depreciation. He has to come to terms with all these as something inescapable about which he cannot do anything. In this regard, the British novelist John Fowles reminds us that the text comprising an artist can cover three main areas: 'to describe the outer world; his next is to express his feelings about that outer world, and his last is to express his feelings about himself' (Fowles, 179). The last point in this quote holds true to Hawthorne as he tries to establish a critical stand concerning this activity. The story is replete with statements about this issue and actually predates the contemporary arguments about art and artistry. At the moment a brief citation from the story is given in order to support the view adopted here that the story combines the critical and creative skillfully, 'From St. Paul's days down to our poor little Artist of the Beautiful, the same talisman had been applied in the words or deeds of men who

spoke or acted too wisely or too well' (Hawthorne, 646). In another situation, the nameless narrator stresses the precarious relation between the artist and his environment which is a reciprocal one,

In Owen's case the judgment of his town people may have been correct. Perhaps he was mad. The lack of sympathy—the contrast between himself and his neighbors which took away the restraint of example—was enough to make him so' (p.646).

No doubt the critical tone here overlaps the fictional one and the author's voice is more outspoken. The rationale, then, behind the choice of this material is to shed more light on the artist-community relationship and its underlying themes. Above all, the study investigates how the critical tones are intermingled with the creative ones.

Many are those dramatic and novelistic texts that choose as their main topic the artist's predicament, idiosyncrasy, and his/ her dealings with the outside world and ceaseless psychological conflicts. Any survey of such works inevitably covers a huge number of writers from different generations and places. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a representative one. In the Victorian age and Twentieth century there are landmarks that can not escape the discerning eye: Henry James's 'The Figure in the Carpet', Franz Kafka's 'A Hunger Artist', Ernest Hemingway's 'The Snows of Kiliomanjaro', John Fowles's *The Magus*, Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus*, Anthony Burgess's *Inside Mr. Enderby* and above all Lawrence Durrell's gallery of artists, *The Alexandria Quartet*. Such texts are often the products of minds that have a first-hand experience of the mechanism of the creative process, its concomitant reactions both on the practitioner's part and the community's, its ins and outs and above all its costs and sacrifices. Such writings with their theoretical probing of one's own work usually haunt the artist's imagination at a very late stage in one's life after having been involved in the intricacies and problematics of art and its precarious terrain. It is in accordance with these terms that one finds such writings often tinged with a subjective and speculative touch. To choose an artist as the protagonist provides the author with a vantage point for perceiving, appraising and dissecting his artistic interests, conflicts, misgivings as well as those baffling circumstances surrounding him/her. A text of this sort provides the author with an opportunity for fusing the objective and subjective elements so that at the end the story talks about the predicament of the artist and the types of preconceived attitudes held about him/her.

However, before dealing with Nathaniel Hawthorne's treatment of this intricate topic in his short story and how it runs in the mainstream of writings channeling in this direction, it is apt to raise the urgent question pertaining to the

nature of art, and what sort of person the artist is. No doubt these questions represent the heart of the matter in 'The Artist of the Beautiful'(1844). Hawthorne's predecessors, both ancient and modern, such as philosophers, aestheticians, and creative writers have sought to figure out the slippery or mystifying side of the artistic process. Among these balks large the name of the poet/critic S.T. Coleridge whose *Kubla Khan* (1797-8) typifies the duality of pleasure and pain, recognition and apprehension inherent in the artistic enterprise. Such is the pleasure derived from the Abyssinian maid's playing on her musical instrument (dulcimer) that the poet or his surrogate can erect domes in the air. The reaction of those surrounding him is a mixture of awe, admiration and apprehension,

That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! These caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.(Lines 45-54)

In general Edmund Wilson sums up the merits and demerits of art as perceived by its practitioners and recipients in society in his reference to the classical myth of *The Wound and the Bow* (p.1) which gives in a nutshell the social need for the artist and at the same time apprehensions about his imaginative flights breaching of the normal and conventional. It is the myth of *Philoctetes* whose long sufferings because of illness and banishment to the black island are intolerable. However he has a bow 'that never missed its mark' (p.244). The bow has been given to the demigod, *Heracles*, by *Apollo*. This is indeed the summary of the artist's critical situation, swaying between recognition and repulsion, admiration and apprehension. *Joseph Conrad* gives his verdict on art and its exuberating role in life when he says that, 'Art may be defined as a single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its very aspect' (Conrad, 1991, 3).

From a psychological viewpoint, the Swiss psychiatrist *Carl G. Jung* problematizes the matter in such a way as to strip the artist of any individual aspect. His argument centres on the impersonal quality of the artist's effort, or to quote his phrase, it is simply 'an impersonal creative process' (p.176) in that the

artist is the willless means of reflecting the collective unconscious of the race. Indeed the testimonies of many creative writers, Hawthorne's included, enhance this weighty Jungian rationalization of the artistic drive and its terrible grip on so many people. The contemporary Columbian novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez argues to this effect in his testimony about how he has been implicated in the intricacies of art,

I began writing by chance, perhaps only to prove to a friend that my generation was capable of producing writers. After that I fell into the trap of writing for pleasure and then into the trap of discovering that there was nothing in the world I love more than writing.(Mendoza,25)

The art/life duality expounded by Marquez here has already been summed up in Yeats's dictum in his poem "The Choice" stating that "The intellect of man is forced to choose /Perfection of the life or of the work' (Yeats, 296). Nearly all writers opt for the second alternative despite its painstaking costs and frustrations, for both conscious and unconscious reasons. The repercussions of this process have been utilized by artists to explore a further much intimate topic: their own suffering and grappling with the written word or other artistic means of expression. Examples abound here. In his short poem, 'The Rest', Ezra Pound expounds the great amount of misconception and depreciation artists often smart under, 'Artists broken against her,/A-stray, lost in the villages/Mistrusted, spoken-against,/Lovers of beauty, starved,/Thwarted with systems/Helpless against the control.../Hated, shut in, mistrusted' (Pound, 92-3). The series of sufferings and frustrations Pound elaborates in his poem are true. However, one has to add that there is a special type of pleasure and self-satisfaction that only art can provide its practitioner with. So this ambivalent attitude towards art and its bitter-sweet situation is the only rationale behind pursuing its endless adventures and thorny routes.

If Freud has referred to the 'neurotic' side or 'psychotic personality' (Hayman, 145) behind the artistic drive, he does not veer very much from the painful fact that what the artist wants or practices does not often run in parallel lines to the dictates of society. Hence ostracism or virtual exile is often his lot as an inevitable price to be paid for the authentic and genuine art. This is because the artist's mood and concept of life usually differ from the common and acceptable. It is left for the critic Upward to epitomize the artist's disposition and romanticize it when he says that he (the artist) is 'the last delicate bud that sprouts from the tree of man...the slender wire that rises from the receiving station to catch the unseen image coming across the sea from an unseen continent' (Upward, 240).The outcome of this incompatible or unequal

confrontation between the artist and his insensible milieu is inevitably a unique psychological state whose main matrix is 'unhappy' and 'compulsive' (Doyle, 112).

The striking thing about the artist's position in such creative texts is his sturdy faith in his choice and adamant sense of challenge as will be shown in the following pages about Hawthorne's protagonist and his endless pursuit of the perfect and the beautiful as things inimitable and invaluable. All other concerns and temptations seem marginal and tiny in comparison with the overriding image of aesthetic beauty. Keats tells us in his 'Endymion, Book 1, that 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever:/Its loveliness increases; it will never/Pass into nothingness' (Keats, 61).As a practitioner of art-for-art's sake, Keats seems preoccupied by the exhilarating role of art in man's life as seen in the following lines from his renowned "Ode on a Grecian Urn", ' Beauty is truth, truth beauty--that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know' (Keats, 224). Here the poet does not exaggerate the real ecstasy the artist entertains and remains exclusively his own. It is this sort of ethereal pleasure that James Joyce meditates and is ready to sacrifice his family's peace, his own eyesight and health for the sake of pursuing its seducing allurements and uncanny rewards as felt in his *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and *Ulysses* (1922).His fellow Irish writer, Oscar Wilde verbalizes this Joycean endeavor in his statement 'To become a work of art is the object of living'(Wilde,292).The life-sustaining role of art is stressed once again in Wilde's view that,

We would each one of us be wearied if Art, with her fine spirit of choice and delicate instinct of selection did not,as it were,purify it for us, and give to it a momentary perfection.(ibid., 344)

Needless to add, too much engrossment in the world of art and its aesthetic beauty is not a common phenomenon if we recall that there are many artists who are socially and morally committed in addition to their search for pleasure and beauty. Nathaniel Hawthorne, though fully steeped in the art-society dialectics, brings home the irresistible temptation of art and writing. As he puts it, 'By some witchcraft or other...I have been carried apart from the main currents of life and find it impossible to get back...I have secluded myself from society...I have not lived, but only dreamed about living' (quoted by Early, 235).The tone of regret here at such deterministic misfortune is self-evident. Also this testimony is indicative of how art can possess its practitioners and strip them of many daily interests and joys.

'The Artist of the Beautiful' traces the precarious position of the artist in a community (New England's Puritan society) and its preconceived views about anything transcending the common and traditional. There is always a sense of awe and apprehension concerning the main character's practices and interests.

By implication the individual unrestrained freedom is seen to be fearful and suspect. Art, as we know, hinges and thrives on the notion of boundless freedom and divergence from the common. Hence the tacit and disquieting tension between the artist (the young watchmaker, Owen Warland) and many of the lethargic and insensible people surrounding him. As will be shown in the following pages, the details of the story typify the failure or reluctance of the community to respond positively or at least sympathetically to the artist's initiative and grasp what he/she is after. This inescapably inflicts much harm on the artist's morale and his social sense as the polarization between the two often becomes too sharp and unbridgeable. As it turns out, the main trait of the artist of this story is his sensitive mood and highly perceptive understanding of life and its glamour. Interestingly, many slices of his community respond favorably to his art. Nevertheless, those who are close to him and whose judgment he takes into consideration are lukewarm or even indifferent to his uncommon visions. This predicament has been diagnosed by George Santoyana elsewhere in his laconic comment that it is 'the alienation of the intellect from the milieu' (quoted by Manning, 103). This alienation is inevitable as there are few things in common between the artist and his insensible surroundings.

Although the main line of action in the story is the artist- community relation, it develops equally interesting topics such as professional rivalry, the physical-intellectual, the common-exceptional, and innovative-traditional. This multiplicity of topics and meanings emanating from Hawthorne's short story even in its limited size drives the reader to have some reservations about J. Hillis Miller's sweeping judgment that all Hawthorne's stories are simply 'idle weeds and withering blossoms...old faded things, reminding me of flowers pressed between leaves of a book' (p.59). In this story there are vivid situations, people and attitudes that crystallize the main topic of the story, i.e., the artist-community.

Irrespective of the different and contradictory critical reactions, the fact remain that 'The Artist of the Beautiful' is a story invested with a personal or biographical touch (or may be it is the most personal of all his works in its stark comment on the problematic situation of the artist in an indifferent and utilitarian world as felt in the unanimous critical stand concerning this matter). Hawthorne's lashing of a 'materialistic' society (Meserole, 336) has become a catchword for critics and researchers investigating his artistic and intellectual world. By means of his persona, the young watchmaker and the nameless narrator siding with him and apologizing for him, Hawthorne expresses his intellectual stand regarding the disputable position of the artist. This is a last-ditch defence against all the allegations and attempts to underrate the artist's efforts and feats. As one of Hawthorne's critics aptly puts it, in this parable or

sketch Hawthorne 'speaks directly and in his own person' (Matthiessen, 224) as regards this very touchy side in the American writer's career. Choosing a craftsman embodying the most outstanding traits of a full-fledged artist necessitates a reference to Hawthorne's reasons or justifications behind dealing with a topic whose social dimensions are not that prominent. Indeed the subjective aspect is all that counts although its social context is not ruled out altogether. Here he records one of his most intimate affairs as an artist and man. He is quoted to be saying about his early experiences and dreams, 'I do not want to be a doctor living by men's diseases, nor a minister living by men's sins, nor a lawyer living by their quarrels. So I don't see anything left out but be an author' (quoted by Bolton, 541). Indeed 'The Artist of the Beautiful' celebrates and registers minutely those moments and sensations accompanying this rare experience of perceiving what happens in the mind of the artist smarting under all types of intellectual and social pressures and misconceptions. The few events and situations in Hawthorne's story are simple but adequate for shedding ample light on the artist's dilemma. There are a few characters that are deftly manipulated to reveal the artist's setbacks and frustrations in addition to his mounting sense of isolation. However, his alienation is not willful, planned or meant by the character in question as a result of 'the tendency to reject the human bonds of love and respectability' (Inge, 129). Rather, it is the other way around. The protagonist, Owen, does his utmost best to get integrated in society and be loved and appreciated by the only woman in the story, the daughter of his former master in watch making, Annie. If she disappoints him in failing to recognize his gift, his explanation is note-worthy: she lacks the love and dedication he has towards his art and craft. As he puts it, 'Even Annie Hovenden, possibly, might not have disappointed him had she been enlightened by the deep intelligence of love'(p.645). All these efforts prove to be of no avail. The story ends not only in losing his sweet heart for the ruthless blacksmith, but also he finds the product of his ingenious thoughts and meditation completely and hopelessly subverted.

The story revolves around the young watchmaker and his unprecedented attempts of innovation in the fabric and design of clocks and watches. In his early days Owen Warland has worked as an apprentice for the now retired watchmaker, Peter Hovenden. Through retrospect and a series of shots and recollections, it transpires that the two watchmakers have totally different concepts of watch making and its layout. Hovenden is a typical New Englander who is content with the practical and utilitarian. In his mind there is no room for creative imagination and ingenious devices. All this seems to the conformist mere faddish nonsense. In short he is living in full harmony with all the dictates and rules of his limited environment. He knows nothing of the psychological disorders accompanying real artistry and innovation. His chances for joy and

inner peace are secured. His daughter's reaction is different in that she perceives that Owen possesses something characteristic and exceptional 'Perhaps, father', said Annie, without showing much interest in the question, 'Owen is inventing a new kind of timekeeper. I am sure he has ingenuity enough' (p.640). In other words she belongs to the other category in society which partially appreciates the artist's distinction and ingenuity. However, she is a typical New Englander when it comes to matters of marriage. Indeed she chooses the practical and physically powerful blacksmith. She proves to be honest to her background, although the heart sometime tends to another different direction. These painful situations in the story will be clarified in the following pages.

In total contrast to this, Owen entertains certain ambitious dreams and thoughts that are too half-perceived and nebulous to be set in advance before embarking on his meticulous task of updating the formal and aesthetic qualities of clocks and watches. Such a mentality is expected to arouse the jealousy of his master, Hovenden, and the curiosity of the whole community in which he lives. The extent of misunderstanding besetting the young artist is due to the fact that there is a growing rift between tradition represented by Hovenden and innovation represented by the artist, between the static and kinetic. What the old watchmaker as a representative of a conservative society fails to perceive is the role of the intuitive and visionary in the artist's profession and life. This quality at last attracted the attention of the establishments and the highbrows of his community and drove them to appreciate and evaluate highly its unique essence. Owen's work, which is superbly imaginative, can not be fully subjected to common sense and rationality. This is so because we recall the position of the real artist as a 'mediator between the world of experience and the world of dreams and his task is to re-embody in one image elements from these two worlds' (Baker, 81). The old master is very surprised to find that his own apprentice, despite his relatively short experience, is actually matching, if not surpassing, his own work in which he takes much pride. His surprise springs from the fact that Owen takes his work too seriously and is intent upon it day and night with an inexhaustible industry, 'these six months past I have never come by his shop without seeing him just as steadily at work as now' (p. 640).

Annie's generally positive attitudes can only arouse adverse reactions on her father's part as seen in his derogatory view that 'his ingenuity could not grasp anything bigger than a child's toy' (p.640). It is amidst these polar oppositions concerning the role of the artist that the narrator's sober voice reminds the reader about the artist's invaluable role. In contrast to these, the narrator's sagacious and sympathetic judgment settles the matter in bringing home Owen's ingenuity. Actually he puts an end to all other adverse reactions and detractions,

From the time his little fingers could grasp a penknife, Owen had been remarkable for a delicate ingenuity which sometimes produced pretty shapes in wood, principally figures of flowers and birds and sometimes seemed to aim at the hidden mysteries of mechanism. (p.641)

To substantiate the story's point of view, the author devotes much space to the narrator's intrusions and speculations which only succeed in highlighting the artist's position and the great extent of misunderstanding surrounding Owen's enterprise. The following quotation is helpful in showing the narrative aspect of the story and how the author manipulates all the facilities at his disposal for representing the virtual alienation of such individuals immersed in an uncommon idea or project, intellectual or artistic, the character of Owen's mind was microscopic, and tended naturally to the minute, in accordance with his diminutive frame and the marvelous smallness and delicate power of his fingers[...] The beautiful idea has no relation to size and may be so perfectly developed in a space too minute for any but microscopic investigation. (p.641)

This device of putting the artist in contrasting situations with others (Hovenden, and to a less extent, Annie) is once again felt through the remarkable differences in mood, understanding and interests between the artist and the blacksmith, Robert Danforth. Indeed the danger of this man is greater as he represents a typical foil for the artist and his interests. Worse still, he proves to be a successful rival in Owen's love to Annie, whom he succeeds in marrying at last. Robert is very proud of his physical power that has nothing to do with the abstract and intellectual. Owen's own self-explorations and interior monologues show that Robert does pose a serious threat to Owen's interests, aspirations and dreams. Seen from another angle, such an intimidating and brute force can only arouse Owen's great faith in himself and his enterprise, 'I, too, will be strong in my own way. I will not yield to him' (642). Such harm inflicted by the blacksmith reaches the deep psychological and spiritual levels so that sometimes Owen can not prevent himself from raising doubts about the validity of his choice and its legitimacy.

Heaven! What have I done? exclaimed he, the vapour, the influence of this brute force...it has bedeviled and obscured my perception ... I have made the fatal stroke. (p.642)

Although the other characters in the story tend to suspect or even depreciate Owen's efforts and devices, many social circles never fail to evaluate these efforts and give them their due respect. The author's recurrent ruminations shed light on this fact as felt in the following example,

Owen Warland was invited by the proper authorities to regulate the clock in church steeple. He succeeded so

admirably in the matter of public interest that... the town
in general thanked him.(p.643)

Such moments of self-esteem and extreme joy are transient and short-termed since those with whom he is in direct touch betray adverse reactions and intensify his bafflement. His artistic distinction can turn into a terrible charge by those narrow-minded people, who perceive in his acts a sort of witchcraft and heresy,

'What have you here? Owen! Owen! There is witchcraft in these little chains, and wheels, and paddles[...]Take you own course, but I warn you again in this small piece of mechanism lies evil spirit. Shall I exorcise him?

'You are my evil spirit[...] You and the hard, coarse world! The leaden thoughts and the despondency that you fling upon me are my clogs, else I shall long ago have achieved the task I was created for. (p.643)

In this oscillation between pursuing the plans and visions swarming in the artist's mind and succumbing to the brute force of the physical and materialistic, the narrator's view once again comes to the rescue of the artist's attitude, which is perhaps the author's own,

(he) must keep his faith in himself which his incredulous world
astonishes him with its utter disbelief; he must stand up against
mankind and be his own disciple, but as respects his genius and
the objects to which it is directed.(p.642)

This psychological conflict due to the depreciative acts of his former master and his intimidating rival reaches its zenith when Owen finds that his sweetheart has actually opted for the brute and materialistic. Indeed it is in the reference to the relation between the artist of the beautiful and Annie that the extent of the artist's sacrifices is unraveled and stressed. Annie is the real stimulus and drive behind his ingenious inventions and it is her reactions and responses that count for the embittered artist. He has been entertaining the hope that she will recognize and appreciate his life-long project: the butterfly which has 'spiritual essences—call it magnetism or what you will' (p.651). Thus his shock will be the more devastating to realize that she is not different from the rest in her indifference and contempt of the achievement he cherishes most, the object that 'he has instilled all his life into' (p.651). Psychologically she knows very well that can not dream of putting herself on equal footing with him simply because they represent totally different worlds, amid all the wonder and admiration with which she contemplated the marvelous work of his hands and incarnation of his

ideas, a secret scorn—too secret perhaps, for her own consciousness, and perceptible only to such intrusive discernment as that of the artist. (p.650)

The ever-growing chasm separating them here reaches the climax when her infant puts an end to the toil and insomnia of many years. The spiritualized and animated butterfly, the emblem of creativity and meticulous industry, is finally and irreparably destroyed by an unfeeling baby. Ironically enough, the father of this baby is Owen's worst foe and rival.

This is in short the main issue of the story which, as we have seen, is unfurled through the actions and reactions of a limited number of characters. Hawthorne carefully chooses his characters and assigns to each the role of clarifying and manifesting the different layers of the artist's causes of struggle and discontent. Underlying this simple structure of the story there lays a good web of nuances and subtleties that bring the reader to the real essence of the artist's ordeal. The outstanding aspect of Hawthorne's story is its potentiality to combine the factual and metaphoric, local and universal. This multiplicity of the story is partly attributed to its allegorical side and its ability to provide 'enigmas which each reader solves in his own terms' (Bradley, 440). Owen's predicament is not merely a New England situation: rather it is typical and universal in that there are so many artists in this world whose lot is that of lovelessness, isolation, scorn, abject poverty, and deprivation. As such, it is not surprising to find that this short story has been aptly described as 'an allegory of our time' (Carlson, 22). This is because of its expressive and cogent comments on the endless series of bafflements and embitterment the artist has to cope with and acclimatize to. The discontent of daily reality and the artistic pleasure offered by art represent the core of many modernistic fictions in the twentieth century. Among these is Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. The following is just an excerpt culled at random from a text entirely devoted to the issue of art and its bitter-sweet worlds,

Mrs. Ramsay and Lily Briscoe triumph over the chaos of experience; and their triumphs constitute a compellingly positive vision of life and art. But that vision depends upon reductive simplification of the world and a partial withdrawal from life into art.(p.29)

In contrast to many artists who can no longer put up with this painful 'withdrawing' from life eventually may think of 'committing self-destruction' (p.639), Owen's faith in his art and ingenuity remains powerful. He even creates the impression that he will soon embark on another equally ambitious project amidst all the debris and futility of the present. It is enough for the artist of the beautiful that his lifelong dream of making the spiritualized butterfly is capable of eliciting Annie's words of admiration and appraisal, 'Beautiful! Beautiful!', exclaimed Annie, 'Is it alive? Is it alive?' (p.649) Owen's moment of euphoria as

he extracts Annie's favorable words will be reverberated in James Joyce's novel of art and the suffocating and paralyzing milieu of Dublin, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. As Joyce's hero, Stephen Dedalus, walks by the stream he suddenly sees the wading girl who represents the epiphany of the novel. It is turning-point in the novel and his career as a whole, since he sees in her the call for art and creativity,

Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols [...], a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (p.183)

The present reading of 'The Artist of the Beautiful' has stressed the universal and timeless aspects of Owen's ordeal as a typically dedicated artist. As already indicated, the story has a further biographical, or if you prefer, confessional level on the part of the author himself. Hawthorne gives us his testimony as a witness of an age that glorifies and ennobles the practical and utilitarian. The fiasco of the artist in the story coupled with the undeserved victory of the brute force (the blacksmith) do explicate Hawthorne's stand towards a society that often does not give the artist his due. To be more precise, this is Hawthorne's unequivocal judgment of his myopic and narrow-minded society that always looks askance at any attempt betraying uncommon originality and innovation. There are authorial interventions that support this hypothesis about Hawthorne's disapproval of or dissatisfaction with such a society.

In fact, Hawthorne has tackled the issue of his insensible and utilitarian community in nearly all his works of fiction. For instance, the main action of his great novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, directly indicts the double-dealing and the striking differences between what is professed in public and what is practiced in secret. The woman's adultery in the novel is actually practiced by the person whose duty in life is to prevent or at least to warn against it. In the interesting story, 'Young Goodman Brown', he shows that the highbrows of society (clergymen, statesmen and judges) are actually involved in secret diabolic practices. Given this glaring fact about Hawthorne's society, it is not surprising to come across a statement of the following type,

What the prophet, the poet, the reformer, the criminal, or any other man with human yearnings, but separated from the multitude, might feel, poor Owen felt. (p.644)

If we leave aside this unmistakably biographical aspect of the story, its allegorical or symbolic one is equally interesting as it enables the writer to

explore the other potentialities of fiction, i.e. the ability to mingle or fuse the factual with the suggestive or symbolic. The reception theory led by Jaus, Iser, Fish and Ingarden focus on the role of the reader in generating meanings and levels of experience, especially if the text has some understatements. The presence of the butterflies, both real and man-made, represents the core of this important level of the story's structure. In fact the epiphanies in the story and its evolution hinge on these butterflies. For instance, at certain moments in his life Owen feels completely disillusioned and resentful about his unfortunate choices and preferences. He actually seeks the company of drunkards to alleviate the sense of distress and suffocating anger. It is at such a critical moment that an actual butterfly eventually ignites his consciousness to pursue the task to which he is born and preordained. His spiritual euphoria is expressed in very romantic terms, 'a butterfly had alighted, and he lost himself in contemplation of it...as if its airy trade would show the path of heaven' (p.645). The butterfly here in its lightness, grace and sense of freedom could stand for the call of art and its offerings to the artist. This is supported by a highly poetic diction which enhances its thematic side. This watershed experience in the artist's life with its promises of a bright future is highlighted and celebrated to the full,

"Ah"...you are alive again, child of the sun and playmate
of the summer breeze, after your dismal winter's nap? Then
it is time for me to be at work! (p.645)

This rare moment in the protagonist's consciousness is of prime significance in the coming stages of his life. Obviously the writer resorts to the explicitly critical tone in order to foreground its implications,

It might be fancied that the bright butterfly, which had come so spirit-like
into the windows as Owen sat with the rude
revelers, was indeed a spirit commissioned to recall him to
the pure ideal that had etherealized him among men.(p.645)

Not only does Owen stop these practices, to which he is alien by disposition and psychological make up, but he also finds himself in frantic search for these lovely creatures in farms and woods. They will serve as prototypes for his future inventions which will keep his society mesmerized and spell-bound by such an unprecedented invention. Such roamings in the woods and solitary meditations only split his community about his mental sanity or normality. The pathetic failure of Owen's life-like achievements is in line with Hawthorne's moral conviction as a Puritan fully saturated with the doctrines and preconceptions of New England. Not only does this story embody its themes from 'Puritanism' (Chase, 76), but also his other works draw upon this fountainhead for topics and views. The New Critic, Yvor Winters, argues in the same vein when he stresses the fact that Hawthorne uses a good account 'of the contradictory doctrines of

New England Puritanism' (ibid.74).Owen's plight lies in the fact that he is not only content with what is acceptable and feasible. His aspirations go further than that in his desperate attempt to fulfill what is beyond the reach of ordinary people. Morally speaking, his creativity, though laudable and admirable for so many people, is doomed to be self-destructive and self-annihilating. In one respect, it brings to mind those archetypes of creators and thinkers like Dr. Faustus who have transcended the permissible and eventually perdition is the only thing that lies in store for them,

In his idle and many days he had considered it possible, in a certain sense, to spiritualize machinery, and to combine with the new species of life and motion thus produced beauty that should attain to the ideal which Nature had proposed to herself in all her circumstances, but has never taken pains to realize. (p.647)

These long moments of meditation and speculation materialize in creating such well-wrought butterflies that even the most discerning spectators can not help crying in disbelief that what they see is artificial "Beautiful! Beautiful![...] Is it alive? Is it alive? (p.649) In twentieth-century British literature, Joseph Conrad manipulates similar symbols in his *Lord Jim*. The butterfly in Conrad's novel is endowed with the same sense of splendor and spiritual joy,

I respected the intense, almost passionate, absorption with which he looked at a butterfly, as though on the bronze sheen of these frail wings, in the white tracings, in the gorgeous markings, he could see other things, an image of something as perishable and defying destruction as these delicate lifeless tissues displaying a splendor unmarred by death. (Conrad, 1995, 187)

Though such reactions of admiration are heartening and exhilarating to the spirit of the artist itching to the recognition of his toil and suffering, they arouse commensurable disapproval and grudge among his detractors and rivals. The allegorical levels of the story do not rest only in the process of creating something extraordinarily beautiful and its positive and negative effects. Creating this life-like butterfly turns into a yardstick or objective correlative for knowing and manifesting the various feelings and conflicts people hold against the artist and the tacit challenge he poses to their self-complacency,

to the increased astonishment of Annie, when the tip of her father's finger was pressed against that of her husband, on which the butterfly still rested, the insect drooped its wings and seemed on the point of falling to the floor. Even the bright spots of gold upon its wings and body, unless her

eyes deceived her, grew dim, and the glowing purple took a dusty hue, and the starry luster that gleamed around the blacksmith's hand became faint and vanished "It is dying, it is dying!" cried Annie, in alarm.(p.651)

Seen from this perspective, the butterfly turns into a sort of emblem reflecting and embodying the various reactions and hidden feelings of the characters in question as well as their quintessence. As his world does not follow the trodden path of habitualization, Owen's butterfly becomes the emblem or means of explicating the ever-growing distance between the artist and pseudo artists or disclaimers of genuine art and its hazards. It is true that the butterfly is virtually destroyed by Annie's unfeeling infant. But the process of dismantling the artist's dreams and plans has already started much earlier than this critical moment. The psychological war waged against Owen and his futurist projects is ceaseless and takes different manifestations—scorn, humiliation, depreciation, ignorance and cool reactions towards the fruit of lengthy hours of labor and meditation. Perhaps Hawthorne's postulate is that there is no room for such radical artistry and aesthetic breakthrough and perfection. The author's comments and intrusions through the narrator's views contribute to substantiating the story's main postulate about the disparity between the material and immaterial, the physical and the spiritual or aesthetic. Once more the author's ruminations are helpful and deserve to be quoted at some length,

He knew the world, and Annie as the representative of the world, whatever praise might be bestowed, would never say the fitting word nor feel the fitting sentiment which should be the perfect recompense of the artist who, symbolizing...moral by a material trifle, converting what was earthly to spiritual gold – had won the beautiful into his handiwork.(p.650)

The striking emphasis on the role of the butterfly in the story and its thematic and aesthetic considerations is a key factor in disambiguating the different levels of the story. The present study has hopefully shown the role of the butterfly in revealing the reactions of those surrounding Owen. What is needed now is to see the parallels and resemblances between these beings and the swift and graceful acts of the artist as he seeks an expression to those visions smoldering in his mind. One of Hawthorne's critics tells us about such similarities in saying that the spiritual stages of the artist 'parallel the stages of the butterfly metamorphosis' (Bassil, 7). In its graceful shifts from one flower to another, the butterfly stands for the artist's restless soul and endless search for what is beautiful and sublime. Owen's continuous pursuit of butterflies in farms suggests the inescapable affinity between the pursuer and pursued: both are restless, delicate and graceful. And above all, they are always in a continuous

state of metamorphosis. In the artist's case, he can transform the mundane into something imperishable and enjoyable.

One of the characteristics of the story is the overwhelming emphasis laid on the artist's viewpoint to the extent that the reader is automatically driven to side with and adopt Owen's own views and concepts regarding life, art and creativity. Those who have raised objections or condemnation of his practices (Hovenden, Robert Danforth and to a less extent, Annie) appear to be too weak to change the status quo. The reason is obvious enough: Hawthorne actually identifies himself with the artist of the story and finds an outlet for his (Hawthorne's) own bitterness in choosing the verbal art as a living and its hazards. Owen, in short, represents the prevalent point of view in the story.

No matter how we view this short story and its author and the immeasurable frustration of its protagonist, the fact remains that art is the eternally irresistible call that chooses its practitioners or victims, bestowing upon them a different sort of pleasure and spiritual joy. In the mean time art inflicts on them a great measure of persecution and material need. This ambivalent situation of bitterness and joy is the recurrent point in the story which can not escape the discerning eye. Amidst the series of frustrations and buffets the artist's persistence in following up his profession is undoubted. His faith in his craft and inner vision remains essentially sturdy, although often he has his moments of despair and self-defeat. The story's message is evident: art never stops reproducing itself so long as there are people who have the potentiality and readiness to sacrifice their time and energy for its sake. The story has given us the image of the artist in a nutshell: the artist's position underlies a number of contradictory sensations and situations. On the one hand, he feels elated and self-complacent about his artistic achievement, an achievement that has its admirers and supporters in society. On the other, he has to accept his loneliness, misunderstanding and even hostility as part of the sacrifice to be given. The society does crave to the efforts of the artist but at the same time it has qualms about his/her real intentions and the extent of his/her conformity to what is acceptable and normal. The story shows these ambivalent attitudes of the members of the community concerning the artist's efforts. In this brief but highly representative piece of fiction, Hawthorne refers to the real anguishes of writers and artists in his local community and humanity in general. This is because 'a story is always told or written at a given place in a given moment of history' (Walter 12). It is this duality between the wishes of the individual when tested against the dictates and proscriptions of the community that constitutes the main issue of 'The Artist of the Beautiful'. Moreover the question of beauty as perceived by the artist is relative, controversial and at times suspect. What is the value of beauty, one may ask, if the final outcome is poverty and social deprivation and aloofness? The final impression the story

leaves on the reader or recipient is that the artist has to temper down his individualism and remember that his mere presence and value consist mainly in the recognition of his own community and people. Without these, all his efforts and ingenuities remain inadequate and ineffective. There is a need to reconcile the needs of the individual and those of the community, if the inner peace is to be attained. The artist of the story, for all his superb skill and ingenuity, is unable to set a balance between the inner vision and the commitments imposed by other, between the intuitive and rational. This is almost typical in artists in all ages and places.

معضلة الفنان في قصة هوثورن "فنان الجمال"

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ملخص

البحث التالي محاوله لاستكشاف صورة الفنان في قصة ناثانيل هوثورن "فنان الجمال". يبدأ البحث بتقديم فكره موجزه عن المفاهيم العامة المطروحة عن الفنان وطبيعة نشاطاته. ويكرس الجزء الأكبر من البحث إلى تبيان أوجه القصة المختلفة، خصوصاً ما يواجهه الفنان من تقدير أو انتقاص من شأنه في الحياة اليومية من قبل الأفراد والمجتمع.

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