

H.G. WELLS' THE WONDERFUL VISIT: A SOCIAL NOVEL

Dr. Maneesha Verma, Prof. Sanjay Kumar Swarnkar

Assistant Professor, Head of English Department

English Department

S.K.J.D Degree College, Rura, Kanpur, India

Abstract: *The novels of H.G. Wells are social novels. He did not believe in the idea of art for art sake but he asserted that art must be rooted in life. The Novel The Wonderful Visit symbolizes pure art and the angel we see in it, is kind of socialist who helps the poor and needy and sacrifices his life in order to save poor girl, Delia.*

The Most influential thing about HG Wells we notice through the novel, is the strength of his moral and imaginative qualities. The Novel met with a mixed reception and Wells in this book has proved to possessed the art of satire. Novel also threw light of Wells' gift of invention and imagination as well as narrative and descriptive power.

Keywords: *Ornithologist, Polychromatic, Iconoclast, Querying, Credential, Nordau, Vivisectionist, Exquisite, Crusading*

The novels that H.G. Wells wrote in the Edwardian era are social novels. Wells rejected the idea of art for art's sake. He was of the view that art must be rooted in life. In *The Wonderful Visit* we watch the Angel, who symbolizes, pure art, transformed into a kind of socialist, helping the poor and the needy and sacrificing his life to save the poor girl, Delia.

This novel met with a mixed reception. Wells, in this book, had proved to possess the art of satire, having applied his ingenuity and fancy in satirizing gently, but none the less effectively, the English rural community of today.

This book had several points of merit freshness, unconventionality, originality, good humor and effective satire. This story manifested the author's gift of invention and imagination as well as narrative and descriptive powers.

Some critics had earlier dubbed Wells a destroyer of convention. But unlike Bennett, they had ranked convention with art and religion as one of the values of life. Consequently, they had regarded him as an iconoclast. Bennett saw in him a moralist who, in his criticism of the existing order, demanded that every convention should produce a reasonable foundation for its existence. This revolt was thus that of a scientist against muddled thinking, associating reformation with clear thinking and attacking the public for its blind acceptance of convention.

The angel of this story was the Angel of art. The white angel was made in Germany, in the land of blonde women and domestic sentiments. Delia was alone among the angelic hosts in being distinctly feminine. She was a pure woman, pure maiden or pure matron. She was of a piece with that gentle innocent lady like school of art where of the greatest triumph was "a lump in one's throat" and where wit and passion, scorn and pomp have no place. She came to us cool and worshipful, pure and tranquil as silently soothing as the breath and calmness of the starlit sky.

One night, many people at Sidderton saw a glare on the Sidderford moor. The glare was golden like a beam shining out of the sky, not a uniform blaze, but broken all over by curving flashes like the waving of swords.

Next day Sandy bright was coming down the road. The strange bird flapped over him, something larger than himself, with a vast spread of wings, and, as he thought, black. He screamed and gave himself up for lost. Sandy bright went to talk the matter over with Mr. Jekyll the 'Primitive minister' afterwards the vicar of Siddermorton.

The vicar of Siddermorton was an ornithologist. His name was Well- known in the columns of Zoologist. He carried a gun, was loaded with swanshot for the strange bird. When the vicar stood in the gateway. His eyes caught something, particolored that wavered and went for sometime nothing stirred, he almost feared that his eyes had played him false. But after sometime, something rose suddenly full wavering colors, twenty yards or less in front of his face and beating the air. He took a shot at it from his shotgun. There was a scream of superhuman agony, the wings beat the air twice came slanting swiftly downward, broken wing and flying blood-stained plumes upon the turf slope behind.

The Vicar stood aghast, it was not bird at all, but a youth with an extremely beautiful face, clad in a robe of saffron and with iridescent wings. Never had the Vicar seen such gorgeous floods of color, not the wings of butterflies, not even the glories of crystals seen between prisms, no colors on earth could compare with them. Vicar felt sorry to shot him.

This angel the vicar shot was, no such angel at all but the Angel of Italian art, polychromatic and gay. He came from the land of beautiful dreams and not from any holier place. At best he was a popish creature.

Ingvold Raknem writes –

"To some readers Wells appeared as an iconoclast, his method of destroying accepted theories and views of things by querying them instead of flatly and clumsily asserting their untruth or folly.....being the most interesting and also precisely the most effective."¹

The angel was confused to see a man, without a feather upon him, he understood that he was in the land of dreams. Angel was not able to fly as his left wing had suffered which causes a pain that he never felt before.

In the land of the Angels, so the vicar learnt in the course of many conversations, there was neither pain nor trouble nor death marrying nor giving in marriage, birth nor forgetting. Only at times new things begin. Even he was unknown with the word and feeling of hunger and eat and die. Finally, the angel went home with him.

The Curate's wife and her two daughters and Mrs. Jehoram saw the Vicar and the Angel to come. They all were horrorstruck. They all, ran away from there immediately. Angel told that he had been frightened at things without wings. He glanced down at the Vicar's feet and told that he had hoofs like a hippogriff. Vicar suggested him to wear the clothes like him, when in Rome one must do as the Romans do. Otherwise he would find himself somewhat isolated in society.

Vicar called Dr. Crump to show the angel's wound. He understood to see the angel, a man of abnormal growth and a mottoid, having noticed the effeminate delicacy of his face. Dr. Crump said, "Mark of mental weakness, many of this type of degenerate show this same disposition to assume some vast mysterious credentials. One will call himself the Prince of Wales, another the Archangel Gabriel..... reading all about it is Nordau. No doubt his odd deformity gave him an idea.....No doubt he's slipped away from confinement"². Vicar disagreed with it. Vicar told him that he was a real angel with wings not a figure of speech.

Then Vicar told the Angel that nobody there had ever seen an Angel, or heard of one except in church. So, he should feign to become a man and eat like a man. Next day in Vicar's study the angel saw a violin and played it. The quality of the note made the Vicar turn suddenly. Once more the glory of heaven was upon the Angel's face.

The Vicar allowed the Angel to go down into the village by himself to enlarge his idea of humanity. He peered curiously into the eyes of the people. And at the time of quarreling with Mrs. Gustick he felt a sensation of insult. He went up the hill towards the Vicarage. He came upon the respectable tramp slumbering peacefully among the wild flowers. he stopped to look. He was a pallid creature, with broken spirited crush hat cocked over one eye. He told the Angel about the pithed frog. He said, "It's a thing these here vivisectionists do. They take a frog and they cut out his brains and they shove a bit of pith in the place of them. That's a pithed frog. Well that their village is full of pithed human being."³

The Angel came thoughtfully by the hedge across the field towards the Vicarage. By the gate stood little Delia, the waiting maid. It suddenly came into the Angel's mind that she was beautiful and not only beautiful but also alive and warm. And for just one moment he looked into her face. She looked back at him and something leapt within her.

At the dinner table the Angel told the Vicar the more striking of his day's adventures. He told that the strange thing was the readiness of his human being the zest-with which they inflict pain. He felt that everyone seemed anxious willing at any rate- to give this pain, and everyone seemed busy giving pain.

Vicar said, "Of course it's fighting everywhere. The whole living world is a battlefield-the whole world. We are driven by pain. How it lies on the surface! This angel sees it in a day! It is not so in the Angelic Land. Further Vicar said, "Pain is the warp and the woof of this life.....It is almost impossible for me to imagine.....a world without pain... It is the very reverse of an Angelic world."⁴

Even Vicar told the Angel that their food was not obtained without inflicting pain. Here Wells gives a message of vegetarianism. Angel faces the struggles of adapting to everyday life, and has to deal with the problems of earthly life. He feels uneasy among men. The experiences in the village make him revise his views of art and realizes the truth that art is rooted in human life.

There Mrs. Jehoram said, "I love music Mr. Angel, adore it. Life without music is brutality. Then the Angel began to play, thinking of the wonderful things of the Angelic Land and so great was the hold of the Angelic music upon the vicar that his anxieties fell from him at once.

Curate managed duet with Mr. Angel, Mr. Wilmerdings had sected himself at the piano and had turned to a familiar pile of music in the recess. He opened the folio before the angel but he was unable to understand the dots mean and he was unable to play the music with notes. But they understood that the Angel did not wish to play with Mr. Wilmerdings.

Mrs. Jehoram asked the Angel if he looked for sympathy. The Angel answered he had found it and her name was Delia. His behavior with servant was not right. Because he knew nothing it how to behave. They made out that he was in love with the Vicar's house maid. So ingloriously, ended the Angel's first and last appearance in society.

The Angel deeply pained that the Vicar was pained. The iron of the world was entering into his soul. For a week he had known pain and rejection, suspicion and hatred, a strange new spirit of revolt was growing up in his heart.

This Angel had been breathing the poisonous air of this struggle for Existence. He had eaten and slept and learnt the lesson of pain-had travelled so far on the road to humanity.

Delia was thinking, she had all that wonderful emotional tenderness, that subtle exquisite desire for self-sacrifice. She had been looking out at the tranquility of the moonlight long before the Angel began to play. The music was so sweet and keen, it came so near to the thought of her heart and the tears streaming down her face.

Sir John Gotch, came to meet the Vicar about Angel and told him a secret that the Angel had been going about that village preaching socialism. He was making everywhere setting class against and the poor man against their bread and butter.

Ingvald Raknem comments -

"Sir John Gotch stand up for the privileges of their class, defend private property and turn their fury against anyone holding modern ideas"⁵

Next Night, Delia sat hoping to hear the Angel play. But that night there was to be no playing. She saw angel who began taking short runs, flapping his wings and leaping. His shriveled wings flashed and fell then she heard him sobbing. Delia stood up impulsively she knelt down and took his face between her hands. She promised to do anything to help him. The angel said to himself that this was no world for an angel. It was a world of war, a world of pain, a world of death. He lifted up his hands to Heaven, the ultimate bitterness of helpless remorse in his face.

When the Angel came over the brow of the moor, a vivid light sprang up before him, that was a glare of fire, golden or red, that shot from the windows and a hole in the roof of the Vicarage. He began to run towards the burning houses. We heard a voice saying that she had gone in and could not able to get out and went in after a fiddle.

Then in a flash he saw it all, saw this grin little world of battle and cruelty, suffused suddenly and insupportably glorious with the wonderful light of love and self-sacrifice. He gave a strange cry and before anyone could stop him, was running toward the burning buildings. There was a cry of 'Delia' and no more. But suddenly the flames spurted out in a blinding glare that shot upward to an immense height, a blinding brilliance broken by a thousand flickering gleams like the waving of swords. Thus, the Angel regained his wings through love and self sacrifice. One is inscribed Thomas Angel and the other Delia Hardy and the dates of the deaths are the same.

Bennett read the Wonderful visit, and characterized it as ironical work in which Wells was crusading against the convention ridden village. The most impressive thing about Wells was the strength of his moral and imaginative qualities.

Bennett writes-

"Wells saw things afresh, and in this he was an artist. But an artist does not go far by only having visions. A power of creating, or of recreating what one sees in one's vision is essential. Wells was a moralist in being concerned with the relationship between man and woman."⁶

References-

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- ² H.G. Wells, The Wonderful Visit (New Delhi : Rupa Classics Ahad Enterprises, 2609, Baradari Ballimaran, 2007) P. 40.
- ³ H.G. Wells, The Wonderful Visit (New Delhi : Rupa Classics Ahad Enterprises, 2609, Baradari Ballimaran, 2007) P. 99.
- ⁴ H.G. Wells, The Wonderful Visit (New Delhi : Rupa Classics Ahad Enterprises, 2609, Baradari Ballimaran, 2007) P. 108.
- ⁵ Ingvald Raknem (Ed.) H.G. Wells & His Critics (Norway: George Allen & Unwin Ltd) , P. 418.
- ⁶ Ingvald Raknem (Ed.) H.G. Wells & His Critics (Norway: George Allen & Unwin Ltd) , P. 52, 53.