

H.G. WELLS' ANN VERONICA : A Feminist Interpretation

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Abstract: H.G. Wells is famously known for his science fiction but he also wrote social & philosophical novels. Most of them threw light on sarcastic picture of society. Ann Veronica is revolutionary social novel and it focuses on woman's hope of freedom and liberty. Ann Veronica, leaving her studies, devotes herself to the cause of woman's suffrage. No doubt, the novel dramatizes the contemporary problem of the new woman. Suffrage movement to gain women's democratic rights was the most important impact of the new woman. This Movement in twentieth century Britain aimed at securing voting right for women.

Keywords: Empowerment, Sensation, disaster, Swept, Desperate, Tolstoyans, Fabians, Suffrage, Stimulus

Though H.G. Wells is well known for science fiction, being a Fabian socialist in thought he produced such novels as *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, *Kipps*, *Tono Bungay*, *Ann Veronica*. They are all sarcastic pictures of social life. He presented *Ann Veronica* as a revolutionary social novel. It was his bold and daring novel which concentrating specifically on feminist issues. Exploring the conflict between female empowerment and the sacrifices people made for love this novel caused a sensation was damned in the press and preached against from the pulpits when it was first published in 1909, due to Well's ground-breaking treatment of female liberty.

He wrote this novel as a reflection and representation at his society condition when he lived in Victorian age which was authorized by Edwardian England. So, Wells portrayed the attitude of Edwardian England, in particular, these of the heroine's father and boyfriend who were completely unable to understand why a woman should want to be independent, study science, have the right to vote and so on.

At twenty-one, the passionate, head strong, reckless and fiercely independent Ann Veronica Stanley is determined to be a 'person', to rule her own life, to work, love above all, to live. She compromised at length on the science course at the Tredgold women's college. She discovered a desire to enter as a student in the Imperial College at Westminster. She had asked her father about it but he forbade her. Even Ann Veronica wanted to go annual Fadden dances of a fashionable art school ball with her friends but her father told her not to go. She argued that she had not any reason of not going there. Her father told her that it was not a suitable place and a suitable gathering and she was rash and ignorant absolutely inexperienced. She knew nothing of life and danger. Then she argued that it was not only this affair of the dance. She wanted to go to that because it was a new experience and would give her a view of things. That was probably true that she knew nothing but how she was to know of things. She wanted to be a human being.

When at evening Ann Veronica was dressing up as a corsair for going to that ball, her father interrupted her and both of them began absurdly desperate struggle, the one to open the door, the other to keep it fastened. She seized the key and he grasped her hand. His grip twisted her wrist. She cried out with the pain of it. A wild passion of shame and self-disgust swept over her. Her spirit awoke in dismay to an affection in ruins to the immense undignified disaster. Her soul was full of the sense of disaster. She had made her first fight for dignity and freedom as a grownup and independent person and this was how the universe had treated her. She vowed to the night, she will go or she will die! She leaved her home in order to live independently and got refused in London.

Ingvald Raknem comments-

Being a Victorian father, he considered "his daughters his absolute property, bound to obey her, her to give away or her to keep....." ¹

Here Wells reveals unhealthy hidden humor of parent and shows the thought of patriarchal society of Victorian age. Patrick Parrinder comments-

"It is less a story than a study: a study of the unrest and dissatisfaction which has entered into the soul of the modern city bred girl."²

Wells has stated the problem of the young women of present peculiar condition. The revolt which comes from idleness and artificial occupations and the circumscribing tumuli of dead conventions, dead moralities, dead religions. In the most masterly fashion he presents to us a fine type Ann Veronica, the young women of strong character and ideals, who

lives in a conventional semi-suburban home. Her situation is that which confronts thousands of young women. The choice seems to lie between a limited life in a home. In part the story is more universal: of the stimulus and great desire of adolescence, with the world suddenly opened to the mind first attaining self-consciousness

After it Veronica discussed her matter with Miss Miniver, who was bearing the words on her lapel on Ivory button 'Votes for women' Miss Miniver told Veronica with an air of conveying great open secret, "Thousands of women have married merely for freedom, and found it a worse slavery. We live under man made institution and that is what they amount to women have practically no economic freedom because they have no political freedom". While we were minding the children, they stole our right and liberties. The children made us slaves and the men took advantage of it."³ She told her that there is no remedy except the vote. Even there a woman never got a fair chance. There's only one way to get on for a woman and that is to please man.

In this novel, some important messages are revealed clearly, this is to show the women society is under men's domination so that is why the main character of Ann Veronica wanted to break off the Victorian norms which existed under position of men. Everybody knows that all human beings are equal, whether they are men or women, they have some suffrage. They wanted to be equal socially, economically and politically. But in reality, of Ann Veronica's life, women's life is in the second position. The representation of women is dealt with negative, weaker and inessential. Men represent the positive stronger and essential. A hundred years women have been treated as inferiority by men. As mostly Victorian girl, Ann Veronica also has experienced injustice treatment from her father. She is expected to be a good and obedient daughter for her family. Rebelling the Victorian norm, Ann Veronica struggled hard to fight the patriarchal system for the hope of freedom and liberty as a woman. Wells was well known for his stance on women's suffrage and was perhaps the most effective male voice for early feminism.

Wilfred Whitten writes,

"The world is moving so fast, new ideas and horizons are opening so quickly, that young people are dazzled by life as a spectacle as an aggregate of brilliant contacts and opportunities. They want to live..."⁴

Miss Miniever took her to the struggle people, Tolstoyan and The Fabian. Fabians was the center of the intellectuals. There were Shaw, Webb, Wilkins the author, Toomer and Dr. Tumpany – the most wonderful people. Ann Veronica became more and more alive and so much to a system of ideas as to a big diffused impulse towards change. Fabricans were attempting to transform modern civilization with surreptitious intrigues.

Ann Veronica wanted to make women's life better socially, economically and politically. She got what she dreamed by working and studying. As a result, she started to survive her life alone without family. As what reflected in her character which can be called Feminist elements. She tried to change women's life which is fully under domination of men.

At the advice of Ramage she borrowed forty pounds to continue her study at imperial college to make her good value because then she was unripe and half educated.

With this money Ann Veronica became able to devote herself to study in the biological laboratory of The Central Imperial College. One day a letter from Mr. Ramage arrived inviting her to join him for a performance of Tristan and Isolde followed by dinner at a cabinet particular. Ann Veronica was very glad because she had never heard it before. "Don't the dark longings of Wagner's music instill a stirring in your nether regions?" Mr. Ramage recklessly declared, thrusting his mouth towards her lips.

Ann Veronica punched him firmly on the chin. "How dare you!" she cried "I am not a woman of lower truth." Mr. Ramage answered her that she could not go because he had paid for her and helped her. Else it he threatened her that she had all her life in his hand.

Patrick Parrinder writes,

"When Ann Veronica borrows forty pounds from a man who had appeared a genial suburban gentleman of unimpeachable reputation, she finds that the wolf and tiger instincts have only dressed themselves up in thin clothing that primitive man will feed and must take his pasturage".⁵

H.G Wells writes,

"My book was written primarily to express the resentment and distress which many women feel now-a-days at their unavailable practical dependence choice, and in full sympathy with the natural but perhaps anarchistic and the antisocial idea that is intolerable for a woman to have sexual relation with a man with whom she is not in love."⁶

When Ann Veronica reached her little bed sitting room again, every nerve in her body was quivering with shame and self-disgust. She faced the facts of a woman's position in the world. She had thought that this dependence of woman was but an illusion which needed only to be denied to vanish. She supposed woman's life is all chance. Find your man, that's the rule, all the rest is humbug and delicacy. She resolved that she would not have this slavery and not to be slave to the thought of any man. Veronica joined suffrage movement. It was working for the equal citizenship of the men and women.

From Ann Veronica's rebellion character, we can see that she has a high idealism as a girl. She has experienced men's domination in the Victorian age. It means that not only Ann Veronica has it, but also every woman has experienced

like Ann's life. Therefore, she decides to break off the Victorian's norms that have controversial issue of feminism at that time. She struggled hard to fight the patriarchal system for the hope of freedom and liberty as a woman by voting for women.

Ann veronica offers vignettes of the women's suffrage movement in the Great Britain and features a chapter inspired by the 1908 attempts of suffragettes to storm parliament. Education and employment opportunities were increasing for women as western countries became more urban and industrialized. Suffrage movement to gain women's democratic right was the most important influence on the new women.

Here Wells was able to build up a unique character which has two significant natures by combining between the characters of femininity which became the highlight issue in the society at that time. In fact, the novel attacked the Victorian and Edwardian attitude to women and advocated outspokenly for their freedom in so plain words that it was banned by the government. The conservative people condemn Wells for making the heroine acknowledge the existence of sexual desire and gratification, although he presented sex as a problem challenging men's rationality. Aldous Huxley echoed him in his first novel *Crome Yellow* in 1921. Wells classic tale of a woman's fight against the stifling conventions of Edwardian England is as relevant today as it was in 1909.

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 4. Wilfred written,*H.G.Wells: The critical Heritage* (London & Boston: Routledge & Kegen Paul), p.169
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