

## **Invisibility and the Fragmented Self in H. G. Wells's *The Invisible***

### ***Man***

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### **Abstract**

H.G.Wells novel “ The Invisible Man” delves into the multifaceted character of the invisible man in H.G. Wells' iconic novel. This study explores the transformation of the protagonist from visibility to invisibility and the profound psychological and ethical dilemmas that ensue. The paper delves into the scientific and moral aspects of invisibility, examining the character's descent into secrecy, alienation, and ultimately, madness. It scrutinizes the ethical implications of wielding the power of invisibility and how it leads to moral degradation, shedding light on broader philosophical questions of identity and accountability. Furthermore, this analysis discusses the broader implications of the invisible man's character within the context of H.G. Wells' body of work, emphasizing the recurring theme of the consequences of unchecked

scientific experimentation and the impact on human psychology. In conclusion, "Invisibility Unveiled" offers a comprehensive exploration of the complex character in 'The Invisible Man,' highlighting how Wells masterfully weaves science, morality, and psychology into a narrative that continues to captivate and provoke thought, leaving readers to ponder the intricacies of invisibility and its consequences on the human psyche.

**Keywords:** Invisibility, Complex Character, Ethical Dilemmas, Psychological Transformation, Identity, Scientific Experimentation, Moral Degradation.

In the opening chapter of the novel, "The Invisible Man," Griffin makes his first appearance at the 'Coach and Horses' inn, setting the stage for the enigmatic narrative that follows. Here, he encounters the inn's proprietor, Mrs. Hall. Griffin's peculiar appearance is immediately striking, as he is swathed in layers of bandages, obscuring his features entirely. Yet, Mrs. Hall's curiosity gets the better of her, and she attempts to discern his hidden face, an endeavour that ultimately proven fruitless.

H.G. Wells skilfully depicts this initial encounter between Mrs. Hall and the invisible man, setting the tone for the mysteries and intrigue that will unfold as the story progresses.

“His gloved hands were clasped behind him, and he seemed to be lost in thought, Mrs. Hall noticed that melted snow that still sprinkled his shoulders dripped upon her carpet.” (p.22)

Certainly, here is an excerpt from the initial conversation between Mrs. Hall and the invisible man,

“Can I take your hat and coat, sir she said,  
And give them, a good dry in the kitchen?  
No, he said, without turning.” (p.22)

Indeed, the initial conversation between the invisible man (Griffin) and Mrs. Hall in the kitchen of the 'Coach and Horses' inn hints at Griffin's unsettling nature. Mrs. Hall's fear is

palpable as she complies with his demanding requests, preparing food as he desires. This interaction foreshadows the fear and apprehension that Griffin instils not only in Mrs. Hall but also in the villagers of Iping.

As the story unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that Griffin is not a good-hearted individual. His actions go beyond mere eccentricity, as he engages in acts of theft and deceit, preying on the unsuspecting villagers. Even his own landlady, Mrs. Hall, becomes a victim of his unscrupulous behaviour. Griffin's failure to pay his rent at the inn underscores his disregard for societal norms and obligations. The invisible man's reign of terror extends beyond mere invisibility, as he uses his newfound power to manipulate and exploit those around him, leaving a trail of fear and mistrust in his wake.

“Top of Form

Is it your bill you're wanting, sir? she said.

Why was not my breakfast laid?

Why haven't you prepared my meals and answered my bell?

Do you think I live without eating?

Why is not my bill paid? said Mrs. Hall

That is what I want to know.” (p.64)

Indeed, Griffin's consistent attempts to evade payment and his indifference to Mrs. Hall's inquiries about the bill reveal his disregard for financial obligations and social norms. His actions further emphasize his selfish and unscrupulous nature, as he continues to exploit his landlady's hospitality while refusing to settle his debts. This pattern of behavior underscores the character's descent into moral ambiguity and his increasing detachment from societal norms as he grapples with the consequences of his invisibility.

The culmination of Mrs. Hall's patience leads her to demand that Griffin vacate the inn, a request that sparks his anger. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Mrs. Hall seeks the

assistance of Mr. Huxter, Mr. Marvel, Mr. Hall, and Teddy Henfrey to rid the inn of the troublesome Griffin. However, the invisible man proves to be a formidable adversary as he attempts to evade capture. As the pursuit unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Griffin, the invisible man, is depicted as a character with numerous negative qualities in the novel. His actions and behaviour, including his anger and violent resistance, cast him in a negative light. He is portrayed as a character who stops at nothing in his relentless pursuit of scientific goals, even if it means resorting to unethical and criminal means.

Griffin's character is further complex as he appears to achieve through his invisibility what he could not attain in his visible state. His use of invisibility becomes a tool to fulfil his desires and needs, ultimately portraying him as a character driven to extremes in his quest for power and control. The novel explores the consequences of wielding such unchecked power, leading Griffin down a dark and destructive path.

Escapism serves as a tool for individuals to temporarily divert their attention from the challenges and harsh realities of life. In essence, it offers a respite from the burdens of daily existence. It's a universal tendency for humans to seek moments of relief from the pressures and difficulties they face. While there are critics who argue against escapism, asserting the importance of confronting reality and its consequences, there are equally valid arguments in favor of escapism. Many believe that escapism, in moderation, can actually enhance one's ability to navigate the real world and manage the stresses of modern life. It provides a mental break and a chance to rejuvenate. Escapism often takes the form of entertainment, such as radio or science fiction programs, allowing people to explore alternate worlds and experiences. This imaginative exercise can lead to new discoveries and insights, contributing to a deeper understanding of our own universe and scientific realities.

In essence, escapism can serve as a source of inspiration, creativity, and personal growth, offering a different perspective on life. It can expand our horizons and lead to

advancements in various fields. Balancing escapism with a healthy dose of reality can indeed enrich our lives and contribute to a more well-rounded human experience. Indeed, Griffin's character in "The Invisible Man" is deeply entwined with the practice of escapism. He resorts to stealing money whenever the need arises to fund his scientific experiments, using this illicit means as a way to escape from financial constraints. When Griffin's clothes are scattered around the room but he himself is invisible, marks a significant turning point in the story. When Mrs. Hall confronts him, his revelation of invisibility is a dramatic example of how he has escaped the confines of normal existence through his scientific experiment. His subsequent escape from the police, including the dramatic moment where he sheds his clothes to become fully invisible, underscores his increasing reliance on invisibility as a means of escaping capture and societal norms. Griffin's journey throughout the novel can be seen as an extreme form of escapism, as he seeks to evade not only the authorities but also the consequences of his actions.

“Here, stop that said Jaffers, suddenly realizing what was happening. He gripped the waist coat, it struggles, and the shirt slipped out of it and left it limp and empty in his hand. ‘Hold him!’ said Jaffers loudly. ‘Once he gets the things off’- ‘Hold him!’ cried everyone, and there was a rush at the fluttering white shirt, which was now all that was visible of stranger.” (70)

Griffin's relentless efforts to escape from the people, including the police and the villagers, stem from a complex blend of fear, self-preservation, and a desire for personal freedom. Firstly, Griffin is acutely aware that his invisibility makes him a unique and potentially dangerous individual. As news of his invisibility spreads, people become increasingly afraid of him, and he becomes a hunted figure. This fear of capture by the authorities and the potential consequences of his actions drives him to evade capture. Simultaneously, Griffin is indeed motivated by a desire for personal freedom and the ability to

enjoy his life. Invisibility provides him with a form of liberation that allows him to move unseen and unchecked. However, this newfound freedom comes at a cost, as it isolates him from human society and leads to a descent into moral ambiguity and unethical behaviour.

So, Griffin's attempts to escape from the people are driven by a combination of his fear of capture, his desire to preserve his life, and his longing for the liberation that invisibility offers. It's a complex interplay of motivations that underscores the character's multifaceted nature.

“Look out! said everybody, fencing at random and hitting at nothing. ‘Hold him! Shut the door! Don’t let him loose. I got something! Here he is!’ a perfect Babel of noises they made. Everybody, it seemed, was being hit all at once, and Sandy Wadgers, knowing as ever, and his wits sharpened by a frightful blow on the nose, reopened the door and led the rout.” (71)

His actions, which include hitting and violently resisting anyone who attempts to capture him, indeed reflect his desperate and ruthless determination to escape capture. As the invisible man, Griffin possesses not only the advantage of invisibility but also a sense of power that allows him to act with impunity, making him a formidable and dangerous figure. Griffin's actions are driven by a primal instinct for self-preservation. He understands that capture could lead to dire consequences, and he is willing to go to great lengths to protect his life. His use of escapism as a tool to ensure his survival is a central theme in the novel, highlighting the extremes to which he is willing to go to evade capture and safeguard his newfound abilities.

Griffin was very much affected by the betrayal of Marvel, he started chasing him. When Marvel fled and sought refuge in the Happy Cricketers Inn, Griffin's pursuit led to a confrontation where he was shot in the legs, causing severe injury. This incident forced him to seek shelter elsewhere, leading him to Dr. Kemp's house. In his conversation with Dr. Kemp,

Griffin provides insights into his past experiments with light and the development of his invisibility formula. He explains how he progressed from making wool invisible to testing it on a cat. When the owner of the house where he was staying became a nuisance, Griffin decided to use the invisibility procedure on him. Griffin's narrative serves to shed light on the gradual evolution of his experiments and the moral complexities that arose from his pursuit of invisibility. It reveals his detachment from the ethical consequences of his actions and his single-minded dedication to his scientific goals. This conversation with Dr. Kemp provides valuable context for understanding Griffin's character and motivations.

“And then came a curious experience I heard a miaow behind me, and turning, saw a lean white cat, very dirty, on the cistern cover outside the window. A thought came into my head. ‘Everything ready for you’ I said, and went to the window, opened it, and called softly.” (143)

Indeed, Griffin's experiment with the cat plays a pivotal role in the narrative. He captures the cat and successfully renders it invisible through his experimentation, a crucial step in his quest for invisibility. However, the consequences of his actions soon become evident as the owner of the house realizes her beloved pet is missing, leading to suspicion falling upon Griffin. This incident serves as an early indication of the moral dilemmas and ethical consequences of Griffin's experiments. His actions, while driven by scientific ambition, have real-world repercussions that extend beyond his laboratory. It foreshadows the chaos and turmoil that will follow as Griffin continues to explore the limits of invisibility, ultimately spiralling into a destructive and ruthless pursuit of power and control.

Griffin's interactions with the old woman and her missing cat further highlight the complexities and consequences of his invisibility. Despite successfully avoiding the old woman's initial suspicions, her persistent search for the cat keeps Griffin on edge. His constant need to escape detection becomes a recurring theme as he navigates the challenges of

invisibility. The moment when the cat miaows in his room becomes a critical juncture, as it draws attention to his presence and raises suspicions. The old woman's investigation and eventual confirmation of Griffin's involvement in the cat's disappearance put him in a precarious situation. The appearance of Griffin's landlord adds another layer of tension to the situation. It underscores the difficulty of maintaining a secret when living in close proximity to others. Griffin's struggle to keep his invisibility hidden becomes increasingly challenging, setting the stage for the events that follow in the novel.

“And there was someone rapping at the door. It was my landlord with threats and Inquiries, an old Polish Jew in a long grey coat and greasy slippers. I had been tormenting a cat in the night, he was sure-the old woman's tongue had been busy. He insisted on knowing all about it. The laws of this country against vivisection were very severe-he might be liable. I denied the cat. Then the vibration of the little gas-engine could be felt all over the house, he said. That was true, certainly.” (147)

Griffin's use of invisibility to escape from the consequences of his actions indeed represents a dramatic form of escapism. Faced with the mounting evidence of his involvement in the cat's disappearance and the growing suspicions of the villagers, he resorts to the ultimate escape by rendering himself invisible. This decision sets in motion a series of events where Griffin must carefully plan and strategize his escape from the crowd of villagers who are searching for him. His ability to become invisible grants him a unique advantage, allowing him to bide his time in his room while he formulates his escape plan. His willingness to adapt and follow the ideas that come to mind showcases both his resourcefulness and desperation. Griffin's use of escapism in this instance demonstrates the lengths to which he is willing to go to evade capture and continue his exploration of invisibility, regardless of the moral and ethical

implications of his actions. It's a compelling portrayal of a character driven to extreme measures by his scientific pursuits and the consequences they entail.

Throughout the novel, it becomes increasingly evident that Griffin's mind is plagued by fear, confusion, and the corrupting influence of his invisibility. His transformation into the invisible man takes a toll on his mental well-being. The isolation, secrecy, and constant need to evade capture contribute to a deteriorating mental state. Griffin's initial pursuit of scientific discovery gradually gives way to an obsession with power and control, leading him down a dark and vengeful path. This psychological turmoil manifests in his cruel and ruthless behaviour, as he becomes increasingly detached from moral and ethical considerations. His desire for revenge against those who he perceives as threats, including Dr. Kemp, fuels his violent actions and attempts to attack them.

Griffin's actions and behaviour in the novel reflect a deeply anti-social and destructive nature. His pursuit of invisibility, initially driven by scientific curiosity, devolves into a relentless quest for power and control. His willingness to terrorize and kill those who oppose him underscores his descent into a state of moral chaos. Griffin's actions have dire consequences for the people and society around him, as he leaves a trail of fear, suffering, and financial hardship in his wake. His inability to control his emotions, coupled with his cunning and manipulative mind, make him a formidable and unpredictable antagonist. Griffin's character is a stark portrayal of the dangers that can arise when unchecked scientific ambition is combined with a lack of moral restraint. His anti-social behaviour and ruthless pursuit of his own desires serve as a cautionary tale within the narrative.

An analysis of "The Invisible Man" and its exploration of the relationship between science and society is insightful and thought-provoking. The novel indeed serves as a cautionary tale, demonstrating the potential dangers when scientific knowledge falls into the wrong hands or is driven by selfish ambition.

Griffin's character embodies the idea that scientific discovery, while inherently value-free, can be corrupted when used for personal gain or malevolent purposes. His misuse of scientific knowledge leads to chaos and poses a significant threat to society, as evidenced by the fear and suffering he engenders. The impact of science abuse on both society and the individual is apt. It underscores the importance of responsible and ethical scientific practices, as well as the need for societal safeguards to prevent the misuse of knowledge that can harm humanity.

This analysis serves as a valuable reminder of the dual nature of scientific progress – it can bring great benefits to society when used for the common good, but it can also pose serious risks when manipulated for personal gain or destructive purposes. Promoting awareness of these ethical considerations in science is crucial for ensuring the responsible use of knowledge and its positive impact on society.

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