



THE LIGHT OF ESCAPISM IN H. G. WELLS' *THE INVISIBLE MAN*

VISHNUKUMAR E.

Post-Graduate Student (Integrated)
Department of English
Annamalai University, Chidambaram
(TN) INDIA

ABSTRACT

The Invisible Man is a science fiction novella written by H.G. Wells in 1897. The Invisible Man is the story of an invisible man, who achieves through his invisible identity what he cannot achieve through his real identity. The invisible man of the title is Griffin, a scientist who theorises that if a person's 'Refractive Index' is changed the exactly that of air and his body does not absorb or reflect light, and then he became invisible. More than a scientific romance, this is the story of a man, Griffin, who accidentally stumbles upon the logically impossible idea that a man can be invisible, only to be introduced to the harsher realities of existence. This refractive experiment leads him in to an extraordinary way of life. Then, he himself successfully carries out this procedure, but cannot regain his original form again, and as a result becomes mentally unstable.

Key Words: *Scientific Romance, Invisible Identity vs Real Identity.*

INTRODUCTION

H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* contains 'twenty eight' chapters and an Epilogue also. Each chapter describes about the character of Griffin and his strange experiment and how he escaped from the society. The author narrates the story in an interesting fashion and keeps the reader captivated till the end of the chapter. The very first chapter's title is 'The Strange Man's Arrival', which describes the arrival of Griffin who is known as the Invisible Man. The first chapter starts with the following sentence:

The stranger came early in February, one wintry day, through a biting wind and a driving snow, *the* last snowfall of the year, over the down, walking from



Bramblehurst Railway Station and carrying a little black portmanteau in his thickly-gloved hand. (21)

The very first sentence of the novel contains fourth words, and that almost seems to be a paragraph. The author H.G. Wells describes the story carefully and puts forth his ideas and every incidents of the main character in the novel. Then he narrates every chapter with strange experience which is new and like a magic to hear.

The story of the novel starts in the village of Iping in West Sussex. The local inn is named 'Coach and Horses', where a mysterious looking stranger arrived to stay there. There, so called fear started up in the habitants of the inn. The stranger wears a long, thick coat, gloves his face is hidden entirely by bandages, and large goggles. The stranger is extremely reclusive and demands to be left alone, spending most of his time in his room working with a set of chemicals and Laboratory apparatus; he used to go out only at night time. Then the local people of the village talked about him as he unnerves the local. Mrs. Hall is the owner of the Coach and Horses inn. Meanwhile, a series of mysterious burglaries occur in the village in which the victims catch no sight of the thief. One-day morning when the innkeepers pass the stranger's room, they enter inside with curiosity. At that time they notice the stranger's clothes are scattered all over the floor or room but the stranger is nowhere to be seen to their eyes. However, the furniture seems to spring alive and the bedclothes and a chair leap into mid-air and push them out of the room. Later in the day, Mrs. Hall confronts the stranger about this, and the stranger reveals that he is an invisible man, and removes his bandages and goggles to reveal nothing beneath. Then Mrs. Hall flees in horror and she informs about that, the invisible man to police and the police attempt to catch the stranger, but he throws off all his clothes and escapes from the inn.

Griffin, the Invisible Man flees to the downs, where he frightens a tramp, and he meets Thomas Marvel there. Then Griffin forces Marvel to become his lab assistant even though Marvel is not willing to do work or help him. Then together with Marvel, Griffin returns to the village where Marvel steals Griffin's books and apparatus from the inn, while Griffin steals the doctor and vicar's clothes. Then, Marvel carries around Griffin's scientific notebook for him and, eventually, large money that Griffin had stolen from a band. Thomas Marvel grows afraid of his unseen partner and he leaves to the Port Burdock, taking both the notebooks and the money with him, where he seeks the protection of the police. Marvel attempts to betray Griffin and his invisibility to the police and for this Griffin chases after him, threatening to kill him.

Marvel is being frightened very much and he flees to the seaside town of Burdock where he takes refuge in an inn. Griffin attempts to break through the back door of the inn, but he is overheard and shot by a black-bearded American, and flees the scene badly injured. Then, he



enters a nearby house to take refuge and dress his wound. However, the house turns to belong to Dr. Kemp. When both meet each other, Griffin reveals his true identity. He was a brilliant student with whom Kemp studied at University.

Mr. Griffin narrates the past events to his old friend Kemp that after leaving University he was desperately poor. He was determined to achieve something of scientific significance and he began to work on an experiment to make people and objects invisible. He wanted to get money for his experiments from his father, but it was denied to him. So, he had to steal money from his own father. After being robbed by his son, Griffin's father committed suicide. Then Griffin experimented with a formula that altered the refractive index of objects, which resulted in light not bending when passing through the object, thereby making it invisible. He performed the experiment using a cat. After that test, he succeeded in his experiment and the cat became invisible. But when the cat's owner who is Griffin's neighbor, realized that the cat was missing she made a complaint to their land lord, and Griffin landed up performing the invisibility procedure on him to hide from them. So here, he starts to escape from them.

However, the reality is soon proved that sense misguided. After struggling to survive out in the open, he stole some clothes from a dingy backstreet shop and took residence at the Coach and Horses inn to reverse the experiment. Then he explains to Kemp that he plans to begin a 'Reign of Terror', using his invisibility to terrorize the nation with Kemp as his secret confederate. Realizing that Griffin is clearly insane, Kemp has no plans to help him but instead alerts the police. When the police arrive, Griffin violently assaults Kemp and a police officer before escaping. The next day he leaves a note on Kemp's doorstep announcing that Kemp will be the first man killed in the 'Reign of Terror'. But Kemp has no fear on his threat and he remains cool and writes a note to the Colonel Adye, who is the chief police officer in the town of Port Burdock. That letter, details a plan to use him as a bait to trap Griffin, the invisible man. However, as a maidservant attempts to deliver the note she is attacked by Griffin and takes away the note.

Just as the police helps to accompany the attacked maid back to the house, Griffin breaks in through the back door and makes for Kemp. But Kemp is cool and is not frightened. Kemp bolts the house and runs down the hill to the town below, where he alerts a navy that the Invisible Man is approaching. In the town people get together and witness the pursuit and rally around Kemp. A few minutes later, when Griffin pins down Kemp, the navy strikes him with a spade and knocks him to the ground. Then Griffin falls down, violently assaulted by the people. Griffin dies of the heavy injuries he has received, and after he dies, his naked and battered body slowly becomes visible on the ground. Later it is revealed that Marvel has Griffin's notes; with the invisibility formula written in a mix of 'Russian and Greek' which he cannot understand. Griffin is a fictional character and the antagonist of H.G. Wells'

science fiction *The Invisible Man*. Griffin is a young scientist who wants to create the ultimate humanoid by creating a race of invisible people. So he finds himself with a lot of power to fight and escape too and he uses this power with great delight. As he is invisible, no one can catch him, so there are no moral limitations on his actions. At the beginning, one is not quite sure whether to feel sympathy and pity for Griffin or hate and contempt.

The Invisible Man, Griffin appears at the inn ‘Coach and Horses’ in the first chapter of the novel and then, he meets the owner of the inn, Mrs. Hall. When Mrs. Hall looks at him, he was wrapped up from head to foot, with bandages. However, she tries to see his face but she failed. H. G. Wells gives an account of Mrs. Hall’s first meeting with the invisible man in the following lines,

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)

The initial conversation between Mrs. Hall and the invisible man goes like this:

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)

Both of them are conversing in the kitchen, Mrs. Hall was afraid of the invisible man, and she prepares food for him according to his wish. So, one comes to know that Griffin might be a bad man and not a good-hearted person. The invisible man frightens Mrs. Hall and other people in the village, at Iping. Griffin also creates terror in the villages and he begins to cheat the people by stealing money and other materials from them. He cheats his owner Mrs. Hall. He does not give his rentals to the inn’s owner. She asks him to pay the bill by asking,

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)

Therefore, it is evident that Griffin often tried to escape from the property owner without paying the bill. But Mrs. Hall very often informed about the bill, but he neglected to her question whenever she asked him.



Finally, Mrs. Hall asked Griffin to vacate the inn and Griffin gets angry. So Mrs. Hall calls Mr. Huxter, Mr. Marvel, Mr. Hall and Teddy Henfrey to help her get rid of Griffin from the inn. Nevertheless, Griffin tried to escape from them. They all realized that Griffin, the invisible man was in wrong way, so they started to chase the invisible figure. However, the Invisible Man started to fight like a mad man. Thus, the Invisible Man is projected as a character with many negative qualities in the novel. However, the more we learn about him the more he looks as the 'mad, scientist who will stop at nothing in his pursuit of his scientific goals' (Wikipedia). Griffin is characterized as a person who achieves through his invisible identity what he cannot achieve through his real identity. He seems to fulfill all his desires and needs through the tool called invisibility.

Dr. Kemp appears in chapter-17, which is titled as 'Dr. Kemp's Visitor'. Kemp is an important character in the novel next to Griffin. It is because Dr. Kemp is the only person who knows about Griffin very well than any other character in the novel. Dr. Kemp is also a scientist who lives in the town of Port Burdock. He is an old friend of Griffin. In the Chapter titled 'Dr. Kemp's Visitor', Griffin comes to Kemp's house to hide after his transformation as the invisible man. Dr. Kemp's encounter with Griffin goes like this,

'He stared at this in amazement. It was an empty bandage- a bandage properly tied, but quite empty. He would have advanced to grasp it, but a touch arrested him and a voice speaking quite close to him.'

Kemp! said the voice.

Eh? said Kemp, with his mouth open.

Keep your nerve, said the Voice. I'm an Invisible Man,

Kemp made no answer for a space, simply stared at the bandage.

"Invisible Man?" he said. (122)

First of all Kemp does not believe and accept the invisibility of Griffin. He couldn't believe his ears. He is shocked to find that his friend is invisible. Later, Kemp allows him to narrate his past story of how he began his experiments and all that had happened to him. After learning Griffin's past, and his ideas and future plan, Kemp realizes that he is insane with his new power. However, Kemp does not like his activities and his plan about 'Reign of Terror'. So he quickly informs Colonel Adye, chief police officer. Griffin had tried to escape from so many things right from the beginning of the novel. Initially, he had escaped from being caught by the land lord for making his cat invisible. Then, he escapes from paying the bill at Mrs. Hall's inn. Later, he escapes from Dr. Kemp and the police. Thus Griffin escapes from his follies, punishments and finally even from reality.

'Escapism' acts as a tool in people's life to distract them from their struggle filled life. In other words, 'Escapism' helps people to escape from the harsh realities of life. However,



every human being tries to escape from the depression and unpleasant realities of daily life. The importance of escapism, while there are many opponents of escapism and those that said it is important to the human experience to live in reality and face the consequences; there are also many proponents of escapism. It is largely accepted that escapism can help people more ably interact within reality and cope with some of the stresses of modern life. For years, people have been turning to radio programs or science fiction programs to envision another world and grasp at what life might be like within another experience. This thought has often led to the discovery of many items of interest within our own universe and our world, which has in turn led to an enhanced reality of our scientific world. Escapism can open doors and can surpass natural science in many ways.

Griffin is found with the practice of escapism. Griffin is used to steal money whenever he is in need of it to do the experiment. One morning when the innkeepers pass the stranger's room they enter in. Then they notice the stranger's clothes are scattered but he is nowhere to be seen. Later in the day Mrs. Hall confronts the stranger about this, and the stranger reveals that he is invisible removing his bandages and goggles to reveal nothing beneath. As Mrs. Hall flees in horror, the police attempt to catch the stranger, but he throws off all his clothes and escapes. First of all he is starting to escape in his daily life in movement onwards. First he escaped from Jaffers hand at the room. In an attempt to capture Griffin, Jaffers says,

Here, stop that said Jaffers, suddenly realizing what was happening. He gripped the waist coat, it struggle, 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)

So, we came to know clearly about Griffin that he used to escape from the people and he wants to be free in his invisible life. In this instance he escaped from Jaffers because everyone knew that he is invisible man and the people informed to police that, he is frightened that he will be arrested by the police. Though the village people are around him and a few are holding him, he is hitting them and he tries to escape from the crowd. Why is he trying to escape from the people? It is because all human beings are afraid of being chased by death. Here, he is worried about his life and he wants to save his life from them at the same time he wants to enjoy the life. This could be one of the reasons for his escaping nature. When the people were around him, they said,

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)

Here, the village people were able to catch Griffin, but while they come out from the doorway he escapes. There seemed to be a big tussle between Griffin and the people before he escaped.

The hitting continued. Phipps, the Unitarian, had a front tooth broken, and Henfrey was injured in the cartilage of his ear. Jaffers was struck under the jaw, and turning, caught at something that intervened between him and Huxter in the melee, and prevented their coming together. (71)

Thus, the Invisible Man was hitting everyone who tried to catch him and he escaped. His behavior was very cruel and wild. He was ready to do anything to escape from being caught. He has more power in his body as well as he is invisible. So, he uses the technique of escapism to escape from being caught. Escapism is very much visible in his behavior. Griffin tries to escape because he is threatened and hence he hits the people to save his life and escape from them. He escapes in order to protect his life.

Griffin could not tolerate betrayal. Hence, he chases Marvel and ran into the Happy Cricketers Inn and closed the door, where a black bearded man held a revolver and shoot Griffin's legs. Then Griffin was wounded and escaped from the Inn and he hides at Dr. Kemp's house. The next morning Griffin told Dr. Kemp how he had always experimented with light. He told him all the details of how he first made some wool invisible, then a cat, and when the owner of the house wanted him out of his lodging he had decided to make him invisible here, Griffin narrates the past events, that he uses the cat for his test. Griffin tells Dr. Kemp,

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)

Thus, Griffin caught the cat for his experiment and he made it invisible. He succeeded in his experiment and the owner of the house comes to know that her cat was missing and she doubted Griffin. Then Mrs. Hall asks Griffin about the cat, saying,

It was an old woman from downstairs, who suspected me of vivisection-drink-sodden. Old creature, with only a cat to care for the entire entire world I whipped out some chloroform, applied it, and answered the door. 'Did I hear a



cat?’ She asked. ‘My cat?’ ‘Not here!’ said I, very politely. She was a little doubtful, and tried to peer past me into the room-struggle enough to her, no doubt, bare wells, un curtained windows, truckle-bed, with the gas-engine vibrating, and the seethe of the radiant points, and that faint stinging of Chloroform in the air, she had to be satisfied at last, and went away again. (144)

Thus Griffin managed the old woman, but she is still seeking the cat. However, Griffin escaped from the old woman and finally she confirmed that he was the cause for the missing of the cat. So, Griffin tried to escape at that situation and again the old woman came and investigates the cat at his room, because the cat had miaowed at that time. Then, Griffin’s landlord appeared there,

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)

So the landlord also came to know about Griffin’s activities and warned him. After a few days later she confirmed that Griffin was the cause for the cat missing. Then, Griffin got fear and he tried to escape from them for his mistake. Griffin applied that theory or invisible solution on him to hide from their vision and then became invisible. This is also one of the ways of Escapism that Griffin had used in his life to escape from the people. After becoming invisible, he stayed inside his room, because villagers were searching in front of his room to catch him. So he is waiting for the right time to escape and before that he also planned how to escape from the crowd. When he thinks on his escape plan he gets ideas somehow and follows that idea which came to his mind.

I went into one of the sitting-rooms and waited until they came down, still speculative and argumentative, all a little disappointed at finding no ‘horrors,’ and all a little puzzled how they stood legally towards me. As soon as they had gone on down to the basement, I slipped up again with a box of matches, fired my heap of paper and rubbish, put the chairs and bedding thereby, led the gas to the affair by mean of an India rubber tube ‘You fired the house?’ exclaimed Kemp. ‘Fired the house!’ It was the only way to cover my trail, and no doubt it was insured.... I slipped the bolts of the front door quietly and went out into the street. I was invisible, and I was only just beginning to realize the extraordinary advantage



my Invisibility gave me. My head was already teeming with plans of all the wild and Wonderful things I had now impunity to do. (153)

The Invisible Man is always thinking about escapism, because the people were aware of his invisibility and they are searching for him, to punish for his crime. In the village all were talking about him and tried to capture him. So he lived with fear and looked at every corner of any place. Then some people were searching for him with light and he was searching for a way to escape. The following lines reveal this incident,

Then far down the place, in the brighter light of some department which had already raised its blinds, I saw two men approaching. I scrambled to my feet, looking about me for some way of escape, and even as I did so the sound of my movement made them aware of me. I suppose they saw merely a figure moving quietly and quickly away. 'Who's that?' cried one, and 'Stop there!' shouted the other. (166)

Griffin's mind is full of fear and confusion, his behavior is cruel and he has a corrupted mind in him. When we analyze the character of Griffin with reference to psychologically, one could understand that he is affected mentally. This becomes the reason for his revengeful attitude towards the people and Dr. Kemp and hence he tries to attack them and then escape from the place and people.

Verma states that,

An emotion usually originates as a result of something you see, hear or think about. This feeling may be pleasant or unpleasant. The result of this feeling is certain action like assault or murder. Man's life is thus affected to a large extent by his feelings or emotions, and therefore it is accorded a distinct place in the causation of anti-social behavior. (Crime Psychology, 3)

So Griffin is acting against the people and the society. Due to his behavior, people struggled a lot and he had stolen the money from the public. He has anti-social behavior. Griffin's only aim is terrorized and kills people who are raising their hand against him. Griffin is not able to control his emotions and feelings on the spot and he has developed a cunning mind.

According to Verma,

Character is the moral part of the personality that regulates daily behaviors. If a person has defects in their character such as aggressiveness, cunning or brutality, he will find it difficult to rationalize between right and wrong in



moments of emotional upset and will not be able to exercise self-control. (Crime Psychology, 5)

Verma further states that,

A person suffering from depression may believe that life is pointless, so that he might as well “escape” to criminality. (Crime Psychology, 6)

Therefore, from the views of Verma, one could come to a clear understanding of Griffin’s behavior. Griffin’s mind is full of anger and revenge and hence, he behaves like an animal. Griffin’s animal like behavior is shown in the following lines,

The Invisible Man seems to have rushed out of Kemp’s house in a state of blind fury. A little child playing near Kemp’s gateway was violently caught up and thrown aside, so that its ankle was broken- and thereafter for some hours he passed out of human perception. (190)

Thus, Griffin’s cruel animal like behavior is explicit through the above given quotation. So sometimes an escapist’s behavior turns into an animal like behavior and such people might try to destroy or frighten others. Griffin behaved like an insecure animal in the novel. Thus it is very evident that Griffin escapes from punishment that reality has in stock for him and he adorns the role of an escapist by making himself invisible to the world.

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