

Exploring Thematic Implication of The Invisible Man from Language Art

Xiao Yao
12 December 2022

1. Introduction

There are two things in the world to fear, one is death, the other is unknown. When the two are combined, The Invisible Man is born. Written by Herbert George Wells and published in 1897, it is a science fiction novel that explores the consequences of a scientist's attempt to create an invisibility potion, following the story of a man named Griffin, who becomes invisible after conducting a series of experiments on himself. At first, he revels in the freedom and power that his invisibility affords him, but as he becomes more and more isolated and desperate, he quickly realizes the drawbacks of his condition, descending into madness, ultimately causing destruction and chaos wherever he goes. This essay attempts to explore and appreciate the thematic implication of The Invisible Man through language art.

2. Gothic language style and delicate psychological description

One of the most striking aspects is his extraordinary language style. With the focus of the images of surreal and unusual events full of dark, strange, scary and mysterious atmosphere, this novel is written in the Gothic style, which arose in the 17th century and reached its peak in the 18th century, quite distinctive from the mainstream literary creation at that time. The Gothic language style adds to the horror of the story, so some people think it should be defined as a horror novel, and it is even labeled "horror" in its Wikipedia introduction. For example, Wells made a grim and spooky scene of Griffin's bizarre costume and the reaction of people walking down the street:

His goggling spectacles and ghastly bandaged face under the penthouse of

his hat, came with a disagreeable suddenness out of the darkness upon one or two home-going labourer...was scared shamefully by the stranger's skull-like head (he was walking hat in hand) lit by the sudden light of the opened inn door. (32)

However, it definitely works as a science fiction owing to the setting of a plausible scientific basis for this surreal phenomenon, using the physical features of leukemia to make people invisible by altering the refraction and reflectivity of blood to light. This combination of science and anti-science, reality and Gothic creates a literary tone of contradiction and conflict for the style of the whole novel, paving the way for a profound understanding of the technological and ethical conflict in its social sense.

Complemented by tremendous psychological descriptions, Wells' gothic language of Griffin's invisibility is particularly conspicuous, which is especially reflected from Chapter 19 to 23 of the novel, where he uses embedded first-person narrative perspective to complete Griffin's self-description of his memories before and after his successful invisibility, highlighting the plentiful and delicate portrayal of psychological changes. For instance, when Griffin first realizes that he has become invisible, Wells writes:

I shall never forget that dawn, and the strange horror of seeing that my hands had become as clouded glass, and watching them grow clearer and thinner as the day went by, until at last I could see the sickly disorder of my room through them, though I closed my transparent eyelids. (74)

Vivid and grotesque scenes being used to convey the horror of being unable to be seen by others, this passage perfectly captures the fear and astonishment that Griffin feels at the realization of his condition.

The change of mental state shows how the unhealthy development of technology has eroded human ethics and mental health. As Griffin becomes more and more isolated, he becomes increasingly violent and unpredictable, unable to prevent himself from using his invisibility to achieve his own selfish goals, thus obsessed with his power and completely disconnected from reality.

3. The metaphorical meaning of “body” and the inevitable social relationship of man

The concept of “body” in the story is no longer a simple presentation of visual senses but is used as a metaphor for various themes and ideas, reflecting the symbolic characteristics of skin. First, the body is a potential communication tool. Nina Jablonski explains this:

Our skin talks even when we don't; it is not a neutral canvas. Through the expressive functions of skin and body decoration, we have expanded the communicative potential of our bodies and reinforced the primacy of the visual sense in our sensory repertoire. Especially in industrialized societies, this may well be a response to the increasing importance of the sense of self and the identification of self at the level of the skin. (164)

But unable to make basic communication through his own body to be observed or read, Griffin is excluded from social interactions, resulting in isolation and loneliness, which is in a way extremely similar to people's invisibility today, since due to the increasing reliance on technology and lack of face-to-face social contact, “bodies” are hidden behind cold screens, struggling with feelings of solitude.

Second, the invisible body can be seen as a metaphor for the way in which society often ignores or overlooks certain individuals or groups. In Victorian times, it was a response to the values, desires and anxieties of the present, and could be applied to anyone who did not fit the accepted image of the British subject, or the qualities in the individual that were considered unexpected and undesirable. Griffin is a crazy genius whose research is not comprehended by others, while he is afraid of being robbed of his scientific achievement, wanting to get the freedom and unrestrained pleasure brought by stealth, which fundamentally means he desires to break away from regulations of society. However, without protection of clothes against cold weather, he could not only probably fall down the stairs because he could not see his feet, but also easily be hit by others or carriages when walking on the road and even can't eat in front of others, thus finally being black and blue, receiving the pain of losing his identity, and being marginalized by society. Meanwhile, wandering naked in public symbolized the desire of primitive wild animals, defying and confronting Victorian values. Therefore, without the regulation of social ethics, whether he is still a human is a question worth pondering.

Nowadays, in the age of big data, there are some people, to put it bluntly, the online keyboard warriors, who are the “invisible man” in real society, devastating and bullying under the cloak of electronic invisibility, while to think deeply, it also can be understood in reverse, which means that in this era, there is no such an invisible person. Since people are closely connected with society, anyone currently inevitably needs an identity and social relationship. Consequently, the more eager people are to break the restrictions of society like “invisible man”, the more unable to be invisible and the more constrained they become. People sacrifice personal privacy and information to contribute to the public in order to achieve a social contract of temporary equality, but what if one day we really do live in a world where any privacy is open to prying eyes and to what extent people can be invisible at that time? And this is the transgenerational significance and eternal value of Wells’s The Invisible Man.

4. Conclusion

The Invisible Man is a thought-provoking novel that explores the dangers of isolation and the consequences of unbridled scientific progress. Through its brilliant language art of gothic style and metaphor, the novel delves into the psychological effects of invisibility and the dangers of pursuing knowledge without considering the consequences, demonstrating the inevitability of the inextricable connection between man and society. While the novel was written over a century ago, its themes are still highly relevant today, making it a timeless and enduring work of literature.

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