

Univerzita Hradec Králové  
Pedagogická fakulta  
Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

## **Pojetí a míra zla ve vybraných dílech anglicky píšících autorů**

Diplomová práce

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### Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Cílem práce je analýza a srovnání pojetí a míry zla ve vybraných dílech autorů John Bunyan, Daniel Defoe, Oscar Wilde a E. A. Poe. Předmětem srovnání bude vývoj jednotlivých postav, sebepojetí protagonistů, zasazení do kontextu prostředí, míra vyjádření zla, způsob působení motivu zla na čtenáře.

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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto diplomovou práci vypracoval (pod vedením vedoucího diplomové práce) samostatně a uvedl jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové dne

## **ANOTACE:**

MULÁR, Robert. *Pojetí a míra zla ve vybraných dílech anglicky píšících autorů*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2015. 60 s. Diplomová práce.

Cílem diplomové práce je srovnání pojetí a míry zla ve vybraných dílech anglicky píšících autorů. Práce se zaměřuje na vývoj jednotlivých postav v souvislosti s jejich prostředím a kontextem.

Mezi vybrané autory patří N. Hawthorne, R. Ellison, I. McEwan, S. Crane a W. Golding. Práce je rozdělena do tří kapitol. První analyzuje formu útlaku, vytvářenou společností či komunitou na jedince. Druhá kapitola sleduje vývoj morálních hodnot u dětí či dospívajících jedinců v závislosti na jejich prostředí a rodinném zázemí. Poslední kapitola zkoumá cestu muže za realizací jeho vize, kde si dosažení jeho ambice žádá vážné oběti.

V obecné rovině práce sleduje příčiny a následky vývoje postav a snaží se poukázat na jejich ovlivnění z prostředí, do kterého je autoři zasadili. Předmětem zkoumání jsou také východiska, ke kterým se autoři prostřednictvím svých postav dostávají.

Klíčová slova: zlo, jednatelce proti společnosti, morální integrita a její vývoj, boj uvnitř jedince, Hawthorne, Ellison, McEwan, Crane, Golding.

## **ANNOTATION:**

MULÁR, Robert. *The Treatment and the Measure of Evil in Selected Works of Authors in English*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové, 2015, 60 pg. Master's Degree Thesis.

The aim of the M.A. thesis is to analyze and compare different treatments of evil as well as different attitudes and perspectives authors use when contemplating evil.

The selected authors include N. Hawthorne, R. Ellison, I. McEwan, S. Crane and W. Golding. The thesis is divided into three chapters. The first describes a form of oppression of an individual by society. The second observes the development of moral integrity within children with insufficient or inadequate family support. The last chapter analyzes a self-destruction of a man, driven by his ambition to fulfill his vision.

Generally, the thesis studies the development of the major characters, the influence, under which they are from their surrounding and the author's resolve on particular issues.

Keywords: evil, individual against society, moral integrity and its development, struggle within oneself, Hawthorne, Ellison, McEwan, Crane, Golding.

## **Poděkování**

Tímto bych rád upřímně poděkoval své vedoucí diplomové práce, paní Heleně Tampierové, PhDr. Th.D., za její odborné vedení, cenné rady a trpělivost, kterou mi při vypracování této diplomové práce poskytla.

V neposlední řadě také velice děkuji své rodině, přátelům a blízkým za podporu v průběhu tvorby této práce a během celého studia na Univerzitě Hradec Králové.

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## Introduction

The topic of the thesis was chosen according to author's interest in and personal liking of the issue of good and evil. This thesis also follows the topic of author's bachelor thesis.

There is a total of five literary pieces selected for analysis. The aim of these analyses is to contemplate the question of evil from different perspectives. These include: *The Scarlet Letter* (Nathaniel Hawthorne), *The Invisible Man* (Ralph Ellison), *The Cement Garden* (Ian McEwan), *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (Stephen Crane) and *The Spire* (William Golding). The origin of the authors and the historical periods of their literary work are not as important as their choice of theme and setting as well as their relevance to the concept of this thesis. Thus the novels are sorted, according to the latter, into three chapters.

The first chapter - *A Struggle of an Individual against the Established Customs of Society* – observes, as the title suggests, how a human being endures a life in unfavorable conditions. The case study of the first of the selected novels, *The Scarlet Letter*, considers how Puritan people treat sinners and at the same time keeps focus on the sinner's self-perception. It describes the protagonist's (sinner's) development and the possibility of her overcoming her own damnation and striving towards a fresh start. The second piece of literature, *The Invisible Man*, analyzes a journey of a man of African-American race in America in the 1930s. It describes, beginning with his graduation and the following university studies, how poorly society treats such a character. Under the false impression of achieving greatness and position of respect by following rules (furthermore enhanced by an overall naivety), the protagonist lets other people humiliate him and push him around. He does not realize how others abuse him, until he witnesses a violent arrest (of an African-American man) ending with gunfire and bloodshed. Only then does he learn how to take advantage of his "invisibility" and ends a free man. He has been ever since liberated from expectations and rules, which were set by a strict and unforgiving society.

The second chapter – *Inheritance of Moral Standards* – examines the essential importance of parental care and its influence on the children’s conception of moral fiber as well as their personality traits. It uses both *The Cement Garden* and *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* for the analysis of the children’s development of ethics and their differentiation of right and wrong. The study also emphasizes the influence of surroundings, domestic atmosphere and the relationships within the family. It further explores the extent, to which children inherit the parents’ vices, virtues and generally the patterns of behavior. In case of the first selected novel, the analysis ponders on the way children deal with the absence of their parents with no one to restrict and modify as well as to support their behavior.

The third and last chapter - *Sacrifices Made to Achieve One’s Goal* – *William Golding’s The Spire*

All in all, the thesis aims to objectively examine the conception and treatment of evil as displayed by the authors of the selected literary pieces. It mainly gathers the data from primary literature with the support of secondary literature to establish a general analysis. The study tries not to pay too much of attention on historical background and other factual circumstances and instead focuses primarily on the information found within the designated novels. Therefore, the final product of this thesis should be an in-depth report on how the authors portray and treat evil within one of their work of literature.

## **1. A Struggle of an Individual against the Established Customs of Society**

### **1.1 The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne**

#### **1.1.1 Plot Overview**

At the beginning of the novel, there is a short story, or (as the author calls it) a sketch, about a surveyor located in a custom house. The surveyor is relieved of his duties due to a recent political change. Most probably, this story describes what might have been a real life experience and inspiration for Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* between the years 1846 and 1849.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the story, the reader is taken to a much different setting. In one of the earliest settlements of white Anglo-Saxon Puritans, a young woman (later recognized as Hester Prynne) is facing a condescending look from all the people in the town. It is due to her adultery, from which her daughter Pearl is conceived, that Hester has to be publicly humiliated and is ordered to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her clothes to the end of her times. Later on, Hester lives in a cottage on the outskirts of the town.

The plot develops with the arrival of an unknown man, who later turns out to be Hester's husband. He goes by the name of Roger Chillingworth. He soon earns the trust and respect of the townspeople with his skills and knowledge in the field of medicine. However, the only secret purpose, for which he stays in the town, is to find the man who sinned along with Hester and bring that man to justice.

Throughout the story, Hester finds herself in the middle of a shadowy game between Roger Chillingworth and Arthur Dimmesdale. The latter is a minister of the Church, a man of respected position and status. The plot reveals that Dimmesdale is indeed the father of Pearl. Understandably, a man of such intellect as Roger Chillingworth soon learns this secret identity and decides to undermine Dimmesdale's confidence and enhance the burden of the guilt he bears. Thus Roger decides to execute his own personal revenge on the sinner.

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<sup>1</sup>Millington, pg. xvi

Meanwhile, in a forest far away from the inquisitive watch of the townspeople, Dimmesdale and Hester plan on leaving the settlement for a new place, where all of them (including Pearl) could live together. However, on the day of the departure, Hester discovers that Roger Chillingworth found a way to get onto the list of passengers as well.

The story reaches the conclusion when Arthur Dimmesdale, after giving one of his most inspired sermons, dies, confessing to his sin on the very scaffold, on which Hester faced her punishment in the beginning. Without any further significance, Roger Chillingworth passes away, leaving Pearl enough money to start a new life far away from the town. Hester stays in her cottage and offers support for women, who find themselves in situations similar to hers.

### **1.1.2 Order – *Society***

The setting of the novel depicts one of the early settlements in the so-called “new world”, where Puritan people lived by a renewed set of rules. The reader must understand that though the city of Boston is situated in the seventeenth century, many of the problems, which Hawthorne projects into it, are from his day, meaning the first half of the nineteenth century. Supposedly, what inspired Hawthorne to set the story into a Puritan settlement was the fact that his predecessors were prominent Puritans<sup>1</sup>.

The first thing one learns about the surrounding is the ironic fact that even in the “new world”, in one of the early settlements, there is a need for prison. Though it is not expressed, the reader gets the feeling that the Puritan settlement decided to hunt and punish undesired behavior instead of reinforcing the positive one. Indeed, it was the prison, which Hester walked out from and faced the punishment for her crimes. Hawthorne best describes the atmosphere in a dialogue between the newly arrived guest (Roger Chillingworth) and another undisclosed spectator of the trial:

“You say truly,” replied [Roger Chillingworth]. “I am a stranger, and have been a wanderer, sorely against my will. I have met with grievous mishaps by sea and land, and have been long held in bonds among the heathen-folk, to the southward; and am now brought thither by this Indian to be redeemed out of my captivity. Will it please you, therefore, to tell me of Hester Prynne’s, - have I her

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<sup>1</sup> Millington, pg. xiv

name rightly? – of this woman’s offences, and what has brought her to yonder scaffold?”

“Truly, friend; and methinks it must gladden your heart, after your troubles and sojourn in the wilderness,” said the townsman, “to find yourself, at length, in a land where iniquity is searched out, and punished in the sight of rulers and people, as here in our godly New England.”

(Hawthorne, pg. 58)

Despite the fact that Roger’s previous whereabouts outside “civilization” are undisclosed, the presentation of the new society is almost ironical, as if the change of surroundings is almost for the worse. Nevertheless, in *The Scarlet Letter* the conception of such civilization is favored, while the wilderness (from which Roger came) is being prejudiced. There is not much depiction regarding the wilderness, and thus “*the various references to the wilderness imbue it with distinct and consistent characteristics. It is a place of loneliness, terror, the unknown, rebellion, palpable evil, mystery, lawlessness, unbridled joy, pleasure, emotion, and sexuality.*” (Johnson, pg. 42)

Indeed, the Puritans were aware of the omnipresent temptation and evil and the townspeople were keen on obeying the public rules, or at least making sure that others obey them, thus establishing a civil authority in town. There are signs indicating that Hester was not the only person, who sinned in town, though she was the only one, who could easily be accused and convicted of it. As for other townsmen, Hawthorne accurately depicted how living in such environment does not encourage the settlers to behave in a proper way, but rather hide their secrets and mistrust others.

To avoid the look of other people, usually eager to uncover a secret, the author introduces a safe place – the forest. Whereas in the marketplace in town people have to keep their image, dignity and moral integrity, in the forest, people are free to speak their minds and express their emotions. As seen on the following dialogue, which takes place when Dimmesdale (obviously enthusiastic) returns from the forest, where he and Hester have just made a plan to run away, and meets old Mistress Hibbins (Governor’s sister, who is considered to be a witch):

“So, Reverend Sir, you have made a visit into the forest,” observed the witch-lady, nodding her high head-dress at him. “The next time, I pray you to allow me only a fair warning, and I shall be proud to bear you company. Without taking overmuch upon myself, my good word will go far towards gaining any strange gentleman a fair reception from yonder potentate you wot of!”

“I profess, madam,” answered the clergyman, with a great obeisance, such as the lady’s rank demanded, and his own good-breeding made imperative, - “I profess, on my conscience and character, that I am utterly bewildered as touching the purport of your words! I went not into the forest to seek a potentate; neither do I, at any future time, design a visit thither, with a view to gaining the favor of such a personage. My one sufficient object was to greet that pious friend of mine, the Apostle Eliot, and rejoice with him over the many precious souls he hath won from heathendom!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” cackled the old witch-lady, still nodding her high head-dress at the minister. “Well, well, we must needs talk thus in the daytime! You carry it off like an old hand! But at midnight, and in the forest, we shall have other talk together!”

(Hawthorne, pg. 202)

The conversation suggests that Arthur (as well as others) is almost obliged to hide his excitement and any sign of emotional happiness, because in the settlement, such expression would only arouse the curiosity of other people. Such curiosity would then apparently raise the question regarding the source of clergyman’s excitement.

Unlike the forest, the town was a place of secrets. And anyone who could not keep or conceal such a secret was condemned by the tribunal of Puritan elders, which also has Arthur Dimmesdale as a member. Nevertheless, Hawthorne does not blame the elders of abusing their power to strike fear in citizens’ hearts nor does he consider them evil men.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, Hawthorne “*believes that some sort of repression is necessary to maintain civil order*”. (Millington, pg. 166) Still, the novel reflects how this repression leads to the tendency of rebelling against it, thus creating places like the forest to break free from it. The measure of conviction in the moral standards and rules was amplified by being rooted in the upbringing of children. That is demonstrated on the interaction between Hester (and Pearl) and the Puritans’ children. As Hawthorne depicts in his novel, “*the discipline of the family, in those days, was of a far more rigid kind than now. The frown, the harsh rebuke, the frequent application of the rod, enjoined by Scriptural authority, were used, not merely in the way of punishment for actual offences, but as a wholesome regimen for the growth and promotion of all childish virtues*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 84) Not surprisingly, the christened children of the townspeople expressed contempt and even hostility towards both Hester and Pearl.

One aspect remains alarming in such society, though. That is the fragility and possible flexibility of interpretation of the law and its original form. In Hawthorne’s

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<sup>1</sup> Millington, pg. 165

words, people, who would for instance interfere with the gloomy atmosphere of “The New England Holiday”, would be repressed “*not only by the rigid discipline of law, but by the general sentiment which gives law its vitality*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 211) Not only does Hawthorne imply that a public system cannot actually work without public consent, but also understands that with civil authority, law can quickly transform into a variable. Such a treatment of law is displayed in the conversation between women at the market. During that conversation, several gossips (as Hawthorne calls them) discussed the justness of Hester’s punishment and even came up with their own versions, escalating the conversation to a point, when one of the gossips claimed that Hester “*has brought shame upon [them] all, and ought to die. Is there not law for it? Truly, there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 49) A deadly threat, though it remained idle at that point, undermines the authority of the tribunal and can result in public discontent with the official verdict. If one follows such hypothetical chain of events, it is possible, that sooner or later, a time would come when people’s discontent would spread public disorder and call for a change of the legal system.

Finally, Hawthorne does not condemn the Puritan society and its elders. They do what needs to be done to preserve order and peace. However, Hester’s case was more complex than anyone could have foreseen and it is due to her strong will that she makes others realize it. Perhaps Hawthorne wanted to compensate for the inquisitive character of the society by making them also forgiving in the end.

### **1.1.3 Endurance – *Hester Prynne***

The reader first meets Hester Prynne on a scaffold, where she has no intention of denying the act of adultery, for which she is being punished. There is not much information given about the actual act. The story only reveals that she had been neglected by her husband, who decided to further improve his career before moving into the town with his wife, and thus it is most likely presumed by the townspeople that Hester must have sinned with another man for the baby to have been conceived. At that moment, Hester had two things close to her chest. First was the “scarlet letter”, a symbol of the committed sin, which was to be seen on her clothing thereafter. The second was the baby, a result of the said sin. While the symbol inflicts a great deal of



pain to Hester, the result does the opposite. That might have been one of the factors, which later determined her future.

After the public punishment, Hawthorne offers a simple and understandable solution – departure. He suggests it in a way, in which the reader perceives it as an essential means of resolving such issue. The sinner simply moves, changes identities and starts a new life with no regard to his previous wrongdoings. However, Hester decides not to give in to such temptations of an easy way out and stays, seeking redemption for her sin. Possibly, it is due to Hawthorne’s growing up “fatherless” with powerful and independent women in his surrounding that he also sees Hester’s self-reliance and endurance as a possible outcome of the situation.<sup>1</sup> The previous whereabouts of Hester are undisclosed, but seeing as she cannot live in the town anymore; she chooses a place that fits the circumstances – a cottage on the outskirts of the town. It reflects that Hester still wants to maintain a connection with the town, while not being able to live there.

Nevertheless, since moving to the edge of the town, Hester’s priorities have changed to caring about her baby Pearl and seeking redemption for her deeds. Despite her initial sin, no other vice or character flaw concerning her is displayed. As Hawthorne mentions in his custom-house sketch: “*Like the greater part of our misfortunes, even so serious a contingency brings its remedy and consolation with it, if the sufferer will but make the best, rather than the worst, of the accident which has befallen him.*” (Hawthorne, pg. 41) Hester finds the strength to carry on and indeed make the most of her misfortunes, much like Hawthorne himself. He suffered a foot injury in his childhood and while he acknowledged being different with his wound, he did not let it influence him in any negative way.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the townspeople do not make it easy for Hester. Her self-made embellishment of the scarlet letter on her dress makes the people aware of her artistic and handy abilities; therefore she spends most of her time making both simple clothing for the needy and splendid pieces of clothing for people from upper classes. Her hard work does not collide with her care for Pearl though, as is reflected on Pearl’s dress, which is considered to be the most fascinating in the whole town.

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<sup>1</sup> Millington, pg. 81

<sup>2</sup> Reynolds, pg.15

The upper classes of Puritan elders, however, maintain a different attitude when they suspect Hester of neglecting the child and being an unfit example for her. They “*feel that, for her own good and that of the commonwealth, Pearl, who had no father willing to claim her, could be taken from her mother*”. (Millington, pg. 169-170) This action does not intend to provoke the reader to antagonize the Puritan elders. After all, in seventeenth-century Boston, “*appeal to a mother’s right did not have force until the new model of marriage convinced courts that the upbringing of children – especially in their tender years – was best accomplished by their mothers*”. (Millington, pg. 170) Their attempt to rip little Pearl from her mother’s care loosens, however, when Pearl proves having been raised by all the standards and principals of the Puritan society. Furthermore, the separation is avoided due to Dimmesdale’s (her actual father’s) plea. Once again, Hester endures the misfortune laid upon her and, more importantly, does not feel any hostility towards the Minister or the Reverend for their actions. Without any contemplation, she simply accepts this as both the rules of the society she lives in and part of her path to redemption.

Meanwhile, Hester’s reputation in the city improves. The scarlet letter on her chest begins to transform its meaning. Originally, as Hester describes, the point of the symbol of her sin was that “*the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast ... as the figure, the body, the reality of sin*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 73) However, as her helpfulness and care for others dominate her actions, she quickly earns the townspeople’s grace and appreciation. She even goes by the title “Sister of Mercy” while her chest “*with its badge of shame, was but the softer pillow for the head that needed one*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 148) Furthermore, Hester describes the letter as a symbol of her calling, which, in return, leads to only one expectable resolve – that “*many people refused to interpret the scarlet A by its original signification*”. (Hawthorne, pg. 148)

Step by step, the reader’s sympathy for Hester is evoked. That is only natural due to the fact that after committing the sin, Hester shows but virtues and behaves in a desired and acceptable manner, suppressing her own needs and taking good care of her child. These feelings, however, are tested when Hester meets her former lover, Arthur Dimmesdale, in the forest. In one of the most compelling moments of the novel, Hester, accompanied by her daughter, meets Pearl’s father and they set up a plan to leave the town and start over in a place, where all of them could be together. Nonetheless, the

plan fails as Hawthorne “*does not allow them a new beginning.*” (Millington, pg. 164) By not fully resolving the issue of giving the lovers a chance for a fresh start, Hawthorne expresses his neutral position in the conflict between the passion of the two lovers and the rules of the society they live in. Sadly, Hester understands that for her and Dimmesdale to admit their love publicly they would either have to do it in a different place or achieve a possible, yet very improbable, change in the fundamental standards and principles of the Puritan society.<sup>1</sup> In other words, were the two granted a new beginning, the reader would be pleased while still feeling the controversy of their getaway from justice.

To conclude, it is difficult to feel either disdain or sympathy towards Hester’s character. Although she chooses to stay in town and endure all the contempt and disgust from the rest of the townspeople, she can never be fully liberated from her sin as well as the scarlet letter she wears still stays on her clothing. It is questionable whether Hester and Dimmesdale should have been granted their escape to a new beginning without facing a tribunal judgment. All in all, Hester’s overall characteristics lead the reader to consider her adultery rather an act of passion than an act of evil.

#### **1.1.4 Justice – *Roger Chillingworth, Arthur Dimmesdale***

Arthur Dimmesdale, a highly respected and cherished member in the service of God, is never thought to be the other sinner alongside Hester. Despite his young age, he earns the trust and sympathy of most of the townsfolk through his sermons and words of wisdom, which he delivers in a very common and down-to-earth way. Just as Hawthorne describes:

“His intellectual gifts, his moral perceptions, his power of experiencing and communicating emotion, were kept in a state of preternatural activity by the prick and anguish of his daily life. His fame, though still on its upward slope, already overshadowed the soberer reputations of his fellow-clergymen, eminent as several of them were. ... All that [*the fellow-clergymen*] lacked was the gift that descended upon the chosen disciples at Pentecost, in tongues of flame; symbolizing, it would seem, not the power of speech in foreign and unknown languages, but that of addressing the whole human brotherhood in the heart’s native language.”

(Hawthorne, pg. 130)

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<sup>1</sup> Millington, pg. 164

Indeed, the Reverend is presented as a man of honor and integrity, who would be the last person with anything to hide. Nevertheless, from an objective perspective, despite all his public service and good will, he is still a sinner and Pearl's father.

At first, it would seem, the author's intention was to show that even the most holy individuals can be corrupted. However, while Hawthorne (or perhaps the character of Dimmesdale himself) still considers him to be hypocritical, he implies that his previous wrongdoings are also beneficial to his character, giving him some sort of insight and amplified empathy with common people (as they are sinners too). In the author's own words; it was the very burden that "*gave him sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrated in unison with theirs.*" (Hawthorne, pg. 131) The controversial moment comes when Hester pleads for Pearl's custody. He defends the mother's intentions by claiming that the child shall remind Hester of her sin, which seems fairly satisfactory for the town leaders. Yet Dimmesdale's motives, as correct as they may seem, were (at that moment) probably selfish as he tried to ease his consciousness by doing her a favor.

Nevertheless, Dimmesdale continues to guide people to redemption and pose as an example, while being aware of the burden he bears. Throughout the story, he finds himself in a hopeless position. He can either continue to keep his secret and remain in the service of God while having sinned, or he can leave with Hester and betray the trust of his people. Either way does not feel right and he constantly fails to reach a decision.

In such very unhappy and inconvenient situation, the character of Roger Chillingworth takes action to fulfill his desire of vengeance upon the Reverend, who sinned along with Hester Prynne. Chillingworth (as is described in the story), is a man of advanced age and gloomy appearance, with a cloak of obscurity around him. Such depiction suggests that he should not be fully trusted. However, Roger is also a man of intellect, who dedicated his life to medicine. This would imply that such an individual would sacrifice his time and power in order to help others (as the townsfolk also presume). Yet the reader soon gets the feeling that his intentions are not as generous as they are purely rational. Before his arrival, the physician was most probably perfecting his and broadening his experience in the field of medical skills. Still, it was not the need to help others that had driven him, but rather curiosity and lust for knowledge. And the same insatiable lust drives him now to uncover and punish Pearl's father. However,

after learning the identity of the sinner, Roger has no intention of leaving the punishment to an objective tribunal, nor to anyone else. He decides to perform a punishment, which he sees fit to the current situation. As is described in the following paragraph:

“In a word, old Roger Chillingworth was a striking evidence of man’s faculty of transforming himself into a devil, if he will only, for a reasonable space of time, undertake a devil’s office. This unhappy person had effected such a transformation, by developing himself, for seven years, to the constant analysis of a heart full of torture, and deriving his enjoyment thence, and adding fuel to those fiery tortures which he analyzed and gloated over.”

(Hawthorne, pg. 130)

From a certain point of view, the character of the physician is a paradox. On one hand, Roger is a man of high intellect and obviously the rational way to punish the Reverend would be to uncover his secret (or at least find enough evidence and accuse him) and let the tribunal punish him in a suitable way. Yet Roger succumbs to his feelings of betrayal and anger, leading him to a more aggressive attitude. Still, the author does not justify such feelings: “*Hawthorne does not deny that betrayal is, indeed, at the heart of the adultery plot. But he dissents from the traditional consensus that the most important betrayal is the sexual one. ... So long as [Roger and Hester] insist on holding each other accountable for what was in fact a mutual disappointment, of course they will find no path out of their ‘dismal maze’.*” (Colacurcio, pg. 151) Therefore the physician fails to resolve the situation in a civilized manner and rather comes up with his own personal revenge against the clergyman.

However, while the cause of his revenge is primitive, the act of revenge itself is very sophisticated. As is stated in the work of Toni Morrison, “*wicked people love wickedly, violent people love violently, weak people love weakly, stupid people love stupidly.*” (Morrison, pg. 186) And Roger Chillingworth is no exception. Normally, a less intelligent person would physically harm or murder the object of his revenge. That would be more than easy, when being the reverend’s physician gives Roger countless chances to dispose of the physician in an undetectable way. Still, Roger decides to punish the sinner not violently, yet very painfully. What he sees more fit than physical violence is transforming into “*a satanic figure, probing the psyche of a guilty man*” and committing “*spiritual murder*” (Kopley, pg. 22). Perhaps it was Hawthorne’s intention

to show that the act of revenge, or any evil for that matter, is executed in a fashion which corresponds with the performer's intelligence, set of skills and level of conviction. In general, evil often manifests itself in actions, which are performed by people, and thus a person's mental characteristics must be significant and contribute to the way of producing evil.

### **1.1.5 Summary**

*The Scarlet Letter* offers several interesting points when contemplating evil. The first is the fashion, in which various characters deal with wrongdoings done upon them. After Pearl's birth, Hester surrenders to being marked as a sinner and accepts her fate and (for the time being) even disgust from the rest of the village. She is conscious of her sin, and though she does not consider it a mistake and is happy with the consequence (Pearl being conceived), she does not make any attempt to apologize, give explanation or convince the townspeople. However, the character of Roger Chillingworth is not happy with the turnout as only Hester is being publically humiliated without her lover. With a twisted sense of justice, he resolves the situation by torturing the reverend in a manner he sees fit. Therefore, the reader can clearly witness how the physician makes the whole matter personal and ends up taking the matter of justice into his own hands. As for Arthur Dimmesdale, it is never clearly indicated how he would resolve the situation. On one hand, he could accept his own sin and face the consequences, but on the other, he still wants to maintain his position and continue guiding people to salvation. It might have been Hawthorne's aim to show that not only the people, who community would deem likely to sin, are actually sinners. Due to the subtlety of sin, it is able to corrupt the best, as well as the worst, that is in us.<sup>1</sup> By analogy, the same could be said about people. Inevitably, feeling the weight of his own guilt, amplified by the physician's influence, Arthur slowly and steadily follows the path of self-destruction. In the end however, he rises up and finally reveals his secret. In other words, he is able to overcome his own demons. By having done so, he eases his consciousness and reaches a feeling of relief and spiritual harmony, which is probably Hawthorne's portrayal of salvation.

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<sup>1</sup> Rawls, pg. 202

The other important point is the actual ending of the plot. There could be an endless speculation on the matter of how *The Scarlet Letter* could (or should) have ended. Nevertheless, what Hawthorne displays perfectly in his book is that there are always results and obstacles which will be unforeseen. As has been said, the reader is bound to feel at least a bit of sympathy towards Hester and Arthur, but they were not allowed to escape and to be granted a happy ending. Not perhaps because Hawthorne would not want them to, but simply because Roger's wrath was a natural reaction to the reverend's sin and secret guilt, which he failed to admit publicly.

All in all, the novel shows sin in its natural and complex occurrence. When analyzing *The Scarlet Letter*, it is important to understand that "*the usual definition of sin as rebellion tends to lose the subtlety of sin. ... Sin can be a more insidious kind of action such as deceit, hypocrisy, silent self-worship, indifference to God and to other men.*" (Rawls, pg. 202) Furthermore, sin can be described as a "*separation from community*", whereas faith represents "*integration into community*". (Rawls, pg. 243) Such definition of sin suggests that sin cannot (or perhaps should not) be considered as an intentional act of evil, but rather a fractional corruption of soul. In Hawthorne's novel, committing such action lead the characters into either consumption by darkness (Roger Chillingworth), repentance (Hester Prynne) or triumph over one's self (Arthur Dimmesdale).

## **1.2 Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison**

### **1.2.1 Plot Overview**

The plot starts retrospectively in an abandoned cellar, in which the main character<sup>1</sup> takes shelter. It is lit by numerous lights, so that he can observe his own "invisibility". As the *protagonist* is invisible and even his very existence itself is doubtful, it is only logical that he does not pay a fee to the *Monopolated Light & Power Company* and struggles in a legal fight with them.

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<sup>1</sup> The main character's name is not mentioned in the novel. Therefore, throughout this thesis, he is referred to as either the *protagonist* or other similar references.

When the plot goes back an unspecified amount of time, the reader observes the *protagonist's* way through university studies. These are, in his words, the times when he was still “visible” (or so he thought). He does everything he is asked to do and aspires to be a man of respected position at the university, such as is his superior, Dr. Bledsoe. The otherwise successful studies, which are almost about to finish, are interrupted in very unhappy circumstances. As the *protagonist* works part-time as a driver, he unintentionally drives a wealthy white man – Mr. Norton - into an unfitting nearby environment (habited by unpleasant, African-American individuals). Such environments are not to be shown to the school founders. After such an incident, the *protagonist* is expelled from the university. However, after threatening Dr. Bledsoe to inform the founders of the event, the *protagonist* is still released, but can (or so it seems) rejoin the school after having made enough money to complete his studies.

Thus the plot is set in New York, where the *protagonist* hopes to get a decent job, earn the money and get back to the university at the end of summer. He is given letters from Dr. Bledsoe to a few powerful employers in the city, which should help him reach this goal. But as he goes for job interviews, it seems (at least to the *protagonist*) that he is simply out of luck. However, on his last interview, out of pity, a man reveals the content of the letters. The *protagonist* learns he has been already sentenced by Dr. Bledsoe and will under no circumstances join the university in order to complete his studies.

After learning this fact, he decides to stay in Harlem and get a job in a paint factory. Nonetheless, the conditions are so bad that when the *protagonist* gets into a fight with a senior colleague, he (for the first time) gets sick and tired of being pushed around and truly stands up for himself. Yet, the later resolved fight ends with an accidental explosion, which sends the *protagonist* to the company hospital. There, he is an object for experimenting, as both his identity and his existence are not important.

Soon after being released from the hospital, the *protagonist* witnesses an eviction. Using his rhetorical skills, which got him to the university, he encourages spectators to rise up and stand against such a shameful act. Almost immediately he is asked to join an institution called the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood believes in equality of all people and wants the *protagonist* to be their spokesman for the Harlem district. Despite initial doubts, he accepts after reasoning that he has nothing to lose. He is given



luxurious salary, an apartment and a meaningful job. In return, his purpose is to give speeches, unite the habitants of Harlem and spread the message of the Brotherhood.

Nevertheless, after a short break from being the Harlem spokesmen, the *protagonist* returns to his office, only to find it in desolation. All of his hard work and dedication is ruined and citizens in Harlem are more and more depending on the character, who calls himself Ras the Exhorter, who is a nationalist and believes African-Americans should rise and launch an offensive against oppression.

An unnecessary death of the *protagonist's* former colleague from the Brotherhood and his ceremonial funeral give rise to feelings of uneasy among the people of Harlem. The suspension then reaches its climax when a riot breaks out in Harlem. Former Ras the Exhorter is now Ras the Destroyer, who leads crowds of people against the oppressors. The *protagonist* sees that all of his work has been in vain and even struggles for his own survival, having to deal with Ras and his wrath. In the end, he accidentally falls into a coal cellar and stays there.

### **1.2.2 The *Protagonist* and His Development of Self-perception**

As has been mentioned, the main character's name is not mentioned in the novel. Throughout the story, several situations get close to unraveling the mystery of his identity, but not one does. This is most probably due to the author's intention to show that the *protagonist* is truly "invisible". Obviously, as names are used to distinguish people and acknowledge one's existence, the *protagonist*, in his invisibility, has no need for one.

Though it would be quite intriguing to observe how the main character's self-esteem has developed since his childhood, the reader gets the earliest picture of the *protagonist* from his performance at an important event. The *protagonist* graduates from an undisclosed high school and hopes to give a speech compelling enough to get him a scholarship to a university (perhaps *the* university would be more accurate, as it is not stated whether or not African-Americans had the freedom of choice, when it came to universities). During the said event, the *protagonist* is supposed to only give his speech, which in the end convinced the audience of his rhetorical and intellectual skills. However, before the actual speech takes place, he is publicly humiliated by participating in a cruel fight and on top of it, after getting beaten up; he (among other

participants) is encouraged to take his fee from an electrified carpet. Nevertheless, the *protagonist* quietly endures the pain in order to give his speech and earn the scholarship.

When the main character enters the university, he is a loyal and obedient student (perhaps one of the most obedient, but comparison with other students is never given). Yet, while the main character is performing his duty as a driver, a paradox occurs. The *protagonist* does everything that Mr. Norton (one of the school founders) requires and yet by fulfilling his wishes and needs, he fails Dr. Bledsoe (the president of the university). He transgresses school rules by driving Mr. Norton to an unsafe location and threatening his well-being. The main character, still unsure of the significance of his crimes against the university, gives up and regrets his actions:

“I wanted to stop the car and talk with Mr. Norton, to beg his pardon for what he had seen; to plead and show him tears, unashamed tears like those of a child before his parent; to denounce all we’d seen and heard; to assure him that far from being like any of the people we had seen, I *hated* them, that I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul, and that I believed in his own goodness and kindness in extending the hand of his benevolence to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness. I would do his bidding and teach others to rise up as he wished them to, teach them to be thrifty, decent, upright citizens, contributing to the welfare of all, shunning all but the straight and narrow path that he and the Founder had stretched before us. If only he were not angry with me! If only he would give me another chance!”

(Ellison, pg. 91)

It is obvious that the *protagonist* is not only unable to make his own judgment about the occurred incident, furthermore he is willing condemn, hate and despise other people to prove that he can live up to the expectations and forget, where he came from and who he is.

Another important point in the development of the *protagonist*’s self-image is his adventure in New York. The setting “in the North” leaves the main character astonished by the level of freedom and independency that African-Americans have in the city. Being disillusioned, he thinks during one of his job interviews:

“Never before had I been so curious about money as now that I believed I was surrounded by it.”

(Ellison, pg. 147)

In his logical, yet false impression, he believes that a change of environment also implies change of customs and opportunities. Bewildered by the new surroundings, he hopes to get a respectable job and social position. However, his success depends on the letters, which Dr. Bledsoe gave him and which, as he believes, are his best chance at getting such a position. But then again, those letters were merely a guillotine, ensuring his failure at each interview he underwent.

As the reader witnesses such an example of nearly no confidence and sense of identity, it does not come as a surprise that, while the *protagonist* has been hospitalized, he was object to several experiments. Those experiments, in the end, led to a temporal loss of both memory and identity, as the main character could not recall his name.

However, in the preceding fight, in which his colleague threatens to kill him, the *protagonist* lets his accumulated anger out. In his words, the colleague “was not grandfather or uncle or father, nor teacher or preacher” and thus he did not feel the need to apply his life-long training of accepting such foolishness from older people to this situation<sup>1</sup>. In other words, the *protagonist* got finally sick and tired of being pushed around and shouted at for no understandable reason and decided to repay such behavior with aggression. And more importantly, a threat on one’s life should not be taken lightly, and the actual self-preservation instinct, which drove the *protagonist* to engage in the fight, indicates that the *protagonist* is aware of his own existence and identity.

After his hospitalization, the main character is recruited (offered a job position) to an organization called the *Brotherhood*. The newly found job gives him an opportunity to speak up, not only for himself but also for every African-American in the Harlem district. Furthermore, the *protagonist* feels important and, as it appears, finally finds a meaning to his existence. Yet he soon discovers that the *Brotherhood* is not as concerned for the African-Americans as he thought so. After an incident, in which Tod Clifton, a former member of the *Brotherhood* who is considered a traitor to the organization, is shot and killed by a police officer, the *protagonist* organizes a funeral march. Such action causes an immediate reaction in the form of raising the spirits and awareness of the conditions of the African-Americans. Despite the fact that this appears to be the *Brotherhood*’s goal, the *protagonist* is abruptly brought down and questioned by the organization’s committee:

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<sup>1</sup> Ellison, pg. 197

“... You were not hired to think.” He was speaking very deliberately and I thought, So . . . So here it is, naked and old and rotten. So now it’s out in the open . . .

“So now I know where I am,” I said, “and with whom –“

“Don’t twist my meaning. For all of us, the committee does the thinking. For all of us. And you were hired to talk.”

“That’s right, I was hired. Things have been so brotherly I had forgotten my place. But what if I wish to express an idea?”

“We furnish all ideas. . . .”

(Ellison, pg. 405)

To his surprise, the *protagonist* learns that the true aims of the *Brotherhood* were not to create a society of equal conditions and opportunities, nor was he meant to do anything else but speak for the *Brotherhood*, instead of himself.

To conclude, the main character’s behavior has led him through many unexpectedly harsh and surprising events. He always tried to fulfill the requirements for his social role and position, his job and tried to live up to the expectations that were laid upon him. In the end however, the *protagonist* realized that for one to be completely free and to find his own identity, he must act and behave on his own impulses. He must do what he thinks is right, regardless of the other opinions. He must not allow to be sacrificed for his own good if he does not see anything good about the sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> In the *protagonist*’s words: “*What and how much had I lost by trying to do only what was expected of me instead of what I myself had wished to do? What a waste, what a senseless waste! ... there would be some things that would cause quite a bit of trouble, simply because I had never formed a personal attitude toward so much. I had accepted the accepted attitudes and it had made life seem simple . . .*” (Ellison, pg. 231) Thus, if one wants to be satisfied with himself, feel responsible for himself and answer only to himself, he must break away from opinions and attitudes of other people, and, more importantly, from the conventional perspective.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellison, pg. 437

### 1.2.3 Community, Dr. Bledsoe and the Illusion of Integration

From the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to what appears to be a society strictly following a set of rules, or a code of behavior. Yet the exposition of the setting at the university does not seem to be unusual. All the students obey their superiors and the school founders are highly respected, as they should be. Nevertheless, the rector of the university, Dr. Bledsoe, is not depicted as one would expect. During a university assembly, the protagonist contemplates the story of how Dr. Bledsoe became the rector of the university:

“I remembered the legend of how he had come to the college, a barefoot boy who in his fervor for education had trudged with his bundle of ragged clothing across two states. And how he was given a job feeding slop to the hogs but had made himself the best slop dispenser in the history of the school; and how the Founder had been impressed and made him his office boy. Each of us knew of his rise over years of hard work to the presidency, and each of us at some time wished that he had walked to the school or pushed a wheelbarrow or performed some other act of determination and sacrifice to attest his eagerness for knowledge.”

(Ellison, pg. 105)

Indeed, this is, presumably, the official version of how Dr. Bledsoe became the president of the university. Perhaps, at that point, most students really believed that determination and hard work can possibly help them achieve what they desire. However, from the narrator’s perspective, the reader cannot help but see the rector’s qualities as somehow obscure and dishonest. After the incident, in which the main character unintentionally drives one of the school founders into an unfitting neighborhood, the *protagonist* is punished very strictly for such innocent carelessness. Moreover, when the main character tries to defend himself, the true nature of Dr. Bledsoe is revealed. The president states that his position was not gained by hard work, but rather by doing what was expected of him and telling “white people” lies, which they wanted to hear. Furthermore he tells the narrator that he would “*have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where [he is].*” (Ellison, pg. 128)

The twisted sense of equality is also illustrated on a dialogue between the *protagonist* and Mr. Emerson, son of a wealthy businessman in New York, in whose company the narrator is applying for a position:

“... Look,” he burst out impulsively. “Do you believe that two people, two strangers who have never seen one another before can speak with utter frankness and sincerity?”

“Sir?”

“Oh damn! What I mean is, do you believe it possible for us, the two of us, to throw off the mask of custom and manners that insulate man from man, and converse in naked honesty and frankness?”

“I don’t know what you mean exactly, sir.” I said.

“Are you sure?”

“I . . .”

“Of course, of course. If I could only speak plainly! I’m confusing you. Such frankness just isn’t possible because all our motives are impure.”

(Ellison, pg. 164)

The reader can clearly observe the sympathy young Mr. Emerson has for the main character after he read the contents of the recommendation letter. However, in spite of his sympathy, there is nothing he can do, for the *protagonist’s* perception of reality is still distorted. After all, he is “*a man born into a tragic, irrational situation who attempts to respond to it as though it were completely logical ... and he blinds himself to all those factors of reality which reveal the essential inadequacy of such a scheme for the full development of personality.*” (Callahan, pg. 25) Any attempt to disillusion the narrator would not resolve the situation in any acceptable way. Thus, from the confusing explanation he was given afterwards, the main character begins to grasp the true nature of reality.

One of the consequences of motives being impure is also displayed in an incident, which takes place when the main character is chosen to be a spokesman for Harlem district in the *Brotherhood*. On a party, held by the organization, the *protagonist* is asked, in perhaps a completely unbiased and harmless manner, to sing. And yet the man who proposes the performance is discredited and taken out of the room. That leads to the narrator’s contemplation of whether it was a stereotypic suggestion or just an attempt to cheer the atmosphere of the room, making it less formal. In his own words, he says: “*Shouldn’t there be some way for us to be asked to sing? Shouldn’t the short man have the right to make a mistake without his motives being considered consciously or unconsciously malicious? After all, he was singing, or trying to. What if I asked him*

to sing?" (Ellison, pg. 272) Nonetheless, Ellison's obvious intention is to "*exploit this tension over black/white humor.*" (O'Meally, pg. 12)

The awareness of African-American community being treated differently is present throughout the novel, although the naivety of the *protagonist* keeps it slightly disguised under the top layer most of the time. However, the escalated incident, which then led to the death of *Todd Clifton*, a former member of the *Brotherhood*, gives rise to spirits of the Harlem district, inevitably leading to a revolution. The narrator comments the occurrence in a satirical fashion, claiming that *Clifton's* mistake was rather an ordinary one: "*He thought he was a man and that men were not meant to be pushed around.*" The narrator also adds that "*his blood spilled out like any blood*" and was "*red as any blood*". Nevertheless, according to his summary in the funeral speech, the exact cause of *Todd's* death was "*resisting reality in the form of a .38 caliber revolver*".<sup>1</sup>

All in all, Ellison's novel implies that African-Americans are not at all integrated, but rather accommodated and assimilated into society. Even though different communities co-exist in the novel, one is still superior and thus the other has no other way but to remain obedient and silent to any unfairness. There are several hints to support the imbalance between the communities. Firstly, during his studies, the narrator says he remembers "*the short formal sermons intoned from the pulpit there, rendered in smooth articulate tones, with calm assurance purged of that wild emotion of the crude preachers*". (Ellison, pg. 100) A parallel can be found in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes*, in which the African-American women need "*to get rid of the funkiness. The dreadful funkiness of passion, the funkiness of nature, the funkiness of the wide range of human emotions.*" (Morrison, pg. 68) Both cases present an example of adaptation to a different culture and lifestyle instead of integration of the "apparently" inferior race. Secondly, at the *Liberty Paints* plant, the narrator is told by his colleague *Lucius Brockway*: "*They got all this machinery, but that ain't everything; we are the machines inside the machine.*" (Ellison, pg. 190) Not only does this statement imply that African-Americans are treated as machines, being disposed of when they malfunction, but also the expectations for them to be unemotional, mechanical and self-unaware. Sadly, these examples are a result of "*racial conditioning which often makes the White American interpret cultural, physical, or psychological differences as signs of racial inferiority.*" (Callahan, pg. 24)

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<sup>1</sup> Ellison, pg. 394-396

#### 1.2.4 The Character of Ras and His Answer to Unfair Conditions

The *protagonist* first meets Ras in New York doing what was about to be his future job as well. Consequently, these two characters start at the same point; they are both unhappy and unsatisfied with the current state, in which the African-American community in Harlem has to live. However, the ways they decide to deal with it are different.

The character of Ras is, supposedly on purpose, not complex at all. His built-up anger and impulsiveness leave him with only few choices. Therefore, he takes a very simple attitude towards the issue of imbalance – aggression: “*It’s three hundred years of black blood to build this white mahn’s civilization and wahn’t be wiped out in a minute. Blood calls for blood!*” (Ellison, pg. 326) At this point, the character represents not only one individual, but probably a large part in the community. That is why, calling himself Ras the Exhorter, he decides to exhort more people to join his quest for justice. Indeed, violence can be a way to express one’s discontent with his situation and can very effectively raise a lot of public awareness on the topic.

Nevertheless, when Ras succeeds in his exhortation and his self-appointed last name turns from Exhorter to Destroyer, he instigates a riot. During the event, he and his followers bring their swift justice to people regardless of their race, opinions or intentions. Whoever they do not see fit for their new post-revolutionary society is punished, but most likely killed. As the novel is open-ended, the reader cannot see for himself, what the riot has accomplished or whether it has caused any further troubles between the communities.

Still, when the *protagonist* comes across Ras and his followers during the riot, he sees that he had his share in turning Ras into what he has become. Ras’s disapproval of the main character has been obvious from one night, during which both their groups fought together on the street. A failure of understanding occurred that night, because Ras could not see that the narrator has not yet understood that he is being manipulated by the *Bortherhood*. Simultaneously though, Ras fails to see he is being manipulated by



darkness.<sup>1</sup> Due to Ras's demand that the narrator deserves to be hung, he (either to save himself or seeing that there is no other way of changing Ras's mind about the whole situation) stabs a spear through his jaw in an attempt to kill him.

### 1.2.5 Summary

*The Invisible Man* offers a realistic insight into the issue of race discrimination, which is timeless. Through the narrator's search for identity, the reader is presented to numerous matters concerning the African-American culture and its co-existence with other cultures.

Even though the novel does not point out any particular solution to the problem as a whole, it helps to enrich the reader's perspective on the problem and encourages empathizing with the *protagonist*. The main character has done nothing wrong (in measure of significant deeds) and, arguably, no serious harm was done to him by any other than Ras, yet the novel displays his hopeless despair in his attempts to bring about a change in the social customs and standards.

Nevertheless, one of the most surprising and significant characters, and consequently a representation of similar people, is Dr. Bledsoe. He is a perfect example of human condition, in which an individual adapts to his surroundings in order to gain as much benefit as he can get from the current situation. Obviously, one needs to either have his moral standards low or modify them to be so as to settle for otherwise unfair conditions. It is almost the same as *Milo Minderbinder's* war profiteering in *Catch-22*. Such thoughtlessness and selfishness is still however one way for people to cope with a situation, which is unfavorable towards them.

The second way is an outburst of negative emotions, which an individual has been suppressing. On one hand, such emotional release is sure to deliver relief and feeling of satisfaction. On the other hand, when operating under such heat of passion, it is very easy to lose sight of right and wrong and the actual consequences of the violent response could, in the end, leave the individual and his targets in a much worse state than the original. Both cases lead the *protagonist* to only one possible conclusion, which

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<sup>1</sup> Nadel, pg. 72

is that “*both the Brotherhood and Ras are ‘religious’ extremes and the narrator is forced to see that neither of them can work towards providing humanity with freedom and dignity.*” (Morel, pg. 166)

### 1.3 Chapter Conclusion

The first chapter analyzes evil in a particular perspective, in which an individual stands against traditional, cultural and social customs. Though this theme appears in both of these novels, the setting and resolution differs in each literary piece.

To begin with, in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester’s initial position is a result of her former sin, however understandable it might be. Although the rest of the town excludes her and reduces the value of her character just to the “scarlet letter” she wears, Hester does not feel the need to react to it. She accepts her situation and does not do what others would have done in her place. Having found the meaning of life in raising Pearl, she tries to make the most out of her misfortune. Her love for Pearl far outweighs the shame and regret Hester feels for committing adultery, even though she repents for it. And in the end, even though she cannot fulfill her own wishes, she is able to come to terms with herself and the townspeople.

On the other hand, the narrator of Ralph Ellison’s *The Invisible Man*, starts having done nothing wrong and still finds himself in a situation similar to Hester’s. Blinded by ideals, he fails to see that he has been born into a society, which will not embrace him. Despite his fully obedient struggle, he does not manage to rise on the social ladder and, unlike Hester, does not reach any kind of positive change. Therefore he gives up on any effort and descends into invisibility.

One aspect remains common in both novels. Hawthorne and Ellison decided to embody a certain kind of evil within one person. To punish all the wrong and unjust that had been done throughout the story, they presented a character keen on carrying out revenge. Though the ways in which Roger Chillingworth and Ras execute revenge differ, they both bend the social customs, rules or law in order to bring justice based on their own perspectives. Since both of these characters are narrow-minded, the question of whether their victims deserve such a harsh penalty still remains. Due to their lack of

objective judgment about the situation, they act on impulse, which in the end makes their righteous behavior the most evil of all.

To sum up, the selected literary pieces display how an action, which would not be considered criminal, can cause a reaction of far greater impact and intensity. In other words, it is dangerous to distinguish between “lighter” sins and more serious ones as well as it is wrong to perceive a wrongdoing with no regard to its circumstances and causes. The conclusion of the present analysis may be that mutual misunderstandings and misinterpretations of individual intentions could result in evil consequences.

## **2. Inheritance of Moral Standards**

### **2.1 The Cement Garden**

#### **2.1.1 Plot Overview**

The plot is set into a big family house on the outskirts of a city. Inside the house, there lives a family of two parents and four children – Tom (the youngest), Sue, Jack and Julie (the oldest). One of these children, Jack, is the narrator of the story. There is an obvious dominating power of the father over the rest of the family with only a slight argumentative influence of the mother. The title is derived from the father's act of pouring concrete all over the garden, since his physical state does not allow him to tend to the garden any longer.

The plot graduates with the sudden, but not unexpected, death of the father after his second heart attack. The mother keeps a sense of stability among the siblings, but as she later falls ill, she no longer has enough energy or power to manage the household, leaving most of the responsibility to Julie, the oldest of the four siblings. However, after a short while, the mother passes away, leaving the children only her salary, which Julie regularly collects from the authorities. Afraid of being separated from one another by social security, the remaining residents of the house decide to bury their mother in secret and fill a trunk in the cellar with her corpse and the spare concrete.

The reader follows the siblings further on their path of freedom, adventure, but also dysfunctionality, self-destruction and regression. Each one of the siblings deals with the sudden liberty and unstable order in his own way. With the approaching end of the summer holidays, Julie presents Derek (her new boyfriend) to the family. At first, Derek is in agreement with the current situation in the household and later even plans to move in and live with the siblings. However, after witnessing the sexual intercourse of Jack and Julie, he calls the police in and reveals their secret.

### 2.1.2 The Setting, Circumstances and Their Influence on the Development of the Characters

At the beginning of the novel, the reader gets quickly accustomed to the relationships within the family. The father is depicted as “*a frail, irascible, obsessive man*”, who needs to be in control of everything that is going on.<sup>1</sup> To support this description, Jack recalls one of the memories he has about him:

“Neither of [*Jack and his mother*] mentioned the effect my father had had on [*Julie’s tenth birthday*] and all the other parties I could remember. He liked to have the children standing in neat lines, quietly waiting their turn at some game he had set up. Noise and chaos, children milling around without purpose, irritated him profoundly.”

(McEwan, pg. 33)

Apart from the obvious inclination to control, the father does not seem to engage in children’s raising. He makes the definite decisions without explaining himself, using his pipe as an indicator of his power over the rest of the family. The garden displays the father’s obsessive attitude, when he “*constructed rather than cultivated [it] according to plans he sometimes spread out on the kitchen table*”. (McEwan, pg. 14) As well as the children, the garden, which was smothered with cement, later defies the father’s oppressive behavior, grows wildly and slowly decays, as Jack describes it:

“I walked around the garden the way Father had always wanted everyone to go, along the tiny paths, down the steps to the pond. It was hard to find the steps under the weeds and thistles and the pond was a curling piece of blue plastic.

(McEwan, pg. 104)

The unattended children later display the same manner as they need to cope with the unfavorable reality, in which their parents are gone. Though instead of having to go through cement as weeds did, they break through social rules and moral customs and, for the moment, simply do as they like.

The second characteristic of the surroundings which had an important impact on the development of the siblings is the feeling of isolation. There are several proofs and implications, which support the concept. First of which is the plain and simple

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<sup>1</sup> McEwan, pg. 9

statement, uttered by the narrator: “*No one ever came to visit us.*” (McEwan, pg. 21) Indeed, there is no sign of family relatives or neighbors coming to visit. But most importantly, the siblings were not used to the company of their peers. Even though “*Julie had boyfriends at school ... she never really let them near her. There was an unspoken family rule that none of [them] ever brought friends home.*” (McEwan, pg. 19) This might have been one of the key factors, which caused the distortion of relationships among the siblings. Even while their parents were still alive, Sue, Jack and Julie together played a “game”, in which the two elder children were scientists, who (rather thoroughly) examined the body of Sue, the youngest of the three. Despite the otherwise harmless idea of the activity, it had an erotic subtext, which is usually undesirable and immoral among family members. Furthermore, “*the image of the house and the neighbourhood significantly reflects and strengthens the obvious isolation of the family*”. (Wilczewska, pg. 42) In the narrator’s words, he says:

“Our house had once stood in a street full of houses. Now it stood on empty land where stinging nettles were growing round torn corrugated tin. The other houses were knocked down for a motorway they had never built. Sometimes kids from the tower blocks came to play near our house, but usually they went further up the road to the empty prefabs to kick the walls down and pick up what they could find. Once they set fire to one, and no one cared very much. Our house was old and large. It was built to look a little like a castle, with thick walls, squat windows and crenellations above the front door.”

(McEwan, pg. 21)

Judging by the portrayal of the house, it could be perceived as a castle or a kind of fort, which protects the residents from the outside world.

On the other hand, after the parents’ deaths, the house becomes both the symbol of indifference and emptiness, as well as it “*gives the impression of a prison as almost the whole story takes place in or around it.*” (Schromek, pg. 2) Essentially, almost every teenager loves when their parents are not around. It gives them the opportunity to experiment and do what is otherwise forbidden or unwanted. Even the protagonist, Jack, recalls in one of his memories a day, when his parents were away. On that day, the siblings obviously did not care for the assignments they were given. That day was full of adventure and carelessness, including a pillow fight and fort building. Nevertheless, the joy was due to the fact that their freedom was only temporary and that “the day” would sooner or later end and things would go back to their normal state. Yet, now that the parents’ leave was permanent, the whole act is different. Even though it starts

similarly, as soon after his mother died, “*beneath [Jack’s] strongest feelings was a sense of adventure and freedom which [he] hardly admits to [himself] and which was derived from the memory of that day*”, the initial eagerness swiftly passes. (McEwan, pg. 64) Not long after the children start living in solitude, the atmosphere turns gloomy and the overall state of the household becomes neglected and messy. To illustrate and stress this depiction of the surroundings, the author uses the image of the garden. It is usually imagined to be a peaceful and colorful place, where people come to ease their body and mind from everyday anxiety. However, McEwan’s “cement” garden is a sterile, unnatural and generally appalling place.<sup>1</sup> The inside of the house is not an exception as well. The ungracefully mixed portion of cement within the trunk cracks and releases a faint smell of the mother’s corpse, which thereafter lingers around the house and reminds the children of their unsuccessful attempt to forget about her. In addition, social interactivity among the siblings is that of exhaustion and indifference, as most of the siblings initially retreat to themselves and almost cease all communication. Thus the decay of both environment and relationships is apparent.

To sum up, it is generally essential, in order to secure a natural development of children’s mental condition to be in close contact with their family as well as their surroundings, including their peers. After all, “*one of the crucial characteristics of a psychological novel is the illustration of the family life which greatly affects its characters*”. (Wilczewska, pg. 57) McEwan intentionally embeds the story into an inappropriate setting in order to secure the unnatural mental growth of the four siblings. Moreover, after their parents’ passing away, the author is also able to let the children develop in an independent way.

### **2.1.3 The Characters and Their Development of Moral Integrity**

The main twist in the story is obviously the parents’ death. It marks the beginning of significant changes, which follow. However, each of the siblings does not simply change, but rather adapts to the new reality. Naturally, all of them do so based on their past experience and according to their role models, who, due to the circumstances, could be no other than their parents. Evidently, when the family was still

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<sup>1</sup> Schromek, pg. 3

complete, the mother was the one who took care of the kids and managed the household. However, the family was still patriarchal, meaning the father was a figure of absolute authority. He made the decisions, held the family budget and his instructions were always the most superior.

After the father's death, the mother falls ill, being more and more bound to her bed. Of the four siblings, Julie is the one who spends most time with her. As the narrator describes, Julie "*had long conversations with Mother in the kitchen that would break off if Tom, Sue or [Jack] came in suddenly*". (Mc Ewan, pg. 28) Presumably, during those long conversations, the mother was preparing Julie to manage the household until she feels better. Yet, none of these facts convince Jack that Julie should have the final say in family matters or that she should be able to give orders and distribute work among the remaining family members. Therefore, not long after the mother passes, the situation "*is mainly dominated by power struggles among the siblings*". (Schromek, pg. 1) Furthermore, the children "*are simply overwhelmed with all the freedom they suddenly have ... The sudden loss of parental authority is a mental burden for all of the four children*". (Schromek, pg. 2) There begins the process of regression and self-destruction for each of the siblings.

The most obvious regression is Tom's. It is apparent that "*the invalid father competes with Tom for the mother's attention*". (Malcolm, pg. 60) Therefore Tom gets often scolded and his father is severe with him. Most probably, both the father and the fact that he was bullied at school led Tom to develop an impression that girls generally have an easier life. Consequently, he expresses his desire to be of opposite gender and both Julie and Sue partially grant that wish by dressing him up as a girl. In addition, Tom regresses into infancy and enforces the attention of Julie, whom he sees as his new maternal figure.<sup>1</sup> With no pressure from Julie's side, Tom has no motivation to progress further in his natural development and slides back into babyhood. The tension he had with his father is now aimed at Jack, the new oldest male member of the family. In return, Tom's whining and the attention he gets from both Sue and Julie leaves Jack excluded and irritates him.

The tension among the male members of the family is also displayed on the relationship between Jack and his father. At the beginning of the story, one can see how

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<sup>1</sup> Wilczewska, pg. 67



Jack observes and imitates the father, perhaps due to Jack's longing for any sort of integration into the rational and dispassionate world of male adults. Yet the father keeps his distance and does not give Jack any credit for his work or effort. There is only one brief moment, after both of them finished dragging the bags of cement into the cellar, in which Jack claims to feel "*at ease with [his father]*". (McEwan, pg. 17) After his father passes, the influence of authority fades and is substituted by feelings of exclusion from the female part of the family. As part of his struggle against such feelings, he is negligent of his hygiene in order to feel "*proudly beyond [his Mother's] control*". (McEwan, pg. 20) The struggle continues with Julie in charge even before the mother's death, when Jack accuses Julie of fabricating mother's orders to her will.<sup>1</sup> At one point, Jack's looks disgust his siblings and his violent expressions of discontent towards authority intimidate the younger family members. In addition, Jack compensates for his lack of power by showing signs of domination over inferior beings (as he sees them). The first indication of abuse of power occurs when Jack finds an abandoned sledgehammer and after lifting it also finds a group of worms living under it. His imminent reaction is to smash the worms without giving it much thought. His later demeanor takes place when he speaks to his younger brother's friend and says:

"I'm telling you," I hissed at him. "I've just come from your house. Your dad's pretty upset and he's really angry with you. Your mum got run over because she was looking for you." The boy stood up. The colour had drained from his face. "I wouldn't go home if I was you," I continued, "your dad'll be after you."

(McEwan, pg. 55)

It is not unusual for teenagers to exhibit power and dominion over those they deem less powerful. However, the boundaries of what is morally and socially acceptable do not apply for this instance as Jack has no limits in his actions. His toying with Tom's friend displays a deviation from traditional norms, yet he does not think about it in such manner.

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<sup>1</sup> McEwan, pg. 40-41

## 2.1.4 Summary

It is difficult to summarize or generalize the display of moral standards in *The Cement Garden*. Although there is an obvious deviation of each of the siblings from social norms, it is even more difficult to hold them accountable for it. Even the children “*scarcely feel that their actions are reprehensible*”, because within the parentless family “*traditional norms seem not to apply*”. (Malcolm, pg. 64) Furthermore, the interpretation of all of the controversial situations is distorted due to the fact that McEwan does not offer the reader an objective opinion on the various matters, leaving all judgment up to the reader himself. Yet, there is one situation, in which the children follow social rules and are capable of making sacrifices to benefit the family. It occurs when the kitchen is filled with “*all the mould-covered plates, the flies and the bluebottles, the huge pile of rubbish that had collapsed and spread across the floor*”. (McEwan, pg. 78) The siblings then decide to clean up the room together, though it may not have been for the sake of order and civility as much as it could have been for the sense of unity. After all, the house is still their home and once people create an emotional bond for any object, they start treating it with care and decency. Nevertheless, contemplating children’s actions as evil would be exaggerating, given the circumstances. Even though the siblings engage in activities, which society would neither accept nor sanction, they do not do so intentionally or knowingly. The lack of moral authority and emotional enclosure lets them grow wild as well as the weeds in the garden.

## 2.2 Maggie: A Girl of the Streets

### 2.2.1 Plot Overview

Maggie grew up in a troublesome family. Both her parents were alcoholics, constantly fighting over insignificant matters and, as a result of the fights, often used more alcohol as a last resort. Her brother Jimmie was a street kid, always picking fights with boys from another neighborhood to prove his worth. His coming home covered in blood and beaten often made his mother angry, while his father remained uninterested.

At first, the author describes the setting of the novel and the environment, which surrounds the protagonist and anti-heroine Maggie, who has little contribution to the development of the story. The reader is shown the aggressive nature of all the other members of Maggie's family, including both her parents and her brother. Whereas Jimmie fights outside, the parents quarrel inside the tenement, not only causing distress within the family, but also inflicting physical damage to the flat, as the mother usually relieves her anger by smashing the furniture.

With the passing of the father, the remaining parent in the family only gets worse. The alcohol enhances her rage, which she now, in her husband's absence, aims at the rest of the world. Doing the latter, she obviously often gets into trouble with law. Jimmie, inheriting the impulsive and warlike nature, manages to straighten his mother when necessary, though. Nevertheless, Maggie is purely submissive and does not oppose her mother in any way. Still, Maggie does her best to keep the family and their habitat in an acceptable condition, until she meets Pete, her brother's acquaintance.

Pete is a bartender in a local saloon. He is a man of little elegance, but he is very good at concealing this fact by posing as the strongest fighter in the neighborhood. He has visible tendencies toward leadership and enjoys being the smartest man in the room and being in charge of everything. It is of no surprise then, that Maggie falls for him and lets him take care of her. Although there are not any remarks concerning their intimate life, the family assumes them and, with a sense of betrayal, banishes Maggie from the household. The only option for Maggie is to move in with Pete, which she happily does.

The twist occurs when Pete meets a lady called Nell, who is later revealed as an ex-lover of his. Pete and the lady leave the ball room, where they meet, leaving Maggie and the lady's companion to themselves. Later, when it is apparent that they are not coming back, Maggie leaves and decides to return home. However, neither Jimmie nor her mother allows Maggie to come back after she disgraced the family's name.

The following chapter reveals a woman, presumably Maggie, employed as a prostitute wandering the streets. Pete is portrayed in a bar, surrounded by Nell and her friends. In spite of the fact that ladies are obviously there to get free drinks, Pete enjoys their company in blissful ignorance of the circumstances. He is self-absorbed in his domination over the serving waiter enhanced by him being surrounded by ladies, until he passes out in his drunkenness.

The final chapter concludes the story with Jimmie and his mother discovering that Maggie is dead. After a weeping moment of sorrow and pressure from her friends, the mother finally decides to forgive Maggie all the disturbance she has caused and wrongness, which she has brought upon the family.

### 2.2.2 Historical Background and the Depiction of the Surroundings

For one to meditate on the issue of literary naturalism and its influence on Crane's work and to better understand *Maggie*, it is necessary to get accustomed with the developments that took place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in America.

First of all, it was an age of industrialization. The process of urbanization made masses of people move from the rural environment into big cities due to open employment positions. Among other defining characteristics, there was “*rapid technical progress in agriculture*” and “*elastic European immigration rates*”.<sup>1</sup> These circumstances created a working class, which was on the verge of poverty.

Secondly, in 1859, an American publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* strongly influenced not only American writers, but also philosophy and thinking of the time. His theory of evolution brought about significant changes in philosophy, science, but also literature. It significantly supported, if not inspired, the rise of naturalism. This literary theory sees a character in close dependence with its environment. The final effect which the surroundings have (and have had all the time) on the character is called “determinism”. It is a force beyond the character's control and there is no escaping it. Thus the authors often deprive their characters of their free will. In other words, naturalism depicts “*humanity as the passive pawns of an indifferent world*” (Newlin, pg. 3)

It was also Crane's intention to show “*that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless*”. Furthermore, fulfilling the role of a naturalist, Crane shows no signs of involvement in the story. He offers no actual moral catharsis and he does not express any kind of compassion for Maggie. The author is

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<sup>1</sup> Williamson, pg. 14

rather a detached, ironic observer, who does not interfere with Maggie's fate. After all, it was his aim "*to show people to people as they seem to [him]*".<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2.3 Maggie's Family and Its Influence on the Development of the Plot

Most probably, Maggie's family is supposed to represent the most common image of families in the age of industrialization at the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. There is an obvious struggle for domination within the family, whereas the father, who secures the income, either has his way or leaves for a nearby saloon. The mother, on the other hand, starts the fights already under the influence of alcohol and there are implications of ongoing fights between the mother and the father. This fact is also well-known among other neighbors living in the tenement. It is implied in an incident, in which Maggie accidentally drops and breaks a plate, which makes the mother furious. Jimmie, seeking help for Maggie, talks to one of the neighbors, who replies: "*Eh, child, what is it dis time? Is yer fader beatin' yer mudder, or yer mudder beatin' yer fader?*" (Crane, pg. 18) Furthermore, the father does not stay home very often, which his wife blames him for, but it is due to his night shifts, which indicate that he probably has an undesired, poorly-paid job. In the end, the parents' alcohol-fueled rage often frightens the children to the point, where they take cover in the corner of the room, quietly and patiently waiting for the fights to end.

It is of no surprise then that Jimmie is used to the tense atmosphere of confrontation and fighting. He tends to pick up fights within the neighborhood. He considers himself a war hero, whose bravery in battle gains him respect and admiration by other participants. Usually, right after the brawl, distorted versions of it would appear, regardless of whether it was victorious or not.

Causes of retreat in particular cases were magnified. Blows dealt in the fight were enlarged to catapultian power, and stones thrown were alleged to have hurtled with infinite accuracy. Valour grew strong again, and the little boys began to brag with great spirit."

(Crane, pg. 5)

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<sup>1</sup> Fanning, pg. 227

In the end, Jimmie does not pay attention to his wounds and the possible outcomes his skirmishes might have. Instead, he tries to be the most fearless soldier among the boys from his street. When Maggie's brother gets older, the battles between the boys of Rum Alley and those from Devil's Row cease, or at least he no longer takes any part in them. However, in order to not lose certain superiority in his adolescence, Jimmie has acquired a "*belligerent attitude toward all well-dressed men. To him fine raiment was allied to weakness, and all good coats covered faint hearts. He and his order were kings, to a certain extent, over the men of untarnished clothes, because these latter dreaded, perhaps, to be killed or laughed at. ... He considered himself above both of these classes. He was afraid of nothing.*" (Crane, pg. 30) In other words, Jimmie, in his need for a sense of superiority, develops a way to be above other men without measuring each other's strength and agility in physical confrontation. He refuses to see himself as inferior via the conventional perspective. At this point, Jimmie unconsciously establishes a feeling of disgust, envy and anger towards the upper classes. With this feeling progressing and evolving further, Jimmie takes a negative stance towards "*all things*". With little respect for authorities, he believes that the police "*were always actuated by malignant impulses, and the rest of the world was composed, for the most part, of despicable creatures who were all trying to take advantage of him, and with whom, in defence, he was obliged to quarrel on all possible occasions.*"<sup>1</sup> Although it is not only Jimmie's fault to feel this way considering the fact that Crane described the city as "*invariably cold, bleak, and killing to real social life*". A sense of belonging or a formation of community in these conditions is "*impossible*". (Fanning, pg. 227) Though it is not mentioned at the end of the novel, it is highly probable that Jimmie kept his way of mocking higher classes so as to elevate his own self-esteem and improve his self-perception.

All in all, the portrayal of the character of Jimmie clearly states that he is equipped physically and mentally for the kind of world he was born into. The cause of his condition may be that the inheritance of such qualities from his parents and his surroundings, which molded his aggressive nature. Unlike Maggie, he constantly struggles for domination and refuses for his life to be controlled or steered in any direction by anyone else than himself.

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<sup>1</sup> Crane, pg. 32

#### 2.2.4 The Main Characters, Pete and Maggie, and Their Ways of Coping with the Surroundings

There is very little told about Maggie's childhood or her overall development. However, from what the reader witnesses, her submissive nature is very obvious from the beginning. Not only does she not cause any trouble or distress, but she also takes a defensive stance, when the atmosphere inside the tenement building gets tense. Thus she quietly accepts and struggles to break free from her family in order to find a more peaceful environment. Before she can accomplish that, she tries to keep the visual aspect of her home in a bearable condition, especially when Pete (Jimmie's friend) appears and they both draw each other's attention.

The twist comes, when Maggie grows into "*a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl*" blossoming from a "*mud puddle*". To emphasize the contrast of her and the surrounding, the author adds that "*none of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins*". (Crane, pg. 38) Indeed, even the neighbors notice the maturity and beauty in her appearance. Consequently, Maggie meets her brother's friend Pete, when Jimmie brings him around one evening. At first, Pete is keen on boasting and sharing stories, in which he had to deal with local drunkards, especially those, who were allegedly also dreaded fighters. Perhaps due to the insufficient probability of meeting someone else or due to the fact that males, who were closest to Maggie were used to quarreling, she instantly sees Pete as something more than a regular bartender. From her perspective, he was "*a formidable man who disdained the strength of a world full of fists*" and "*one who had contempt for brass-clothed power; one whose knuckles could ring defiantly against the granite of the law. He was a knight.*" (Crane, pg. 47) This conception may very well be far from the usual definition of a knight in the Chivalry age. However, the only possible reason for Maggie's "*romanticizing of this oaf, quixotically converting him from a brute into a knight, is the ugliness of her dark, dusty home that clouds her vision*". (Bloom, pg.40) Even before Pete arrived at her doorstep, she had been in a need for a man of his qualities – a strong will inside a strong body, to lead her on the path of life, or so she probably thought. To further convince herself, Maggie also believes that his "*elegant occupation brought him, no doubt, into contact with people who had money and manners.*" (Crane, pg. 48)

Therefore, she is determined to escape the poor conditions of her tenement life with Pete. To accomplish that, she shows her female qualities in the only way possible – by managing her home. In order to prove to Pete that she is capable of such thing, she decides to fix the broken furniture and remove “*the general disorder and dirt of her home*”. (Crane, pg. 44)

A series of dates follow, during which Maggie and Pete steadily get to know each other. Everything goes smoothly, until one night, when the mother comes home so drunk she is unable to recognize even her own son, Pete rescues Maggie from the following dramatic and unpleasant experience and takes her with him. The mother claims that her daughter is going to the devil, but her current state does not allow her words to be of any significance. And thus Maggie willingly and gladly follows Pete to move on in her life. Later, her mother makes it clear that she would not see Maggie enter the tenement building at any cost as a result of disgracing the family. For a moment, Maggie’s life seemed to be on the right track (at least from her perspective). She was satisfied with “*her life [being] Pete’s and she considered him worthy of the charge*”. (Crane, pg. 103) This situation only emphasizes that Maggie has never really been an identity, a character of her own, which would be able to make its own decisions. Therefore, it becomes easier for the author to crush her without pity or sympathy.<sup>1</sup> And so, in return, Pete slowly begins to lack interest in Maggie. Considering the fact that she has nowhere else to go and thus depends on him, Pete clearly sees he does not need to make an effort to maintain his relationship with her. After three weeks, since Maggie was taken under Pete’s wings, her dependence was “*magnified*” and there was an obvious “*off-handedness and ease of Pete’s ways toward her*”. (Crane, pg. 114)

For a character of Pete’s qualities, this situation is rather undesirable. He is a man who is not looking to peacefully settle down and start a family. Since Maggie is no longer a challenge for him and represents no point to be reached or mountain to be conquered, Pete rather stagnates. All of this leads to the inevitable appearance of something or in this case someone, who could bring back Pete’s lust for capture. Nell, a woman who would precede Maggie’s fall, meets him at a ball room. After recalling several mutual memories of their youth, Nell and Pete instantly initiate a series of pretended arguments, in which Pete pressures her to talk to him in private for a minute,

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<sup>1</sup> Bloom, pg. 42



whereas she suggestively refuses his offers, until she finally submits. Very little sufficed to arouse Pete's baser instincts and abandon Maggie in the room.

Realizing that her lover is long gone, Maggie does what she has been doing each time there was a crisis in her life, she seeks help. At first, she goes home to her family, probably expecting scorn and mockery, but also compassion and forgiveness. Yet she receives only the first two. As was mentioned before, her mother has an uncompromising stance on the issue of her daughter coming back home. Jimmie is of no support either. After spending one night at the neighbor's place in the tenement building, she decides to turn to Pete, who is working his shift in the local bar. Pete appears surprised to see Maggie asking him for help. Yet he firmly turns her down and denies that he would have any part in her misfortune. Finally, having nothing to lose, she wanders the street until she sees a friendly face:

“His beaming chubby face was a picture of benevolence and kind-heartedness. His eyes shone good will.

But as [Maggie] timidly accosted him, he made a convulsive movement and saved his respectability by a vigorous side step. He did not risk it to save a soul. For how was he to know that there was a soul before him that needed saving.”

(Crane, pg. 138)

Therefore, Maggie, who has run out of options, decides to exploit the only thing she has to offer, her beauty and youth.

Although it is never truly stated, it is assumed that the chapter, which describes the life of a prostitute, walking through the town and luring wealthy gentleman to private places, actually tells the end of Maggie's story. As the circumstances of her death are undisclosed, but notably hinted, the reader is left to contemplate the possible causes and outcomes. In addition, Pete, even though he does not realize it in his state of denial, is a victim of false admiration from Nell and her friends, who only abuse him for money.

### **2.2.5 Summary**

Crane's novel offers several interesting perspectives on the matter of right and wrong. Whereas today, social services would most likely interfere and separate the children from the parents, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century things were obviously different. Upbringing, as harsh as it may have been at that time, was left exclusively for the parents to handle. The causes for the parents' dissatisfaction are both irrelevant and most probably common at that time. Nevertheless, their excessive fighting clearly left a mark on both of the children. Jimmie took the best out of it and grew up strong both physically and mentally for the environment that he was born into. From what the reader learns about him, it is hard to blame him for his feelings, for it is only a natural way of coping with reality. In addition, the sneer that he developed might not have been his choice or invention, but rather an expression of his acquired aversion for the outside world, mostly inherited from his parents. Maggie, on the other hand, is a fragile being, unable to adapt to her surroundings. She never really took the initiative into her own hands and rather relied on others. Perhaps with this kind of nature and in a place like Rum Alley, Maggie was cursed from the beginning to the very end, as her mother wished upon her when she had left home with Pete.<sup>1</sup> In the end, reality perhaps literally assimilated her and deprived her of her dignity and of a chance for a "normal" life. In her helplessness, Maggie only soared through life like a leaf in the wind, being blown in all directions.

### **2.3 Chapter Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter is on the upbringing of children and its essential role on the development of moral sense. The two novels, although their settings might differ at some points, offer the reader several common characteristics and outcomes on this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Crane, pg. 84

The first selected novel, *The Cement Garden*, evidently shows an occurrence of absence of moral authority. The four siblings, from which none has evolved into a stage where he would certainly distinguish right from wrong, were only left to deduce whatever they could from what they had gathered from their parents' behavior. After the initial adventure, which naturally took place from the overwhelming sense of freedom, the siblings started to impersonate some of the key characteristics of their parents' personalities. This is where the two novels share a common ground, as Jimmie (Maggie's brother) also adapts to the environment mostly by mimicking his parents. Indeed, the process of socialization involves a very essential part – imitation. Even though there exist countless indications, which are supposed to lead children towards the moral fiber (for instance there is almost always a moral lesson in fairy-tales), these two literary pieces display that if there are inadequate role models, or furthermore, if there are not any present, immature minors tend to either ignore these indications or alter them to benefit their situation.

It is very difficult to state for certain that children with unsuitable or no archetypes are more inclined towards evil. Yet it may be more likely that such youngsters will not grasp the concept of evil and will also not be aware of the consequences of their action. It is then safe to say that such people act out of ignorance rather than wicked intentions. With these fact, the chapter stumbles upon a dilemma. On one hand, the deviation from dogmatism is presumably right, for it encourages children to grasp the meaning of moral fiber instead of simply handing it over to them. On the other hand, modern upbringing of children in the way of liberal education keeps pushing the boundaries of what the children see as acceptable and what they do not.

Thus the conclusion of this chapter certainly indicates that children must be surrounded by love instead of violence and should be granted free will to the greatest possible extent. However, there should also be an imaginary borderline established by the parents, which should not be crossed. Therefore, it also emphasizes the importance of the role of parents not only as the guiding authorities, but also as providers of a set of qualities, which they want their children to praise, imitate and identify with in the future. If these requirements are met, then it might not be vital to question the functionality of incomplete or foster families.

### 3 Sacrifices Made to Achieve One's Goal – William Golding's *The Spire*

#### 3.1 Plot Overview

The author sets the plot of the novel into an unidentified cathedral, where its dean, Jocelin, envisions a way to praise the glory of God. He sees a spire, reaching four hundred feet straight up. This phenomenon, yet unseen, is supposed to mark the greatness of the Lord and bring people closer to Him. With an absolute devotion to complete building the spire, the dean is determined to offer anything, even his own self.

At first, there seems not to be any problem. Due to an affair that his aunt had with the late king, Jocelin's plan is sufficiently funded. However, the dean's dream soon meets with opposition and refusal from both his colleagues and Roger Mason, the master builder, who is in charge of erecting the spire. Roger argues with Jocelin that there are no suitable foundations for construction. Yet he is repeatedly accused by the dean of lacking faith and is talked into continuing building the spire.

The reader then follows a series of events, which occur simultaneously with the process of assembling the dean's vision. As the master builder looked for sufficient foundations, he and his workmen dug a remarkably deep pit. Symbolically, the pit represents the consequences or, as Jocelin believes, sacrifices that were made in order to reach the top of his dream. Such horrifying affairs include the disappearance of Pangall, a cathedral servant, who has been constantly bullied by the workmen for being crippled and impotent. In addition, an affair takes place between Roger Mason and Pangall's wife Goody, which later results in Goody's pregnancy. This affair surprises Jocelin, who has always been thinking of Goody as an ideal woman and has also been supposedly suppressing his physical desire for her. Furthermore, Goody Pangall passes away in the process of giving birth to the child. Thus, the master builder later resorts to drinking to ease his mind. Nevertheless, Jocelin, now rather obsessed with the completion of the spire, perceives these occurrences as an inevitable cost of achieving greatness.

In the end, the dean neglects all his responsibilities and decides to keep a close eye on the construction site. Therefore, he spends a vast majority of his time on the

unfinished spire, accompanying the workmen. Eventually, a Visitor arrives in the cathedral and after a short while, Jocelin realizes that he is on trial. The tribunal wants him to answer for his misdeeds. Yet, before he can, the dean becomes seriously ill and with the satisfaction from hearing that the spire has not yet fallen, he gives in to his spinal tuberculosis and passes.

### **3.2 Warnings and Indications in Favor of Not Building the Spire**

There are a few characters, set into the plot, which are against the building of the spire. Each one of them has his own arguments and tries to convince the dean to cancel the construction. Furthermore, the atmosphere in the cathedral often leaves a gloomy, depressive and even scary impression on the reader. However, Jocelin, enthusiastically driven and focused on his goal, ignores facts and insists on continuing. Plus, he gracefully manages to maintain the ongoing process despite the complaints and counterarguments that he is given by his colleagues and the master builder.

First of all, when the dean's spire needed good weather conditions the most, it started to rain for a notably long period of time. Obviously, all the work on the spire had to be postponed and after a while "*the main impression [of the incomplete structure] was not now one of God's glory, but the weight of a man's building.*" (Golding, pg. 69) This description, one of few, strips the spire of its, almost heavenly, image in Jocelin's mind and sees it only for what it scientifically is, a building. Nevertheless, the dean never doubts his intentions and patiently waits for the rain to stop. In addition, the pit, which had been dug to check the foundations by Roger and his workmen, started to let out an unpleasant smell, which was to forecast a series of unnatural events, yet about to come. Throughout the story, Golding often uses the pit as an essential counterpart of the spire. To construct his dream, his divine vision of celebrating God's glory, the protagonist must first be prepared to have his faith tested. The pit, dark and deep, symbolizes a balance in the process of erecting the spire. Although it probably does not go as deep down as the tower goes up, it displays that for one to achieve his goals and ambitions, it is likely necessary to let go of things he holds dear and make sacrifices along the way. In the end, while he is being on trial, the reader witnesses Jocelin

admitting that he “... *didn't know what would be required of [him], even when [he] offered [himself].*” (Golding, pg. 189) And thus his recklessness and his stubborn pursue of a dream has brought him more sorrow than joy.

One of the characters opposed to the dean's vision is Pangall, a cathedral servant. Due to his undesirable condition (as he is crippled and impotent), he is the perfect target for the workmen, who, in order to allegedly keep off bad luck, constantly bully him and humiliate him in front of his wife. Pangall tries to protest against the workmen's long-term stay at the cathedral and speaks with Jocelin. Jocelin calmly replies:

‘They are a trial to us all my son. I admit it. We must be patient. Didn't you say once that this is your house? There was sinful pride in that, but also loyalty and service. Never think you aren't understood and valued, my son. Presently they will go. In God's good time you will have sons –‘

Pangall's sneer disappeared.

‘The house they will have to guard and cherish will be far more glorious than this one. Think, man. In the middle of it this will stand up –‘ and passionately he held out the spire – ‘and they will tell their children in their turn; “This thing was done in the days of our father.”’

(Golding, pg. 63)

Evidently, Jocelin unsuccessfully attempts to exploit Pangall's low self-esteem and bring out a sense of pride in him. Such tempting is not expected and certainly not right for a man of such rank and position. However, what is even worse is the part, in which Jocelin advises him not to think he is not valued, whereas later, after Pangall's disappearance, the dean does not make any effort to resolve the situation, as his mind is keen on finishing the spire. And thus he remains company for the workers, who presumably, “*as devil-worshippers, offer[ed] Pangall ... as a human sacrifice with a mistletoe bough across his ribs*”. (Sugimura, pg. 102) The cause of such terrifying act still stands in the same, simply – to keep off bad luck. Considering the fact that the spire is a monumental building of a height not yet seen, the workmen are willing to resort to anything, which might help them preserve their lives and sane minds in the process of building it. Therefore a ritual sacrifice was convenient, since mistletoe “*also functions as a symbol for a steel band that binds stone together to stabilise the whole tower*”. (Sugimura, pg. 102)

On the other hand, Pangall's wife is of much more value to Jocelin. Although he does not yet know to what extent, he tells Goody that she is very dear to him.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the dean's knowledge of Pangall's impotence led him to arrange a marriage of Pangall and Goody, so that he could still secretly keep his desire for her.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, during a conversation between Jocelin and his aunt, he suggests that "*his own repressed sexual longings for Goody have been the unacknowledged motivation for his behavior.*" (Dickson, pg. 87) Without his conscious realization at the time, the dean felt a great deal of affection towards the servant's wife. Yet, when it came to measuring the value of Goody and the realization of his vision, he once again proved to have his priorities firmly set:

"Then he shook himself, for he felt her cling, and this was bad for the work. I must put aside all small things, he thought. If they are part of the cost, why so be it. And if I cannot help, what is the point of all this brooding? I have too great a work on hand. Work! Work!"

(Golding, pg. 109)

Indeed, in his blindness and disillusionment, Jocelin refuses to distract his mind with "small things", such as the hardship of a woman he holds very dear and the presumed death of her wife, whom he has known for a long time.

Despite the admirable will and faith the dean has in erecting the spire (also often referred to as "Jocelin's Folly"), his lack of interest in the surroundings is too great. It inevitably leads him to self-destruction, in which he, unknowingly, destroys and corrupts much more than he builds and intends in a good will.

### **3.3 Reason and Faith, *Roger and Jocelin***

In his novel *The Spire*, Golding introduces two major characters, Roger Mason, the master builder and Dean Jocelin. These two characters differ in their beliefs, opinions and priorities, yet they perfectly complement each other. Jocelin, with his unwavering faith in both his vision and the master builder, often stimulates and even

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<sup>1</sup> Golding, pg. 108

<sup>2</sup> Golding, pg. 241

forces Roger, who is often doubtful about erecting the spire to four hundred feet, to continue.

It is crucial for the reader to be aware of the greatness of the spire that both of them were, in Jocelin's words, chosen to build. Thus, as a result, each of the participants is, in his own way, affected by it:

‘Have you seen it done before?’  
Jehan laughed.  
‘Has anyone built this high before?’  
‘Perhaps in foreign countries. They tell stories.’  
‘If the skin doesn't crumble, or the capstone split; if the wood stretches enough and if the pillars stand it –’  
He kicked a wedge again, shook his head, and whistled ruefully.  
‘No one but he could have an idea like that.’  
‘Roger?’  
‘He's drunk and he's crazy. But then, you have to be crazy to build as high as this.’  
...  
‘Up here, we're *all* crazy.’  
(Golding, pg. 163)

It is clear that Jehan, one of the workmen, includes Jocelin into the group of crazy individuals, who dare to continue erecting the spire upward. Whereas the dean's blindness and stubbornness prevents him to see the consequences of his decision, Roger, despite his fear of heights, succumbs to the temptation of completing the spire as well as having an affair with Goody Pangall.

Furthermore, the master builder does not fully believe in the success of his craftwork. He openly tells Jocelin about what it truly means to be a master builder: *‘I tell you, we guess. We judge that this or that is strong enough; but we can never tell until the full strain comes on it whether we were right or wrong.’* (Golding, pg. 128) Once again, the author creates an analogy between characters of such differences, as Roger's skill is being tested as well as Jocelin's faith. However, due to his everlasting faith, the dean soon realizes *“that it was partly the power of his own head that was thrusting the master builder up, up, and would continue to do so, until by some*



*contrivance of his art, he swung the great cross into place, four hundred feet in the air at the spire's top.*" (Golding, pg. 101) He understands that without putting pressure on the master builder, he could not achieve materializing his vision. And in return, Roger's ingenuity, skill and progress reinforce Jocelin's belief that he was chosen to shape the four-hundred-feet-high phenomenon.

The spire was, at the end, indeed "Jocelin's Folly". Even though the novel does not explicitly say whether the spire stands or falls after the protagonist's death, the sacrifices that were made along the path were of far greater importance, than the miraculous structure. Then again, to inspire people and to convince an experienced master builder who repeatedly claims the impossibility of erecting the building of the opposite, might be one of the protagonist's most impressive achievements.

### **3.4 Chapter conclusion**

In the novel, Jocelin is truly described as a real visionary. He has a clear goal and his priorities are certainly set. Yet, before embarking on the path towards fulfilling a dream, one must ask himself first to what extent he is willing to pursue the vision.

At first, Dean Jocelin's intentions were undoubtedly pure. His aim was to celebrate God and praise his glory by building the spire and to bring faith closer to the attention of ordinary people. Nevertheless, in spite of his good motives, Jocelin started to take pride in his work and the way he pressured others to follow in his footsteps made the reader aware of his growing egotism. His delusion of being chosen by God left him completely blind to everything that had to be thrown into the pit in order to conclude the construction of the spire. Then again, the power of uniqueness and supremacy can sometimes be overwhelming and as Jocelin asks Roger: '*Since when did God ask the chosen ones to be reasonable?*' (Golding, pg. 133)

Still, his ambition caused disgrace, misery and death. Even if Jocelin was to complete the spire, it is up to the reader to decide if the final product would be worth the sacrifice.

## General conclusion

The aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the selected literary pieces and also to offer an insight into the way authors work with the concept of evil, treat their major characters and set the plot of the work accordingly. This objective is realized in three different stages, divided into the same amount of chapters.

The first chapter observes an individual, who struggles to integrate himself in a community, which refuses to accept him. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester was isolated due to her sin and though the circumstances of the act of sin are insufficiently expressed, the thesis follows her way towards overcoming the troublesome fate of bearing the scarlet letter A on her chest. In *The Invisible Man*, the protagonist is not guilty of any wrongdoing. On the contrary, being fed the illusion of the possibility of rising to a respected position, he unquestioningly follows the path of obedience, until he realizes that his ambition is unreachable without giving up his dignity and freedom. That is when he decides to become invisible. Throughout the first chapter, the thesis also concentrates on other characters in the plot, as they play an important role in shaping the treatment of the major character and significantly influence the progress of the story.

The second selected treatment of evil focuses on the authors' approach to the development of moral integrity within children or adolescents. The thesis analyzes the consideration of good and bad in the point of view of children with both incomplete families (*The Cement Garden*) and dysfunctional ones (*Maggie: A Girl of the Street*). It also contemplates the impact of the surroundings as well as the relationships among the members of the families. The chapter is then concluded by stressing the essential importance of appropriate parenting.

The last chapter follows a path of one man towards realizing his vision. The analysis examines the development of his mental condition, which progresses from pure intentions to ambition and egotism. The protagonist loses his ability for compassion and leaves every business, which is not relevant to the completion of the spire, unattended. The aim of the last chapter is to speculate on the cost of achieving one's ambition on the account of making sacrifices, which may result in other people's misfortune.

In the process of making this thesis, the most difficult aspect was to not simply label the actions right or wrong, but to consider their circumstances and to see them as a part of a bigger and more complex structure. In other words, sometimes, where one sees something wrong, another might see it as a natural reaction of an individual who feels he or his reputation has been damaged. Where one sees an evil person, another might see a disturbed individual, who did not properly acquire in his childhood the sense of right and wrong. And last, but not least, one should always take into consideration that people are of different natures with different aspirations. If a person resorts to acting recklessly upon immediate impulse with no regard to the surroundings, he might become the next *Roger Chillingworth* or *Ras*.

Nevertheless, judging by this concept, many things could be excused or otherwise explained and criminals would surely find a way to abuse it. Therefore, a question arises: Where should people draw the line, separating good from evil? Where is the point, in which surroundings and circumstances do not excuse a wrongdoing? And if one is able to draw the line, should it be straight and fixed? Should it be used to measure all crimes with no regard to its context? These questions are yet to be answered.

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