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**The Children's Alienation in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by
Stephen Chbosky and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* by Lionel
Shriver**

Bakalářská práce

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Prohlášení

Tímto prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci s názvem *Odcizení adolescentních protagonistů v románech Ten, kdo stojí v koutě* od Stephena Chboského a *Musíme si promluvit o Kevinovi* od Lionel Shriverové vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího mé práce s využitím citovaných zdrojů a literatury. Dále souhlasím, aby tato práce byla uložena na Palackého univerzitě v Olomouci a zpřístupněna ke studijním účelům.

Declaration

I hereby declare that I wrote my bachelor theses *The Children's Alienation in The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* by Lionel Shriver individually with cooperation of my supervisor and the cited literature and sources used in the thesis. Furthermore, I agree that this thesis can be at disposal at the premises of the Palacky University in Olomouc for academic purposes.

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.....
Pavlína Indruchová

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Introduction

This bachelor thesis deals with the children's alienation in the works of the two contemporary authors – Stephen Chbosky with his novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), and the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003) by Lionel Shiver. Both novels belong to a literary genre of the Bildungsroman (also known as a coming-of-age story) "that deals with the maturation process, with how and why the protagonist develops as he does, both morally and psychologically."¹ The most representative examples of this genre are, for instance, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by Jerome David Salinger or *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee.²

The thesis is concerned with Chbosky and Shriver's portrayal of Charlie and Kevin's alienation. Above all, it focuses on the impact of the past traumas which have had a harmful influence on the protagonists' development. Main triggers in the alienation process such as sexual abuse, child maltreatment, intimidation, socially embedded conventions, and pressures are scrutinized. Furthermore, a significant role is assigned especially to the family members, whose harmful behavior initiated the protagonists' estrangement. The above mentioned, are elaborated upon, in order to evaluate their influence on children's growth and development. Furthermore, the final outcome and consequences of such impact on children's maturity is also a subject of examination.

The thesis incorporates other author's works on various topics which are essential for understanding of the core of the thesis. Works relevant for the analysis dealing with the subject of children's alienation, abuse, and violence are: Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* as well as *The Catcher in the Rye* by Jerome David Salinger. As the thesis' main core lies in the examination of the influences and causes which led the protagonists to make certain decisions that affected their behavior, the question of parenthood, (especially motherhood), and gender roles are also taken into consideration. Therefore, references are made to Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. Furthermore, Adrienne Rich in her work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* elaborates on issues concerning motherhood, social pressure, and children's development. The great

¹ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Bildungsroman," accessed March 02, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com>.

² Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Bildungsroman."

emphasis is placed on the understanding of the enormous influence the society has on the role of woman as a parent: a woman's attitude to the institution of motherhood is consequently reflected in the upbringing of children. These works along with other equally important sources dealing with the children psychology, sexual abuse and behavioural studies, create the core for the analysis of the novels and demonstrate the principal influences on the children's alienation.

The thesis consists of two parts (theoretical and analytical); both parts have two chapters with several subchapters. The first part of this thesis introduces both authors' biographies; chiefly their personal experiences and concerns that can be reflected in their works with prominent influence on their writing style, themes, and rendering. Moreover, it presents the reasons which led the authors to write so overtly and bluntly about contemporary issues of this period. Other cited authors whose works are relevant for the thesis are presented in the appendix. The following part is concerned with the terminology regarding the child's abuse and alienation. The sources used, provide the readers with the definitions, meanings, and overall understanding of the notions such as the sexual abuse, physical and psychological violence, child maltreatment, alienation, and postnatal depression. The chapter consists of the basic terminology which is used in the analytical part of the thesis; therefore, it is essential for the analysis.

The analytical part of the thesis opens with the summary of the plot of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. More importantly, this part deals with comparison and contrast of the main motifs, symbols and themes of the works.

The main part of the thesis focuses on the comparative analysis of both novels. Primarily, it closely examines the children's alienation of the protagonists, Charlie and Kevin, with reference to other characters, whose analysis is equally essential. It provides the readers with an insight into protagonists' personalities. This part tries to capture the portrayal of the ways the protagonists are alienated, and by what means the authors achieved this. It also closely searches for the possible causes of such an estrangement. Lastly, but by no means less importantly, the significant influence of the society, culture, environment, education, and family background is taken into account. The influence of such phenomena on children's growth and development is also elaborated. Taking into account all the seemingly

external influences, the thesis closes with the outcome along with the consequences of such impact on children's maturity.

1. Authors' biographies

The following chapter comprises of the authors' biographies as well as their motivations and experiences which influenced their writing. As the thesis touches the themes of children's alienation, abuse and motherhood, the authors such as Stephen Crane, Jerome David Salinger, Adrienne Rich and Betty Friedan are also taken into consideration. Their biographies are to be found in the appendices.

1.1. Stephen Chbosky³

An American writer Stephen Chbosky was born in 1972 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to parents Fred and Lea Chbosky. In 1992, Chbosky graduated from the University of Southern California (Bachelor of Fine Arts), where he studied a Film Writing Program. Stephen Chbosky is a screenwriter, television and stage writer, and a film director.

He is chiefly known for his epistolary novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999), which is also his first novel. This coming-of-age novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* was published by MTV Books. The novel brought Chbosky a great success and became very popular, as can be said about "...any book that sells upward of 700,000 copies and is passed from adolescent to adolescent like a hot potato."⁴ What is more, "it also appears on the American Library Association's 2006 list of the 10 most frequently challenged books."⁵ In 2012, the novel was made into a film adaptation of the same name with Stephen Chbosky as its director, under the production of Summit Entertainment. The movie cast introduces Logan Lerman (as Charlie), Emma Watson (Sam), and Ezra Miller (Patrick) in the spotlights. According to a film critic David Edelstein, the novel and the movie *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is "both painful and elating."⁶

³ Stephen Chbosky's biography was compiled from various sources since none of the sources was sufficient and informative enough: Stephen Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 232.

"Stephen Chbosky," *Contemporary Authors Online*, Detroit: Gale, 2012, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

⁴ Robin Finn, "THE ISLAND; Reluctant Readers? Try Resistant Parents," review of *The Perks of being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky, *The New York Times*, July 8, 2007, Sunday Book Review, <http://query.nytimes.com>.

⁵ Finn, "THE ISLAND; Reluctant Readers? Try Resistant Parents."

⁶ David Edelstein, "The Art Of Preserving A High School 'Wallflower,'" review of *The Perks of being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky, *Fresh Air*, September 21, 2012, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

Stephen Chbosky is also a director of the film *The Four Corners of Nowhere* (1995), which had its premiere at Sundance Film Festival, and it won the Best Narrative Feature honors at the Chicago Underground Film Festival. Chbosky contributed and co-edited the play *Sexaholix* (2001), wrote a screenplay for *Rent* (2005), and he was also an executive producer of the drama *Jericho* (2006).

1.2. Stephen Chbosky's motivations and experiences relevant to the novel

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

In an online interview with Marty Beckerman⁷ for the literary magazine *World Riot* (“An Interview with Stephen Chbosky”), Chbosky reacts to the negative responses concerning his novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*: it was banned in several schools, and was denounced by the parents who considered the book indecent, immoral and unsuitable for adolescent readers. The novel is popular as it describes the real life troubles experienced by many adolescents, but at the same time, the work is considered controversial as it depicts the themes of a drug and alcohol use, premarital sex, abortion, rape and homosexual relationships. The strong influence of the novel on the public opinion is at its best demonstrated by the Milwaukee incident as there even had to be summoned public hearings in order to ban the book from the school curriculum. Nevertheless, due to the support from demonstrating students, the schoolboard decided against the censorship. In this interview, Chbosky expresses his deep disappointment concerning all the negativism since he received positive responses and letters from youngsters to whom the novel was something to relate to. The author even mentions two youngsters for whom the message of the book helped to avert from committing suicide. Taking into account the censorship of his book, he proclaims that he did not “...understand why a handful of people could deny it to the whole student body... It’s more of mourning the fact that people can’t agree to disagree, and people can’t find common ground.”⁸

⁷ Stephen Chbosky, “An Interview with Stephen Chbosky by Marty Beckerman,” Interview by Marty Beckerman, *Word Riot*, January 4, 2005, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.wordriot.org/template.php?ID=552>.

⁸ Chbosky, “An Interview with Stephen Chbosky by Marty Beckerman.”

In another interview with Linda Wertheimer,⁹ Chbosky continues to explain that his intention was not to write a controversial novel for adolescents: "...what I wanted to give through the book, through the movie, and through certain lines like: We accept the love we think we deserve, I wanted to give people a little blueprint about how you can face these things that trouble you. And how you can make friends and have a great life."¹⁰

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is an epistolary novel written as a series of confessional letters to Charlie's unnamed friend. Stephen Chbosky remains secretive as regards the identity of Charlie's pen friend. Although he has several theories, he is reluctant to reveal them. Instead, he explains how he came up with the idea of Charlie writing the anonymous letters. Chbosky always wanted to study film writing. When he visited University of Southern Caroline (USC), in Los Angeles, he was deeply moved and inspired by Stewart Sterns (the author of the script for film *Rebel without a Cause*), who was a lecturer there. That was the moment when the decision about his future studies was made; however, soon Sterns suffered a heart attack. Chbosky felt compassionate, empathic and to Linda Wertheimer he says, "... I wrote him a letter just to let him know that he had changed my life and how grateful I was to him. But I didn't sign my name because I didn't want him to think I was just trying to get an agent or something like that. And it took him a year and a half to find me and figure out that it was me."¹¹ This experience inspired Chbosky to use the form of anonymous letters for his novel. From the moment on, Sterns and Chbosky have been good friends. Furthermore, Sterns is a mentor to Chbosky, and he was also the first person who was honored to read the script for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.¹²

In an interview for the newspaper *LAyouth*, Stephen Chbosky talks about the similarities between him and Charlie, the protagonist of his novel. Chbosky says he started writing the novel as a means of dealing with his unhappy personal life situation. To comment on the relation between him and his protagonist, he says, "...I've always said that the book is very personal to me, but it isn't necessarily

⁹ Stephen Chbosky, "'Wallflower' Film Puts Adolescence On Screen," Interview by Linda Wertheimer, *Weekend Edition Sunday*, September 23, 2012, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

¹⁰ Chbosky, "'Wallflower' Film Puts Adolescence On Screen."

¹¹ Chbosky, "'Wallflower' Film Puts Adolescence On Screen."

¹² Chbosky, "'Wallflower' Film Puts Adolescence On Screen."

autobiographical – not in the literal sense of the word anyway. I do relate to Charlie. But my life in high school was in many ways different.”¹³

Chbosky’s writing style is sometimes compared to Jerome David Salinger’s *The Cather in the Rye*. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Salinger’s novel is mentioned several times, for example when Charlie’s teacher assigns him the analysis of the book as additional homework. “I did, in part, reference *The Catcher in the Rye* as a tribute. But no more than *This Side of Paradise*, *On the Road*, and a host of other books that I loved growing up. I can see how people could compare Charlie to Holden Caulfield. At the same time, I think they are very different people with unique problems and perspectives.”¹⁴ Chbosky further names the authors who, to the certain degree, had an influence on him, e.g. Jerome David Salinger, as well as, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Tennessee Williams, and Stewart Stern. Nevertheless, Chbosky disagrees that he copied Salinger’s writing style.¹⁵

1.3. Lionel Shriver¹⁶

An American novelist and journalist Margaret Ann Shriver, known as Lionel Shriver, was born on May 18, 1957 in Gastonia, New Carolina. She was born into a strictly Presbyterian family to her father Donald (a seminary president) and her mother Peggy Shriver (an administrator for the National Council of Churches). When Shriver turned fifteen, she decided for a change of her first name Margaret Ann to Lionel as she claims it suits better to her “tomboyish qualities.”¹⁷ Shriver is married to a musician, Jeff Williams, who is a jazz drummer. In 1982, she graduated from the Columbia University (M. F. A.), and in the present day, she works as an instructor of writing and English. As a novelist and also a prolific journalist, she contributes to *Wall Street Journal*, *Belfast Telegraph*, *Financial Times*, *London Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Economist* and many others.

¹³ Stephen Chbosky, “Interview with Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*,” Interview by Ann Beisch, *LA Youth*, November–December 2001. Accessed February 10, 2015, <http://www.layouth.com>.

¹⁴ Chbosky, “Interview with Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.”

¹⁵ Chbosky, “Interview with Stephen Chbosky, author of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.”

¹⁶ Lionel Shriver’s biography was compiled from various sources since none of the sources was sufficient and informative enough: “Shriver, Lionel,” *Contemporary Authors Online*, (Detroit: Gale, 2012), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 10, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

Jessica Teisch, “Lionel Shriver,” *Bookmarks*, September–October, 2013: 22–25, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

¹⁷ Wendy Perkins, “Overview of *We Need to Talk about Kevin*,” *Gale Literary Overviews*, (Detroit: Gale, 2012), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 1, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

Shriver is the author of novels *The Female of the Species* (1987), *Checker and Derailleurs* (1988), *The Bleeding Heart* (1990), *Game Control* (1994), *A Perfectly Good Family* (1996), *Double Fault* (1997), *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003), *The Post-Birthday World* (2007), *So Much for That* (2010), and *The New Republic* (2012).

Lionel Shriver received various awards such as Aer Lingus travel award, 1993, Northern Ireland Arts Council literature grant (1993 and 1996), Sheldon & Stewart Solicitors “Anonymous Donor” grant (1995). In 2005, Shriver was awarded Orange Prize for Fiction for her epistolary novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, which gained her publicity. In 2010, for the fiction *So Much for That* she received National Book Award finalist, and it followed with BBC national short story award for a story “Kilifi Creek” (2014).

Shriver’s novels touch controversial and taboo topics of various kinds. To write the novel *Game Control* (1994), Shriver moved for a time to Nairobi to become familiar with the setting for her satire concerning the overpopulation of the planet. In the novel *So Much for That* (2010), she explores the theme of the health care system, and in *Big Brother* (2013), she deals with obesity and attitudes to a healthy lifestyle. The key novel launching Shriver’s popularity, *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, was initially refused by “...20 literary agents...in the United States and 30 publishers...in the United Kingdom...”¹⁸ However, Shriver persisted and her novel was first published in 2005 and “...became a cultish bestseller, with word-of-mouth accelerating sales.”¹⁹ Shriver extensively investigated the criminal backgrounds for this novel, and even included real life school massacre incidents.

The novel was made into a movie adaptation of the same name. The director was Lynne Ramsay, who “...has made a surprisingly playful adaptation, prodding our appetite for the corny or the sensationalist with her knowing use of horror-movie mannerisms...”²⁰ The cast was starring Tilda Swinton (in the role of Eva), John C. Reilly (as her estranged husband Franklin), and Ezra Miller (as the infamous Kevin).

¹⁸ Teisch, “Lionel Shriver,” 24.

¹⁹ Lionel, Shriver, *Literature Online biography*, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://literature.proquest.com>.

²⁰ Ryan Gilbey, “Seeing red: A great cast is offset by overkill in this horror story, writes Ryan Gilbey,” *New Statesman* (1996) October 24, 2011: 44, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 16, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

1.4. Shriver's motivations and experiences relevant to the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

The Bookseller magazine reviews Shriver's novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* as "...a provocative, hard-hitting book that carries an extremely powerful charge, but which is certain to polarise its readers, many of whom will be infuriated, even offended, by the story."²¹ Such a critique raises the curiosity about the nature of motivations which prompted Shriver to write a novel about human relationships, and primarily about institutions as matrimony and motherhood in an unflattering light.

In the afterword of her novel,²² Shriver makes a daring confession and enlightens the readers with the inspiration for writing such a novel. Shriver resolved her attitude towards children surprisingly early - at the age of eight. As an empathic child, she could not have failed to notice her father's remarks and dislike concerning "silly children's conversations." Shriver did not feel offended but rather compassionate as she was conscious that she and her two brothers were a nuisance. Shriver also mentions in her novel that the real motivation for writing her novels was probably to examine and confess her inner anxieties and desires. The epistolary novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* is the example of the former. Shriver confesses, "I was petrified of having children."²³ The anxiety was mainly concerning motherhood and the socially embedded role of women in society (she was frequently reminded of since her youth): "You say you want to be a writer, but you're a girl, and all you really want to be is a mommy."²⁴ Shriver is sure that she will never be a mother as she has considered all downsides of motherhood. Still frequent incidents of adolescents involved in school massacres are the last straw. She realizes that being a bad mother is not the worst thing that can happen: what frightens her most is that if everything goes wrong in bringing up her child, the child can also end up as a murderer. She is contended with the decision not to have children as otherwise it might have ended in a disaster. "Imagine bearing a child and then realizing, with this helpless, irrevocable little person squalling in its

²¹ Page Benedict, "A rotten bond: Lionel Shriver has written a disturbing novel about a mother/son relationship," *The Bookseller*, October 22, 2004: 25, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 22, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

²² Lionel Shriver, afterword to *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, by Lionel Shriver (London: Serpent's Tail, 2010), 471-475.

²³ Shriver, afterword to *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 471.

²⁴ Shriver, afterword to *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 472.

crib, that you'd made a mistake. Who really, in that instance, would pay the price?"²⁵

²⁵ Shriver, afterword to *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 473.

2. Terminology: “child abuse” and “alienation”

This chapter covers the basic, essential terminology paying respect to the analysis of both novels. The main concept in focus is that of “alienation;” concentrating mainly on its denotative meanings, etymology and development over the centuries. Moreover, other important terms such as “child abuse”, “violence” etc. are to be also mentioned.

2.1. “Alienation”

The concept of “alienation” is often referred to as an umbrella term as it covers various denotative meanings as summarized below:

- a) According to Seeman, the term “alienation” denotes: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, self-estrangement, social isolation as well as cultural estrangement.²⁶ Alienation is thus ambiguous term which covers a range of fleeting meanings as “...(1) powerlessness, the feeling that one’s destiny is not under one’s own control but is determined by external agents, fate, luck, or institutional arrangements, (2) meaninglessness, referring either to the lack of comprehensibility or consistent meaning in any domain of action (such as world affairs or interpersonal relations) or to a generalized sense of purposelessness in life, (3) normlessness, the lack of commitment to shared social conventions of behaviour (hence widespread deviance, distrust, unrestrained individual competition, and the like), (4) cultural estrangement, the sense of removal from established values in society (as, for example, in intellectual or student rebellions against conventional institutions), (5) social isolation, the sense of loneliness or exclusion in social relations (as, for example, among minority group members), and (6) self-estrangement... the understanding that in one way or another the individual is out of touch with himself.”²⁷
- b) Geyer further defines the term as follows: “With the obvious exception of self-estrangement, alienation always points to a relationship between

²⁶ Melvin Seeman, “Alienation Studies,” *Annual Review of Sociology* (1975): 91-123, JSTOR, accessed February 20, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946041>.

²⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, “Alienation,” accessed March 02, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com>.

a subject and some—real or imaginary, concrete or abstract—aspect of his environment: nature, God, work, the products of work or the means of production, other people, different social structure, processes, institutions, etc.”²⁸

- c) Another way to perceive alienation is “...as an instrument of polemical criticism, rather than as a tool of analysis and description...;”²⁹ it is a relationship “...that is considered undesirable from some point of view.”³⁰
- d) Furthermore, alienation can be described as “...a subjective state of an individual, or rather to a momentary snapshot of what is usually viewed ... as a self-reinforcing inner process.”³¹
- e) “Viewing alienation as a subjective individual state or process implies nothing yet about its causation...;”³² i.e. the factors involved vary greatly as they can be induced e.g. by environment.³³

2.1.1. Etymology of the term “alienation”³⁴

The concept of alienation is not a recent phenomenon as it has its origin in ancient times; back then it was commonly used to describe the “...feelings of estrangement, or of detachment from self and from others...”³⁵ Conversely, in law, the term “alienation” was used for the transfer of property. What is more, the term “alienation mentis,” as used by St. Augustine, referred to insanity. However, in modern times, the term “alienation” is viewed as “an extraordinary variety of psycho-social disorders, including loss of self, anxiety states, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs or values.”³⁶

²⁸ Felix Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Paul Baltes and Neil Smelser (London: Elsevier, 2001), 388.

²⁹ Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388.

³⁰ Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388.

³¹ Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388.

³² Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388.

³³ Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388.

³⁴ Eric Josephson, and Mary Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society* (New York: Laurel, 1970), 36-38.

Geyer, “Alienation, Sociology of,” 388-392.

³⁵ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 12.

³⁶ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 12-13.

Seventeenth century was marked by the development in philosophy and science, followed by industrial revolution and these were the key factors that diverted a man from the nature. As people were feeling empty, many converted towards religion; however, this was done more for social needs than for search for faith. The early nineteen century researches and studies of “alienation” registered a rapid development as the western world fully acknowledged the existence of this concept, and it became a central focus of many highly acclaimed philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. Among the most significant thinkers belongs: Émile Durkheim, Fritz Heinemann, Erich Fromm, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Georg Simmel and many others. The most known works concerning alienation are that of Karl Marx, who was concerned with alienation in terms of labor. He saw men deprived of the control over their labor due to mechanization; therefore, men no longer found the work creative and satisfactory. Under power of capitalism, the work became mundane and thus the workers got lost in their routine, were filled with powerlessness; what is more, they lost part of themselves and became alienated.³⁷

Besides the Marxists’ point of view, there is also a theory of “mass society,” first mentioned, by Tocqueville. He, and many others, saw the mass society as the crush of everything that is individual or exceptional. As an individual blends in the society, he is no longer his own self. This theory was aptly referred to as a “...tyranny of the multitude...”³⁸

As the concept becomes quite clear, it is worth to consider “an alienated man” in modern society, who is “...drifting in world that has little meaning for him and over which he exercise no power, a stranger to himself and to others.”³⁹ An alienated man can be found among the ranks of the “...factory and white-collar workers who find their jobs monotonous and degrading; the voters and non-voters who feel hopeless or “don’t care;” the juveniles who commit “senseless” acts of violence; the growing army of idle and lonely old people; the Negroes who want to be treated like men; the stupefied audiences of mass media; the people who reject the prevailing values of our culture but cannot—or may not—find any alternatives, the escapists, the retreatists, the nihilists, and the desperate citizens

³⁷ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 9-53.

³⁸ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 40.

³⁹ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 11.

who would “solve” all major political problems by moving our society underground and blowing up the planet.”⁴⁰ As the preceding citation covers a wide range of spheres where feelings of alienation occur, e.g. in working environment, politics, mass culture etc., it becomes clear that the term “alienation” is far from being unambiguously defined and thus for social scientists remains philosophical.⁴¹

2.2. Child abuse, sexual abuse and child maltreatment⁴²

A child can be abused by various means; several types of abuse are distinguished: physical, emotional, sexual abuse, also neglect and emotional deprivations. In the past, “child abuse” was perceived only as a form of physical abuse, now it covers also psychological abuse and any other kinds of maltreatment:

Physical abuse usually involves excessive punishment for minor infractions, or for behavior that is developmentally normal for the child. “Emotional abuse” may involve constant criticism, teasing and humiliation. “Neglect” is the failure to provide the child’s basic needs for shelter, food, clothing and the other necessities of life. “Emotional deprivation” is the failure to provide the child with normal human contact, support and warmth. “Sexual abuse” involves the exploitation of a young person by an older person who is in position of power over him or her. The perpetrator of the abuse may be a parent, sibling, other relative or acquaintance.⁴³

2.2.1. Effects of trauma on memory⁴⁴

Children who were the victims of some kind of abuse or maltreatment may suffer immediate or subsequent psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress, cognitive distortions, emotional distress (mainly depression, anxiety and anger), impaired sense of self, avoidance and many others. With respect to the goal of the thesis, it is essential to take a look at these two subchapters concerned with effects of trauma on memory, which is often related with a post-traumatic stress disorder (as a subsequent reaction to sexual molestation).⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Josephson, introduction to *Man alone: alienation in modern society*, 11-12.

⁴¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “Alienation.”

⁴² *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, “Child abuse,” accessed March 04, 2015, <http://www.britannica.com>. John Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, ed. Kathleen Phelps (Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Branch, 2003), 257.

⁴³ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 257.

⁴⁴ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 201-203.

⁴⁵ John N. Briere, and Diana M. Elliott. “Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse,” *The Future of Children*, (1994): 54-69, *JSTOR*, accessed April 30, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1602523>.

It is proved that severe psychological trauma can profoundly affect the memory as is evident in victims of child sexual abuse, natural disasters, psychological or physical violence, or most commonly in soldiers diagnosed with shell shock effect (whether during world wars or other military conflicts). A sufferer is e.g. unable to recall incidents from the past, his own identity, or some particular event.

The separation of traumatic memories and inability to access the consciousness is a psychological process called “dissociation.” “At the time of the traumatic event, dissociation is adaptive, because it isolates the person from an otherwise intolerable experience.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, “...the events are engraved in memory and find expression in dreams, re-enactments and flashbacks. Cues to the trauma may trigger these painful memories.”⁴⁷ The basic symptoms are: amnesia, depersonalization, derealisation, identity confusion/alternation. “Amnesia” is characterized by the loss of concentration, “memory gaps,” and is commonly accompanied by traumatic flashbacks, while “depersonalization” “is an unpleasant feeling of being detached from oneself.”⁴⁸

The sufferers of the trauma are prone to have a low self-esteem, and very often they are accompanied by compulsive feelings of shame or even guilt. Undeniably, it can also be found in children who were the victims of some kind of abuse. In the view of the fact that at the time of the traumatic experience abused children were vulnerable, completely dependent and under power of the abusers, they “often feel that they were somehow to blame.”⁴⁹

2.2.2. Post-traumatic stress disorder⁵⁰ (PTSD)

“Post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder which may develop in people who were affected by a terrifying event or exposed to a severe traumatic event “and is characterized by intrusive recollections (nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts), avoidance off reminders of the event and increased arousal (e.g. insomnia, irritability, jumpiness and anger.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 202.

⁴⁷ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 202.

⁴⁸ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 202.

⁴⁹ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 203.

⁵⁰ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 148.

⁵¹ Davies, *A Manual of Mental Health Care in General Practice*, 148.

2.3. Post-partum depression⁵²

“Post-partum depression” (PPD), also known as postnatal depression, is a condition following childbirth which affects both men and women; however, women’s PPD is much more frequent and has a more profound impact.

The “baby blues” is the most common type of PPD, and it is distinguished via symptoms such as: “...insomnia, irritability, crying outburst, overwhelming feeling and emotional lability...”⁵³ These symptoms are experienced by the majority of women after the delivery, nonetheless, they are gradually subdued. If the symptoms last more than two weeks, it evolves into a clinical condition which includes severe depressions such as: “...sadness, loss of interest, difficulty concentrating ... ambivalent or negative feelings towards the baby, feelings of guilt about the inability to take care of the child and excessive anxiety about the state of health.”⁵⁴ The main cause of PPD are most often hormonal changes connected with childbirth that can be very often accompanied or associated with other factors such as: “...socioeconomic status, race or ethnicity, education levels, the mother’s self-esteem, her age, whether or not the pregnancy was planned, circumstances surrounding labor and delivery, problems with breastfeeding, and infant temperament...;” what is more, “poor quality of the mother’s relationship with her partner, and life and child care stress”⁵⁵ can contribute to the outbreak of PPD.

Since the PPD affects mother’s behavior, moods as well as her abilities, it makes it “...difficult to fulfill the parental duties, affecting child care and the forming of the mother’s attachment. Babies of depressed mothers tend to be less attached to their mothers and are slower in acquiring language, age-specific behaviors, and mental development.”⁵⁶ Post-partum depression “...affects 10-15% of new mothers, but many cases of PPD remain undiagnosed.”⁵⁷ Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the symptoms, and as early as possible, to search for a professional help as the first months of the child’s life play a significant role on its later development.

⁵² Lidia Nica Udangiu et al., “Clinical and Therapeutic Management in Postpartum Depression,” *Management in Health* (2010): 21-22.

⁵³ Udangiu, “Clinical and Therapeutic Management in Postpartum Depression,” 21.

⁵⁴ Udangiu, “Clinical and Therapeutic Management in Postpartum Depression,” 21.

⁵⁵ Sara Thurgood, Daniel M. Avery, and Loyda Williamson, “Postpartum Depression (PPD),” *American Journal of Clinical Medicine*, (2009): 19.

⁵⁶ Udangiu, “Clinical and Therapeutic Management in Postpartum Depression,” 21.

⁵⁷ Thurgood, “Postpartum Depression (PPD),” 17.

2.4. Violence⁵⁸

“Violence,” as defined by The World Health Organization, is “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.”⁵⁹ This definition provides the basis for the broad range of meanings that the term “violence” covers.

As regards a typological diversification, violence can be classified as (1) self-directed, (2) interpersonal or (3) collective. A person, who deliberately hurts himself, is the instance of the self-directed violence. Interpersonal violence (a) concerns family members or partners through which the violence has the form of “...child abuse, intimate partner violence and abuse of the elderly;” or (b) so-called “community violence” “...between individuals who are unrelated, and who may or may not know each other, generally taking place outside the home.” This type includes various acts of “...youth violence, random acts of violence, rape or sexual assault by strangers, and violence in institutional settings such as schools, workplaces, prisons and nursing homes.”⁶⁰ “Collective violence” is characterized by the association with larger groups of people committing violent acts because of social, economic or political motivations. With consideration of the nature of violence, the violent acts may take a form of physical, sexual, and psychological violence; however, it also includes neglect and deprivation. The nature of these kinds of abuse is elaborated upon in the chapter 4.

⁵⁸ Etienne G. Krug et al., *World report on violence and health* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 1-19.

⁵⁹ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 5.

⁶⁰ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 6-7.

3. The summary of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

This chapter introduces a brief synopsis of both novels, as well as a thorough analysis of the main motifs, themes, and symbols with relevance to the goal of the thesis.

3.1. The plot summary of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

In the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Stephen Chbosky provides readers with a unique opportunity to share fifteen-year-old Charlie's ups and downs. Charlie, the protagonist, describes his present feelings and life experiences by introducing the intimate snapshots from his kinship, fellowship and school background, intermixed with retrospective flashbacks from his past. The novel is set in 1991, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which is Stephen Chbosky's, the author's, birthplace. Chbosky, in the interview with Linda Wertheimer explains the reason why the story is set particularly in the nineties. Chbosky says, "I just found that time to be a little simpler, I think, for young people, when private things could be truly private before we broadcast everything. The secrets that we kept back then I feel like they had a little more power."⁶¹

As a form of the confession of his moments of joy, happiness and worries, Charlie chooses communication via letters to an anonymous friend. Nevertheless, the reader is robbed of the pleasure to find out who the recipient is, since the protagonist himself knows the friend by hearsay, and believes that this is the person he can open his heart to. "I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand and didn't try to sleep with that person at that party even though you could have."⁶²

The following brief summary of the novel very nicely depicts the protagonist and his life story:

Charlie is a freshman. And while he's not the biggest geek in the school, he is by no means popular. Shy, introspective, intelligent beyond his years yet socially awkward, he is a wallflower, caught between trying to live his life and trying to run from it. Charlie is attempting to navigate his way through uncharted territory: the world of first dates and mixed tapes,

⁶¹ Stephen Chbosky, "'Wallflower' Film Puts Adolescence On Screen."

⁶² Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 3.

family dramas and new friends; the world of sex, drugs, and The Rocky Horror Picture Show, when all one requires is that prefect song on that perfect drive to feel infinite. But Charlie can't stay on the sideline forever. Standing on the fringes of life offers a unique perspective. But there comes a time to see what it looks like from the dance floor.⁶³

In the first letter, the readers find Charlie in a melancholic frame of mind, preoccupied with feelings of both happiness and sadness: owing to the reminiscences of his most beloved, deceased Aunt Helen, and the suicide of his best friend Michael. The reason which moved Charlie to write this letter is because the next day is the first day at a high school, and Charlie is really frightened of going there.

The high school is a rough place for Charlie as he does not behave as his classmates: he is silent, shy, solitary, and hypersensitive. He does not decorate his locker, nor participates in school dances, but rather listens to the music along a dance hall. That is why he particularly does not like this place; he is being looked down on as a loner, an outcast, and sadly, he is even bullied by a kid called Sean. Luckily for Charlie, his brother taught him how to defend himself. Also the fact that he is a freshman who confronted his bully does not help his popularity: "Some kids look at me strange in the hallways ... I'm the one who beat up Sean and couldn't stop crying after he did it. I guess I'm pretty emotional."⁶⁴ It is not only at school, where Charlie feels desperately alone; he cannot talk to anyone at school, but also at home. His brother is a baseball player, far off at Penn State University, as well as his sister is busy with her duties. The only person who seems to notice him is an English teacher, Bill, who assigns him books outside the class curriculum. Therefore, it makes sense that it is Bill to whom Charlie has confidence to talk about his sister's abuse (she was slapped by her boyfriend). As a result, his sister is forbidden to date her lover, so she is furious at Charlie. Be it as it may, her romance continues in secrecy. After all, Charlie gets his second chance to become trustworthy again in his sister's eyes by taking care of her (after she decides to undergo an abortion as her boyfriend claims the child is not his).

Charlie along with Bill's encouragement to participate in life makes a significant breakthrough: he dares to talk to a schoolmate, Patrick, from his shop class. Patrick, also nicknamed "Nothing" by his classmates is a senior, who can be

⁶³ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, qtd. on the cover of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*.

⁶⁴ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 9.

easily described as a prankster, energetic, and laid-back person. Just like Charlie says: “Now, normally I am very shy, but Nothing seemed like the kind of guy you could just walk up to at a football game even though you were three years younger and not popular.”⁶⁵ What is more, he also meets Sam, who is Patrick’s step sister, a senior.

This is the turning point for Charlie. For the first time in his life, he feels that he belongs somewhere, and people start to notice him. In the truck, driving to his first party with Sam and Patrick, something amazing happened: Charlie enters a new direction of his life journey as he says: “I feel infinite.”⁶⁶ From the moment on, he belongs to the world of friendship; he is entrusted with secrets from Patrick and Brad (Brad is a quarterback of a school football team). He comes to know about Brad’s intimate relationship with Patrick, and he also learns more about Sam, who revealed that she was first kissed by her dad’s colleague when she was little. The party also reminds him of an incident at his brother’s party, when while telling Patrick and Sam about it, he comes to realize that he witnessed a rape, but was too young to know what was going on. Charlie also experiences his first alcoholic drink, a marihuana cookie, and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. Most importantly, he goes on his first date with Mary Elizabeth and kisses with Sam. Sam is a girl, who he is irrevocably in love with, but there is an obstacle, she has a boyfriend Craig.

Yet here is someone else who also notices Charlie, and that is Mary Elizabeth. Nonetheless, their relationship does not last long as in the play “truth or dare” Charlie chooses Sam over Mary Elizabeth to be kissed as the most beautiful girl in the room. He is advised to stay away for a while for things to quiet down. However, Charlie starts to feel bad because he suffers from loneliness, and he has uncontrollable flashbacks concerning Aunt Helen. He misses his friends, and therefore resorts to the experiments with drugs. Due to LSD effects, Charlie is found unconscious, sleeping in the snow, with tufts of hair cut off. His frightened parents advise him to start seeing a psychiatrist again. Meanwhile, Sam breaks up with Craig after his cheating affairs. Moreover, Patrick and Brad’s romance is revealed by Brad’s father and leads to a termination of their relationship, even in

⁶⁵ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 21.

⁶⁶ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 36.

a fight. That is when Charlie engages to help a friend in an unequal fight (four to one); as a result, his help leads to reconciliation with all the friends.

The night before, Sam and Patrick leave for college, Sam and Charlie kiss again. Nonetheless, while Sam touches Charlie, it reminds him of something, and all white of sickness, he falls asleep dreaming about his aunt intimately touching him.

The last letter is by no means encouraging; with Sam and Patrick gone to the college, Aunt Helen and Michael are also gone. “It wasn’t until I couldn’t see the cars that I came back and things started feeling bad again.”⁶⁷ At home, he cannot stop to think very fast; he has hallucinations and comes to his epiphany: “...I’m starting to feel like what I dreamt about her last night was true. And my psychiatrist’s questions weren’t weird after all.”⁶⁸ With Charlie’s goodbye, the readers are left doubtful whether this story has a happy ending.

In an epilogue, Charlie writes to his friend again, after he returns home from the two month’s stay in a hospital, where with the help of his friends and family he overcomes the mental breakdown. This breakdown was most obviously caused due to the molestation by his Aunt Helen. Now here he is, in the truck with Sam and Patrick, his two beloved people in the world, feeling infinite and trying to participate in life again. He says goodbye to his friend: “...please believe that things are good with me, and even when they’re not, they will be soon enough ... Love always, Charlie”⁶⁹

3.2. The story of *We Need to Talk about Kevin*

As the title of the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* suggests, there is a story to be told about Kevin. The novel is set in 2000 in Gladstone. The narrator is a middle-aged Eva Khatchadourian, who works in a travel agency. Eva decides to disclose her version of the events that preceded and followed the period of the birth of her son Kevin. Eva dares to reveal all her dark, suppressed secrets and feelings in her intimate letters intended for Franklin Plaskett, her estranged husband. As a first person narrator, Eva mingles the present incidents with

⁶⁷ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 219.

⁶⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 220.

⁶⁹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 231.

prevailing retrospective recollections of her conversations with her husband and son.

Eva declares that the reason for writing her letters is not only her loneliness, but she also misses somebody who would listen to her, especially, her husband: “I’m unsure why one trifling incident this afternoon has moved me to write to you. But since we’ve been separated, I may most miss coming home to deliver the narrative curiosities of my day...”⁷⁰ The incident Eva mentions, relates to her encounter with an acquaintance, Mary Woolford, in a supermarket. Eva tries not to be recognized, but discovering all eggs smashed after returning to her trolley, she comes to realize that “No one in this “community” shows any signs of forgetting, after a year and eight months—to the day.”⁷¹ This reminds her of their former house on Palisades Parade she had to sell after the trial. Without further explanation, she continues writing her letter, and in desperation informs her husband that “they” came up at night when she was asleep and the following morning she has found the porch of their house all splashed and covered in crimson. At the end of her first letter the readers realize that the odd happenings have their reason—Kevin, her son, committed a mass murder.

Eva remembers the time when she and Franklin were deciding whether to have children is a good idea. Even though Eva is happily married and exceedingly satisfied as a CEO Director for A Wig and a Prayer, for the sake of her husband consents to have a baby, as she knows he secretly longs for an ideal family and children. Nevertheless, in the moment of truth, when Eva gets pregnant, she realizes that maybe it is being a mistake. On that account, in her pregnancy, she has compulsive thoughts about the downsides of motherhood. She loves her job, red wine, and is a passionate traveler. What is more, the delivery is for her a rather stressful and humiliating experience. After Kevin being born, she is not moved by this experience and rather finds “motherhood” dull and disappointing.

To Eva’s apathy contributes the fact that even the infant does not seem to be particularly happy to be born. Kevin refuses to be fed, has seizures of rage and cries all day long. To his mother’s surprise, Kevin suddenly stops crying when Franklin is within earshot. Eva’s condition or rather aversion worsens after her nanny quits; Eva laments over the crib: “Do you know there are some days that

⁷⁰ Lionel Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, ed. Kate Mosse (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2010), 1.

⁷¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 2.

Mummy would rather be dead? Rather than listen to you screech for one more minute there are some days that Mummy would jump off the Brooklyn Bridge...”⁷²

Moreover, Kevin as a toddler is rather apathetic: he does not speak nor play; he is able to sit and stare into space for hours. His growing up accompanies a series of incidents that Eva describes: when was Kevin four years old, he destroyed Eva’s treasured maps with his squirt gun; he was also involved in a series of little sabotages in his kindergarten. He prodded one of the kids, Violetta, into damaging her skin eczema. What is more, Kevin also refused to use the bathroom, and till the age of six, he wore diapers. After another rather disturbing argument with his mother, it seems like Kevin defecates himself on purpose. It happens repeatedly. Eva loses her temper; enraged, she throws Kevin across the room, and to her horror, Kevin ends up with a broken arm. Surprisingly, Kevin lies to Franklin about the true cause of his injury, and since that inauspicious “accident,” he does not need diapers anymore.

The retrospective narration blends with the scenes from Eva’s visits of Kevin in the Claverack Juvenile Correctional Facility. Kevin puts on display his indifference, boredom, showing no pangs of conscience about his terrible deed. Initially, they do not talk at all, but gradually they proceed to nasty conversations, which show how broken and unaffectionate their relationship is.

Eva recalls her feelings of loneliness she experienced after Kevin was born and blames Franklin for his preference for Kevin. Every time she tries to talk with Franklin about Kevin, he defends his misdeeds, and refuses any further discussion. In order to set equilibrium, Eva starts her plan to get pregnant again without Franklin’s consent. The only short period Eva and Kevin seems to be in a nice, emotional bond is within a few days of his ailment: he communicates affectionately with his mother, and she reads him his favorite book *Robin Hood and His Merry Men*. However, after Celia is born, Kevin’s behavior deteriorates even more. While he is babysitting “an accident” happens with Liquid-Plumr, and as a result, Celia loses her eye. Furthermore, Kevin also accuses his teacher, Vicky Pagorsky, of sexual abuse. This is the final stroke for Eva, who openly declares that Celia’s “accident” is Kevin’s fault, and his sexual abuse is an

⁷² Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 126.

elaborate fabrication. For Franklin, such accusations are heartbreakin, and he wishes a divorce; however, the conversation is overheard by Kevin.

Here comes “the Thursday,” another seemingly “ordinary” day for Eva. She passionately kisses Franklin, affectionately hugs Celia, and bids Kevin goodbye with a pat on his head. Immediately after that, leaving for work, Kevin asks her: “Sure you don’t want to say good-bye to Celie *one more time?*”⁷³ Later that day, her colleague informs her of an incident which happened in Kevin’s school, and says there are claimed to be casualties. Eva rushes to school only to see Kevin in a police car. Mesmerized, looking to her son’s face, she sees no hint of remorse and says, “He was looking for something in my face. Whatever he’d been searching for, he hadn’t found it...”⁷⁴ At the police station, Eva learns that there were nine victims: seven schoolmates, a teacher and a cafeteria worker. The murderous weapon was the crossbow, given to Kevin by his father as a Christmas present.

Devastated Eva heads home; however, there is nobody to answer to her calling. She searches the garden. She sees her lovely Celia pinned with arrows to the target, and stumbles over her beloved husband’s dead body. Eva collapses for a while, and then contemplates that Franklin surely tried to reach and save his daughter, though knowing it was late, as he was shot by his son several times.

Last Eva’s account is from the visit of Kevin in prison. Kevin, now turning eighteen, will be transferred to Sin Sin (an adult facility). He is no longer the self-assured, cold-hearted son, but rather a bundle of nerves since now he awaits a real prison life. In an act of reconciliation with his mother, he returns Celia’s prosthesis (her glass eye), and answers to his mother’s burdensome question: why?; “I used to think I knew,” he said glumly. “Now I’m not so sure.”⁷⁵ In the end, Eva declares that she finally loves her son, and after his release she concludes with “...there is a second bedroom in my serviceable apartment. A copy of *Robin Hood* lies on the bookshelf.”⁷⁶

Eva’s version of events as well as her assumptions concerning Kevin seems to be very often far-fetched. She, an unreliable narrator, manipulates the readers to side with her point of view from the very beginning due to her horrid portrayal of

⁷³ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 427.

⁷⁴ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 447.

⁷⁵ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 464.

⁷⁶ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 468.

Kevin and Franklin's foolishness. Nevertheless, it is left up to the readers to decide whether and to what extent is Eva's story exaggerated or truthful.

3.3. Motifs, themes and symbols

The essential theme connecting both novels is “an alienation” of the protagonists: their longing for communication, vindication, love and understanding. While the novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* is more aimed at the troubles concerning growing up, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* offers also an explicit and sincere point of view on the institution of parenthood, and mainly motherhood. Furthermore, the author's subtle hints open even the scary possibility of the innate depravity and evil in children.

In both novels, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, plenitude of subliminal motifs, themes and symbols⁷⁷ can be found. Their underlying meaning provides the readers with further insight into the minds of the protagonists, and helps to explain their alienation.

The most dominant motif that both novels share is “the letter.” The thematic significance of “letters” can be defined in terms of alienation. Charlie as well as Eva feel that there is nobody to talk to: they are unwillingly separated from the community, (though for different reasons), and therefore from the personal/spoken mode of communication. Kevin's alienation will be further discussed in chapter 4.

Charlie, the protagonist of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, seems to have no other choice of communication than via the form of letters, because (as he was already presented in the above chapter 3.1) Charlie is by no means popular, and this explains his anxiety concerning a high school. In comparison with his schoolmates, he is very lonesome. Moreover, his behavior and thinking differs from his classmates, especially in the perception of what is “normal,” and this fact excludes him from this social community. His beloved aunt, to whom he could talk to, died in a car accident and his closest friend Michael committed suicide. Charlie asserts that the reason for writing his letters is to confess his fears: “The reason I wrote this letter is because I start high school tomorrow, and I am really

⁷⁷ All motifs, themes and symbols examined were my personal selection without usage of any external sources and with relevance to the topic of the thesis.

afraid of going.”⁷⁸ Charlie’s decision to write an anonymous letter to a stranger, whom he knows only from a conversation which he overheard by pure chance, seems at a first sight very desperate. On the other hand, it shows his sensible thinking, since it can be a lot easier to write about intimate life experiences and about other people to somebody who is prevented from knowing your identity, misdeeds, and personal tragedies. Charlie is devoid of the fear of discovery, subsequent and undesired pity or even judgement. Charlie feels separated and desperately longs for communication; the letters only stress his alienation. “I just need to know that someone out there listens and understands... I need to know that these people exist.”⁷⁹ Moreover, Charlie seeks relief in writing because he feels excluded not only at school, but also at home. At home, he is considered either too young to participate in daily matters, or there appears to be taboo topics. “I have to talk about it with someone. No one in my family will ever talk about it. It’s just something they don’t. I’m talking about the bad thing that happened to Aunt Helen they wouldn’t tell me about when I was little.”⁸⁰

Similarly, in *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, Eva offers her reasons for writing “letters” to her husband: she cannot stand unbearable loneliness and needs communication. Besides, the letters serve as a means of revealing her innermost secrets and suppressed feelings. Above all, it is a kind of examination off long feared questions such as “what went wrong?” The choice of a recipient is understandable as she has been married to Franklin for nineteen years; she still loves him dearly, and feels she owes him an explanation. Moreover, she says “...I had found my only “help” in writing to you, Franklin. For somehow I feel certain that these letters are not on the list of prescribed therapies, since you are at the very heart of what I need to “get past” so that I might experience “closure.” And what a terrible prospect is that.”⁸¹ Eva clearly seeks help in a form of comprehension, and she also needs to gather some strength to forgive her son. On top of that, it is a very nice way of saying goodbye to her beloved husband.

Another crucial motif to be found in both novels is that of “Secrets.” Nevertheless, their meaning seems to differ due to the diverse representation of what they stand for. Chbosky’s bountiful use of secrets intensifies Charlie’s

⁷⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 7.

⁷⁹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 3.

⁸⁰ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 95.

⁸¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 100.

personal qualities: “He’s a wallflower.”⁸² Such a statement pronounces Patrick after Charlie finds out that Brad and Patrick are having an affair; Charlie promises Patrick that he will keep their secret. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines the term “Wallflower” as “a person who from shyness or unpopularity remains on the sidelines of a social activity (as a dance).”⁸³ The term “Wallflower” has rather a negative meaning, however, Chbosky elevates and enriches the term with such qualities as loyalty, trustworthiness, and comprehension. Consequently, Patrick addressing Charlie “a Wallflower” means nothing negative as he says: “You see things. You keep quiet about them. And you understand.”⁸⁴ Secrets in the novel also serve as a means of bonding between Charlie and his friends as well as family members. He is entrusted with secrets concerning his sister’s abortion, a homosexual relationship between Patrick and Brad, his father’s sensitivity, who is otherwise solemn and proud, but who cries because he watches the very last episode of M*A*S*H.

Also the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin* plentifully uses the motif of “secrets.” Secrets function here as a pleasant substitution for lies, suppressed feelings, aversions, and disappointment. Eva keeps numerous secrets from Franklin, but her most probably darkest secret is her disappointment over Kevin’s birth connected with subsequent disillusion with the dullness of motherhood. Her jealousy, with regard to a father and son bond, moves her to get herself deceitfully pregnant regardless Franklin’s refusal. She writes: “...I’d become accustomed to concealing things from you, but mostly thought crimes—my atrocious blankness at Kevin’s birth, my aversion to our house.”⁸⁵ The reason that prodded Eva to conceal things from her husband is his unwillingness to hear her complains about Kevin. Kevin’s broken arm is her big secret that Franklin must be prevented from knowing, since the physical abuse of “his” son would at least imperil their marriage. Besides, Eva finally has something that she can share with her son, a secret about his “accident.” Eva perceives Kevin’s cover story of how he got hurt as a smart, elaborate calculation, and from that time on she feels emotionally blackmailed.

⁸² Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 40.

⁸³ Merriam-Webster, “Wallflower,” Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015.

⁸⁴ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 40.

⁸⁵ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 241.

Another significant motif with symbolic implication is a “crimson” color. It can be described as a deeply reddish color such as of roses or blood. In general, red color is connected to manifestations of love, passion, or aggression. Eva’s life is defiled-with crimson in the literal as well as figurative sense. Kevin has an idea how to make his mother’s map-papered room “special” and therefore squirts it with crimson and black ink. However, as usual, this precedes a mother and son unpleasant conversation; that is why Eva perceives it as a malicious and aggressive exhibition of his depravity. Also their house and porch is splashed in crimson enamel; Eva writes: “...enamel is expensive, Franklin. Someone made a serious investment. The house looked as if its throat were slit.”⁸⁶ The color shall remind her of her failure as a mother and also her son’s atrocity. Crimson symbolizes the mark of blood as well as hatred, revenge and punishment. The choice of the color is not coincidental: it is not washable and easily removable. It serves as “a stainless reminder” of Eva’s guilt and humiliation.

In addition, Shriver uses a motif of “the Thursday” and the third person pronoun in order to distance herself from the reality. The fatal “Thursday” stands for a day Kevin commits a mass murder; Eva creates the euphemism because it seems she is in denial. To this fact also contributes her frequent use of the third person, singular number. In a disguise for someone else (Eva, the narrator, uses “mummy” or “she”) Eva is able to say nasty, heartless opinions and comments, e.g. over Kevin’s crib. She also chooses this technique to apologize herself for breaking Kevin’s arm. She acts as if someone else did it rather than to admit her failure as a mother.

Furthermore, Eva and Kevin’s relationship is accompanied by “silence,” which corresponds with their failure in communication resulting in their alienation. Eva is willing to get rid of the awkward silence while she takes Kevin for a day out and she tries to improve their relationship. However, she fails again and again. She also suffers the unbearable silence and her inability to communicate when Kevin is arrested, as well as during her regular visits in prison.

“A dream” is another motif which occurs exclusively in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Charlie has a dream about Sam with a sexual overtones: it reflects his desire to be more than a mere Sam’s friend. Moreover, the day before Sam

⁸⁶ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 8-9.

leaves for the college, the dream becomes a reality. Sam and Charlie kiss each other; however, when Sam touches Charlie intimately, he gets sick, angry, and in panic crying he falls asleep. He also dreams about his Aunt Helen, who touches him in the very same way Sam did. This incident most probably awakens memories of his molestation, unconsciously suppressed due to the post-traumatic stress. The web page connected with interpretation of dreams offers an explanation that dreaming about being "... abused in real life then the dream may be a sign that you need to begin to confront your past by speaking to someone."⁸⁷

Furthermore, "books" that Charlie receives from his English teacher, Bill, seem to be a motif inter-related with "letters." The books may be compared to letters that Charlie writes because they are a means of communication which can serve Charlie as a message or moral lesson. Bill notices that Charlie is very intelligent for his age, but also lost and lonesome. Bill uses the books as a medium in order to help him. He becomes Charlie's mentor and friend to whom Charlie can trust. Bill tries to make Charlie understand his own value, encourage him to participate in life, and he enlightens him with the world of complicated relationships as he says: "Charlie, we accept the love we think we deserve."⁸⁸ Moreover, Bill assigns Charlie one of his favorite book, *The Catcher in the Rye* and Bill "...said it was the kind of book you made your own."⁸⁹ The choice of the book indicates Bill's perception of Charlie, who resembles Holden Caulfield's confusion concerning the adult world and growing up in general. Charlie's bright observation concerning the book *Peter Pan* seems to confirm that these books are not merely for academic purposes. "It's just about this boy who refuses to grow up, and when Wendy grows up, he feels very betrayed. At least that's what I got out of it. I think Bill gave me the book to teach me a lesson of some kind."⁹⁰ In addition, Charlie gives Sam and Patrick his beloved books. The gesture shows his unselfish loyalty, affection, and the depth and significance of their friendship.

Charlie lives in the nineties, a period of "music" and mixtapes. While driving with Patrick and Sam through the city streets, they listen to the perfect songs which imprint upon them as moments of joy, celebration of youth, their free spirit, and unforgettable memories. Via music, Charlie expresses how much a friendship

⁸⁷ Dream Bible, "Abuse," accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.dreambible.com/dreamdictionary/a.html>.

⁸⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 27.

⁸⁹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 79.

⁹⁰ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 31.

with Patrick and Sam means to him. He makes a mixtape of his favorite songs for Patrick as something he can relate to. “I just thought to myself that in the palm of my hand, there was this one tape that had all of these memories and feelings and great joy and sadness. And how many people got through a lot of bad times because of those songs. And how many people enjoyed good times with those songs. And how much those songs really mean.”⁹¹ Sam receives the most valued gift, a music record “Something” by the Beatles, which Helen gave Charlie for his birthday before she died. What is more, Charlie uses the song “Asleep” (by Smiths) along with the emotions it evokes, as a means to depict and celebrate Sam’s beauty.

⁹¹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 66.

4. The children's alienation: a comparative thematic analysis

Both novels include a relatively detailed description of the symptoms of the clinical conditions displayed by the protagonists, and thus it enables the analysis of the protagonists' alienation, taking these symptoms into consideration.

The undeniable signs and feelings of protagonist's alienation are to be found in both of the novels: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin*. However, the way Kevin and Charlie display their alienation differs as well as the factors and causes that are involved in their estrangement. Thus, the subsequent outcome and consequences also naturally diverge. As mentioned earlier (chapter 2.1.), the term "alienation" is an umbrella term, so it is essential to distinguish, classify and analyze the kinds of alienation processes displayed by either of the protagonists.

In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the protagonist, Charlie, suffers mainly from "social isolation" (4.4.), predominantly connected with his "self-estrangement" (see 4.1. and 4.2.). On the contrary, Kevin, the protagonist of the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, seems to be alienated on the grounds of "powerlessness," "meaninglessness," "normlessness," and "cultural estrangement" (for terminology see chapter 2.1.). The comparative analysis of the above mentioned external signs and symptoms of alienation is elaborated upon in the following subchapters, with relevance to the authors' portrayal of these instances in both works.

4.1. Mental disorders

This subchapter is concerned with Charlie's alienation mainly in terms of "self-estrangement" with all its signs, symptoms, manifestations and probable causes. For social alienation see chapter 4.4.

Charlie is different. Not only his peers and family, but Charlie himself, suspects that something within his personality is not as it is supposed to be. Being different is nothing to be ashamed of, provided that it is in agreement with social norms, but mainly with the person himself. Nevertheless, Charlie senses that this is not his case, since he says: "I really don't feel very well. I don't know what's

wrong with me, but I'm starting to get scared.”⁹² Charlie is frequently tormented (consciously or subconsciously) with flashbacks and intrusive thoughts. The main “subjects” of these recollections are his aunt Helen and his best friend Michael. Charlie often recalls the times they spent together when they were alive. His memories are sometimes happy, but mostly sad and depressing. These flashbacks are initiated by Charlie’s momentary anxiousness, stress, or a situation reminding him of something from the past.

In connection with post-traumatic stress, Charlie suffers from amnesia connected with painful memories of Helen’s and Michael’s death. He recalls and is fully aware of his mental breakdown after he was told his aunt died, and also recollects his stay as a patient in an asylum.

I don’t really know what happened next, and I never really asked. I just remember going to the hospital. I remember sitting in a room with bright lights. I remember a doctor asking me questions. I remember telling him how Aunt Helen was the only one who hugged me. I remember seeing my family on Christmas day in a waiting room. I remember not being allowed to go to the funeral. I remember never saying good-bye to my Aunt Helen. I don’t know how long I kept going to the doctor. I don’t remember how long they kept me out of school. It was a long time.⁹³

Six years after Helen’s death, another disaster hurts him deeply; his best friend Michael’s suicide. Charlie experiences another blackout: “I don’t really remember much of what happened after that except that my older brother came … and told me to stop crying.”⁹⁴ These personal disasters experienced as a child and young adolescent are reflected in Charlie’s behavior. He is easily prone to hysterical fits of cry, anger and anxiety. Furthermore, the slightest nervous strain and unexpected display of affection or interest in his personae, makes him susceptible to emotional outbursts. This amnesia has its causation: a severe trauma. It is undeniable that Charlie is traumatized due to sudden death of his closest friends. Nonetheless, the true nature of his trauma lies in the past: as a child, Charlie was a subject of sexual abuse by a close relative, his aunt Helen. Charlie experiences a state of denial, thus his subconscious mind protects him from memories of such traumatic experience.

⁹² Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 80.

⁹³ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 97.

⁹⁴ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 4.

When taking into account the immediate and long-term impact of child abuse and trauma, it is essential to mention that “Severe child maltreatment—including early and sustained sexual abuse—may interfere with the child’s development of a sense of self.”⁹⁵ Charlie frequently mentions that he feels confused, as if distanced from himself (like kind of depersonalization happening in a dream). In the following citation, he compares this feeling to looking into a mirror. The state Charlie describes, matches “self-estrangement” and “post-traumatic stress disorder” with the symptoms of severe “anxiety.”

It’s kind of like when you look at yourself in the mirror and you say your name. And it gets to a point where none of it seems real. Well, sometimes, I can do that, but I don’t need an hour in front of a mirror. It happens very fast, and things start to slip away. And I just open my eyes, and I see nothing. And then I start to breathe really hard trying to see something, but I can’t. It doesn’t happen all the time, but when it does, it scares me.⁹⁶

Also Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of Salinger’s novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, seems to suffer from “self-estrangement.” He experiences similar state as Charlie: “...something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I’d never get to the other side of the street ... Allie, don’t let me disappear.”⁹⁷

As mentioned earlier (see chapter 2.2.1.), a traumatic experience may severely affect the memory. Charlie develops the traumatic stress disorder, connected with a dissociative condition, namely amnesia which is characterized by flashbacks and gaps in memory.

In general, suppressed memories may be awoken by a suitable stimulus. One such an exemplary cue is his moment of romance with Sam. Furthermore, the combination of his erotic dream about his aunt, as well as the awareness that all his friends leave the following day for college, triggers something in his memory. He finally recalls his abuse and remains with mixed feelings alone, unable to stop his sobering thoughts and hallucinations. Charlie says that his parents found him paralyzed “...sitting on the couch in the family room. I was completely naked, just watching the television, which wasn’t on. I wouldn’t speak or snap out of it, they said.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Briere, “Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse,” 59.

⁹⁶ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 79.

⁹⁷ Jerome David Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (Hamilton: Penguin, 1994), 178.

⁹⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 225.

The significance of the role of friendship reflected on Charlie's frame of mind is another aspect worth consideration. Sam's influence over Charlie works like the pulling power. She soothes him in his crying fists, moreover, her presence or only a memory of her, helps Charlie to calm down his frenzy, fast breathing or free flow of sobering thoughts. For example, as a child, too young to understand what was going on, Charlie witnessed a young boy to rape his girlfriend at his brother's party. Nonetheless, now at a homecoming dance he sees a happy couple, but he becomes enraged: "...I saw them dancing together. Dave and his girl. And I got really mad. It kind of scared me how mad I got. I thought about walking up to Dave and really hurting him like maybe I should have really hurt Sean. And I think I would have, but Sam saw me and put her arm around my shoulder like she does."⁹⁹

On the other hand, besides the positive influence of his friends, Charlie's state deteriorates whenever he feels that his hardly gained friendship is imperiled. He unintentionally endangers the stability of the group dynamics in a game "truth or dare." He stirs the negative emotions by kissing Sam instead of his girlfriend Mary Elizabeth, and so Charlie is excluded until things gets to normal. "I stared at my reflection and the trees behind it for a long time. Not thinking anything. Not feeling anything. Not hearing the record. For hours. Something really is wrong with me. And I don't know what it is."¹⁰⁰ Charlie, too scared to lose his friends, seeks comfort in drugs and alcohol. However, after his "LSD" experience, he is found sleeping in the snow with his chunks of hair gone. "I don't know how much longer I can keep going without a friend. I used to be able to do it very easily, but that was before I knew what having a friend was like."¹⁰¹ Luckily for Charlie, he is taken back after he helps Patrick in distress. The use of alcohol and drugs can also be easily explained: "Childhood sexual abuse appears both to have sustained impacts on psycho-logical functioning in many survivors and to have the potential for motivating the development of behaviors that, while immediately adaptive, often have long-term self-injurious consequences."¹⁰²

As a victim of sexual abuse, (besides clinical conditions described above), Charlie is afflicted by low self-esteem, hypersensitivity, and is susceptible to

⁹⁹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 35.

¹⁰⁰ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 147.

¹⁰¹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 155.

¹⁰² Briere, "Immediate and Long-Term Impacts of Child Sexual Abuse," 64.

compulsive feelings of guilt and apprehensions. All the factors combined contribute to his inability to participate in social activities. Consequently, Charlie pays for his suffering by his exclusion from the society (see 4.4.). As Pasternack claims, abused children manifest severe “psychological, neurological, and cognitive deficits”¹⁰³ in comparison with nonabused, “normal” children. The author also stresses the fact that “The abused children were reported to be more self-destructive and more aggressive both at home and in school.”¹⁰⁴

The following analysis is to be concerned with Kevin’s and Eva’s alienation (the protagonists of the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*) in terms of the possible initiative processes of alienation with its consequences. First of all, it is important to take into consideration that Kevin’s alienation is examined via the eyes of his mother, Eva, who as an unreliable narrator. Eva reflects upon Kevin’s behavior, personality, and it is therefore vital to allow her to be instrumental in this analysis. Eva’s pregnancy with regard to post-partum depression along with its probable effect left upon Kevin is to be thoroughly examined.

For most women, an affirmation of pregnancy is the moment of joy; however, in Eva’s case, it is rather a mixture of grief and shock. Rich would definitely understand this contradiction as she believes that “As mothers, women have been idealized and also exploited.”¹⁰⁵ Too late Eva realizes that she does not want to be a mother and never really yearned for it. Thus, it is probable that Eva develops an aversion to Kevin already during her pregnancy, because she very often compares herself to “a biological experiment” and comments on her changing body very unfavorably. Eva cannot withstand that she is supposed to eat, drink, and do only what is good for the baby regardless her needs. Moreover, Franklin rebukes Eva for her drinking wine during the pregnancy, and forbids her to dance since he is worried about the baby’s safety. Eva feels oppressed, offended, misunderstood, and lonesome. It is a pity that Franklin could not read Rich’s statement that would only confirm Eva’s feelings: “I question the implicit belief that only “mothers” with “children of their own” have a real stake in the future of humanity.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Stefan A. Pasternack, ed., *Violence and Victims* (New York: Spectrum Publications, 1975), 170.

¹⁰⁴ Pasternack, *Violence and Victims*, 170.

¹⁰⁵ Adrienne Rich, introduction to *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, by Adrienne Rich (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), xxiv.

¹⁰⁶ Rich, introduction, xxiv.

Eva works as a chief executive officer for a travel agency A Wig and a Prayer. She is an ambitious, imperious business woman, a successful one, who is used to be very independent. She loves her job, travelling, and in the adventurous nature of life she finds a source of fulfilment. Being pregnant, she has a foreboding that her frequent business trips to foreign countries as well as her self-indulgence in drinking red wine does not match with the new course of her journey: motherhood. Moreover, she is obsessed with the idea that people look down on pregnant women both on the street, and at work. Friedan stresses the fact that there exist plenty of women who would say: “I want something more than my husband and my children and my home.”¹⁰⁷ Rich is in agreement with Friedan when she puts forward an idea that “Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal “instinct” rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self.”¹⁰⁸

The above mentioned may serve as the foundation for understanding of her negativism towards Kevin. What is more, a thirty-seven hours of labor marks her with a rather stressful and disagreeable experience. She recollects her feelings during the delivery: “I hated myself for ever having agreed to this humiliating theater, when I was *fine* before and right at this moment I could have been in *France*.”¹⁰⁹ She admits to resist the delivery because of the nagging pain. She always thought herself to be very resilient, thus she is shocked by her weakness. In this very moment, her feelings toward her unborn child deteriorate as she says: “...I associated Kevin with my own limitations—with not only suffering, but defeat.”¹¹⁰ Eva’s obsession with travelling projects onto her exorbitant expectation concerning motherhood—she often compares it to “a new country” and her newborn son as “a stranger.” Therefore, she seems rather disappointed after Kevin’s birth, because she expected something exciting will happen. “...Kevin would yowl, rest limply, and jerk irritably from time to time; I felt the first stirrings of what, appallingly, I can only call boredom.”¹¹¹ Eva’s emotional paralysis is enhanced by the fact that the infant refuses to be fed, which makes her feel rejected. Moreover, as Kevin still does not accept her milk, Eva becomes

¹⁰⁷ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1977), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 42.

¹⁰⁹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 89.

¹¹⁰ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 90.

¹¹¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 97.

depressed and hopeless. What is more, she suspects that even the baby knows she is not delighted with his existence:

In fact, I became convinced that our little bundle of joy had found me out. Infants have great intuition, because intuition's about all they've got. I felt certain that he could detect a telltale stiffening in my arms when I picked him up. I was confident that he could infer from a subtly exasperated quality in my voice when I burbled and cooed that burbling and cooing did not come naturally to me and that his precocious ear could isolate in that endless stream of placating blather an insidious, compulsive sarcasm.¹¹²

Besides the change in a hormonal level and her advanced age, Eva is diagnosed with commencing post-partum depression. In the novel Eva comments on her condition as follows: "...Dr. Rhinestein offered up *postnatal depression* like a present, as if simply being told that you are unhappy is supposed to cheer you up..."¹¹³ As was said before, also stressful childbirth resulted in ambivalence in feelings toward the infant. Nevertheless, the depression does not subdue, and due to a combination of Kevin's resistance to breast feeding and lack of support from her husband, she develops a severe clinical condition. Eva's awareness of her inability to awake her and affections makes her even more irritated. The humiliation and rejection deepens her coldness toward Kevin and even strengthens during his growing up. Friedan offers a food for thought: "Is she trapped simply by the enormous demands of her role as modern housewife: wife, mistress, mother, nurse, consumer, cook, chauffeur; expert on interior decoration, child care, appliance repair, furniture refinishing, nutrition, and education?"¹¹⁴

Eva's mood ameliorates after she hires a nanny, Siobhan. She can go back to work, however, after some time, Siobhan quits because she cannot bear Kevin's bad temper. Eva becomes desperate again and accuses Kevin, crying in the crib, that he chased Siobhan away. Unaware that Franklin watches her, she says: "What's your problem, you little shit? Proud of yourself, for ruining Mummy's life?"¹¹⁵ Franklin reacts upon the scene in horror: "They understand speech long before they learn to talk ... I don't understand how you can stand there and watch him cry."¹¹⁶ Franklin senses Eva's regret about their decision to have a child,

¹¹² Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 102.

¹¹³ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 101.

¹¹⁴ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 25.

¹¹⁵ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 125.

¹¹⁶ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 125.

which also contributed to marital alienation and gradually deteriorates their relationship. With the prospect of the family future, it seems that none of them is aware of the fact that also the relationship, understanding and mutual support between parents is important to be sustained and flourished: "...if the interaction between family members is not a quality one, it can constitute a risk factor of special relevance which may predispose the adolescent to learn violent and socially inappropriate responses."¹¹⁷

As a result of post-partum depression, Eva is unable to form a healthy relationship with her son, which affects the whole family. "Resentful of the helpless infant who has totally altered her relationship with the husband and who seemingly receives more love than she, the mother, receives, the mother becomes hateful."¹¹⁸ Eva is depressed, as she failed not only as a mother, but also as a wife in the eyes of her husband and society. Kevin gives the impression that yet, as a toddler he senses his mother's indifference and pretense. Consequently, Eva's depression most probably causes a developmental and attachment disorder in Kevin, who from an early age shows a lack of empathy and affections. The fact that his speech is belated, and that he also wears diapers till the age of six, can be attributed to the harmful influence of Eva's behavior and moods affected by the post-partum depression. The long-term depressed mother definitely accounts for Kevin's at first harmless sabotages as a kid, that led to serious behavioral deviations as an adolescent. To conclude with, it is vital to highlight that "The parent-adolescent relationships significantly influence children psychosocial adjustment, when it comes to negotiate the main adolescence tasks such as identity and autonomy acquisition, and can consolidate the necessary bases for the development of important cognitive and social abilities."¹¹⁹

4.2. Sexual and other abuses

Both Charlie and Kevin were subject to abuse by the perpetrator being a close family member or parent. This chapter analyses the maltreatment of the protagonists with the main focus on the probable outcome of such experience on young adolescents with respect to the alienation processes. It is needless to say but

¹¹⁷ Estefanía Estévez, et al, "Violence and Victimization at School in Adolescence," *School Psychology: 21st Century Issues and Challenges*, ed. David H. Molina, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008): 16.

¹¹⁸ Pasternack, *Violence and Victims*, 167.

¹¹⁹ Estévez, "Violence and Victimization at School in Adolescence," 16.

always good to bear in mind that "...not only do we have battered children but also the increased likelihood that such children will grow up to be brutal and potentially violent adults."¹²⁰

The following analysis is devoted to the examination of the causes of Charlie's alienation due to his molestation experienced as a kid, with consideration of its impact on his self-estrangement and social integration. From the very beginning of the story, Charlie gradually reveals scraps of information about his past. The most frequent memories belong to his aunt Helen. Charlie often commemorates her whenever he feels sad, nervous, and confused, or when the present situation reminds him of something in relation to Helen. Charlie introduces their relationship as very affectionate: "My Aunt Helen was my favorite person in the whole world."¹²¹ She was always there to listen to him, she also provided him with books, and let him stay late to watch television while she was babysitting. Moreover, his aunt was the only person who always gave him two presents, even though Charlie has a birthday the day before the Christmas Day. Continually, the readers come to know and even sympathize with Helen's horrid childhood and family history; "The psychological explanations emphasize that the probability of the adolescent implicating him/herself in antisocial behaviours increases when the family socialization process is altered by factors such as an erratic discipline, frequent conflicts or the lack of parental support."¹²² Charlie reveals that his grandfather battered his mother and her sister Helen, and what is worse; Helen was molested by a close family friend. When she finally found the strength to confide to her parents, they did not believe her, so the abuse continued. As a result, Helen was drowning her sorrows in alcohol and drugs. Charlie learns that before she moved to stay in with his family to get over her family history and pain: "My aunt Helen had many problems with men and boys. She was a very unhappy person most of her life. She went to hospitals all the time."¹²³

Helen dies on his seventh birthday in a car accident (on the way to buy Charlie presents). Charlie never completely recovers from the shock of her loss; he even blames himself for her death and spends some time in an asylum. "Despite everything my mom and doctor and dad have said to me about blame, I can't stop

¹²⁰ Pasternack, *Violence and Victims*, 167.

¹²¹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 6.

¹²² Estévez, "Violence and Victimization at School in Adolescence," 16.

¹²³ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 96.

thinking what I know. And I know that my aunt Helen would still be alive today if she just bought me one present like everybody else.”¹²⁴ For Charlie, Helen is much more than an aunt, she is his friend. Even long after her death, Charlie visits her often at the cemetery because he misses her and feels alone: “I bought flowers with my Christmas money. I even made her a mix tape and left it at the grave. I hope you do not think that makes me weird. I told my aunt Helen all about my life.”¹²⁵

Despite all the odds, Charlie finds new friends, love, and his life seems to take, at least for a while, a positive direction. Unfortunately, here also comes the end; there remains the last day he can spend with his beloved friends, because tomorrow they will be gone. While they anticipate their new college life ahead, for Charlie, there is not such a happy prospect. He gets depressed; again, he is about to lose friends who love him despite all his sentimental outbursts and strange behavior. Charlie, more than aptly depicts his personality as he says: “I really am a roller-coaster sometimes.”¹²⁶ He wants to belong somewhere, and not to be a weirdo and loner without friends as before.

When Charlie gets together with Sam, and he finally dares to kiss her, all he desires seems to come true. However, the prefect intimate moment with Sam brings both happiness and disillusionment: “... she moved her hand under my pants, and she touched me.”¹²⁷ Charlie is suddenly overcome by an unexpected wave of anger, confusion and cry. He says: “I can’t do that anymore ... But I wasn’t talking to Sam anymore. I was talking to someone else.”¹²⁸ Although Charlie is madly in love with Sam, he feels unwell. Sick with crying, he falls asleep, dreaming about his aunt who intimately touches him. Inevitably, Charlie as well as the readers come to an appalling epiphany: Charlie was sexually abused by his aunt Helen. Most probably it lasted the whole period she lived with them when his parents were not at home. Consequently, Charlie is unable to cope with the picture of his beloved aunt and all the memories scattered, and therefore, he ends up in the care of psychiatrists again. Alike Holden (the protagonist of Salinger’s novel *The Cather in the Rye*) is traumatized by the cruelty of the

¹²⁴ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 98.

¹²⁵ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 73.

¹²⁶ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 209.

¹²⁷ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 217.

¹²⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 218.

reality; he experiences a death of his younger brother (Allie), and sadly is also a subject of unwanted sexual advances of his teacher. “When something pervert like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it.”¹²⁹

The sexual abuse marks Charlie with a severe trauma that he, as a child, did not overcome and thus he developed a post-traumatic stress disorder with all its manifestations. It is elaborated in detail in chapter 4.1. When Helen misused her power over her nephew, she not only committed a crime, but what is worse, she betrayed his trust and severely hurt his feelings. This affected Charlie’s psychological state and behavior for the rest of his life. That is why Charlie is hypersensitive and has a low self-esteem, which may, in turn, result in his disability to create close friendship. Also his excessive sensitivity reflects his subconscious and incessant fear of loss: he is frightened that all the people he loves and adores will disappear as it happened with Helen.

To move on to the second analysis concerning the novel *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, first of all, it is important to point out that after the massacre. Eva is sued for parental negligence. Eventually, all allegations are dismissed. Eva subconsciously feels guilty, however, when she is asked by a court whether she ever abused her son, she reacts: “Violence only teaches a child that physical force is an acceptable method of getting your way...”¹³⁰ This makes Eva recollect a conversation from Kevin’s weekly visits in prison. She asks him if he remembers how she made him to use the bathroom: “He traced a faint white scar on his forearm near the elbow with a note of tender possessiveness, as if stroking a pet worm. I was proud of you ... Most honest thing you ever done.”¹³¹ The conversation pushes Eva to write Franklin another letter in which she casts her mind back to their embarrassment at that their son, who is still in the age of six in the need of diapers. Not only that Eva is forced twice a day to leave from work to go to the kindergarten to change his diapers, but she is also accused by Franklin that it may be all her fault. He claims she pays it little or too much of attention that creates in Kevin a physical block. According to Rich, “...guilt is one of the most powerful forms of social control of women; none of us can be entirely

¹²⁹ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 147.

¹³⁰ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 207.

¹³¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 204.

immune to it. A woman whose rage is under wraps may well foster a masculine aggressiveness in her son...”¹³²

When Eva and Kevin have a vacation, Eva tries to engage him in a play and teach him the alphabet and numbers. However, Kevin provokes her with nasty comments, makes fun of her, and to humiliate his mother, he defecates himself for the third time within a short time. Eventually, Eva loses her temper:

A rush of heat rippled up through my body, and I barely noticed that Kevin was now dangling with his feet off the carpet. He seemed to weigh nothing, as if that tight, dense little body stocked with such inexhaustible quantities of shit was packed instead with Styrofoam peanuts. There's no other way to say this. I threw him halfway across the nursery. He landed with a dull clang against the edge of the stainless steel changing table. His head at a quizzical tilt, as if he were finally interested in something, he slid, in seeming slow motion, to the floor.¹³³

Eva knows she will pay the prize for what she has just done, and rushes with Kevin to the hospital. On the other hand, she cannot deny the mixture of revulsion as well as satisfaction and bliss about breaking Kevin's arm: “For two seconds I'd felt whole, and like Kevin Khatchadourian's real mother. I felt close to him. I felt like myself—my true, unexpurgated self—and I felt we were finally communicating.”¹³⁴ Kevin always had a communication barrier; he never expressed his feelings out loud until his imprisonment. Moreover, he seems to enjoy pushing Eva's patience into limits. As already mentioned, he invents a cover story of his “accident” for Franklin, but from the moment on, Eva feels psychically blackmailed. Supposing that Kevin really attempts to make something out of the domestic violence, then Kevin's ill self-indulgence may suggest that he prefers any of her manifestations of feelings than none at all. “I think he had experienced a closeness to me that he was reluctant to let go. Not only were we in this cover-up together, but during the very assault we were concealing, Kevin too may have felt whole ... For once I'd known myself for his mother.”¹³⁵

Kevin also accuses his teacher of unwanted sexual advances; however, the whole testimony appears to be false.

¹³² Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 206.

¹³³ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 229.

¹³⁴ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 232.

¹³⁵ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 238.

4.3. Aggression, violence and crime

This chapter is exclusively devoted to the portrayal of Kevin's alienation with respect to violence. Only to note down, in contrast to Kevin, Charlie is in his essence a loving creature who tries to subdue his aggression, and is altogether harmless. In comparison, Kevin communicates his aggression and violent nature more via his actions than words. The violence, aggression and hate in youth appear to be very shocking and rare, however, "Between 1985 and 1994, youth homicide rates increased in many parts of the world, especially among youths in the 10–24-year-old age bracket."¹³⁶ In the United States, there was a great increase in youth homicides involving guns: from over 70% to homicides of 77%.¹³⁷

In order to analyze Kevin's alienation, it is crucial to pin point his personality traits and changes accompanying his growing up as Eva describes it. Although Eva characterizes Kevin as "...nihilistic, morally destitute, depraved, degenerate, or debased..."¹³⁸ It ought to be clear that "Factors associated with the interpersonal relations of young people – with their family, friends and peers – can also strongly affect aggressive and violent behaviour and shape personality traits that, in turn, can contribute to violent behaviour."¹³⁹ As Kevin's alienation is primarily defined in terms of "meaninglessness," he sees no purpose in being interested in the world affairs, his family or other people and their activities. In addition, Eva notes that "...everything adults did also struck him as absurd."¹⁴⁰ From his early age, he has displayed certain apathy or indifference to the outside world. The sense of "meaninglessness" is not rare in child's perception. For instance in Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Jimmy has the same experience and attitude as Kevin has: "He never conceived a respect for the world, because he had begun with no idols that it had smashed."¹⁴¹ Eva's maternal instincts are tested in the early infancy with Kevin's crying fits lasting for hours which suddenly cease when Franklin comes home. Then, as a toddler, Kevin makes her feel uneasy with his deafening silence. His total apathy and disinterest

¹³⁶ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 26.

¹³⁷ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 27.

¹³⁸ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 291.

¹³⁹ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 184.

¹⁴¹ Stephen Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Short Fiction*, ed. Jayne Anne Phillips (New York: Bantam Books, 1986), 13.

does not change even in his preschool-age. Eva tries to arouse his interest in any kind of a play; she tries to engage him, but his lack of curiosity and preference in food, otherwise prevalent among small children of the same age, makes her life even more difficult. By the time he can speak, he refers to all kinds of activities, plays, opinions and food as “dumb” and “Idonlikedat.” In a kindergarten he also shows no interest in plays nor other children. Moreover, his convictions concerning “purposelessness” strengthen even more as he approaches adolescence. For example, Holden (the protagonist of Salinger’s novel *The Catcher in the Rye*) shares Kevin’s indifference concerning institutions and social conventions. Holden is often reminded that “Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.”¹⁴² However, he can see no point in “proper” education especially when he leaves fourth school; he says: “It was one of the worst schools I ever went to. It was full of phonies.”¹⁴³

The only things Kevin ever found at least worth noticing are his crossbow and his favorite book *Robin Hood*. Nonetheless, Eva assumes that he is fascinated by Robin Hood because he admires him as a sort of a hero who does not follow conventions and rules. About Kevin’s choice of a crossbow as a murder weapon Eva says: “Something about that arrow—the focus—its purposiveness, or sense of direction. Maybe he envies it. There’s a ferocity about Kevin at target practice. Otherwise, he can seem rather aimless.”¹⁴⁴ Maybe that is why he decided to kill so many people—to escape his feelings of uselessness (he finally has a purpose).

Kevin’s “normlessness” shows his lack of comprehension of common social values and accepted behavior set and treasured by the society. Also Jimmie (in Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*) “...considered himself above both of these classes. He was afraid of neither the devil nor the leader of society.”¹⁴⁵ Kevin’s choice to exhibit his atrocity beyond doubt manifests his normlessness in that respect that he is able to plan and realize a mass murder of his classmates and his teacher without a slightest hesitation. Kevin himself affirms that he feels no remorse: “I knew exactly what I was doing ... *And I’d do it again.*”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 7.

¹⁴³ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 151.

¹⁴⁴ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 391.

¹⁴⁵ Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Short Fiction*, 13.

¹⁴⁶ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 50.

During one of her visits in prison, Kevin unscrupulously reveals to Eva that not only his victims and location were a result of a long and careful planning, but also his choice of a date was deliberate. This also shows Kevin's intelligence, as for a fifteen-year-old boy, he researches how he can get away with the lowest penalty for the worst crime. He figures out that in order to avoid "full legal accountability" he must carry out his plan before he turns sixteen. Kevin not only refuses to recognize social values, but also institutions such as school and jurisdiction. He uses his wit to trick his parents as well as the legal system. "And there's a freedom in apathy, a wild, dizzying liberation on which you can almost get drunk. You can do anything. Ask Kevin."¹⁴⁷ He cunningly takes Prozac, an antidepressant, which may develop unwanted side effects—and thus it can lessen his punishment. Kevin is sentenced to seven years in prison; however, normally, he should have been punished with a death penalty or life imprisonment.¹⁴⁸

Eva ruminates on Kevin's "powerlessness" in another letter: "Though Kevin seemed to want practically nothing, I now realize that he was spiritually ravenous."¹⁴⁹ Kevin is not totally devoid of desires; he strives for fame and attention. Nonetheless, fame he has in his mind is beyond ordinary conception. It is sad that Eva did not realize sooner how much damage she and Franklin have done:

Parental behaviour and the family environment are central factors in the development of violent behaviour in young people. Poor monitoring and supervision of children by parents and the use of harsh, physical punishment to discipline children are strong predictors of violence during adolescence and adulthood.¹⁵⁰

Kevin yearns for fame that shocks and never lets go: he wants to be "special" and noticed. He finds a getaway from his "powerlessness" in committing a crime—a mass murder. One of the reasons may be directly linked to the feeling that his life is predestined by the society he lives in. Kevin's life is planned beforehand as his family is well off, so he is sure to be supported in his studies, etc. Kevin's teacher, who wanted to discuss with Eva why Kevin always looks as

¹⁴⁷ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 174.

¹⁴⁸ "Title 18 – Crimes and Criminal Procedure, Chapter 51, Section 1111: 2010 US Code: US Codes and Statutes: US Law: Justia," accessed April 1, 2015, <http://law.justia.com>.

¹⁴⁹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 302.

¹⁵⁰ Krug, *World report on violence and health*, 33.

if he is enraged inside at best illustrates and explains what might have bothered her son:

Maybe he's mad that this is as good as it gets. Your big house. His good school. I think it's very difficult for kids these days, in a way. The country's very prosperity has become a burden, a dead end. Everything works, doesn't it? At least if you're white and middle class. So it must often seem to young people that they're not needed. In a sense, it's as if there's nothing more to do. Except tear it apart.¹⁵¹

Mainly one thing remains to be clarified, thus the reason for murdering eleven people. It looks as if he revolts against everything that he finds mundane and constricting. What is more, he challenges the social norms and roles, his parents, and institutions as nothing seems to be dear to him. As Kevin always hated school, his choice of this institution for a mass murder, is obvious. This again demonstrates Kevin's cultural estrangement and normlessness as Eva says: "I can only assume that he discovered what I never wish to. That there is no barrier."¹⁵² I cannot agree more upon this point, as it is beyond comprehension how state can punish someone, who sees no value in life. In general, the concept of imprisonment is based on the prison sentence which may equal to being depraved of the freedom. Nonetheless, justice cannot touch Kevin, simply because he does not care. Eva wonders how dreadfully he must have felt, being excluded: "Having never seen the point—of anything—he must feel so brutally left out."¹⁵³ For a while, within his jail sentence, Kevin gives the impression he finally finds contentment to say "a family." He is famous now; his fellow prisoners will worship him till they shift to other more recent "school massacre stars."

4.4. Kinship and life in communities

This chapter is devoted to Charlie's social alienation, which will be followed with the examination of the influence of social norms and pressure on Eva, and consequently on Kevin.

Charlie's victimization, as well as the impact of the death of Helen and Michael (the only people who seemed to communicate with him on daily basis) have profoundly affected Charlie's development, and laid a foundation for Charlie's "social alienation."

¹⁵¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 391.

¹⁵² Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 443.

¹⁵³ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 303.

Being more and more withdrawn, he finds it extremely hard to befriend someone. Besides, he also has low self-esteem, and his strange behavior does not help him to blend in. His loneliness makes him very desperate—taking into account that he needs to talk to his deceased aunt over her grave, and he even invents whole conversations with his absent friends while driving in a car. In addition, except for having a reputation of “the introverted weepy weirdo who beat up his bully,” he is also the teacher’s “pet.” On top of that, being a nerd does not exactly raise him on the social scale in the eyes of other students. What is more, Charlie is reminded of his unpopularity not only by his peers in the school corridors, but also by his sister: “You’re a freak, you know that? You’ve always been a freak. Everyone says so. They always have.”¹⁵⁴ Charlie is not the only protagonist who feels excluded from the social stratification. Also Holden, (the protagonist of Salinger’s novel *The Catcher in the Rye*) feels that he does not belong anywhere, because he never really shows much interest in anything. Holden rather seeks company of people whom he considers to be “phonies” in order not to be so lonesome. Holden’s alienation originates in his confrontation with the reality full of disillusion and disappointment. Moreover, his encounter with death and sexual abuse makes him miserable as he says: “I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead.”¹⁵⁵ As Han suggests: “When this vision of his self-made society is finally broken in his encounter with the world of reality, the adolescent must compromise or painfully withdraw from the world of reality.”¹⁵⁶

However, Charlie is trying really hard to participate. Finally, he is rewarded with friends who accept his true self; moreover, they are happy to have someone who is trustworthy, and in hard times, proves to be a real friend. More importantly, it works the other way round, especially when Sam and Bill attempt to show Charlie the way out of his isolation. They advise him to make an effort to live in a present moment; not only to witness life pass by and eventually feel bad about it. Bill notices Charlie for his intelligence; however, it does not escape his attention that Charlie is rather satisfied with his role of a wishful thinker. Bill tries to

¹⁵⁴ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 28.

¹⁵⁵ Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, 42.

¹⁵⁶ Xiaomei Han, “A study on the painful transition of adolescent in J. D. Salinger’s writing,” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 4.11 (2014): 2384+, *Literature Resource Center*, accessed 5 April, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

explain what can be wrong with him: “It’s just that sometimes people use thought to not participate in life.”¹⁵⁷ Also Sam tries to enlighten Charlie: “You can’t just sit there and put everybody’s lives ahead of yours and think that counts as love. You just can’t. You have to do things.”¹⁵⁸ She mainly refers to Charlie’s acting as if nothing is under his power. This may again has its cause in the guilt and “powerlessness” generated by his aunt taking advantage of his innocence and defenselessness.

Surprisingly, Charlie does not allow the readers to dwell on “the victim versus villain verdict:”

It’s like if I blamed my aunt Helen, I would have to blame her dad for hitting her and the friend of the family that fooled around with her when she was little. And the person that fooled around with him. And God for not stopping all this and things that are much worse. And I did do that for a while, but then I just couldn’t anymore. Because it wasn’t going anywhere. Because it wasn’t the point. I’m not the way I am because of what I dreamt and remembered about my aunt Helen. That’s what I figured out when things got quiet. And I think that’s very important to know. It made things feel clear and together. Don’t get me wrong. I know what happened was important. And I needed to remember it.¹⁵⁹

In spite of Helen’s deplorable deed, he is incapable of hatred and completely forgives her. He still feels compassionate toward her, because he understands what it feels like to be an outcast, and he cannot blame her for a want to have somebody to love.

Charlie, as well as Helen, are both alienated, owing to the direct influence of the environment they were brought up in. Charlie respects and loves his family, but sometimes he feels like talking to someone is useless, because they are preoccupied with their private matters. His father is tired from work, his mother is busy with household chores, and Charlie’s siblings are in love, so they treasure the time for their lovers. Besides, his parents are not used to show their affection so often and overtly as Charlie would probably appreciate. Nevertheless, they behave nicely and care for each other. The fault is thus to be found in his aunt’s transgression. It is essential to reconsider her action as a direct influence of the traumatic childhood abuse and failure of her own parents. Nonetheless, in favor of everyone, Charlie realizes that it is pointless to be drawn in sorrow and hatred, so

¹⁵⁷ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 214.

¹⁵⁹ Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 228.

he has a new goal: to move on—and participate in life. To offer some comparison, also in Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*: "Maggie was anxious for a friend to whom she could talk about Pete. ... At home, she found her mother often drunk and always raving."¹⁶⁰ Maggie, as well as Charlie, understand that their villains are also victims: "It seems that the world had treated this woman very badly, and she took a deep revenge upon such portions of it as came within her reach."¹⁶¹

The following citation depicts the scene after Charlie finished reading a poem (a suicide note of some unknown author) he was given by Michael. "Sam and Patrick looked at me. And I looked at them. And I think they knew. Not anything specific really. They just knew. And I think that's all you can ever ask from a friend."¹⁶² Charlie finally finds someone who understands his feelings of loneliness and despair that sometimes seem unbearable. Who else can understand Charlie more than Patrick, who is, by the prejudice, embedded in the society as "different" for being gay. Also Sam, due to being molested as a small girl, who later behaved wildly not knowing her own value, understood him. All in all, together, they create their own "community of outcasts" who finally belong somewhere.

To turn the attention to another analysis, inevitably to Kevin's alienation with its causes and impacts is to be founded on his mother's alienation, i.e. Eva's. Although Eva shows no particular interest in children, as she approaches her thirty-seventh birthday, she decides to give motherhood a try. She loves her husband too much to rob him of the opportunity to become a father. What is more, Eva is subconsciously influenced by the pressure of social norms and customs, and the historically embedded belief that woman's main role is to become a mother. Friedan confirms that it was truly believed that the woman's only role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers; "Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity."¹⁶³ Eva also says: "There's something nihilistic about not having children, Franklin. As if you don't believe in the whole human *thing*. If everyone followed our lead, the species would

¹⁶⁰ Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Short Fiction*, 26.

¹⁶¹ Crane, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and Other Short Fiction*, 26.

¹⁶² Chbosky, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, 71.

¹⁶³ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 11.

disappear in a hundred years.”¹⁶⁴ Eva sounds as if she felt guilty about considering a childless marriage, and senses her social obligation to stick with the beliefs that are considered “normal” and “healthy” by the society she lives in. She describes her feelings about motherhood: “...crossing the threshold of motherhood, suddenly you become social property, the animate equivalent of a public park.”¹⁶⁵ It is as if Eva was in harmony with Rich’s view rather than with generally held views or Franklin’s:

Women who refuse to become mothers are not merely emotionally suspect, but are dangerous. Not only do they refuse to continue the species; they also deprive society of its emotional leaven—the suffering of the mother.¹⁶⁶

She also connects Kevin with her loss of independence. She has to abandon her business trips, traveling and eventually her work and career. She is now supposed to be at home, to take care of him and her husband, and what is more, to live an “...alien life as a full-time suburban mother.”¹⁶⁷ Eva becomes alienated because she is denied of the self-realization and independence in comparison with her former life. Friedan easily explains Eva’s alienation: “The problem is always being the children’s mommy, or the minister’s wife and never being myself.”¹⁶⁸ Eva’s loneliness and emotional deprivation connected to post-partum depression worsens after Kevin’s birth. Moreover, she lacks support of her husband who shows clearly his preference for his son. As a result, her dissatisfaction projects into her relationship with Kevin.

It is evident that Eva initiated Kevin’s alienation since his early childhood as their relationship was influenced by her mental and emotional state. Also neglect and abuse of her son definitely affected Kevin’s development. Without any doubt, Eva pays Kevin an attention; however, she often says her son is very smart for his age. Whether it is her intonation, body language or physical abuse, Kevin sees her pretense and accuses Eva: “You never wanted to have me, did you?”¹⁶⁹ Nonetheless, Eva is not the only one to blame; Franklin has also a sense of guilt. He failed as an authority for Kevin because of his overly liberal attitude, affection,

¹⁶⁴ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 27.

¹⁶⁵ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 62.

¹⁶⁶ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 169.

¹⁶⁷ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 181.

¹⁶⁸ Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 23.

¹⁶⁹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 67.

and blind trustworthiness. He always sided with Kevin against Eva. Maybe if he tried to hear his wife out and did not forbid her to “talk about Kevin,” there would be a chance that he and Celia could have lived. Despite all Franklin’s efforts to have an ideal happy family, he is ironically the one who sets Kevin an example how to destroy it: “To be really famous in this country, you’ve got to kill somebody.”¹⁷⁰

Eva is used to Kevin’s little sabotages, however, after Celia loses her eye thanks to Kevin’s babysitting and when the career of the teacher is destroyed, Eva cries out all she was forbidden. Franklin, either too blind or reluctant to admit that his son is beyond control, offers a solution—a divorce.

The divorce of his parents is probably the trigger that only reassured Kevin about the murderous plan. Eva recollects: “In retrospect, I can only assume that it was bad enough living with a woman who was cold, suspicious, resentful, accusatory, and aloof. Only one eventuality must have seemed worse, and that was living with you, Franklin. Getting stuck with Dad. Getting stuck with Dad the Dupe.”¹⁷¹ Eva makes a fair point here; however, I venture to disagree. It is a common knowledge that love is often accompanied with jealousy and hatred. It seems that unrequited love awoken in Kevin is the worst: Kevin loves his mother and desperately longs for her affection. His only decoration in his prison cell tells a lot about Kevin’s feelings toward his mother. Eva notes the photograph pinned above his bed: “Badly creased from having been folded small enough to fit in a pocket or wallet, it was a photograph of me.”¹⁷² With the threat of divorce, he probably decides to carry out his plan since he knows his mother is not going to take him into custody. This is what ails him, the knowledge that she would finally dispose of the son she never loved and wanted, while she would be free with her angelic Celia.

Therefore, one of the reasons to commit a mass murder is to punish her for not loving him. He intentionally deprives her of everything she loves and what means much to her: a flawless daughter and a beloved husband. Finally, she loses her company, house, a position in the society, because of the trial expenses. Eva is left with nothing but her solitude and guilt.

¹⁷⁰ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 275.

¹⁷¹ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 410.

¹⁷² Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 406.

Alike Charlie, Kevin as well as Eva eventually see no point in hatred or revenge. Eva experiences a closure; she writes Franklin her last letter and bids him farewell. She feels happy with the picture of Celia with her father in Heaven or wherever they are. Eva confesses all she kept in secret. Above all, she has an answer to the big question: Was she the one to blame for what Kevin did? She concludes: “The truth is, if I decided I was innocent, or I decided I was guilty, what difference would it make? If I arrived at the right answer, would you come home?”¹⁷³ Anyway, Eva pays the prize; the man she loved and the dream-of daughter are gone. “*Home* is precisely what Kevin has taken from me. And since I have been exiled to this rarefied class, the mother of one of those ‘Columbine boys,’ Kevin has turned me into a foreigner again, in my own country.”¹⁷⁴ Eva acknowledges that she no longer feels as a rightful member of the society, and her alien life depresses her.

The only solution is to go on and to try to forgive herself and her son. Kevin probably shares Eva’s views as he submits his trophy (Celia’s prosthetic eye) in an act of reconciliation with his mother. They also apologize to each other. With Kevin leaving from juvenile to an adult facility, Eva bids Kevin farewell, with an assurance that she will see him next week. Despite all he did, Eva finally feels as his mother, and is probably the only one who will be there for him when he returns home. Although she forgives Kevin, she will probably never be able to forget because as Rich reminds “... it is still assumed that the mother is “with the child.” It is she, finally, who is held accountable for her children’s health, the clothes they wear, their behavior at school, their intelligence and general development.”¹⁷⁵ Therefore, even if Eva would forget and move on, the unforgiving society will remember all the injustice.

From my point of view, I believe that present-day demands on adolescents are enormous; they are under continual pressure to live up to someone’s expectations as successful members of the family and society. What is more, they are often pushed to blend in with the crowd. Those who are not able to achieve the inclusion into the mainstream are whereupon deviating from the norm – with being looked down on with contempt. This pressure of the society shapes the lives

¹⁷³ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 467.

¹⁷⁴ Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*, 53.

¹⁷⁵ Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, 53.

of our protagonists, and it also forces them to find a safer place in their inner world. As for Charlie, I understand that the trauma he underwent must have left the damage in his personality that can be hardly healed. Therefore, as a protection, he subconsciously alienates himself from the society and his family. On the other hand, no matter how monstrous, disapproving and unforgivable Kevin's maniacal behavior and deeds are, acknowledging his family background, I highly pity Kevin's family status: the unloved, unwanted and unaccepted son. His behavior is thus directly connected with the relationship with his mother Eva. Her position of a victim of social conventions forces her to become a mother, even if she is not prepared for such a role; this is the initiation of the alienation process.

Personally, I am fully aware of the enormous influence and the striking impact that my family background, upbringing, education and social conventions had on the shaping of my personality and person I am today. All things considered, I think that children, sensible and above all sensitive human beings, are often drawn into isolation, since the great portion of evil is sadly caused by following the society norms, and in the worst case, by being under the power and will of the people closest to their heart.

Conclusion

The protagonists of the novels *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *We Need to Talk about Kevin* seem to be afflicted by the lack of communication and understanding. Charlie as well as Kevin contend with feelings of loneliness; they feel excluded from their friends, family, and society in general. What is more, they desperately strive to discover their true identity, rightful place in the society, and wish to get on well with other people. Nonetheless, both of them fail, and thus become alienated.

The analysis proves that Charlie as well as Kevin display undeniable signs of alienation, however, the thesis tries to highlight that their estrangement differs depending on the type of “alienation.” Charlie, due to his victimization as a child, suffers from “post-traumatic stress” and “dissociative disorders,” inevitably leading to his “self-estrangement.” As a result, Charlie with his “atypical behavior,” preoccupied with feelings of detachment from himself, is unsure of the social discourse, and is too timid to socialize owing to the fear of mockery and failure. That is why Charlie becomes more and more “socially alienated.” On the contrary, Kevin’s alienation has its cause predominantly in his apathy and deprivation due to his “powerlessness.” Kevin cannot acknowledge the prospect of being an average American leading a mundane suburban life with his big family and solid work to repay his mortgage. Furthermore, Kevin’s “purposelessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and cultural estrangement” is best portrayed in his lethargy, deteriorated interpersonal relationships, and above all, in his rebellion against state and educational institutions.

Protagonists’ “alienation” may be somewhat perceived as their own failure to adapt to the reality they live in. The unsuccessful quest for identity and integration into society makes them even more depressed and withdrawn. Both protagonists have to deal with the consequences of the failure in communication, which in its essence contributes greatly to the protagonists’ alienation. Hence Kevin never even attempts to communicate his concerns, worries or discontentment to anyone. He is audacious enough to commit a cold blood murder of eleven people. On top of that, he seems to be too proud and feels uneasy to directly confront his own mother with concerns about their cold, love-hate relationship or his unfulfilled desires. He prefers to battle with Eva in silence and this way punishes her for her

transgressions. He is too blinded by his inferiority complex and hatred to see that he hurts mainly himself. Contrarily to Kevin's attitude, Eva tries to break the barrier of oppressive silence and endeavors to make their relationship stronger. However, she fails in getting to know "the stranger" (as she calls her son), because she discusses only trivial matters of no importance to Kevin. She does not dare to ask Kevin about his personal feelings as she is afraid of his affirmation of being "a bad mother." Only after Kevin's imprisonment are they able to say the unutterable. They are aware that they have nothing to lose as the idea of "a healthy mother-son relationship" has been scattered forever. Similarly, Charlie is also unable to communicate his feelings out loud. He longs for companionship; however, even if he befriends Sam and Patrick, he still prefers to continue in writing the confession letters to an anonymous recipient rather than to share "secrets" with his friends. He deprives himself of the opportunity to discuss his worries, feelings of displacement and loneliness in a face to face interaction. To defend Charlie's restraint, it can be pointed out that he is probably worried to scare his new friends away with his horrifying history.

The thesis' analysis reveals and stresses that both protagonists are actually the "victims." Their bringing up and development was irretrievably marked by the negative, harmful and unstimulating environment that initiated their alienation. Charlie, as a victim of sexual abuse, is affected (probably forever) with low self-esteem and distrust in intimacy. For example, he is unable to communicate his feelings and ask for help despite being on the verge of his mental breakdown. Charlie's molestation evokes in him tenacious guilt. He thus supposes it normal to suffer in silence, just as he did as a child. Not only his molestation leads to severe clinical conditions and alienation, but the display of the symptoms makes it harder for him to be socially accepted since he is acting "weird." Alike Charlie, Kevin is abused by a close relative, his mother, Eva. The abuse is not only physical, but also psychical. Right from the infancy, Kevin is exposed to his mother's coldness, aversion, and emotional indifference, which has deeply hurt his feelings. Eva's attitude toward motherhood irreversibly reflects upon Kevin's upbringing and mental development. Kevin's abuse, neglect and lack of mother love, may be considered as the most dominant factors that significantly contributed to his withdrawal. With Eva's affection and ardent devotion to her second child, so

much “wanted” Celia, Kevin’s unsound development and maturing degenerates even more.

Taking into consideration the external factors that, to a considerable extent, accounted for the initiation and intensification of “alienation,” I dare to say that Charlie and Kevin are not the only “victims.” Helen and Eva, boys’ abusers, can be viewed as victims as well. It is obvious that the influence of the environment the protagonists were brought up in shaped their personalities. It would be too easy to blame Charlie’s Aunt Helen for her despicable transgression against morality without considering her own past. As already mentioned in the thesis, people who were, as children, victims of child abuse are later prone to become the abusers themselves. Helen’s family history and experience can thus also be pitied; for being a victim of her abusive father and of a close family member. Similarly, Eva should not be blindly judged as “a bad mother” who is responsible for all her son’s actions. As Friedan and Rich affirm, as a mother, Eva faces the embedded societal stereotypes and prejudices: she is supposed to be the uncomplaining, always perfect, ideal mother and wife, suppressing all her other needs and desires. As the analysis proves, Eva becomes alienated due to the lack of her fulfillment in personal and professional growth. Moreover, she feels to be pushed by her husband and the society to unwillingly become a mother. Her failure in a role of “a happy mother,” considered as a betrayal and disappointment in the eyes of her son and husband, brings her only more suffering.

Charlie as well as Kevin strive to cope with alienation in their own way. While Charlie longs to be just “a normal child” in the eyes of his family, peers and other people, Kevin desires to be noticed, different and “special.” Nonetheless, despite their diverse ways of motivation and realization, both boys needed the same things – love, understanding, to belong somewhere. Charlie does his best to be ordinary, whereas Kevin searches the ways to escape the mundane routine and predestined life. Charlie’s obscure behavior deprives him of the possibility to be popular, loved, and admired. He seeks solace in his letters that serve him as a means of dealing with his trauma, and as a way how to find his identity and peace. On the other hand, Kevin chooses a mass murder as a solution to free himself from his “powerlessness” and “purposelessness” that constricts his life. His detestable crime gave a way to manifest his disrespect for social values, scorn

for any kind of institution, as well as it was meant as a message for his mother to communicate his feelings toward her.

The consequences of the protagonists' deeds considerably differ. Luckily for Charlie, he overcomes his fears, and with the help of professional care, his friends and family, he ventures to face and solve the causes of his alienation. He makes an effort to get over his past traumas and gives himself a chance to be finally participating in life. In comparison, Kevin pushed the limits beyond the respect for human life. Kevin's endeavor to free himself from his alienation and hunger for revenge results in the disintegration and collapse of a great number of families. Many parents will never see their children come home because of "the Thursday." What is more, he gave rise to Eva's alienation. She will never restore her social position, but what is worse, she will never hug her daughter and kiss her husband again. Too late Kevin realizes that his deed only deteriorated and intensified his alienation. The ironical fact is that the only one person who will await him outside the prison will be his mother, Eva.

As both novels very accurately depict the symptoms of the clinical conditions, such as the post-partum depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative conditions, etc., the analysis of the protagonists' alienation with due consideration of these clinical conditions may be easily provided.

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá odcizením dětských protagonistů v románech *Ten, kdo stojí v koutě* od Stephena Chboského a *Musíme si promluvit o Kevinovi* od Lionel Shriverové. Cílem práce je popsat odcizení hlavních protagonistů a analyzovat možné příčiny, které toto odcizení způsobily nebo se na něm významně podílely. Z tohoto důvodu jsme brali v potaz i vnější a mezilidské faktory, zejména pak jejich vliv na dospívání a vývoj protagonistů. Mezi tyto faktory patří kulturní a společenské zázemí. Zvláštní pozornost je věnována navíc roli rodičovství.

Práce se sestává ze čtyř hlavních kapitol spadajících do částí teoretické a do samotné analýzy. První kapitola je věnovaná biografiím obou autorů, zvláště pak jejich osobním motivům a zkušenostem, které je ovlivnily při psaní románů.

Druhá kapitola obsahuje základní terminologii týkající se zejména definování odcizení (alienation). Odcizení neboli alienace je termín zastřešující širokou škálu významů. S ohledem na zaměření této práce se jedná zejména o pocity bezmocnosti (powerlessness), bezvýznamnosti/bezúčelnosti (meaninglessness/purposelessness), ale také o beznormovost (normlessness), kulturní odcizení (cultural estrangement), sociální izolaci (social alienation) a sebeodcizení (self-estrangement). Druhá kapitola mimoto obsahuje i stručnou etymologii termínu odcizení (alienation). Další podkapitoly zahrnují základní terminologii týkající se násilí, dětského zneužívání a týrání spolu s terminologií zabývající se vlivem traumatických prožitků na paměť a s tím souvisejícím posttraumatickým stresem. V neposlední řadě zmiňujeme také poporodní depresi.

V analytické části práce se zabýváme již samotnou analýzou knih a srovnáním obou protagonistů. Třetí kapitola nabízí stručný obsah děje obou románů. Mimo to se zaobírá i analýzou hlavních motivů, témat a symbolů. Jedním z hlavních témat spojující oba romány je, jak už bylo zmíněno, samotné odcizení protagonistů. Oba procházejí složitým obdobím dospívání a oba spojuje zejména touha po komunikaci, lásce a porozumění.

Čtvrtá kapitola je věnována samotné komparativní analýze odcizení obou protagonistů s ohledem na další postavy, jejichž analýza poskytuje bližší pochopení a nahlédnutí do smýšlení hlavních postav. Charlie, protagonista románu *Ten, kdo stojí v koutě*, stejně tak jako Kevin, protagonista románu *Musíme*

si promluvit o Kevinovi, jeví jasné známky „odcizení“. Jejich odcizení se ovšem, co se týče projevů a druhů, liší. Charlie byl v dětství sexuálně zneužíván jeho tetou Helen. Toto potlačené trauma mělo za následek posttraumatický stres a doprovodné disociativní poruchy, které ve svém důsledku zapříčinily jeho „sebeodcizení“. Charlie je jako oběť sexuálního zneužívání sužován pocity osamělosti, méněcennosti, ale také nízkým sebevědomím, což mu znemožňuje začlenění do společnosti. Co víc, jeho atypické chování (přecitlivělost, záchvaty pláče a hněvu) vyúsťuje v „sociální odcizení“ a tedy vyloučení ze společnosti.

Kevin již od mládí projevuje naprostý nezájem o okolní dění. Jeho apatie, lhůsteknost a deprese souvisí s pocity „bezmocnosti a bezvýznamnosti“. Jako východisko z této situace volí sérií záškodnických přestupků vedoucích až k masové vraždě jedenácti lidí, včetně svého otce a mladší sestry. Tyto činy poukazují na jeho nepochopení základních morálních a společenských norem, neúctu k autoritám a dalším lidem a obecně zdůrazňuje jeho opovržení státními institucemi.

Oba protagonisté se zoufale snaží najít uznání a své místo ve společnosti. Jejich neschopnost zbavit se pocitů spojených s odcizením má za následek pouze prohloubení jejich deprese a odcizení. Hlavním problémem obou protagonistů se zdá být selhání komunikace jak s okolím, tak s rodinnými příslušníky.

Tato práce se snaží zdůraznit, že oba protagonisté jsou ve své podstatě „oběti“, ať už mezilidských vztahů či neméně podstatných vnějších vlivů. Jejich dospívání a vývoj byly nenávratně poznamenány negativními interpersonálními vlivy, spojenými zejména s blízkými rodinnými příslušníky či rodiči osobně. Sexuální zneužívání se na Charliem podepsalo především nízkým sebevědomím, nedůvěřivostí a nepochopností požádat někoho o pomoc, a to i v situacích, kdy se pohybuje na pokraji psychického zhroucení. Také Kevin je obětí fyzického násilí, a to ze strany své matky Evy, která nikdy neprojevovala zájem o to, stát se matkou. Eva bohužel shledává mateřství zklamáním, její nespokojenost spolu s následky poporodní deprese se odrážejí na vztahu s jejím synem. A je to právě tento chladný vztah, který pouze podněcuje v Kevinovi zášť a touhu po odplatě.

Oba protagonisté se snaží vypořádat se s odcizením různými způsoby. Charlie se za pomocí svých přátel, rodiny a profesionálů snaží vyřešit své traumatické zážitky z dětství. Naštěstí se mu podaří vyrovnat se s minulostí a znova, a tentokrát aktivně, se pokouší začlenit do společnosti. Na druhou stranu Kevin se

rozhodne vymanit ze své apatie plánovanou masovou vraždou. Jeho čin má za následek nejen jeho trvalé vyloučení ze společnosti, potrestání matky, která ho nemilovala, ale také zintenzivnění jeho odcizení.

Práce zohledňuje také externí vlivy, konkrétně kulturní a společenské, které měly za následek také Evino odcizení. Eva čelí předsudkům, které ji jako ženu nutí stát se matkou. Eva se tedy pod tlakem společnosti a svého partnera nedobrovolně matkou stává. Její neschopnost seberealizace a prohlubující se poporodní deprese však v důsledku vyústí v Evino odcizení. Samotný Kevinův skutek ji nakonec připraví nejen o jejího manžela, dceru a domov, ale i o místo ve společnosti, které jako „špatná matka“ ztrácí.

Závěr práce poté uzavírá osudy protagonistů (Kevina, Charlieho, ale Helen a Evy) zhodnocením veškerých kritérií, které vedly k jejich odcizení. Zjednodušeně lze říct, že všichni jsou svým způsobem oběti odcizení vlivem společnosti, špatného rodinného zázemí a prostředí, ve kterém vyrůstali.

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Annotation

The bachelor thesis is concerned with the children's alienation in the novels *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky and *We Need to talk about Kevin* by Lionel Shriver. The main aim of the thesis is to portray the protagonists' alienation and to analyze the aspects that caused or influenced their alienation. Furthermore, external and interpersonal factors, such as cultural and social background, and above all, the role of parenthood, are also taken into account, since they significantly influence the protagonists' development. The thesis also takes into consideration the works related to children's alienation and abuse: Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Jerome David Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, and *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as an Experience and Institution* by Adrienne Rich. The theoretical part comprises of the authors' biographies along with their motivations and influences concerning the writing of the novels. Another chapter contains the terminology related to alienation, abuse and violence against children. The practical part also pays attention to the thorough analysis of the protagonists' alienation as well as to investigation of possible causes and consequences of such alienation. Furthermore, it includes the synopses of both novels with their main motifs, themes and symbols.

KEY WORDS:

Children's alienation, child and sexual abuse, violence, Kevin, Charlie, mother, love, childhood, deprivation

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce pojednává o odcizení adolescentních protagonistů v románech *Ten, kdo stojí v koutě* od Stephena Chboského a *Musíme si promluvit o Kevinovi* od Lionel Shriverové. Hlavním cílem této práce je popis odcizení hlavních protagonistů a analýza aspektů, které odcizení zapříčinily nebo ovlivnily. Kromě toho práce zohledňuje vnější a mezilidské faktory, které značně ovlivnily vývoj obou protagonistů. V potaz je bráno zejména kulturní a společenské zázemí, a především rodičovství je připisována důležitá role. Tato práce také bere v úvahu díla vztahující se k odcizení a zneužívání dětí, jako jsou například: *Maggie, dítě ulice* od Stephena Cranea, *Kdo chytá v žitě* od Jerome David Salingera, *Ženská mystika* od Betty Friedanové, a *Z ženy zrozená – Mateřství jako zkušenost a instituce* od Adrienne Richové. Teoretická část práce obsahuje životopisy obou autorů a motivy, které je ovlivnily při psaní těchto románů. Další součástí je terminologie týkající se odcizení, zneužívání, a násilí na dětech. Praktická část se zabývá důkladnou analýzou odcizení protagonistů spolu s vylíčením možných příčin a následných projevů. V této části práce se také nachází shrnutí děje obou děl spolu s jejich hlavními motivy, tématy a symboly.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA:

Odcizení dětských adolescentů, sexuální zneužívání dětí, násilí, Kevin, Charlie, matka, láska, strádání v dětství

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- Appendix A: Stephen Crane
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- Appendix C: Adrienne Rich
- Appendix D: Jerome David Salinger
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Appendix A: Stephen Crane¹⁷⁶

An American writer Stephen Crane was born on November 1, 1871 in Newark, New Jersey, to Jonathan Townley and Mary Helen Crane. In 1890, he attended Lafayette College, and in 1891 also Syracuse University. Nonetheless, he never finished his studies since he decided that becoming a fulltime writer is a better value of time. Crane is known as a prolific and successful short story writer, novelist, poet, historian and also a journalist. Stephen Crane is considered to be one of the first and most important Naturalists as his works are very realistic depictions of psychological states of mind; especially his novel *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War* (1895). Crane was well acquainted with the life of the poor, and in his novella *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) he was therefore able to depict the life conditions in the slums. In 1897, he moved to London with Cora Taylor, where he befriended with Herbert George Wells, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. Stephen Crane died due to his deteriorated health and tuberculosis in June 5, 1900, in Germany, aged twenty-eight. He is buried at Hillside, New Jersey.

Stephen Crane's collections of short stories include: *The Open Boat, and Other Tales of Adventure* (1898), *The Monster, and Other Stories* (1899), *Last Words* (1902) and many others. The popular novella *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* was first published in 1893, under his pseudonym Johnston Smith. In 1895, followed the novel *The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War*, *George's Mother* (1896), *The Third Violet* (1897), *Active Service* (1899) and *The O' Ruddy* (1903). Crane is also the author of poetry collections *The Black Riders, and Other Lines* (1895), and *War Is Kind* (1899).

Appendix B: Betty Friedan¹⁷⁷

An American feminist, Betty Friedan, was born on February 4, 1921 in Peoria, Illinois. Friedan was a daughter of Harry and Miriam Goldstein. She married a theater producer Carl Friedan in 1947. Nonetheless, in 1969 they got divorced. They had two sons, Daniel and Jonathan, and a daughter Emily. Friedan was educated at Smith College (1942). She also studied at University of California,

¹⁷⁶ "Stephen Crane," *Contemporary Authors Online*, (Detroit: Gale, 2000), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

¹⁷⁷ "Betty Friedan," *Contemporary Authors Online*, (Detroit: Gale, 2007), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

Berkeley, University of Iowa, and in Esalen Institute. Betty Friedan was a feminist writer, and lecturer who was politically engaged especially in foundation of the National Organization for Women. Friedan also lobbied for the Equal Rights Amendment and legalization of abortion, and she was an active member of many other organizations. Her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) secured her the prominence among the feminists as its concern was the role of the myth of the domestication of women in their lives. On the other hand, in *The Fountain of Age* (1993), Friedan focuses on ageing. She obtained many awards: Wilhelmina Drucker Prize for contribution to emancipation of men and women (1971), Humanist of the Year award (1975), Eleanor Roosevelt Leadership Award (1989) and many others. Friedan died of heart failure in February 4, 2006 in Washington, DC.

Friedan is notable for the writings such as: *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (1976), *The Second Stage* (1981), *The Fountain of Age* (1993), *Beyond Gender: The New Politics of Work and Family* (1997), *Life So Far* (2000).

Appendix C: Adrienne Rich¹⁷⁸

An American poet, Adrienne Cecile Rich, was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 16, 1926. She was born into a family of Arnold Rice, who worked as a physician, and a musician Helen Elizabeth Rich. In 1953, Rich married an economist Alfred Haskell Conrad who died in 1970. Rich then continued living with Michelle Cliff who worked as a writer and editor. She was a member of various associations, e.g. Modern Language Association (1985), American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Writers Union etc. She was educated at Radcliffe College, A.B. (1951). Adriane Rich was a famous and renowned poet, writer, lecturer, and feminist. She died in Santa Cruz, California on March 27, 2012.

For her writing she received a number of awards such as the following: for *A Change of World* Yale series Younger Poets Award (1951); National Book Award (1974) for *Diving into the Wreck: Poems, 1971-1972*, and Medal for Distinguished Contribution, National Book Foundation (2006).

¹⁷⁸ "Adrienne Rich," *Contemporary Authors Online*, (Detroit: Gale, 2013), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 19, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

Her works of poetry include: *A Change of World* (1951), *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems, 1954-1962* (1963), *Diving into the Wreck: Poems, 1971-1972* (1973), *Selected Poems, 1950-1995* (1996), *Tonight No Poetry Will Serve: Poems, 2007-2010* (2011) and many others. She is also an author of a pamphlet *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* (1980), the prose *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution* (1986), *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected prose, 1979-1986* (1986), *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1996-2008*, (2009) etc.

Appendix D: Jerome David Salinger¹⁷⁹

Jerome David Salinger was an American novelist born on January 1, 1919 in New York, NY. He was a son of Sol and Miriam Salinger. Salinger was married twice. Nevertheless, both marriages ended up in a divorce. With his second wife, Claire, he had two children, a son Matthew, and a daughter Margaret Ann. He graduated from Valley Forge Military Academy in 1936, and also attended New York University, Ursinus College, and Columbia University. Salinger also served in the United States Army as a staff sergeant between the years 1942 to 1946. He was awarded with five battle stars. Salinger is recognized as a very popular writer of short stories, a contributor to the periodicals such as *Saturday Evening Post*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's* and *Collier's*.

Salinger is best known for the novel *The Cather in the Rye* which brought him the greatest success. Nevertheless, as an author, he was a source of mystery because after the successful acceptance of this novel, he became solitary (avoided attention from the public and did not participate in the critical discourse). For such behavior and his obsession with the Glass family themes, he was frequently criticized. Nonetheless, he remains very popular and widely read thanks to his novel *The Cather in the Rye*. Salinger died on January 27, 2010 in Cornish, New Hampshire.

Salinger's most famous works are *Nine Stories* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (two short stories compiled in a book in 1961), *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters; and Seymour: An Introduction* (1963), *The Complete Uncollected Short Stories of*

¹⁷⁹ "Jerome David Salinger," *Contemporary Authors Online*, (Detroit: Gale, 2011), *Literature Resource Center*, accessed February 18, 2015, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

J.D. Salinger (1974), and the novella *Hapworth 16, 1924* (1997), and the coming-of-age novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (2001).

Appendix E: Stephen Chbosky's name

As Stephen Chbosky is often asked about the pronunciation of his surname, on the webpage *TeachingBooks.net*, which is concerned with audio names pronunciation, he explains the origin and story behind his unusual surname. When a son was born to his grandfather and grandmother, they decided to remove all the vowels from the surname as his grandmother found it too long and also wanted it to sound more American-like. He stresses that his full name, Stephen Chbosky, was the name of his grandfather, and it is personally very significant for him as he is proud that his book carries his name.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ “Stephen Chbosky Audio Name Pronunciation,” *TeachingBooks.net*, accessed February 15, 2015, <http://www.teachingbooks.net>.

List of Abbreviations

A.B.	Bachelor of Arts
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
LSD	Lysergic acid diethylamide
M*A*S*H	Mobile Army Surgical Hospital
M.F.A.	Master of Fine Arts
PPD	Post-partum Depression
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder