

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI

Pedagogická fakulta

Katedra anglického jazyka

Chuck Palahniuk and Violence in His Books

Bakalářská práce

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Olomouc, 2015

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně, s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

V Olomouci, dne 20. 4. 2015

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Vlastnoruční podpis

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mgr. Andrea Hoffmannová, Ph.D. for all her advice, her willingness to help me and for her patience with me and my work.

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the element of violence in the works of an American writer Chuck Palahniuk. It is notionally divided into two parts – the first one is concerned with the concept of violence and psychological theories connected with it, and sociocultural and personal aspects which could have influenced Palahniuk in his writing on this topic. The second part is dedicated to the analysis of three of his books – *Fight Club*, *Lullaby* and *Haunted*. In each of these a different kind of violence is described, so each of the analysis deals with a different theory, nevertheless the thesis tries to prove that Palahniuk's work perceives the phenomenon of violence in the society as unhealthy and does not encourage people to succumb to it.

Introduction

When people say the name of Chuck Palahniuk, hardly anybody knows who he is. But when the question is asked whether they know *Fight Club*, almost everybody nods enthusiastically and smiles. *Fight Club*, what a great film. But it is not only David Fincher and his adaptation of a novel by Chuck Palahniuk, but Chuck Palahniuk and his novel themselves who make the cult out of *Fight Club*. Palahniuk's writing style is unusual and gripping and that is why he had caught the attention of so many readers and the rumor around it was the reason why David Fincher was interested in making a film according to the book.

The main topic of *Fight Club* certainly is violence and aggressiveness. But it is not superficially dealt with as it may seem. Palahniuk uses the element of violence extensively, but in fact he subtly brings the reader to the idea that violence is a danger weapon in irresponsible hands of nowadays people. Also in other works, such as *Lullaby* and *Haunted*, which were chosen to be analyzed along with *Fight Club* in this thesis, he does that, although with a different type of violence and in a different context. Therefore the aim of this thesis is to prove that Chuck Palahniuk does not encourage people to behave violently, although he admits some benefits of it, but in fact criticizes contemporary society for pushing people into it and then punishing them for what they did.

The thesis is divided into two parts. The first one is concerned with the general theory of violence and describes how the violence is rooted in American society, which could have been one of the reasons, why Palahniuk dedicates his writings to this topic. The first part also includes some details from Palahniuk's life, which I consider to be very influential in his work. The second part comprises of the analyses of the three books mentioned above. The different types of violence used by Palahniuk are described and given into connection one with another.

Palahniuk is a contemporary and not really a mainstream author, so not many pieces of the secondary literature pay attention to him. This is the reason why so many of the sources come from the Internet.

1. Author and His Work

Charles Michael Palahniuk was born on 21st of February 1962 in Washington. He spent his childhood in a mobile home, or after his parents' divorce, on a cattle farm, which belonged to his mother's parents.

He graduated from Columbia High School in Burbank, then attended the University of Oregon and although he worked as a journalist for a very short time, he has a BA degree in journalism. He has an experience with working as a mechanic, as an author of technical manuals or as an escort for terminally ill hospice patients. All of these experiences appeal as an important inspiration in Palahniuk's work. Also his membership in The Cacophony Society, which was and still is "*a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society*" (Wikipedia, The Cacophony Society) became one of his patterns and motifs in *Fight Club*. (Chaplinsky, 1999-)

His first and rejected writing attempts were novels *If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home Already* (parts of it were recycled into *Fight Club*) and *Manifesto* (later *Invisible Monsters*). Chuck was disappointed and as a kind of a protest he wrote something he thought nobody would like. *Fight Club*. (Chaplinsky, 1999-) At first a short story, later a novel, evaluated as "too dark, too violent, too strident and shrill and dogmatic" by reviewers. Despite of that, it won 2 literary awards and led to a famous film adaptation. (Palahniuk, 2006)

Novels *Survivor*, *Invisible Monsters*, *Choke* and others followed and Chuck has been publishing almost a novel per year since. A novel that proves the link between Palahniuk's private life and his works is *Lullaby*. It is a story about the power of words and it was written after his father's murderer was sentenced to death. (Chaplinsky, 1999-)

Before he writes a story, he does a thorough research. (The Cult, 1999-) It provides the source of contact with other people for him. He tells he is mostly influenced by minimalist writing by Tom Spanbauer. What he does is that he keeps the same number of elements throughout the story and gives them a sort of dynamic energy as he repeats them over and over again in a different circumstances. (Chuck Palahniuk: Tell All, 2012)

Palahniuk has got a very distinctive style. He uses short sentences and limited vocabulary, to induce the way ordinary person would tell a story. (Minárik, 2011) Also he chooses the non-fiction form of writing a novel, as the conventions of form play against the nature of the story. His writing style is rhythmical and dynamic, often with a surprising

plot twist at the end of a story. According to his own words he loves to build a paradox into his stories, for example exact rules involved in anarchy represented by Project Mayhem in *Fight Club*. (Chuck Palahniuk: *Tell All*, 2012) The tone of his stories is dark, they include loads of irony and cynicism and although they can be hilarious, they always depict something deeply sad and tragic.

The characters appearing in Palahniuk's novels are pathetic, however they somehow make you to sympathize with them and eventually fall in love with them. (The Cult, 1999-) They reject violently and sometimes self-destructively the expectations of American society to find their own identity in a materialistic and conformist world. (Literature Online biography, 2005) Palahniuk sees deviations of his characters as natural and necessary phenomenon, people have recourse to, in order to maintain normal in a sick society. (Mendieta, 2005)

He often reacts to the changes in American culture, therefore his main topics are for example men and feminization of masculinity, consumerism, or struggle of an individual against the whole society (Mendieta, 2005), although at a public reading and discussion with him over his book *Tell All* (2012), he compares his novels to the Rorschach test, telling there is no real meaning behind them and the meaning is to be found by reader himself.

Chuck Palahniuk's latest works include first two parts of *Maddison Spencer trilogy*, novel *Beautiful You*, or a graphic novel sequel for *Fight Club* – *Fight Club II*. (The Cult, 1999-) Not only Chuck is a writer, but he also teaches writing – in a form of short essays published on his official fan site, but also lectures at universities. (Chaplinsky, 1999-)

2. The General Introduction to the Theory of Violence

This chapter introduces the general theory of violence and aggression to present the topic which will be dealt with later in the thesis. Aggression is an everyday part of people's lives. Doctor Jan Poněšický (2004) defines aggression as the part of personality which has the goal to harm nature, things, other people or oneself. In fact, this definition of aggression is not sufficient in these times. To define one's behaviour as aggressive, it has to exhibit the signs of intention. Therefore more accurate definition of aggression would be: the intended behaviour, which harms other people, contravenes situationally relevant norms and is not motivated by effort to help others. The last sign is mentioned with regard to, for example, doctors, who might hurt people but only in an effort to cure their illnesses. (Meixner, 2001) Furthermore Poněšický (2004) not only perceives aggression as something negative, but in

contemporary society, where people agreed on non-violent coexistence, aggression could be a demonstration of courage or experiencing a dangerous situation.

If aggression is defined as behaviour, aggressiveness would be the inner aptitude to act aggressively. (Linhart et al., 2003) If we pass over the fact that aggression on its own is controversial, there is another important question related to the topic that contemporary psychologist discuss about. Is aggressiveness natural to people, do they born with aggressive tendencies, or is aggressiveness a reaction to frustrations, which means learned, thus alterable? (Poněšický, 2004) Petrušek (1996) states that there are 3 theories of aggression. The theory of innate tendency to aggression, the theory of aggression as a reaction to frustrations and the theory of aggression as socially learned behaviour. (Petrušek, 1996)

2.1. The Theory of Innate Tendency to Aggression

This theory is based on psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud – that human nature is a composition of two instincts and as they fight, one of them comes out of the human and turns to aggression. (Petrušek, 1996)

Another significant contribution to this theory is a theory of congenital aggression by Konrad Lorenz. It says aggression is instinctive tension, which looks for the opportunity to come out, even if it leads to killing a conspecific. This ensures the optimal number of individuals in one territory, thus surviving only of the strongest ones. The fear that one could be violated leads to preserving of traditional hierarchic order and to rituals, which eliminate the weak ones without actually killing them. (Lorenz, 1992)

2.2. The Theory of Aggression as a Reaction to Frustrations

Many psychologist explain violence as a normal or maladaptive reaction towards the frustrations – for example somebody or something obstructing people from achieving their goals etc. Doctor Poněšický (2004) agrees with this statement, but adds this is the case of immediate reaction to frustrations only. The overall aggressiveness is usually caused by combination of different impulses, for example bringing up on one hand in too strict or on the other hand too liberal environment.

Another aspect that plays an important role in whether people react aggressively or not is motivation. When considering motivation, we speak about how important is to achieve the goal, how much the obstruction counterworks or how many times before has the goal

been blocked. In cases where it seems the attacking person has no reason to act aggressively against something or someone, he might chose a substitutive object to attack instead of the real 'blocker', because he or it might be too intimidating or unknown. (Petrušek, 1996)

Doctor Poněšický (2004) points out, that frustrations are not always the only cause of aggression. Anxiety, fear and related defensive reactions might be aggressive too. It can be compared to animal behaviour described by Lorenz (1966). He states that cornered animal fights for its life ferociously, so this principle can be applied to a human being either fighting for life or for its pride or dignity.

2.3. The Theory of Aggression as Socially Learned Behaviour

Aggression can be learned from role-models, media or in a form of experience with aggression, when aggressive behaviour is rewarded and thus repeated. (Petrušek, 1996) Sometimes aggression is seen as a form of communication, because people feel that to act aggressively (for example be angry, reproach somebody for something) is appropriate and that they have the right to behave like that. (Poněšický, 2004)

3. The Theme of Violence in Palahniuk's Works

3.1. Sociocultural Aspects

Over the past century western society has changed dramatically and especially Americans had to go through many conflicts. Not only 20th century is a century of wars, but also the century of anxiety, existential doubts and dread. (Fraser, 1967)

3.1.1. American Society in Conflicts

The society started to move forward very quickly. People were confronted with new situations, new inventions, with quick progress and momentous mistakes in international policy that caused the deaths of millions of people. When Americans interfered into European conflicts for the first time - in the World War I – they did it with enthusiasm, they wanted to do something, but it left the feeling of emptiness, rootlessness and meaningfulness of their effort, as in fact they had not had to fight. (Quinn et al., 2011)

On the other hand the Second World War was a very different matter. Americans emerged from it strong, confident and proud of their military and industrial powers. Tindall and Shi (1992) discuss the fact that it was only after the World War II, when the United

States experienced the years of prosperity, which turned the post-war society into consumer, materialistic and conformist one. Many writers and artists expressed their feelings of discontent and worries about where the society heads for. People's life had started to concentrate around televisions and this trend was to be seen from then on. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

In times of Cold War, whole world was full of passive aggression and violent insinuations, being afraid of the threat of communism people were suspicious and countries were getting armed. Furthermore Americans took part in two very violent conflicts – the Korean War and the War in Vietnam - the most destructive military conflicts after World War II. (Hickey, 2011) They put the USA into economic problems and again isolationism had for a time become a solution for the hardships they suffered from helping other nations. (Digital History, 2014)

Also on domestic scene historians had recorded many violent deaths of influential people, mostly politicians. Assassination of Martin Luther King, John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and others could be described as a part of rising violent tendencies in society. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

In 1989 The United States of America got a new president – George H. W. Bush, former vice president with extensive foreign policy experience. With the vision of the USA as a world power, he got busy with leading the United States into two wars – when they invaded Panama and the Gulf War. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

The Panama invasion had been provoked by Panamanian head of armed forces and tyrant General Manuel Noriega. Noriega was accused of drug smuggling in the USA and as an answer declared that Panama is in war with the USA. On December 16, 1989, one off duty American officer was killed which lead to sending 12,000 American men to the same number already present soldiers in Panama. The USA won this conflict and the losses expressed in numbers were 23 American servicemen and 4,000 Panamanians. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

The Integrity of Saudi Arabia, the factual beginning of the Gulf War, was an American answer to Iraq's aggression led by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. All this conflict was about the division of land and power, connected to petroleum, in the Middle-East. President Bush rejected the attempt of the United Nations to put an embargo against Iraq and sent troops of 400, 000 heads there. This step of him had started debates in The Congress whether it

could have been solved peacefully or not. Also the society had split into halves. Eventually he gained the support of The Congress and Senate and he had the permission to use the armed forces there, as Hussein didn't react to diplomatic attempts from the side of U. N., including the USA. Operation Desert Storm started on January 17 by hitting Iraq by allied forces' missiles and ended six weeks later with allied truce. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

The Gulf War was one of the first wars broadcasted right to American homes via television, which was excessively forming the public opinion on it by stressing only some information, not mentioning others and etc. The casualties on American side were 137 people and on Iraqi side the estimated number is 100, 000 of both – civilians and soldiers. This conflict had a huge impact on the Iraqi society – the war was so destructive, Saddam Hussein remained in power even after that. (Tindall, Shi; 1992)

Also the beginning of the 21st century had brought problems, mostly related to terrorism, which put the USA into another conflict, this time with such a deceitful enemy that even nowadays the threat of terrorism is present in American society and all over the world.

On the 11th of September 2001 two American airplanes had been hijacked by Muslim terrorist attackers and crushed into the Twin Towers – buildings of the World Trade Centre. (Griffin, 2006) The consequences of this incident have been destructive. 3,000 people died in the airplanes or in the building, more than 6,000 people were injured and American society has been shaken. (Ameri, Arida; 2012) Immediately after the attacks Americans started to call for revenge. For example Henry Kissinger wrote in his article that he hoped the system which is responsible for that would be destroyed. (Kissinger in Griffin, 2006) Another journalist was urging for anger and rage and not peaceful way of reconciliation. (Morrow in Griffin, 2006)

This had become a pretext for the cabinet of President George W. Bush Jr., who was convinced that the main threat comes from Iraq, to start a war against terrorism in the middle-east, sometimes called as the second Gulf War, in fact more aggressive imperialistic policy. (Griffin, 2006) American army helped to overthrow Hussein's regime, dissolved army and helped to establish new democratic government. (Plevzová, 2012) U. S. Army left Iraq in 2011.

As proven above, the 20th century, of course including 1990's when *Fight Club* was written, and the beginning of the 21st century was a time of involving American society into many armed conflicts and although they were not fought on the USA land, it had left

an impact on American people for sure. Also the Cold War, even though it was not a war of weapons, might be, with its hidden aggression and racing in being the most powerful country in the world, one of the underlying inspirations for Palahniuk's novels.

3.1.2. Violence in Media

Although the word 'media' means more than just the Internet, television, radio or newspapers, they are the most powerful kinds of media, due to their accessibility and immediacy. Violence has always been present in every culture and society, but it is only now that people are exposed to so many doses of violence that it is really almost impossible to escape them. (Signorielli, 2005) Violent images are to be found everywhere in America nowadays – in literature, music, newspapers, video games, on the Internet and most of all on television.

As Nancy Signorielli (2005) points out, violent messages on television have very strong effect especially on children and their behaviour as they can easily adopt aggressive elements into it. Madan, Mrug and Wright (2014) explain that television is an important part of children's and adolescents' socialization and identity development, for model behaviour, values and perspectives can be found there. Nancy Signorielli (2005) adds that even though it may not always affect children in terms of acting violently, it may have impact on perceiving violence as a socially acceptable and normal behaviour since the violence shown on television lacks realistic context. All these things may lead to increased rate of aggression in people's behaviour and in interpersonal contact.

On contrary John Fiske (1996) states that violence shown on television is not the cause of increased violence in society that in fact it is vice versa. Television mirrors the values and role models present in the culture. He emphasizes the metaphorical meaning of physical violent images on television which represents the social or class clash. And it is no surprise that the number of violent confrontation is the highest and so popular in American culture, where the social gap between poor and well-off is remarkable. He demonstrates his point on an example of reducing physical violence on television in America in 1970's, which not only didn't reduce the rate of aggression in society but was substituted by so called visual violence against women. (Fiske, 1996)

Popular culture violence is a matter of masculinity, although in society it is not only a man who is aggressive. This phenomenon relates to the patriarchal tradition, which tells men how their masculinity should be exhibited. But nowadays the economic system denies

them to do that so there is the need for masculinization of violence in media. (Fiske, 1996) Also in Palahniuk's novels most of the violent characters are men, as for example Tyler Durden in *Fight Club* or Carl Streator in *Lullaby*. But women occur in violent positions too, although they more often can control their instincts and they more often behave aggressively on the psychological level, as for example Helen Hoover Boyle in *Lullaby*.

3.1.3. Gun Ownership in the USA

In nowadays American society, it is common for people to own a gun. It is said that it is a matter of personal safety but the more people own guns, the less are they becoming safe. (Porter, 2013) Porter in his article for The Guardian in 2013 tells that Americans "*are better armed and slightly less nervy than rebel fighters in Syria*". 34% of Americans own a weapon, which is a very disturbing number. (Roberts, 2014) In comparison, the percentage of people holding weapons in the Czech Republic is roughly 3%.

Porter (2013) presents the number of 1,384,171 people who lost their lives because of guns from 1968 to 2013. The most alarming about all this is the fact, that the number of people killed by guns in the period of 45 years is about 200,000 higher than the number of all American people ever killed in war conflicts involving the U.S. (Porter, 2013) Especially in latest years the public attacks with guns are to be seen more often than ever, therefore the argue over the gun-control law is still going on in America. (Linskey, 2014) But as Porter (2013) mentions, some companies at first took restrictions concerning smoking and other health concerning things and only after that they ban entering with a weapon, which as he puts it, is the weirdest order of priorities.

The USA is one of 3 countries which have gun-ownership rooted in their constitution. It might express the nation's respect for civil rights and reluctance towards their restriction or a symptom of a sick society. (Linskey, 2014) Palahniuk obviously argues for the second option and shows that American people are so afraid of becoming victims that they can very easily slip to the bully pose.

3.2 Psychological and Personal Aspects

Palahniuk's work and perception of violence in it is most probably influenced not only by sociocultural background, but also by his personal experience and by his quite unusual and in a way difficult family life.

Firstly, he never knew his grandparents from father's side as his grandfather shot his wife and then himself after the quarrel over the cost of a sewing machine. (Minarik, 2011) Palahniuk's dad being only a small boy watched all the incident from under the bed in his parent's bedroom. (Chaplinsky, 1999-) This event has been recorded in Palahniuk's work *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories*. These kind of stories are very often part of family mythology and may form an awareness of violence at small children, which may corrupt their basal faith in goodness of the world. (Špok, 2013)

Secondly, the way he realized no one cares whether you act aggressively in outside of your job, as long as it doesn't affect it, when he came from a vacation with a black eye and no-one asked him what happened. (Palahniuk, 2006) Only after that he started writing *Fight Club*, it is one of its topics and it gives a meaning to the concept of fight clubs described in his novel. There occurs the question whether it is socially acceptable to get into fight, provided it happens at one's holiday, or not.

Thirdly, it is the murder of his father in May 1999. (Chaplinsky, 1999-) He, along with his girlfriend, was murdered by ex-husband of hers in a very brutal way and then burned in their bed. (Olehla, 2011) Palahniuk had been present to the death sentence of the murderer and he also contributed by approving to it. (Minárik, 2011) As it has been already mentioned, Palahniuk's novel *Lullaby* deals with this incident and helps him to get over the fact that he had been part of an execution of a man. (Literature Online biography, 2005)

4. Fight Club

The story of a young man abandoned by father and God offers a thorough insight into the mind of a contemporary person in the world full of lies, personal failures and fear. One day he finds out that his anger about the unfair world, where he feels he is not noticed by God and what is more, he is not worth noticing, cannot be suppressed by the life full of emptiness and succumbing to consumer trends in society. He finds the answers in a revolt against the world and God and in a physical fighting.

As the main theme of *Fight Club* is fighting and violence, it will be dealt in the following chapters. Firstly the inspiration for characters to start a fight club, which may be found in support groups and the struggle for life, which had shifted from fighting the nature to fighting our own bodies and mind, and where the presence of death experience had inspired main characters' philosophy. Secondly the need for violence (represented by fight clubs in the novel) present in nowadays society in seek for men's identity. The changing of meaning

of the word masculinity is represented by the character of Big Bob in the novel. In *Fight Club* the decline of masculinity is caused by damaged relationship between fathers and their sons and as a result of this, the character of Tyler Durden has emerged to make a real men out of the narrator and others, so the symbolism related to his character is being dealt thereafter. Thirdly the violence itself as described in *Fight Club*, mainly by the concept of consensual violence, which is the most important question in it, but also by the psychological abuse as minor problem and in the end the rebellion against God, which represents rather metaphorical fight of the protagonist but executed by means of destroying himself, his properties, values and even other people.

4.1. Plot

Fight Club centres around 2 men – nameless narrator and his split personality Tyler Durden, and the project they start together – fight clubs. The narrator is a young man living ordinary but unsatisfactory life consisting of things he wants but doesn't need, boring work he needs but doesn't want and insomnia. When he tries to solve the problem with insomnia, he comes across the supporting groups for seriously ill patients and they supply him with personal contact, understanding, sympathy and friends.

When he meets Tyler Durden his life changes completely. He has lost his home with all the things and he has found a new friend. Together they start fight clubs where you can ask somebody to have a fight with you as easily as it is to ask somebody to dance with you. But soon this 'innocent' clubs start to grow into something bigger – Project Mayhem, which has the goal to exhibit public sabotages.

When the narrator sees that these projects are getting out of their control, he wants to back off, but too late he realises he cannot as in fact he is Tyler Durden – the man who comes to word every time narrator succeeds to fall asleep. In the end the narrator realizes that to stop Tyler he has to shot himself and although he survives and Tyler doesn't, the Project Mayhem is still alive and he cannot do anything.

4.2. Support Groups

This chapter introduces the narrator's inspiration for creating a fight club, which is represented by support groups. Support groups usually provide seriously ill patients the feeling of compassion and the feeling of not being lonely in their illness. The narrator is not seriously ill, he only feels alienated in the consumer world, he has no friends, he has no

hobbies and he doesn't know what to do with his life. To fill in the empty space, he buys things, he believes will improve his situation, because he was taught that the goal of one's life is to be comfortable. It is only when his insomnia forces him to go see a doctor, when he realizes he misses something. The doctor advises him ironically to visit a cancer support group, where he could see real suffering.

When he does he suddenly gets a new hobby, he gets to know a friend-like people, compassionate as they think he is dying as well and desperate as they see their end is coming. All these people are incurably ill, as Palahniuk says: "*Everyone smiles with that invisible gun to their head.*" (p. 19) Not only they try to reconcile themselves with their diseases and also make the effort to look happy, but they also visit the support groups which means they are fighting against the thing which is killing them in the company of other fighting people. That might be the inspiration for the narrator to create Tyler Durden and therefore fight clubs. The presence of death experience is another possible reason for the narrator to create the very destructive, violent figure, as he felt that only when they realize they have nothing to lose, they are free to do anything. The inspiration for this most certainly came up in the support groups, where the narrator found out that nothing matters but life and when people are dying, they don't care that much about consequences of their actions. Specifically the character of Chloe, who was ferociously searching for her last sexual partner in her life is a clear evidence of this theses. Tyler Durden many times remarks that only when you realize you are dying from the moment you were born, you can save yourself.

In the support groups the narrator feels real emotions, pain for the first time in a long period. "*Losing all hope was freedom.*" (p. 22) These people have nothing to lose and the only thing they want is to stay alive. It is kind of ridiculous that this is the only way for him to get some sleep. By this Palahniuk may refer to some sadism in every person (the popularity of violent images in media) or glee present in the society. What is important is the fact that the only person who can make him cry is Big Bob, the character symbolising the loss of masculinity in American culture.

4.3. Loss of Masculinity

The concept of losing masculinity or manhood in American culture as described in *Fight Club* is both – graphic and metaphorical. The metaphorical meaning relates to the fact, that American men are becoming more and more conformist and in a way lazy, which makes them losing their potential and abilities in menial jobs and aiming customary goals.

Palahniuk writes: “*I see the strongest and the smartest men who ever lived, and these men are pumping gas and waiting tables.*” (p. 149) But the denotation of this sentence is probably not meaning that the job of a gas-station worker or waiter would be bad, or not worth doing, but that the men who have the potential to become a significant part of world’s history, or to make other people’s lives better do not have the persistence to do the job they really want to do or have a talent to.

In this spirit the Project Mayhem was drafted – to change the thinking of people and to wake their anger and therefore recruit them into “*the great war of the spirit*” or “*a great revolution against the culture*” (p. 149) as Palahniuk calls it. “*What we have to do, people, is remind these guys what kind of power they still have.*” (p. 120) They do it in a very outrageous way as for example in the case of Raymond K. Hessel. Tyler Durden threatens to kill him if he won’t finish his veterinarian studies, which complexly sums up the whole reflection of the problem as described in *Fight Club*: “*...I’d rather kill you than see you working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television.*” (p. 155)

Another evidence that masculinity and its decline is a very important theme in *Fight Club* is the part, where the narrator realizes he is Tyler Durden and wants to stop fight clubs and especially Project Mayhem. The Space Monkeys are about to punish him in a very meaningful way. They want to remove his testicles, his symbol of manhood. The fact that they do not want to kill him but to ultimately punish him by humiliating his identity is self-evident.

4.3.1. Character of Big Bob (Robert Paulson)

To illustrate the loss of masculinity, the character of Big Bob was chosen, as there is no better way to illustrate the decline of masculinity in nowadays culture than to do it on a former bodybuilder, now his body resembling to women’s constitution. After centuries men were fighting with nature to survive and to feed their families, in wars etc. suddenly there is no need for that. Furthermore as doctor Poněšický (2012) points out, nowadays for women it is possible to do the same job as men, it is them who control the birth rate and with the mechanization of a household, they are not expected to spend so much time taking care of it. Also it is not a problem to wear clothes only men were allowed to wear in the past. With this blurring of differences, the society is looking for alternative methods for men to become real males.

This phenomenon is summarised in the character of Big Bob. Bob used to be model of typical men ideal – a sportsman, muscular, married three times, owning a gym. But to show his masculinity he had to shave his body, lose weight and take steroids and men's hormones – especially testosterone. Also after his testicles removal, Bob gets enormous doses of testosterone. Palahniuk remarks ironically enough that too much testosterone in body leads to increasing the women's hormones in it and therefore getting the effeminate shape.

Another fact which proves Palahniuk's intentions with this character is that the narrator meets Bob in the support group named Remaining Men Together, where the men are supposed to hug each other and cry. After they find out about fight clubs the group is dissolved as fighting succeeds to be better way of remaining men. Big Bob himself comments on it like this: "*'That's the good news,' Big Bob says. 'The group's disbanded.' ... 'The good news,' Big Bob says, 'is there's a new group...'*" (p. 100) To put a contrast between Bob's past and his present in a fight club when talking about what fight clubs do with a man's body, Palahniuk proclaims: "*...but fight club isn't about looking good.*" (p. 51)

Big Bob was the man who became the first Space Monkey in Project Mayhem and with the escalating sabotages in which the men were involved, he was the first one who had been killed. What Palahniuk may imply by this, is the desire of American man, who were bereaved of their manhood, to join an "army" but in the end being not enough strong or capable to withstand. Another possible interpretation is that when the effeminate men join the "army" and take part in violent actions, his effeminacy is killed.

4.3.2. Missing Father

The following chapter is dedicated to the theory of how missing father influences the decline of American manhood. The reason why men in fight club need to regain their masculinity is because they lacked their fathers' attention and his role model. Guy Corneau (2012) explains that the presence of father is essential for normal psychic development of a child, especially when the child is a boy. Men's identity is delicate and on contrary to women's identity it must be learnt by identification with father. When father is not present, the boy usually identifies mostly with mother. The father conveys the ability to objectively understand reality, the positive attitude towards one's sexuality and most importantly of all the access to aggression, which takes the shape of assertiveness and ability to fight back.

Palahniuk refers to this topic numerously. "*What you see at fight club is a generation of men raised by women.*" (p. 50) The reason why the generation needs fight clubs is that they

are not able to fight the actual thing they are angry at or afraid of. *“Most guys are at fight club because of something they’re too scared to fight. After a few fights, you’re afraid a lot less.”* (p. 54) Also Corneau (2012) confirms this thesis. He adds that children with missing fathers can be anxious, not self-confident, depressive or they can suppress their anger, the way men in *Fight Club* do at their jobs.

Furthermore Palahniuk compares the image of father in American society to the image of God. *“If you’re a man and you’re Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God?”* (p.141) Also Corneau (2012) thinks children tend to look at their fathers, and missing fathers in particular, as the images of God. When father is missing, the child loses his touch with reality of what it means to be a man. Palahniuk explains the idea of fight clubs and the Project Mayhem to be a form of defiance against God, because God’s hate is better than his indifference. This phenomenon can be spotted at small children or adolescents, behaving petulantly or even against the law only to draw attention of their parents.

This may mean that men in *Fight Club* who didn’t grow up with their fathers are looking for a way to find their manhood in fighting and violence, as their fathers didn’t teach them how to cope with the aggressiveness inside of them. The character, who replaces father and God for the men fighting in fight clubs is Tyler Durden.

4.3.3. Character of Tyler Durden

Tyler Durden is a very different matter to the character of Big Bob. He is experienced, has much knowledge about explosives and although there is no clear description of his appearance, he appears to be very handsome and manly. He knows exactly what to do with his life and he never regrets the effort he puts in doing and planning things. The perfect example is the moment when narrator meets him at a beach, Tyler building a construction which will cast a shadow of a flawless hand on sand for just a one minute. Supposedly meaningful activity. *“One minute was enough, Tyler said, a person had to work hard for it, but minute of perfection was worth the effort.”* (p. 33) This statement clearly reacts to the metaphorical loss of masculinity as dealt before.

At a first sight, Palahniuk’s interpretation of Tyler Durden is that he replaced father and God, because he helped the men in the novel to find their manhood again. *“To everybody there, I am Tyler Durden the Great and Powerful. God and father.”* (p. 199) On the other

hand, later in the story Tyler behaved similarly to the person he criticised so often – not present father. *“I am Joe’s Broken Heart because Tyler’s dumped me. Because my father dumped me. Oh, I could go on and on.”* (p. 134) Palahniuk probably intended to write Tyler Durden not as replacement of father and God, but as a picture of them. Imaginary, abandoning, merciless and provocative figure.

In Mendieta’s (2005) opinion Tyler Durden symbolizes the part of men’s identity which spoils the idea of masculinity with reckless violence and that men should get rid of it. In fact this interpretation has a justification in later development of Tyler’s character at the end of the novel. The concept of his idea was pure and in fact harmless, if we pass over the fact that the men got hurt in fights. Only after the beginning of Project Mayhem Tyler Durden became a terrorist and a simple representation of everything what makes men and their masculinity dreaded.

4.4. Consensual Violence

One of the most important themes in *Fight Club* is the concept of consensual violence. As said before, after the narrator had seen the fights of dying people, he created Tyler Durden and fight clubs, with the concept of consensual violence as the bases for it. Chuck Palahniuk in an interview for the ShortList Magazine (2013) talks about people’s unresolved relationship with violence. *“It frightens them. So the idea of consensual violence – violence you can explore in a mutually agreed context – helps deal with this fear. People can tell their friends, ‘I need you to hit me, otherwise I’ll always be terrified of being hit.’”*

In the novel it is Tyler Durden who says the words for the first time. *“I want you to hit me as hard as you can.”* (p. 46) The narrator and Tyler have the first fight at a parking lot and the running fight is absurd and ridiculous the more that in fact the narrator is not fighting an actual person. As Tyler Durden later says to narrator: *“You weren’t really fighting me. You said so yourself. You were fighting everything you hate in your life.”* (p. 167) As Palahniuk often remarks, the narrator hates his life – his job, his laziness and the consumerism he had succumbed to. But he is afraid to stand to his problems and fears face to face. This is the reason for creating another personality inside of him, the embodiment of manhood and courage who helps him to fight it.

The above-mentioned hypothesis of doctor Poněšický (2004) that anxiety and fear are also causes of aggression can be applied to the idea of consensual violence. The fighters in fight clubs, with the narrator in a first row, were too scared to fight their bosses and therefore

they were more prone to anger explosions or anxieties. But in a fight they relieved the tension, maybe they were imagining some particular people or things and the physical fight had compensated the confrontation with their problem.

Palahniuk likens the situation to choose a strange person to fight in a club to the situation when people get angry at innocent people in traffic or other public places. “*Even a week after fight club, you’ve got no problem driving inside the speed limit. ..., but you are so cool. ... You get your finger from other drivers. Total strangers hate you. It’s absolutely nothing personal. After fight club, you’re so relaxed, you just cannot care.*” (p. 139) These conflicts with total strangers function as a relief mechanism and so do the fight clubs. The only difference is that the fight clubs are more elaborate and the willingness to fight is mutual and prearranged. The reason why the popularity of fight clubs is so significant and why it drew so many followers is the vision of not totally unknown enemy. If people have to relieve their emotions, it is not certain that they encounter an equal opponent in the streets. But in regularly hold club, where the rules are given, where the people know each other, where they are supervised by others and where they do not have to be afraid of using their physical forces, to give vent to their feelings is much easier, as they do not have to worry about consequences of their anger.

What Palahniuk subconsciously did, is that he had connected the theories of violence with regard to practical contemporary life. In his work the starters for aggressiveness, or – as Poněšický (2004) calls them – frustrations, are happening so often that the reaction towards them may be already inborn, or in other words without a certain measure of aggressiveness people would not survive. Not the way Lorenz implies it, in a struggle for life, but in a struggle for sanity. The struggle for sanity is an important theme of *Fight Club* and the concept of consensual violence should help people to maintain it. Ironically enough, the main hero of the novel is getting more and more mentally ill in the progress of the story and it starts with him fighting in consensual fights. This may be the message that every utopian idea has its arguments pro and con and it urges to consider the impact of every action taken.

When fight clubs had shifted into Project Mayhem, the violence in the books lost its hallmark of consensus. It was not about supplementing men’s identity and relieving negative emotions, but it became an unstoppable, revolutionary-like, army-like, dehumanizing terrorist organization. Its aim was to intimidate people and it was performed by means of psychological abuse.

4.5. Psychological Abuse

Although psychological abuse does not involve actual physical confrontation, it also plays a role in the novel, because it precedes the fight clubs and it is a significant part of Project Mayhem, so it will be shortly dealt with in this chapter. Before the narrator and Tyler Durden started the fight clubs, Tyler had been working as a cinema projectionist and a waiter. The narrator describes the feelings related to the projectionist occupation, which refers also to his job and to job of every man, as “...tired and angry, but mostly you’re bored...” (p. 29) And from that feelings Tyler emerged the first violent attempts, which didn’t involve his own suffering (assimilation to narrator and support groups).

He was ruining the experience from watching films for the audience by splicing single pornography frames into feature films. The moment when the picture flashes on the screen is so quick that nobody notices, but it has an effect on people’s mood. “Tyler spliced penis into everything after that. Usually, close-ups...as Cinderella danced with her Prince Charming and people watched. Nobody complained. People ate and drank, but the evening wasn’t the same. People feel sick or start to cry and don’t know why.” (p. 31) This probably has a connection to narrator’s need for destruction of beautiful things (his own home or the handsome face of a man in a fight club).

Tyler does that several more times and in every case the victim either doesn’t know, that something happened or Tyler makes him think that something happened, but in fact it didn’t. He urinates into soups and spoils food in other ways, or sends notes he had urinated into a lady’s perfume. These acts however are more of a revenge than the pure “violence for violence” thing. These sabotages are an equivalent answer towards psychological terror from the rich people in position of customers: “...to them, you’re just a cockroach.” (p. 81) The revenge is appropriate for them as they do not think about themselves as an equal human beings, but as men, who cannot allow themselves to be humiliated. In fact the undiscovered sabotages, as well as Project Mayhem, which is based on them, are not as brave as it may appear and the original intention to preserve men’s dignity and pride disappears in incapability to confront their enemies and problems face to face.

4.6. Rebellion Against God

In this chapter the existentialist influence in Palahniuk’s work is the main topic, as the characters are fighting also against God. The world in *Fight Club* is described as deeply unsatisfying place. Especially the American society is a big disappointment for

the characters. Consumerist, conformist, self-centred and selfish, effeminate and lazy. But as the idea about the loss of a father influencing people's lives develops, the fact reveals that the characters do not blame society, but God, who is responsible for their hardships as he does not care about them, just the way their fathers did. Noteworthy is the fact that Palahniuk does not deny the existence of God. It may mean that Palahniuk needed more metaphysical enemy for his characters to fight and he had hidden it into the rebellion against the society and physical fighting, but he remarked more times that it is only to be disobedient children of God's, so he would notice them.

In Justin Garrison's (2012) opinion, the characters are not fighting God, but they are killing him and also Christianity and replacing them with Tyler Durden and his philosophy. He likens early fight clubs to pseudo-religious movement, their meetings to church service, Tyler's kissing-hand ritual to baptism, self-destruction as a mean of salvation to God's redemption, Tyler himself to God and the narrator to Jesus. This interpretation is very probable, however if Palahniuk had intended this, the fact that he conceded the existence of God and never stated his death is a bit baffling.

In a result, the conclusion may be deduced that Palahniuk could really talk about rebelling against God, however he does not want to kill him and replace him by Tyler Durden, but he suggests fight club and the things related to it as an rebellious alternative, which corresponds with the characters' desire for God's attention. Tyler Durden's religion therefore may be a branch of Christianity with totally different rituals and sermons and in a way reversed philosophy – Catholics are redeemed by the suffering of Jesus Christ but the followers of fight club cult need to destruct themselves and the world to save it.

4.7. Conclusion

Even though it may appear that *Fight Club* is a work prodding people to behave violently or that it wakes the aggressiveness inside of people, the opposite is the truth. As mentioned above, Palahniuk repeatedly criticises the nature of violence, even when he accepts some merit of it and validates that it is an integral part of every day's people's life.

Also he criticises the culture, in which the men are losing their manliness and are forced to resort to violence to prove it not only to others but primarily to themselves, despite the culture did not teach them how to handle their aggressiveness. Also his references to Christianity and God's guilt justify why some literary experts class Palahniuk as existentialist author.

5. Lullaby

Lullaby is a bit different from *Fight Club*. The protagonist is not fighting against the society or against the God, but when he finds out what power words have, he declares himself the God-of-Old-Testament-like figure and angrily, in the heat of his emotions, he punishes people he thinks are guilty even of talking too loud. In this book, almost no physical violence is depicted, it is all about the power words have in reality, but exaggerated and reduced to absurdity.

In following chapters the theme that words can become a mean of exhibiting one's aggressiveness are going to be dealt with. Firstly the way how people show their dominance with sounds and how it affects the main hero in taking a revenge on them, the next will be his role of God and the Messiah he takes on himself in an effort to save the world. He uses a rhyme to punish the people, so the power of words as a main theme in Palahniuk interpretation is described and in the end the related theme of words used in commercials to influent people's lives is dealt.

5.1. Plot

Lullaby is a horror novel whose protagonist is a journalist Carl Streator. He is writing an article about sudden infant death syndrome and notices, that all the cases have something in common – there is always this book, *Poems and Rhymes around the World* present. Also when his wife and his child died, it was there, as he recalls. He finds out that one particular poem, the culling song has the power to kill people when you say it or even when you think of it, when you are angry.

Due to stress in his life and for a long time repressed anger, he semi-voluntarily kills everybody who upsets him. He meets the real estate agent Helen Hoover Boyle, who also killed her child with it and now sells haunted houses to unsuspecting customers and she has also realised the power of the culling song. They set up for a long journey to destroy every page with the culling song in every book which has been printed, not to become the weapon of mass destruction in the wrong hands. As they find out, they have the “grimoire”, the spell book, which contains spells which can for example make animals talk or even resurrect.

The grimoir is stolen from them by Helen's assistant Mona and her boyfriend Oyster in effort to make world to come back to nature as it was. The book ends with Carl and Helen in

the body of a police sergeant following the pair of ecological activist with grimoir (except the culling song) in their hands.

5.2. The Volume

This part concerns with the volume as a significant part of a violence contained in words. Before Streator finds out about the killing potential of the culling song, he constantly speaks about “the sound pollution”. Everywhere he is, he comes across some disturbing sounds – in the streets, in restaurants, at work, on public toilets and even at home, because his neighbours are watching television and listening to the radio. Palahniuk compares this to misdemeanours, such as throwing litter from cars or in the streets or blowing a cigarette smoke on people, as it disturbs people as well.

“This is the arms race of sound. ... This isn’t about the quality. It’s about volume. This isn’t about music. This is about winning. ... This is really about power.” (p. 17) He cannot understand why, if people want to listen to music in their car, the volume is so high, why they speak loudly, when they are standing close to each other. As he points out, it is about dominance. If a person speaks loudly in a restaurant, it means he wants to dominate, to take control over the conversation, or the space and to show his power.

Talking loudly might be becoming a mean for so called civilised man to demonstrate his aggressiveness. This can be commonly seen in argues – when one gets emotional, the more he shouts, the more powerful and self-confident he feels. Nevertheless, this example is given only to illustrate the theses. Palahniuk does not speak about emotional crises, but about mundane situations, and he is indignant that people who seem decent and respectable can be aggressive so openly, even though they do not use offensive language or they are not in fact posing any threat for the public. The main character feels justly exasperated by this behaviour and that may be the reason, why he kills so lightly later in the story.

5.3. God’s Power

The following part describes the effort of the main hero to take the God’s role. God has the power to punish sinners and according to Streator, every noisy person, he happens to meet, is a sinner, as the thing he hates the most is noise. Unfortunately, in a big pulsing city, similar to the one where he lives, everyone happens to be noisy or irritating at times. But Streator probably perceives the city as Sodom and Gomorrah of his age, where everyone is guilty of polluting his surroundings with sounds. This assumption is confirmed in the line,

where Streator is thinking about his after-death life in these terms: *“You tell yourself that noise is what defines silence. Without noise, silence would not be golden. ... Think of deep outer space, the incredible cold and quiet where your wife and kid wait. Silence, not heaven, would be reward enough.”* (p. 21) When he finds out about the power of the culling song, he takes his retribution by killing people, who annoy him, with words but in total silence. This fact bears a high symbolism and it probably makes the revenge more telling for Palahniuk.

The culling song is an ancient African riddle, which was used to end the suffering of small children in the times of famine or old warriors in African tribes. It is a part of the Book of Shadows – grimoire and it accidentally had been published in the book of nursery rhymes, where Streator finds it. At first he is not sure what to do with the culling song. He thinks about the possibility that it leaked into public and the world would become his long-desired dream – a quiet place, where people would not be afraid of the quiet but of the sounds. Soon he dismisses the idea and tries to forget the song, but the power is too tempting and he starts to punish people for their alleged sins. Also the fact that Streator thinks he is the only one to know the secret, gives him a divine right to use it and maybe that’s why he feels eligible to put the culling song into effect.

Palahniuk speculates about what would happen in the real world, if every time people wished someone was dead, he would drop dead. Nowadays, the swearwords are used so commonly that people do not even care if they speak about killing somebody. *“In a world where vows are worthless. Where making a pledge means nothing. Where promises are made to be broken, it would be nice to see words come back into power.”* (p. 60) sighs Streator and Palahniuk puts him into the position, where his wish comes true and he has to face the fact, that he had killed people, although he did not do anything physically. The God-like power becomes overwhelming and the comparison to Palahniuk’s personal experience suggests itself. One may ask, whether it was really Streator or more precisely Palahniuk, who killed the person, but Palahniuk most probably answers it itself and blames his main character and therefore himself for it.

Another circumstance supports my presumption. In the moment, when Streator is forced to tell his secret to Nash, who wants to use it not to punish people or in a humble way, but for his own delight, and when he realises Helen Hoover Boyle has also noticed the killing power of words, he wants to save the world. It shows that the words as a weapon given to the wrong hand, or rather mouth, is really becoming a serious threat. Furthermore he feels guilty, because he is a grown, even-tempered, sober man and yet, he cannot resist to use the culling

song. Palahniuk by this may attribute the feeling of guilt to Christian God. Carl Streator, as well as God, sends the Saviour to Earth, and the Saviour is, in the name of Holy Trinity, Streator himself. By this he probably wants to reform himself, and rectify his wrongdoings. God sacrificed his own son and Streator sacrifices himself, when he sets on the journey and takes up the difficult mission, to destroy the culling song. He does it one more time, when he calls the police and denounces himself, but this time he does it only for himself and for his salvation.

The twist comes in the Oyster character. He resembles Jesus Christ in appearance and he wants to save the world in a bit different way than Streator does. Streator “only” wants to break the bonds of consumerism in society and to save it from the deathly powers of the culling song and the spells. On the contrary, Oyster thinks that people do not need spells to make words kill. “*The only culling song you know is ‘Make mine medium-well done.’*” (p. 103) He does not want to save people but the nature and animals. He uses the spells in grimoire to set the world right – as he sees it, to the original natural state, so in fact he wants to destroy society in its contemporary form.

5.3.1. Power of Words, the Refrain

This chapter describes how Palahniuk works with the main topic of the novel, the power of words, with helping of refrain which changes throughout the story. Palahniuk uses a nursery rhyme *Stick and Stones* as a refrain. He illustrates the main hero’s state of mind and his attitude towards the killing rhyme with it. “*Stick and stones may break your bones, but words will never hurt you.*” (p. 37) This is the first phrase, preserving its original form. Palahniuk uses it when Streator is about to try the culling song on his boss, but he is not really convinced, about its power. Maybe he is afraid of killing a person and he reassures himself, that words cannot hurt people.

When he uses it for the second time, it sounds like this: “*Sticks and stones will break your bones, but now words can kill, too.*” (p. 41) Streator is shocked, he has killed a man, however he never admits it was him, who killed him. It is easier to him to blame the words, although he suspected the rhyme to be murderous and used it consciously.

“*Sticks and stones may break your bones, but watch out for those damn words.*” (p. 56) In this line there might be again the shock from what he did and by what means, but more probably, Streator is aware of the fact that he is not so strong to persist in not using his newly

gained power again and he warns himself, tries to stay calm and relax, not to wish his succeeding boss to be dead. Unfortunately it does not help and he kills him.

“Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can hurt like hell.” (p. 74) Palahniuk states this when Streator is watching a television programme, where the host is rude and humiliates her guest in a try to help them. This line completely negates the original nursery rhyme, basically telling that although words cannot hurt people physically, the psychological aspect is just as important and maybe even more damaging. By this Palahniuk probably does not have on mind only Streator’s position, but real-life situations and he strongly supports his thesis, when he lets Streator kill the host with the culling song and what is more, on a very long distance.

“Sticks and stones may break your bones, but here we go again.” (p. 184) In this point, Streator realises fully the power of culling song, knows about consequences of his behaviour and he does not want to use it again, but somehow it becomes a part of his problem-solving strategy and although he knows how to master his emotions, he kills a policeman. In this case he excuses the killing by his mission to save the world. This line is rather an entertaining enlivening of the story and has the same meaning as the one mentioned third.

“Sticks and stones may break our bones, but our role is just to be a good audience.” (p. 246) This line comments on the power media puts to words. By carefully chosen language, the media can easily raise panic or fear, they are manipulating people and people willingly let them to do that. This is another field, where the powerful words operate and Palahniuk probably thinks it is as powerful as the culling song.

As proven above, Palahniuk attributes a really great power to words throughout the novel. But in the end, when Carl and Helen are chasing Mona and Oyster, Helen says to Carl: *“How about we just kill them the old-fashioned way?”* (p. 260) This is one of the very last lines in the novel and it more or less changes the whole impression of the novel. Helen actually wants to kill Mona and Oyster not by words but by an actual weapon. Palahniuk thus implies that even though words can be powerful, they are also tricky, as Oyster has an antidote for them. It means that the words can hurt people but only in the case they let them to do that. They can defend themselves either by talking, or keeping them out of their minds.

5.4. Media

Right at the beginning of the novel Palahniuk tells straight that people are addicted to music and television. Although it is not clear whether it is caused by media or whether media

is just making use of the opportunity, when they see, how addicted the people became. Anyway, the way Palahniuk puts it, the advertisements are violating people into buying things, into believing things and into thinking what media wants them to think, or better into not thinking at all.

“Old George Orwell got it backward. Big Brother isn’t watching. He’s singing and dancing. He’s pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brother’s busy holding your attention every moment you’re awake. He’s making sure you’re always distracted. ... He’s making sure your imagination withers.” (pp. 18 – 19) George Orwell’s *Big Brother* is shifted into the modern era, where even he is too lazy to make an effort to watch people. What Palahniuk thinks he does, is that he amuses people, pollutes the space with noises, not to let people think independently.

Another thing Palahniuk turns upside down to illustrate the absurdity of the level of conformism in western culture is thinking of people. Ancient Greeks for example thought they do not think on their own at all, that everything had been given them from a god or a goddess. *“Now people hear a commercial for sour cream potato chips and rush out to buy, but now they call this free will.”* (p. 20) This media violation is the more pervert that it makes people think they want and need things, when in fact they do not. They impose that they are happy when buying and not having their own opinion, on people. This story could be put chronologically before *Fight Club*, where the narrator also becomes a victim of the nesting complex, as he calls it, the victim of manipulating commercials. In *Lullaby*, the main hero does not want to reform the society as Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*, but he chooses his own form of protest in private. He very carefully, almost obsessively builds a perfect models of cities and houses and then furiously destroys them by stumping on them. This probably may belong to the image of God, whom he tries to identify with.

Streator chooses the rather passive-aggressive way of protest, as he metaphorically destroys the items which commercials try to force to people. Furthermore he refuses to watch the television or listen to radio. But Oyster, the image of real Messiah, actively harms the companies by advertising false complaints in the newspaper, fights with them and succeeds to destroy them, or at least to take them the feeling of sureness. It might be the age and experience of Carl Streator, who in fact a little bit deviates from the deviating range of Palahniuk’s main heroes, what holds him back. Or maybe Palahniuk realised which protest is more meaningful and is worth it.

5.5. The Conclusion

On contrary to *Fight Club*, the main hero Carl Streater does not fight against God, but he takes his duty and judges who deserves to be punished and he executes the punishment himself. Palahniuk also gives two examples of Messiah – one young, revolting, full of ideals, who wants to destroy the society to build a new, better one, and one middle-aged, experienced and sober, who wants to save the world by preserving the balance in it.

The main theme in *Lullaby*, Palahniuk deals with, is the power of words. He asks the question, whether words are that powerful and can hurt people, or not. He does not give a clear answer but he shows examples from world, where the supernatural collides with contemporary society and the conclusion can be made, that words may be more powerful than physical violence. By words people can be persuaded to love, to hate, to think something and even to kill. Furthermore Palahniuk thinks the guilt is on the side of the persuader, not the one who pulls the trigger. But the end of the novel proves that in fact people can fight back against the word violence.

6. Haunted

Haunted, the novel of short stories, which reminds Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or Lord Byron's "project" Villa Diodati is another example of author's experiment with horror genre. The novel consists of background story of writers struggling for their lives in an old theatre, poems about the specific authors of a particular short stories, which introduce the short stories and the short stories themselves. *Haunted* reflects a very influential stories of horror, people had to live through, which is becoming a new article in the commodity market.

Characters like Saint Gut-Free, Lady Baglady, Chef Assassin and others decide to take part in writers retreat, compared to Villa Diodati, organized by Mr. Whittier. He tells them he will lock them up in an abandoned theatre for three months to enable them to write their masterpieces, provided with sufficient amount of food and other necessities. However the group decides that they could make more money not on their writing but on their horror from suffering in inhuman conditions.

They start to sabotage the food and utilities, but independently on each other and end up with no food, no heat, and no electricity. Mr. Whittier accidentally dies and the writers start to commit suicides or kill themselves. They even turn to cannibalism of a living person. In the end Mr. Whittier shows up, telling them he had faked his death and secretly observed

them and that now they are free. The writers refuse to leave the theatre and break the locks to be rescued and to share their versions of the stories with world.

6.1. Self-tormenting

In *Haunted*, no main hero, who would fight against something, is present. There are only people from different social background, who represent the whole society, fighting themselves. There are many examples every one of them hurting, humiliating and killing himself, but there is no need to describe it any closer, because it is really a nauseating list. Palahniuk again exaggerated a social phenomenon by this, to make it more visible and to make people aware of it. He put his characters into unreal situation, to show a specific example of behaviour which he had noticed in society.

He writes about people harming themselves physically in an effort to be famous and rich, after the world rescues them. Palahniuk does not react to actual self-harm as a mental disease but a form of a universal masochism always present in every culture, which somehow culminates in these times. *“That’s why we love conflict, he says. We love to hate. To stop a war, we declare war on it. ... ‘Any call for world peace,’ Mr. Whittier would say, ‘is a lie.’ ... Another excuse to fight. No, we love war. ... We have always loved war. ... We love terrorists. Hijackers. Dictators.”* (pp. 100 - 101) He talks about loving the conflict, because he cannot explain the media obsession with catastrophes and he interprets in the way that people love pain and suffering. Conflict is entertaining and as long as it is not happening to them, it keeps people distracted from their personal problems, which seem more important to them. The characters know it, so they want to live through a real horror, to sell their story in a good bargain.

They do not regret mutilating themselves, as they see it as a prop to gain fame and money, because there is a villain missing in their lives. Palahniuk probably reacts on a phenomenon which was brought to the culture by yellow journalism – people feel the only way for them to become interesting, is describing their own tragedy. But Palahniuk implies, their tragedies and horrors are in some cases made up. It is the case of the writers in the *Writer’s Retreat*, they have really suffered and were tormented, but not by their prisoner but by themselves. They even say that it actually did not hurt, because they did not live through the real horror from someone torturing them.

“Despite the ghost, our life is almost bad enough. To Sister Vigilante, the ghost is a hero. She says we hate heroes. ‘Civilization always works best,’ Sister Vigilante says, picking

the knife under another fingernail, 'when we have a bogeyman.' (p. 225) This line can be interpreted in two ways. The first one is that people work best under some kind of pressure. And it is not probably meant only working in jobs or manually, but working as humans. Only in times of wars and trouble, people were able to unite, help and in a touch with inhumanity, they could show, how much humanity is left in them. It is not portrayed straight in *Haunted*, but it might have reference to the supposed life of the characters' after they would be saved. They count on that they will be covered with compassion and money. The second interpretation is that only when there is a villain, or something which could be complaint about, the people have an opportunity to make their lives more interesting and simply better out of their misery.

What Palahniuk states clearly is that people have wars, because they are easily bored and that they deny their low threshold for boredom. It is shocking, if you consider the possibility that the main reason which causes suffering is not hatred nor the need for power, but boredom. "*And, channelling Mr. Whittier, he's saying that human beings need to accept the wild-animal side of their nature. We need some way to exhaust our fight-or-flight reflexes. ... If we ignore our need to hurt and get hurt, if we deny that need and let pile up, that's when we get wars. Serial killers. School shootings.*" (p. 291) The possible solution is offering itself. Consensual violence. The evidence that Palahniuk's work spins in a circle.

Conclusion

In Palahniuk's life there were many moments, which had influenced his novels. The main influence had his personal experiences which directly touched his life and the development of American society, with the life stories of people who he does not know and their actions which are indirectly reflected in his books. The first part of the thesis therefore deals with Palahniuk and his works, his life and a development of American society in the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, with regard to a conflict in it. Furthermore the general theory of violence has been added to introduce the problem of violence as seen by psychologists.

Palahniuk's works reflect the development of contemporary conformist society, where men are losing their manhood, where the lust for power controls people's lives and where the people are willing to harm themselves only to make a profit out of it. All these themes are connected with the element of violence which Palahniuk perceives not as a solution to all problems, but as a substitute mechanism, which people use more and more often, but in fact do not know what to do with it and end up badly. He warns people against the consumerism which leads to unhappy life. He comments on the phenomenon of people living in the world where they cannot think on their own and that their actions are driven by the commercialised media.

The analysis of *Fight Club* comprises of many themes, as *Fight Club* itself is a novel rich in symbolism. The decline of masculinity in American society is entwining the whole novel, so a considerable part of the analysis is devoted to it and to the symbols related to it. Another part discusses Palahniuk's concept of a consensual violence as a solution to some of the characters' problems and a metaphorical rebellion against God, which is explained as a way of attracting God's attention for the characters. *Fight Club* is a novel full of violence, it describes and kind of illustrates the violent tendencies in American society, but it warns against behaving violently as aggressiveness never does any good.

Lullaby is about a word abuse and rather than with fighting the God, it deals with the themes of guilt, just punishment and the consequences of people's behaviour. The analysis starts with how the words and volume can be used to violate others, which is also included in the chapter dealing with the power media give to words. As well as in *Fight Club*, the main character of *Lullaby* has an issue with God. In this case he doesn't stand in the opposition, but he puts a part of God's power on himself, to punish people around him. This symbolism was to be looked into in another of the chapters. Finally, the penultimate

part reflects the author's thoughts on the topic of whether words really are that powerful. Although Palahniuk admits words have a really great power, he thinks their power is not totally invincible and that it can be fought against.

The last of the analyses is concerned with the novel *Haunted* and its approach to violence. Here the characters are hurting themselves to gain money and fame and Palahniuk sees that as one of the most deviating usages of violence. The analysis reveals his negative attitude towards hyped suffering and people's fondness for war.

This thesis is also an evidence that Palahniuk belongs to the category of existentialist authors, as he not only criticizes society but he places his characters into the opposition with God. Although they try to change things and reject God or to replace Him, they fail and are condemned to life with no faith and no future. Violence produces violence and Palahniuk implies that even though his characters behave in the name of supposed justice, still they deserve to be punished by a higher force.

This thesis has proven that Palahniuk's works contain different types of violence. Nevertheless his concept is that violence is in fact unhealthy phenomenon in society. The main thought is that people should get to know the borders and consider the consequences of their behaviour – when they use violence they should expect an adequate answer.

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Anotace

Jméno a příjmení:	Kateřina Kovářová
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Rok obhajoby:	2015

Název práce:	Chuck Palahniuk a násilí v jeho knihách
Název v angličtině:	Chuck Palahniuk and Violence in His Books
Anotace práce:	Cílem této práce je popis násilí použitého v knihách Chucka Palahniuka. Zabývá se aspekty, které ho ovlivňují v jeho tvorbě, ať už sociokulturními anebo událostmi z jeho osobního života.
Klíčová slova:	Chuck Palahniuk, násilí, konzumerismus, media, americká společnost
Anotace v angličtině:	The aim of this thesis is to describe the violence in books of Chuck Palahniuk. It deals with both aspects which influence his works – sociocultural and personal.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Chuck Palahniuk, violence, consumerism, media, American Society
Přílohy vázané v práci:	-
Rozsah práce:	42 stran
Jazyk práce:	Angličtina

Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá prvky násilí v pracích Amerického spisovatele Chucka Palahniuka. Je pomyslně rozdělena do dvou částí – ta první se zabývá násilím a psychologickými teoriemi, které jsou s ním spojené, a sociokulturními a osobními aspekty, které pravděpodobně ovlivnily Palahniuka v jeho tvorbě na toto téma. Druhá část je věnována analýzám tří z jeho děl – Klub rváčů, Ukolébavka a Strašidla. V každé z nich je popsán jiný druh násilí, takže každá z analýz je výsledkem jiné teorie, nicméně se tato práce snaží dokázat, že násilí je nezdravý jev ve společnosti a že Palahniuk před ním nepřímo varuje.