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Bakalářská práce

Self-destruction, despair, and crisis of identity in
Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and *Invisible
Monsters*

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité materiály a literaturu.

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Abstract

This thesis aims to capture and subsequently understand the self-destructive behavior of the main characters of Chuck Palahniuk's novels *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters*.

The focus will be on individuals' desperation and identity crisis and how they influence each other. In this bachelor thesis, I am also describing the author's criticism of today's society, how it affects his books and what inspires him to be a respected writer.

Keywords

Chuck Palahniuk, crisis, despair, self-destruction, chaos

Introduction

The first time I ever heard about Chuck Palahniuk was when I was a fourteen-year-old teenager who did not know what to do with life. After I had seen the movie *Fight Club* I was decidedly impressed. (Fincher, 1999, movie) Not just because of the remarkably great elaboration of the movie with visual and sound effects, and the phenomenal acting of Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, and Helena Bonham Carter, but mainly because of the shocking theme of the depressing age of the 1990s, the decade, when I was born. I have always been realistic about the world and what to expect in life, I understood that the world is not just a happy place, but one can get in trouble at any time. Nevertheless, my perspective was brightened and at the same time – confused.

When I first read the book *Fight Club* (1996) it changed my point of view on everything. I started to concern myself deeply with important issues I was ignoring before. I finally found someone, who can understand my pain, my chaos, my despair. That is the moment when I started to read Chuck Palahniuk's works. I have read fifteen books already and I have chosen two of the novels to write about in my bachelor's thesis – *Fight Club* and the second novel Palahniuk ever published, *Invisible Monsters*. This book was supposed to be his first distributed novel, but it was too disturbing to publish. Considering this fact, the author decided to write a more alarming, violent, and controversial work. The *Fight Club*. (Keeseey, 2016, p. 15)

The thesis is divided into three parts. The first one is about the author of these two novels Chuck Palahniuk. I am describing his life history and his existing work, and in addition, I am presenting a lesser-known term Transgressive fiction. The other two parts are about books. This bachelor's thesis focuses on describing three negative elements in selected novels, including despair, a crisis of identity, and self-destruction. These parts are described firstly by summarizing the books, and then by analysing the characters and the problematic theme. This work explains the definition of the chosen topics and explains various mental illnesses of the human mind. Furthermore, I describe today's society based on the opinion of the author and protagonists of the novels.

1 Author and his life

Charles Michael Palahniuk (Ukrainian pronouncing /'pɔ:lənɪk/ - according to his paternal grandparent's names – Paula and Nick) is an American author of short stories and novels in a transgressive fiction writing style. He was born on February 21, 1962, in Pasco, Washington, U.S. His books are as atypical as his life story. He grew up in a mobile home and after his parents divorced, when he was a teenage boy, Chuck and his three siblings started to live at their maternal grandparents' ranch (Kovářová, 2015). In high school, he found a passion for writing, where he won his first award with the poem "Most Wittiest" (Chaplinsky, 2020).

In his early twenties, he started to study journalism at the University of Oregon. In the meantime, he started to work as a volunteer in a homeless shelter and a hospice as an escort for terminally ill people, that needed to help with transport to support groups. He stopped volunteering after one of the patients in the hospice, whom he was close to, died. However, this was not the first death he had encountered in his life. The violent influence on Palahniuk's stories started many years before he was even born. Chuck Palahniuk's grandfather killed his wife with a shotgun after arguing about the price of the sewing machine she had paid and when he could not find his son Fred (Chuck's father), he shot himself in the head (Chalmers, August 1, 2004).

Fred survived this accident but died later when Chuck was an adult. In 1999 ex-boyfriend of his father's new girlfriend shot them both in their bed; even though the bodies were burnt in the house, the murderer was found and sentenced to death. However, the death penalty was lowered to spending the rest of his life in prison in the following years (Chalmers, August 1, 2004).

Palahniuk took part in the trial and then he had to face his demons and how to deal with the rage that the loss of his father caused. The death of his father affected him a lot. He started to write a novel, *Lullaby* about a lullaby that could kill a newborn and how the protagonist tries to stop the tragedy. The book had a positive response from readers. Maybe that was a signal to get on and continue writing. As he once said in a personal development seminar in 1988: "I want to write books that bring people back to reading." (Keeseey, 2016, p. 3) He simply could not quit.

He started to write novels when he was in his thirties. The author possibly waited to develop the best writing skills to prove that he is not just a journalist, but also

a good writer of novels and short stories. And at this time his work started to be his therapy. In order to calm himself and become more self-aware, he put his personal disgust and experiences into his novels and short stories. Or perhaps he wanted to point out the failing of today's society as well.

Not only other people's lives have influenced Palahniuk's life. Great inspiration comes from heart and soul. The readers can consider that another important impact on his life is his homosexuality. He tried to hide this part of his identity for a very long time, but in 2003, he "came out" as gay. There are many speculations about an interview with Karen Valby, a reporter for Entertainment Weekly. Chuck Palahniuk thought that he might say something about his sexual orientation in the discussion and he was highly worried about the fact, that she will tell the world. Following his fear of being revealed, he filled in an audio post about the moderator on the Newspaper's website and puts a bad report about Mrs. Valby's professionalism. After the publication of the article, it turned out his distress was unnecessary because Mrs. Valby did not say anything about his homosexuality or sexual orientation. He essentially confessed without a plan. He deleted the audiotape and apologized for being rude and childish. However, it was too late. Many people already knew. (Chalmers, August 1, 2004)

He is not likely to talk about his personal life, in one interview he commented on this unpleasant situation: I do regret sort of lashing out against the writer, he says. But really, it was like they were going to completely trivialize me. I mean, it does not matter what I do with my life or what I produce? (Hedegaard, June 30, 2005) It seems like Palahniuk does not want his fans and other people to connect his sexual orientation with his books. These are two separate things. It does not matter if he is heterosexual or homosexual; what matters is the main message of his thoughts in his works.

Palahniuk now lives as an openly gay man, residing with his unnamed male partner and two dogs in a former church compound outside Vancouver, Washington. (Terry, April 1, 2012)

1.1 Palahniuk and his work

There is no hesitation that the largest impact on Palahniuk's works had his life history. His life was never straightforward. As a young boy, according to his teacher, he was not manly enough, and he was forced to take special gym lessons on how to be more "masculine". A restless environment was a part of his childhood, with his parents constantly arguing in front of him and other children. He and his siblings tried to stop the screaming by various acts to disturb them, even if it caused damage or hurt. "To interrupt a loud fight between my parents," Palahniuk recalled, "I once jumped on a needle that was sticking out of the carpet. When I hopped, bleeding, into the kitchen, the shouting ended like magic." (Keesey, 2016, p. 2) Possibly this was the impulse for the protagonists in his stories to tend to self-destruction. The feelings of violence, sadness, and anxiety have been with him all his life since he was a child, and readers tend to notice this in his works very often.

Readers consider Palahniuk's novels unique because they are brutally honest about loneliness and emptiness. One could not be able to comprehend the realistic truth, pain, and suffering originating from our soul. These authors' books are not for everyone. Chuck's thoughts are very difficult for understanding. Palahniuk can often be misunderstood because some readers criticize him due to his taboo topics, such as violence, anarchy, mental illness, homosexuality, drug addiction, plastic surgery, or death, before they even read his books. All those forbidden topics were less common in the nineties and writers did not include them in their works; they were simply not mentioned because it was not appropriate. However, Chuck was different. He wanted to shock people. The best way to remember the author is to give the readers something new, special, and provocative. It was a very good performance by Palahniuk in every aspect.

The first books he wrote are called "If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home Already" – after rejection he transformed a few parts of it into *Fight Club*, and "Manifesto" – he rewrote this novel and renamed it *Invisible Monsters*. After *Fight Club*, a more celebrated eponymous movie followed three years later. After big success, he began to devote himself fully to writing stories he wanted to share with the rest of the world. His career continued with the novels *Survivor*, *Choke*, and as I already mentioned on the previous pages – *Lullaby*, a horror-satire book that won the 2003 Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award. (The novel written after Chuck's father's death belongs

to a very sad period of his life. Each of us has been haunted by the past and Chuck's past helped him to move forward (Palahniuk, 2002, p. 8). While people are reading this book, they are able to feel how broken and desperate Palahniuk was when he wrote it. The misunderstanding of fairness about how life should look like. The injustice is as if people were just the rubbish God flushed down to the earth. (Palahniuk, 2002, p. 76)

God is incredibly often mentioned in most of his books. The audience may have the impression that God means for Palahniuk an evil idol, which left people on this planet and vanished. In the same way, Palahniuk mentioned many times a father that left the family and his children in his books. A point of reference is what people seek in this confusing world, and they rely on someone to show it to them or at least explain where to look for it. And if they cannot get help from others, people want to rebel to get attention from a high power. This thought is very often seen in *Fight Club*.

There is a need to highlight one more book by Chuck Palahniuk called *Haunted*, published in 2005. The infamous dark horror comedy including the legendary short story "Guts", made seventy-three people faint at reading by the author himself (Deining, December 22, 2020). The book is about people telling their stories in a theatre. The group is locked in a building against their free will, and they are trying to survive one year without electricity, food, and medical help, without any connection with the outside world. They are trying to ease their suffering and depression with storytelling and all they want is to escape with the best story they could ever write. Therefore, they are starting to torture themselves mutually: Sister Vigilante was prying up her fingernails with a knife and says, that they need a fictional torturer to have people's sympathy and they needed to look like victims to make a good horror story. Everything must work against them even if it is a lie (Palahniuk, 2011, p. 253).

In a story by the character Saint Gut-Free, "Guts" is divided into three parts. One is about carrot, the second is about vax and the third is about the guts. Regardless of how disturbing the stories are, I believe that they are deliberately ordered from the most peaceful up to the most horrifying one. As a result, the author achieves the greatest shock possible for the readers. All three tales include sexual experimentations of young inquisitive teenage boys, who want to experiment with a newfound approach to get the best orgasm they could ever feel. The young man tried new dangerous stimulations and initially expected to have a different wonderful experience, but it did not turn out this way. Sadly, these techniques ended on a tragic note. These stories are very extreme and

the last is too brutal, too disturbing to the closer description. The most disturbing fact about these stories is that they are probably real. (Deininger, December 22, 2020)

According to Deininger, all three acts that appear in “Guts” are based on real reports. Palahniuk claims a friend told him about the first two acts. For the last story, which is the most shocking, the author visited a group of sex addicts for research and heard the tragedy from someone there. (Deininger, December 22, 2020) Although many people criticized Palahniuk’s *Haunted* negatively, the author rose above his career and achieved great success among his fans. This book moved his life forward again. In a bizarre, odd, speculated direction.

1.2 Transgressive fiction

The adjective Transgressive may be defined as: “violating or challenging socially accepted standards of behaviour, belief, morality, or taste” (Collins English Dictionary, 2012). To some extent, transgressive fiction has been described by Anne H. Soukhanov as a new literary genre that graphically presents issues such as incest and other deviant sexual practices, mutilation, urban violence and violence against women, drug use, and extremely dysfunctional family relationships (Soukhanov, 1996, p. 128).

Most readers tend to perceive this genre as being similar to satire, but in a modern direction with problems of the present era. It is literature that illustrates characters who are constrained by social norms and expectations and who overcome those limits in a shocking, unconventional, or illegal way. The term “transgressive fiction” was formulated in 1993 by Michael Silverblatt of the Los Angeles Times, who recognized a new and characteristically harmful trend in literature (Mookerjee, 2013, p. 1). The basic idea is that knowledge can no longer be found through the opposites of dialectical thinking. Instead, the body becomes the site for the possibility of knowledge. Someone would argue that the leather, piercings, and body modifications point to a desire to escape from our bodies (Silverblatt, August 1, 1993) or seek a different kind of attention from the public and themselves.

Transgressive Fiction protagonists may appear antisocial, nihilistic, or even mentally ill since they are rebelling against the basic norms of society. It seems like these characters are trying to live their lives differently from other boring people irritated about their ordinary unfulfilled life expectations. In some cases, one person’s free will becomes dangerous for another. Whenever people are facing something new or different, which would push them out of their comfort zone, they tend to become scared and more fearful, because of the danger of being hurt, they automatically start to feel insecure about the unknown and different from the usual things they know. People do not want their lives to be put in order. No one wants their problems solved. Their attention needs to be distracted by unimportant dramas, because then what would they be left with? Only the frightening unknown (Palahniuk, 1999, p. 7).

2 Fight Club

2.1 Plot

A novel called *Fight Club* focuses on three main characters - the unnamed Narrator, his alter ego Tyler Durden, and his mistress Marla Singer. A nameless Narrator is an unsatisfied man who works in the car industry. He lives a boring repetitive life exactly following uninteresting social norms, which point to a basic lifestyle of a consumer. He begins to suffer from chronic insomnia as a result of the frequent business trips to different time zones and increasing stress levels. The Narrator needed to get used to various times all around the U.S. and he started to lose an overview of where or who he is (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 29).

The protagonist starts to seek treatment, he wants sleeping pills whereas the doctor tells him that he needs natural sleep and tries to find the reason for his insomnia. The Narrator's doctor said, if he wanted to see the real pain, he should see the people with brain parasites or the cancer patients getting by with their illness and he really went (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 19). The narrator realizes that seeing the suffering of others can be therapeutic; for instance, seeing someone crying leads him to start to cry himself. After that, he could sleep again.

However, another "faker" soon starts attending the groups: a depressed woman named Marla Singer. Marla goes to support groups to feel like she is close to death. A big tourist, the second individual does not belong to support groups because she is not afflicted with these diseases. As she is mirroring his two-year faking, the narrator is not able to sleep once again, because Marla disturbed his natural environment, her lie reveals his lie to himself and he cannot justify it (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 23).

During a vacation, the Narrator meets a naked strange man named Tyler Durden on a beach, who gives him his phone number. As the narrator returns home, he finds that everything he owns is burned to the ground. He has nowhere to go so he calls Tyler if he can stand by his place. They went to a pub and Tyler says that he can live with him but under one condition, "I want you to hit me as hard as you can." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 46) he said. And the narrator punches Tyler. After that, the story begins.

While the Narrator continues to work at his corporate job, Tyler works as a waiter in a hotel, a projectionist in a cinema, and a seller of homemade soap. Tyler sabotages society with his jobs: he pees in the hotel's fancy dishes and splices pornographic frames into family movies. In the meantime, these men found Fight Club, a club, where all ordinary men can wrestle with each other, with only seven rules: :

1. You don't talk about fight club.
2. You don't talk about fight club.
3. When someone says stop, or taps out, or goes limp, the fight is over.
4. Only two guys to a fight.
5. One fight at a time.
6. They fight without shirts or shoes.
7. The fights go on as long as they have to.
8. If this is your first night at the fight club, you have to fight.

(Palahniuk, 2006, p. 49)

The next two rules of the Fight Club are explained by a mechanic later in the book: nobody in the Fight Club is the centre, except for the two men fighting, and the Fight Club will always be free of charge (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 142-143). Having been able to sleep for a while, he decides to leave the support groups for good. A short while later, Tyler receives a strange call from Marla, saying she had taken too many pills and could die. She wants him to hear how her soul leaves the body, or he can make her avoid falling asleep the whole night. Tyler comes to the hotel where Marla is living and takes her out. Meanwhile, the police arrive, and they need to escape successfully (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 61).

This is how Tyler meets Marla, and they are starting to have a bizarre romantic relationship that Narrator considers annoying. During one soap-making session, Tyler kisses the Narrator's hand and pours lye on it, giving him a scar that looks like "Tyler's kiss." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 75) Tyler insists, that he is trying to get the Narrator to embrace death and pain so that he can find his insight: The greatest moment of his life (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 77).

Fight Club is becoming popular, and many new faces are coming every day, which means, that someone broke the first two rules. As the Fight Club starts to be bigger, Tyler starts to assign different tasks to members of the club, which can contribute to

creating chaos in the city and the state. Then the Fight Club evolves. It becomes “The project Mayhem” but the narrator is not included. Recruits of Project Mayhem are put through an initiation procedure by Tyler, who then demands that they sacrifice their own identities for the collective good. Hundreds of Project Mayhem members live in Tyler’s house, all of whom are devoted to him. In addition, he sends his followers on missions to destroy society, often through vandalism. There is mentioned how someone broke into the offices, climbed out of the windows, and painted the south side of the building, and then set fire to another two windows above to make it look like a smiley face (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 118).

Men were grouped to participate in something bigger than themselves. The rebellion was the spirit they needed. A strong leader was needed to give them a new sense of purpose. Finally, they were able to feel that their lives had meaning because they were part of an important project. They could believe they are much more than just ordinary humans with a monotonous, insignificant, unimportant life, but they can make a difference by starting to reach higher places.

Before Fight Club even began, Tyler told the Narrator to not mention him to anyone. After a while, he asks him to promise to not speak about him with Marla. The Narrator promised three times. This unwritten rule was similar to the first rule of Fight Club (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 72). Unfortunately, things changed rapidly. Amid Project Mayhem going on, as planned, Tyler vanishes. The Narrator is confused and wanders through bars and clubs looking for Tyler. He needs to visit every place Tyler ever went to. Then everywhere he goes, The Narrator is addressed as “Sir” every time he asks or wants something. He realizes the truth: everyone believes he is Tyler Durden. He immediately calls Marla to answer his question. Why? She tells him, he is Tyler Durden. Tyler appears before the Narrator, explaining that he is the Narrator’s alter ego. The second personality in his head. Tyler said that the Narrator promised that he will not talk about Tyler, so he wants to clarify the situation to him before he disappears. They are not two separate men, when the Narrator is awake, he has control, but after he falls asleep, he does not really slumber, but Tyler steals the power, and he became the famous Tyler Durden (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 167).

He and the Narrator share the same body, but Tyler is someone who the Narrator wanted to be in his hidden thoughts. The panic has begun. The Narrator is the one who had sex with Marla and organizes Project Mayhem missions. He also plans murders of

enemies of The Project Mayhem. He taught others how to make explosives, and how to create chaos. All of this is his responsibility and no one else's. Frightened by what he is becoming, the Narrator tells Marla the truth. The Narrator tries to shut down Project Mayhem and the Fight Club, but he realizes that "Tyler" has prepared his loyal followers for such a possibility: the members throw the Narrator out of the Project, and he cannot defend himself. They evict him as a Fight Club member. The Narrator wants to surrender and declare everything he did, but the police are also "in the club". Despite his desire to commit suicide, he realizes that Marla is important to him and that he needs to stop this madness because he is in love with her.

The Narrator loses consciousness, Tyler takes control and then the Narrator wakes up on the top floor of the skyscraper, right where he was at the beginning of the novel. Tyler and the Narrator are up on top of the building (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 203-204) and Tyler explains that this city will burn, and they will be glorious. In the skyscraper, Marla and the members of her cancer support group discover the Narrator pointing a gun at himself. The timer for the bomb goes off, but nothing happens. The Narrator realizes that Project Mayhem must have used faulty explosives. Maybe he gave them false instructions? The Narrator shoots himself in the face for the greater good anyway. In the final chapter of the book, the Narrator reveals that his suicide attempt did not work out: he injured himself badly, but he did not die. The Narrator has not seen Tyler again since his suicide attempt. During his recovery in the hospital, Marla writes him letters. Occasionally, Project Mayhem members stop by and address him as Mr. Durden. They said they miss him, and they are looking forward to getting him back. To break the unfair civilization (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 208). It seems like it is not over yet.

2.1.1 Desperation in life

Insomnia is a disorder characterized by difficulties in sleep quality and significant distress and interference with daily work. (Mellinger, March 1985). The protagonist had big problems falling asleep and staying in this kind of condition. It is the state of mind that could make one feel desperate. The desire to slumber can be incredibly strong when one suffers from sleep deprivation. There is nothing else the person wants more than some rest. He would do anything for a minute of doze. The Narrator is three weeks without sleep, nothing is real, and if it is, he is not sure about it. The Narrator was feeling helpless. His doctor said, "Insomnia is just the symptom of something larger. Find out what is wrong. Listen to your body." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 19) Perhaps it is a side effect of depression because of the Narrator's dissatisfied life, or a dissociative identity disorder, a mental health condition of people with two or more separate personalities. (Cleveland Clinic, May 25, 2021)

The Narrator had everything. A perfect apartment, a decent job, an attractive appearance, and a high salary. He told the detective, that his life was perfect, and he loved everything about it. That the whole flat was part of himself (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 110-111). Nevertheless, something was missing. The Narrator felt like he was just going through life, but he had not experienced anything. It was time to fill the emptiness he noticed. He felt like he had to do something to help himself and others like him in his subconscious. To be pushed forward but in a different way. The Narrator's life was too perfect, to be happy. Probably, he thought that he had to break everything so he could create something better (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 52). Being a slave to materialism, a weak society, and massive consumption is tiring. It is time to make a change. Therefore, the Narrator met Tyler Durden, the reason for his insomnia.

Tyler is an entirely different kind of man. Tyler Durden is desperate for power and freedom at once. However, no leader can be completely free. He is an alter ego that wants to become the main persona in a different man's body. His entire existence is fighting with the fact that he is the second one, but this phase of life is ending, he desires to be the first one.

Tyler says, "Maybe you are my schizophrenic hallucination."

I was here first the Narrator answered.

Tyler says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, well let's just see who's here last." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 168)

It is time for Tyler to break free and take control of the Narrator's body.

“Advertising has these people chasing cars and clothes they do not need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they do not need. We do not have a great war in our generation, we have a great war of the spirit. We have a great revolution against the culture. We have a spiritual depression.” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 149) Mechanic says. In Tyler's opinion, modern society is evil. He dislikes a society that makes men strive for the minimum of what they are capable of. Society taught them that they cannot make a change, they are what society wants them to be. A life of boring white-collar workers without any vision of a better future. They are a generation that is raised by mothers rather than fathers. Fathers are gone as well as God. As a unit, they must now demonstrate their power by pointing at themselves with great deeds and being noticed. The best way to draw attention to oneself is to create chaos.

Tyler, in Keesey's opinion, has become an anarchistic character because of his despair for God's love, a sort of anti-god devoted to the destruction of everything on a deeper level. Two of Tyler's proverbs: “You will not be saved” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 143) and “Believe in me and you shall die, forever.” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 145) He is leading his followers to extinction thanks to his lack of faith (Keesey, 2016, p. 22). Great power comes with greater responsibility. Therefore, Tyler lost control over himself and his actions.

Marla Singer is a depressed lost soul. A mood disorder such as depression causes constant sadness and an inability to enjoy life. It leads to a variety of emotional and physical problems, which can affect how a person feels, thinks, and behaves (Britannica, September 9, 2021).

Marla believes that she has been close to death since she was born and that dying is a part of her. In comparison to the average person, Marla is much more aware of her mortality. She worked in the mortuary to understand the end of a lifetime better, but it did not help. Marla is thinking that she is going to die soon, but she does not want to know when or how. Marla Singer said to the Narrator that her philosophy of life is that she can die at any moment because her life is not worth anything. But the tragedy of her life is that she does not, the life is not so easy as death (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 108).

Although she discovered a lump under her arm, she chose ignorance. Subsequently, Marla began to attend support groups. Being close to the terminally ill people is giving her a feeling of peace and rest from her pointless life. When people are dying, she feels better than when they are fully alive. Despite that, someone is in this unfair world still unluckier than she is. Or does she just feel envious? Marla had met many people who had died. Her boyfriend died when she was young, then even though the people were dead they called her at night. In bars, Marla would hear the bartender calling her name, and when she picked up the phone, the line was dead. At the time, she thought this was hitting bottom (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 109). But it was not. Marla is desperate not to be alone and she strives to establish emotional connections with other people. The Narrator treats her ruthlessly, but she never expresses her feelings about it.

Marla yells, "Tyler. Can I come in? Are you home?"

The Narrator yells, that Tyler is not home.

Marla yells, "Don't be mean." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 57)

She reveals emotions through her poor decisions such as taking too many Xanax pills as an unintended self-slaughter (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 88). As a result of her knowledge of her own emotions, she has a unique understanding of the Narrator's instability. Her love for him is based on the fact that he is also broken like her.

2.1.2 Crisis of identity

People experiencing an identity crisis question their sense of their existence or their place in the world. It can be one of the most important conflicts that people face (Cherry, February 17, 2022). A person without a sense of identity can feel disconnected from who they have been, or who they will become next. They can feel like a different human every day. Sometimes they cannot believe who is the person in the mirror (Harley Therapy, May 8, 2014).

The Narrator is suffering from a mid-life crisis (a loss of self-confidence and feeling of anxiety or disappointment that can occur in early middle age) and simultaneously a crisis of identity (Britannica, November 9, 2020). As he tries to be a flawless man, he does not notice that he is becoming a boring repetitive robot. His estate has overtaken him, and he is unsure of what to do or what property to purchase next. Despite having a complete life, the Narrator cannot sleep. It is time to meet with those whose lives have not been that easy. He can find these individuals in support groups for the terminally ill. He chose to be anonymous and does not reveal his real name. In privacy, the Narrator can be whoever he wanted. The protagonist uses fake names in front of other members of support groups as a way of covering up the fact that he is not as ill as they are. "This is why I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention. You had their full attention. People listened instead of just waiting for their turn to speak." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 107)

The only thing he wants is to cry about his miserable life and then sleep in peace. His whole life is passing through his fingers without anyone paying attention. Except there. The Narrator could ease his struggles and he could relax. His mind is not aware that these are manifestations of something greater. There is an alter ego inside him, that will soon draw more attention than before. The opposite of The Narrator.

"But you are Tyler," Marla says.

No. No, I'm not. I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage, and his smarts. Tyler is funny, charming, and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. I'm not Tyler Durden. The Narrator answered.

"But you are, Tyler," Marla says.

"Tyler and I share the same body, and until now, I didn't know it." (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 119)

Tyler is a hero, a saviour. He is a man, that the Narrator adores.

Tyler is trying to push the Narrator out of his comfort zone to make him do what Tyler wants. He is the second persona in The Narrator's body, and this fact is unpleasant for him. He is taking steps to take control of the body even when the narrator is not asleep. Tyler is trying to make chaos everywhere he goes. He does not need to do real action; it is enough for him to get into people's minds and even without evidence they will start jumping as he whistles. To appear as a real person to others, a second personality must also control the main character while manipulating others around him to be more trustworthy.

Tyler despises rich people who live in unnecessary luxury, fake and insincere. He often makes their lives uncomfortable by adjusting their food or slowly putting bad thoughts in their minds overshadowed by wealth without their knowledge and he usually achieves his goals through this kind of manipulation. He wanted to have more time for his projects. Tyler told the manager of a Hotel how he had peed into soup, farted on creme brulees, and now he wanted the hotel to pay him and in return, he will not work anymore for them and will not reveal this secret to anyone. And the hotel did as he wanted (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 114). Tyler is incredibly calculating and full of useful information with improving skills.

Marla is a textbook example of a person with an Identity Crisis. She feels insecure about herself in many ways. Who is she and what is her destiny? How should she live her life? Will she die as she wants to? In peace or violently? Similar to the Narrator, Marla has psychological problems, she is suicidal, and she is constantly thinking about death. Overall, Marla seems more balanced than the Narrator, as she can explain her motivations, problems, and the reasons for the solutions she made (Daňková, Brno, 2017, p. 32).

Since she was a little girl, she had felt different and outside the society, she was trying to fit into. She has lost this desire as an adult, and she is learning to accept the fact that she belongs to the outcasts of the community. In the book *Fight Club*, the reader may notice that Marla sometimes talks about herself in the third person. The reader can notice it when she tried to commit suicide and called the police and paramedics, Marla shouts, that the girl used to be full of hope and kindness and now she

is desperate and confused. Marla thinks she is just human waste, and she is afraid to commit to anything because she is afraid to make the wrong decision (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 61).

It is something she had in common with the Narrator. He also describes his feelings in the third person as Joe an organ from a male body in a magazine: “How could I compete for Tyler’s attention. I am Joe’s Enraged, Inflamed Sense of Rejection” (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 60). Marla is a hopeless woman in love with two men without knowing, she is an important character, but the readers still do not know much about her. Marla is mysterious till the end and beyond.

2.1.3 Self-destruction

Devastation and self-destruction are common topics in Palahniuk's books including *Fight Club*. According to Barowski, self-destruction can be defined as behaviour that actively contributes to negative outcomes. A person may cause harm to themselves or place themselves in a risky situation where they might suffer injury (Barowski, November 3, 2021). Three main characters are suffering from mental problems, and they are thinking that the only way to escape from it is to hit the bottom. They are desperate.

Kavadlo (2008) points out that in *Fight Club*, rebellion against the social order is transposed cruelty against the self, not the reverse. (Kavadlo, 2008, p. 5) They would love to start from the beginning of their lives to make greater things, achieve more important goals and gain more respect. During the lives of the individuals, anger and disappointment accumulated and they must fill the void by making great deeds against the unfair society. "I wanted the whole world to hit bottom." The Narrator says (Palahniuk, 2006, p.123).

Their entire existence revolves around being controlled by others or the desire to control others. Throughout the story, the Narrator wants control over himself, but at the same time, he wants Tyler to show him how, Tyler wants to control everybody, and Marla wants to be controlled by Tyler. In Tyler's philosophy, if the Narrator loses nerve before hitting the bottom, he will never succeed. Humans can only be resurrected after a disaster. After losing everything, one is free to do anything. To be awakened (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 70).

Pain, in its peculiar way, can appear addictive. The Narrator and Tyler had never been in a fight before. Their appearance seemed flawless as did the Narrator's life, but nothing lasts forever. As well as the stability of today's hectic age. In case the Narrator is unsatisfied with his work and his property, perhaps destroying them will allow him to see what he truly desires in his life. The Freedom. According to Keeseey by letting go of how one appears in others' eyes, he may not be revolutionizing the world, but he may be taking a step towards being independent (Keeseey, 2016, p. 21).

To rebel against society's propaganda, Tyler wants the Narrator to cooperate. Unfortunately, they are also amid a masculinity crisis. They need to make changes. Tyler was breaking his attachment to physical power because destroying himself would

allow him to find greater spiritual strength (Palahniuk, 2006, p. 110). In privacy, one can do or be anything he wants. People can always change their lives from the ground up if they are motivated to do so. Sometimes they are fortunate enough to stay in touch with their alter egos.

3 Invisible Monsters

3.1 Plot

The novel *Invisible Monsters* focuses on two main characters – the unnamed Narrator later known as Shannon McFarland with pseudonyms Daisy St. Patience or Bubba Joan, a queen supreme named Brandy Alexander, later known as Shannon's brother Shane McFarland. Other characters are Shannon's ex-fiancé Manus Kelley with many different names throughout the book and Evie Cottrell – her ex-best friend.

Shannon is a model who survived a major gunshot wound. Her lower jaw was shot by a gun and then eaten by birds. Thus, without half of her face, she is covered with a veil and anonymity throughout the story (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 59). Shannon always wished for attention since her parents never gave it to her. All they cared about was her mutilated gay brother. Since an unknown caller told them that he died of AIDS, this shock led to a growing obsessive addiction to supporting LGBT rights, probably because they felt guilty about banishing him from the house (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 90). She became a model and a student at a modelling school, where she met her best friend, Evie. However, her modelling career ended because of the accident, and she got lost.

Shannon did not know what to do with her life and then, during speech therapy in a hospital, she met Brandy Alexander, her saviour. Daisy St. Patience is the first of many new identities that Brandy gives to the narrator. She teaches her how to make a new life and identity for herself and not to look back to the past. To become invisible (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 107). In search of Brandy's sister, Shannon, Brandy, and Manus take a cross-country road trip. It seems like Brandy has no idea that the sister they are looking for is in the car with her. To fund their trips, they are selling drugs while they travel. The group arranges a tour of luxury mansions and then steals make-up, jewellery, and many pills from the owner's bathrooms and first aid kits only to such an amount that it does not appear something is missing (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 29).

During their journey Shannon discovers when Brandy was a young boy, he was sexually abused by a police officer named Manus, resulting in gonorrhoea illness that caused his parents to kick him out of the house. Shannon is shocked. She just finds out that her ex-fiancé is responsible for all the misfortune in her family, Manus met Shannon right after her brother run away from his hometown. It was not a romantic circumstance. Her love was a lie (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 252-254).

It appears like no one truly knows who the other person sitting in the car is. There are three people with many identities with a connected past shrouded in fog. Or not? Readers cannot be sure about anything so far. On the road, Manus is slowly poisoned with artificial female hormones by Shannon as an act of revenge and Brandy reveals that she is not actually transgender, as the last important transformation did not happen. After what he experienced, Shane was no longer himself, to prevent others from controlling him, Brandy takes on the image of a woman to disguise his identity. To make the greatest difference. Brandy says, "I figure, the bigger the mistake looks, the better chance I'll have to break out and live a real life." (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 205)

Evie wants Shannon to live with her, but after she moves into the house, Evie leaves Shannon alone. In the night Manus breaks into the house to kill Evie with a knife thinking she will tell Shannon about their affair. Shannon wakes up and points a rifle that was hidden under her bed directly at him. After he gives up, he apologizes, claiming that sex with Evie did not mean anything to him, and telling her that she needs to forgive him. Manus is locked in the closet by Shannon. She is upset that her ex-fiancé had cheated on her with her best friend, which was something she never imagined happening. Such a betrayal. In retaliation, she sets the house on fire. After she drugs Manus, she locks him in the trunk of his car, and then she drives straight to Brandy Alexander's hotel, terrified of getting arrested for arson. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 158)

At the hotel, she meets three drag queens, the Rhea sisters, who are financing Brandy's operations. Then readers learn that Brandy Alexander is actually her biological brother, Shane. Through a series of surgeries, Shane is trying to look like his sister Shannon, whom he always loved the most. Shannon realizes that Brandy especially looks like her before the accident. Shane's death was a lie, it was a punishment towards his parents for being kicked out of the house. Shannon is unpleasantly surprised. Her dead brother is alive and changed, her love is a sexual predator drugged in a car and her best friend is a traitor. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 180) What will happen next? They hit the road.

The protagonist has an idea and threatens Evie with prison saying that Manus will tell the police, he shot her, and Evie helped him because of their relationship (Same as she threatens Manus). She is demanding the insurance money for her burned-down home to stay quiet (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 227). Shannon's strategy is effective. Evie gives

her the money with threats that if they ever see each other again, she will kill her. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 263) That is a warning Shannon can use later.

After a while, they visit a mansion, of which the realtor is Evie's mother. They start talking with her and discover that Evie was born as a male and transformed into a woman at an early age and she will have a wedding tomorrow. Another shocking information for Manus and Shannon. Shannon suddenly realizes that Evie had always been more of a masculine figure, and she always returned Shannon's clothes pulled and torn by her larger body shape. She also sees her scars, which she had previously been unable to associate with a specific procedure. It makes sense, but it is hard to believe (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 269). Consequently, they attend the wedding. And everything goes out of hand.

Before the ceremony begins, Shannon walks away from the trio for a moment and sets the house on fire so that something can happen the way she wishes, at the same place where she was at the beginning of the novel. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 273) At the same time, they discover that Manus also disappeared. And the groom as well. An enraged bride emerges from the pantry, shouting that she caught her future husband with her ex-lover during sex. An angry Evie runs to her bedroom which is already on fire and grabs her rifle. She got burned, but nothing can stop her. She wants to kill Brandy that looks like a Shannon, and she blames Brandy for ruining her whole life. And then, Evie shot her right in the heart (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 278-279).

At this point, Shannon begins to narrate her and Brandy's life story. She confesses, that she is his sister, and the time she had been beside him while looking for her, they had reunited as a family. That she knows that his real name is Shane McFarland, and she knows that Brandy helped her because he must have felt that Shannon is his sister even though she is mutilated. Brandy admits that he has known about Shannon all the time. Shannon writes down that she did not put the hair spray into the rubbish bin Brandy needed to burn, he said he did it to himself on purpose, to escape the boring life of a perfect child. Shannon reveals the truth that she shot herself in the mouth to stop being so pretty and being a slave to her beautiful look (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 282).

Shannon also learns that Brandy and Evie have known each other since previous years when they met in support groups for transgender people. That it was Evie who

called him about the accident, right after he decided to go to the hospital to save her. He tells Shannon that this shooting is staged. Evie and Brandy wanted to have the greatest drama, but even though Brandy wore a bulletproof vest, Evie actually shot him in his breast. Brandy goes to the hospital. Later, in the hospital, Shannon realizes that she has never genuinely loved anyone except her brother. Love is everything that can make her happy and free herself from her previous life, which was only one beautiful lie. She tells a sleeping Brandy that since Shane is still undecided about what he wants out of life, he may have the one thing she has left, her identity as Shannon McFarland. She is leaving all her identification in his hand. The novel ends with Shannon leaving the hospital into the world to find a new life (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 295-296).

3.1.1 Desperation in life

As in *Fight Club*, the narrator's life in *Invisible Monsters* seemed more complete than happy, and she wanted to escape the ordinary life of the beautiful girl who currently has everything she ever wanted. (Rezlerová, 2016, p. 50) Her life needed a break. Some radical change so that she could liberate herself from being expected to be a perfect woman with a flawless look, a handsome husband, and a great career. Shannon and Brandy always wanted unhealthy attention. This behaviour is Histrionic Personality Disorder. To feel good about themselves, they must appear to others in the best view and feel noticed. Often, those with this disorder act dramatically to gain attention and they want to be the centre of interest around others even if it includes irrational behaviour (Janowsky, 2008, ch. 30).

Due to the genetic predisposition to this disease, the novel shows a similar behaviour among siblings. Shane is one year older than Shannon and tries to be more visible in the eyes of his parents. To escape the stereotype of an average young boy, he planned an accident with an exploded hairspray can that mutilated him, and his parents believed it was Shannon's fault because it seemed she hated him. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 165) Shane was in the centre of their parents' regard and Shannon became invisible. After Shane's faked death the attention was doubled. Thus, she became a model with a cynical view of life.

Both main characters are fighting against the rules of society like Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*. However, the novel *Invisible Monsters* focuses more on beauty and appearance. The novel tries to show us that even with a perfect appearance, people do not have to feel satisfied with life. The beauty began to confine and oppress the narrator rather than help her in developing a joyful presence. Shannon became a victim of beauty and realized that she could not be who she wanted to be, she wanted to be free, but she became a slave to appearance instead, she always had to be perfect and flawless, otherwise, the people around her would start judging her. She decided to live her life according to her own rules rather than the rules society told her to follow, claiming that appearance is everything. She was addicted to her beauty, and she wanted to heal herself in an unusual direction (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 285).

3.1.2 Crisis of identity

Transgender refers to people whose gender identity does not correspond to the sex in which they were born. Gender identities are determined by how people feel about themselves, whereas gender expressions are the ways in which they transmit their identities to others through behaviour, clothes, or physical traits. (American Psychological Association, 2015, p. 832-864)

Shane McFarland as Brandy Alexander, a person with many identities and an interesting past who wants to completely defy his destiny in the greatest form of rebellion. A transformation. Brandy looks like a female supermodel, but he is not really a woman, he does not want to be labelled male or female. None. Glorious Brandy Alexander. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 261) He and his sister are trying to rebel against the stereotype of an American family. Rather than face their determined identity, they want freedom, so Shane transforms into a woman, followed by Shannon, who turns into a monster, unaware of each other's transformation. His real existence has nothing to do with gender or sex identification. (Slade, 2013, p. 32)

Evie was the opposite of Shane; she had identified herself with the opposite sex since childhood and believed she would be happier as a woman than a man. This was not the case; she expected her whole life to be exactly as she had dreamed of when she was younger, but the reality is always different. Thus, there was enough place for a great drama that would perfectly diversify the life and perhaps turn it around so that she could start again from the beginning. Just like the other protagonists in the story. Everyone is searching for a fresh new origination in their lives by making mistakes to feel more natural. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 166)

Manus appears to be a character who is not sure which class he belongs to. The book describes him as a detective who arrests sexual predators who are waiting for young boys in the park. Therefore, he becomes a bait, but as he grows older, he catches fewer predators, and he begins to be desperate. Trying to be a trusted young gay man, he studies magazines and buys gay porn to know how to act. He became obsessed with it, and over time, he starts harassing other men to make sure he is still attractive enough for them to have sex with him. Ironically, he became the predator himself. He is undecided about which group he should fit into. Whether he is heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, refusing to admit that he is confused and trying to hide who he probably is, he is creating a problem with his identity. (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 228-229) The end of the

book reveals that Manus, after having been poisoned by McFarland's siblings with female hormones in his food for months, now wants to be a woman and change his destiny. Shannon describes: "Jump to someday down the road soon when Manus will get his breasts." (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 290)

3.1.3 Self-destruction

Self-destruction reflects trauma that has moulded a person's life and destiny toward reconciliation and understanding (Collado-González, 2013, p. 80) or, conversely, self-destruction means creating the necessary trauma for the protagonists to understand what to expect from life.

Shannon intended to escape the spotlight and her perfection by making irreversible disaster so that people would not even be able to look at her, which is the exact opposite of how she was admired and in the centre of attention before the accident. At the beginning of the story, Shannon runs away from the hospital and goes to the supermarket, where she steals the biggest turkey. She just walked into the market, picked the turkey, and left without being stopped by security guards or by anyone, other people were rather pretending to do something else, to look the other way, to pick food on the shelf longer than is necessary. Only a child noticed something terrible happened. The little boy says, "Look Mom, look over there! That monster is stealing food!" (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 55) Then she gets back and gives the turkey to a speech therapist. She cries but Brandy tells her to stop living in the past and be excited about her new future.

Towards the end of the novel, Shannon feels completely identified with the fact that she will be out of sight of others forever and that she is finally free. Her personality and needs were not seen beyond her beauty, and no one considered her to be a real human with emotions before the accident (Lieders, 2019, p. 57). Her future is in her hands now, so she can become an anonymous overlooked individual who has nothing to lose and has everything to gain. Perhaps, even the true love she has been looking for her whole life. Gon Rhea, one of the three Rhea sisters, says, "The one you love and the one who loves you are never, ever the same person" (Palahniuk, 2003, p. 178). It is not always true, but the protagonists believe in this. By the beginning of the novel, it may seem to readers that the concept of love is depicted in a vicious circle. The narrator loves Manus because she believes it is right at first, although in the subconscious she suspects that between them is not love, but to please her parents' desire, she is trying to ignore it. (Keeseey, 2016, p. 29) The truth was that she loves her brother, and she does not need anything else. The protagonists focused primarily on what they lacked and not on what they received. This manner of thinking changed in the same way as the narrator did.

Conclusion

Both *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters* are told in the first person and the whole stories brings up the idea of one great chaos that is supposed to leave the reader confused until the end. As the stories are not linear, it is important that the readers pay attention to the point at which they appear in the story. There are many thematic similarities between the first two novels written by Chuck Palahniuk. The protagonists are dissatisfied with their perfect lives and seek radical change. While the Narrator in *Fight Club* is an obedient slave to consumerism and materialism, the narrator in the *Invisible Monsters* is a slave to the stereotypes of a beautiful model and the American family.

Concerning secondary characters in these novels, members of *Fight Club* sacrificed their free will in order to overthrow a society they believed was unfair and dictated what they should do and how to live their own lives. Ironically, the next step was to follow Tyler's instructions (the Narrator's alter-ego). While wearing fashionable outfits, and morphing into a beautiful woman, Brandy (the narrator's brother) rejects his physical identity and rejects labels of sexual orientation in *Invisible Monsters*, which was the exact opposite of what Shannon (the narrator) wanted. (Lieders, 2019, p. 58)

Transgressive stories provide a lot of interesting information for readers about taboo topics such as various mental illnesses, drugs, body modifications, desperation, death, anarchy, and what expectations from others and the pressure from society can do to average people around the world. The authors such as Palahniuk do not tell the audience what to do, how to behave, or how not to live their lives. No matter what race, religion, belief, or appearance one has, something like this can happen to anyone. The urge for change can overcome anybody.

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Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá primárně třemi zápornými prvky jako jsou zoufalství, krize identity a sebestrukce ve vybraných románech amerického autora Chucka Palahniuka. Oba romány jsou popsány nejdříve z hlediska jejich děje a dále analýzou postav a dané problematice tématiky, která hlavní hrdiny doprovází celými texty. V této práci je poskytnuta odborná definice různých psychických onemocnění lidské mysli. Dále se zde popisuje dnešní společnost vycházející z názorů autora a protagonistů románů ve snaze představit tzv. transgresivní literární žánr v pozitivním světle.

Annotation

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Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
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Název práce:	Sebedestrukce, zoufalství a krize identity v dílech Chucka Palahniuka: Klub rváčů a Neviditelné nestvůry.
Název práce v angličtině:	Self-destruction, despair, and crisis of identity in Chuck Palahniuk's <i>Fight Club</i> and <i>Invisible Monsters</i> .
Anotace práce:	Cílem této práce je zachycení a následovně pochopení sebedestruktivního chování hlavních postav románů Chucka Palahniuka <i>Klub rváčů</i> a <i>Neviditelné nestvůry</i> . Zaměří se na zoufalost a krizi identity jednotlivců a jak se navzájem v těchto ohledech ovlivňují. V této bakalářské práci také popisují autorovu kritiku dnešní společnosti, jaký má vliv na jeho knihy a také, co je jeho inspirací k tomu být uznávaný spisovatel.
Klíčová slova:	Chuck Palahniuk, krize, zoufalost, sebedestrukce, zmatek
Anotace v angličtině:	This thesis aims to capture and subsequently understand the self-destructive behavior of the main characters of Chuck Palahniuk's novels <i>Fight Club</i> and <i>Invisible Monsters</i> . The focus will be on individuals' desperation and identity crisis and how they influence each other. In this bachelor thesis, I am also describing the author's criticism of today's society, how it affects his books and what inspires him to be a respected writer.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Chuck Palahniuk, crisis, despair, self-destruction, chaos
Rozsah práce:	39 stran
Jazyk práce:	Anglický