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Deviantní postava v díle Chucka Palahniuka

Bakalářská práce

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Zásady pro vypracování

Bakalářská práce se zaměřuje na deviantní postavy v dílech postmoderního amerického autora Chucka Palahniuka. Nejprve práce vymezí pojem deviance v moderním slova smyslu, poté se zaměří na deviaci v literatuře a postupně analyzuje postavy ve vybraných dílech Chucka Palahniuka.

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího bakalářské práce samostatně a uvedla jsem všechny použité prameny a literaturu.

V Hradci Králové

.....

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Anotace

REZLEROVÁ, Pavla. *Deviantní postava v díle Chucka Palahniuka*. Hradec Králové: Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové. 2016. 53 s. Bakalářská práce

Cílem bakalářské práce je seznámit s pojmem deviace, vymežit deviantní chování a člověka označovaného jako deviant. Práce bude zahrnovat vybrané druhy deviace související s praktickou částí, která se týká deviantních postav ve vybraných dílech amerického postmoderního autora Chucka Palahniuka. Teoretická část bude kromě deviace obsahovat stručný život autora a jeho charakteristický styl psaní, aby se rozšířil do povědomí českého čtenáře. Práce vymezí jeho tvorbu před a po 11. září 2001 a dále bude deviantní znaky aplikovat na vybrané autorovy romány.

Klíčová slova: sociální deviace, sexuální deviace, Chuck Palahniuk, transgresivní fikce, porucha osobnosti, konzumní společnost, deviantní osudová žena

Abstract

REZLEROVÁ, Pavla. *Deviant character in the work of Chuck Palahniuk*. Hradec Králové: Faculty of Education, University of Hradec Králové. 2016. 53 p. Bachelor Degree Thesis

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to familiarize with the term deviance and to define deviant behaviour of a person who is classified as a deviant. The thesis includes specific kinds of deviance connecting the practical part of the thesis, which concerns deviant characters in selected books of the American postmodern author Chuck Palahniuk. Apart from deviance, the theoretical part includes a brief Palahniuk's autobiography and his characteristic style of writing to get acknowledgement among Czech readers. The thesis further specifies his work before and after 11th September 2001. Deviant features will be illustrated within selected author's novels.

Key words: social deviance, sexual deviance, Chuck Palahniuk, transgressive fiction, a personality disorder, consumer's society, a deviant femme fatale

Poděkování

Děkuji mockrát panu magistru Janu Sukovi, který se mi maximálně snažil vyjít vstříc. Děkuji moc za cenné rady, odborné vedení a věcné připomínky a tipy.

Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že tato bakalářská práce je uložena v souladu s rektorským výnosem č. 1/2013 (Řád pro nakládání se školními a některými jinými autorskými díly na UHK).

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1 Introduction

“It’s so hard to forget pain, but it’s even harder to remember sweetness. We have no scar to show for happiness. We learn so little from piece.”

Chuck Palahniuk (Diary; Afterword)

This Chuck Palahniuk’s quote shows how much a human should appreciate even little things he has. The individual has such a strong voice because without doing anything there is nothing to be ruined and after all, a person can learn much more from something bad that happened than from living an apple-pie life. That is the case of the author analyzed in this thesis who experienced more horrible things than anyone can imagine.

Chuck Palahniuk belongs to one of the most significant authors of the postmodern era. This bachelor thesis is dedicated to this rebel amongst rebels who does not make an ideal environment for his lost and pathetic characters who this thesis considers as deviants to the society.

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to delimit the term deviance, a deviant personality and a deviant behaviour in order to apply features connected with abnormalities within society on characters created by the contemporary American author Chuck Palahniuk.

At first, the thesis introduces deviance in modern terms. It is mainly focused on social and sexual divergences regarding an individual in a postmodern culture. There are also fields of pornography and perversion mentioned. When writing about characters in Palahniuk’s novels, the thesis further targets literature field and there are also some unique eras throughout the literature remarked, of what it can be classified as deviant.

Moreover, Chuck Palahniuk represents one breed of postmodern extremists, namely Generation X. Its members go strictly against conventions and they deny everything connected with the American dream. It must be noted that this thesis concentrates on Palahniuk’s transgressive period which is era before 11 September 2001. Further it shortly remarks important life events that influenced

author's writing style and how he developed his deviation. Furthermore, the thesis points out elements in Palahniuk writing before and after his transgressive period.

At last, two of the most famous novels are selected in order not only to apply deviant features but also to try to familiarize the Czech reader with the uniqueness and dark undertone within Palahniuk's novels.

2 Deviance in the Modern Terms

Generally, expressions such as deviance, a deviant and a deviant behaviour point to someone or something unconventional, special or non-typical, simply something weird, inadaptable, undesirable or even more, dangerous. Some people consider deviant as valuable, a little understandable, attention seeking phenomenon that rebels against norms. That already comes from the original Latin word 'deviatio', in English language it can be translated as deflection, aberration or even perversion. (Urban et al. 2008, 32) However, there are different people with different deviance.

The two main types are positive and negative. According Urban, Dubský and Bajura as positive ones we can classify excessive, even more fanatic compliance with norms, for example vehicular traffic rules (Urban et al. 2008, 45). On the contrary, as negative deviance we acknowledge things such as intensive infringement, meaning deviation of an unattainable kind, for example promiscuity, family dysfunction, racism, even homosexuality (Hrčka 2001, 21).

An extreme form of deviance is so called social pathological tendency. The word pathological is very appropriate in this content. From the original Latin words 'pathos' which means suffering, and 'logos' meaning order, it emerges that the word pathology can be understood, as a distressing order. Among pathological tendencies there are issues of the highest level of social perilousness, such as criminality, prostitution, suicide rate and also addictions of all kind, including alcohol, sex, gambling. (Urban et al. 2008, 64)

Deviance is considered to be of a universal character. It is obvious in all societies. However, it differs not only in the influence of somatic, psychological and social factors, but also, and more importantly, in the sense of different culture (norms, traditions) (Hrčka 2001).

All non-social deviances are of an antisocial character, which means there are no social interaction and no relation towards objects. (Hrčka 2001, 25) The term for

the particular group consists of words such as hidden, unmarked or unidentifiable deviances.

The question remains the same, what a man should consider as normal nowadays. Although from the emotional and value point of view the word deviant itself should be understood as neutral, in other words there should be no judgment. However, in most languages words such as deviance, deviant are taken negatively, moreover offensively.

2.1 Social Deviance

As aforementioned, deviance can appear in every single scientific field, in every culture. One of the most spread is social deviance. According to the name, it is obvious that this type is found in the human society.

According to Michal Hřčka, a social deviance should not be understood just as deviant behaviour. That is why the term ‘socially deviant phenomenon (incident)’ was established. The term social deviance is used in American and British sociology since the second half of the 19th century. Social deviance studies divergence in sense of socially unwanted, unacknowledged or even criminal behaviour, though, in terms of sociological point of view (Hřčka 2001, 32)

Social deviance emerges into two different types, primary and secondary deviance. Urban considers primary deviance as a norm rupture based on origin impulse or social, situational, psychological source, situations such as reaction on the death of a close family member included (Urban et al. 2008, 45). It is obvious that an individual develops his psyche since childhood and there are many elements that can influence his growing-up.

Secondary deviance is a result of an individual on that particular level, e. g. an individual is labelled into the group of deviants. (Urban et al. 2008, 50). However, each character behaves with an alternation of an own identity, with a reconstitution of an old self, a metamorphosis of self-approach. Therefore the secondary deviance can be understood as a double reaction, specifically a reaction

of a participant (an individual) to the public reaction and to the primary deviance (Milgram 1977). A person who behaves in a deviant way and also evinces the aforementioned deviant characteristics, it is considered as a subject of social deviance.

As far as an object of deviance is concerned, it is something the deviant behaviour is focused on (Hrčka 2001, 65). It can be anything, from the individual to the whole society, especially the consumer's society which is going to be mentioned further in the chapter about Chuck Palahniuk's deviance and the influential elements in his novels. The main aim or goal of deviation is to achieve some kind of satisfaction. In most cases it is the material profit, biological satisfaction (sexual) or social (recognition in some specific group of people, e.g. gangs).

No less important are causes of social deviance. Urban and Dubský state there are four different factors that influence deviant behaviour (Urban-Dubský 2008, 45). As the thesis further states in chapter focused on literature deviance, there are many authors who were influenced already in their childhood and family atmosphere. On the contrary, Hrčka argues that biological factors, also called genetic, are defined by the lack or even excess of hormones, following the physiological disorders, malformation and also abnormalities in development of human individual (Hrčka 2001, 72).

Psychological factors contain social malfunction in an early childhood, disorder of a relation to parental authorities, and also existential crisis (Urban et al. 2008, 60). This topic will be more specified further in the thesis where deviant characters in novels of Chuck Palahniuk are discussed.

Furthermore, social factors include distinguished social structure connected with changes of norms, including urbanization, technical progress (Hrčka 2001, 85). It can be said these are things belonging to the consumer's society which will be discussed further in the thesis.

Urban and Dubský also mention a cultural factor. It is characterized as a different normative criteria and distinct behaviour in particular cultures. This often leads to the deviant marking (stigmatization) of subjects originating from other cultures,

supposing they behave in compliance with standards of their culture in the area of another (Urban, Dubský, Bajura 2008, 95). Impulses can lead to extreme forms of deviants, such as sexual divergence or even perversion.

2.2 Sexual Deviance

The other largely spread type of deviance is the sexual one or in other word used, paraphilia. This type is classified as a sexual impulse, a fantasy or a practice which are not usual, rather deviant or bizarre. It is considered to be as a disorder of sexual arousal and satisfaction.

The term itself was used in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1980. In 1994 the strict criteria were set for the paraphilic diagnosis (Weiss 2002, 25). To this day, it requires from the deviant individual to have repetitive sexual fantasies, sexual needs or sexual behaviour, which has to comprise inhumane objects, partner's or self-torture and self-humiliation, and torture or humiliation of a child or other person without their consent.

Petr Weiss classifies two main different types of sexual deviance that are deviance concerning the activity and deviance involving the object. (Weiss 2002, 32) Deviance concerning the activity (lat. *deviatio in modo*), so called 'courtship disorder' is a malfunction in inducing sexual arousal and satisfaction. It includes voyeurism, exhibitionism, etc.

The word voyeurism comes from Latin word *voir* (to see). Sexual arousal is gained by watching the intimate actions or clueless anonymous objects. Weiss states that the most common explanation for voyeur behaviour is the precondition that concerns sexual stimulation without any threat of sexual contact or refusal (Weiss 2002, 46). Arguably it can influence mental thoughts in relation to practice these sexual fantasies with someone willingly.

Deviance involving the object (lat. *deviatio in objecto*), as Weiss further lists so called 'paraphilic target preferences' determines qualitative abnormalities of

sexual motivation characterized by an inadequate focus of erotic desire. That depends what object is the sexual appetite.

Paraphilic target preferences include a vast range of atypical sexual expression from fetishism, cross dressing (transvestites), sexual sadomasochism to paedophilia, incest and, at the extreme end of the continuum, rape. Nevertheless, these types of abnormalities also appear as higher level of sexual deviance and they belong to the category perversion.

Sexual deviance refers to atypical sexual behaviours generally defined in moral, legal or medical terms. Nonetheless, for some cultures religious mores are more important. On the other hand, B. M. Maletzky in his *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* argues that homosexuality can be taken as an example (Maletzky 1996). However, it represents something completely normal, as it is in most cultures. On the contrary, sex in moral and religious norms came to be understood as a penile-vaginal intercourse, so homosexuality is difficult to be acceptable in Third-World-Countries. In India this sexual orientation is clubbed along with bestiality (sex with animals) or paedophilia and a person could be sentenced to prison. Furthermore, there are some issues discussed relating to women.

2.2.1 Sexual Deviance in Female Gender

It is interesting and ironic at the same time to mention sexual deviance by women considering society is more tolerable to female gender. During the studies of deviant literature it was shown that references about sexual abnormalities connected to women are very rare as if sexual deviance was only a men's privilege. Despite the fact that Weisz and Earls (1995) calculate the ratio between men and women at 10:1 to 20:1 in the collection of sexual delinquents, the forensic and clinical praxis shows even bigger disproportion. Furthermore, there is also an influence by feminists. According to B. M. Maletzky (1996), feminists claim the difference is noticeable because of today's cultural influence rather than biological disposition. Yet, similar ratio is in very diverse societies, culturally speaking, as well. Results of studies of demonstrate that number of sexual female

delinquents comprises 1, 65% of all convicted women in the USA (Maletzky 1996, 32). The main reasons for their conviction were sexual abuse and smaller number of them dealt with sexual aggression.

As far as a female perversion is concerned, results are similar. Wolfgang Berner states that there are no trustworthy statistics concerning the perversion occurrence in females, much less statistics about the intensity and forms of sexual deviant process (Berner 2015, 45). Yet, this thesis mentions some of female deviant characters in novels further in the work of Chuck Palahniuk – relationships based on kinkiness included.

2.2.2 Perversion

The higher level of sexual deviance is perversion. Berner defines it as a not temporary, but permanent divergence from sexual goal (Berner 2015, 15). Unlike standard sexually deviant tendencies, perversion refers to body parts or it can also emerge from fixation on manners which are understood as temporary sexual goals to cohabitation by normal human individuals, e. g. kissing. In both cases it is considered to be an excessive emphasis of elements of pleasure (Berner, 2015, 16 - 17).

Aforementioned homosexuality does not count as a perversion, though, in origin of a meaning it should be considered as one of the perverted tendencies. However, homosexuality stands as an inversion, which can be understood as the first sign of vehement separation of homosexuality from perversion.

2.2.3 Pornography Consumption

Berner claims the general interest in porn is huge that it can be compared to Freud (1905) who labelled pornography as one of the most general humiliations of sexual life. However, pornography consumption is not classified as a kind of perversion in the right meaning though it is a releasing of psychic tension which is necessary when the sexual life has some “obstacle in achieving the goal” (Berner 2015, 28). Yet, it can be alleged that interest in pornographic material is considered to be a passively voyeur activity without any long term consequences. Regarding pornography consumption there are also certain periods and groups of authors in literary throughout the years who have taken porn as inspiration (see chapter 3).

3 Deviance in Literature

This thesis is mainly focused on deviant characters in novels of Chuck Palahniuk, however, the origin of literary deviance and Palahniuk's literary influence should be mentioned. Before introducing the author and his work, this chapter focuses on deviance in literature, because there are certain periods in literature of 20th century that are especially interesting features such as abnormalities connected to human societies.

The features of social criticism, consumer's society and creating extraordinary characters appears already in the early 1920s starting with Lost Generation, featuring mainly Francis Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, following movements Angry Young Men in Britain and Beat Generation in the United States, and ending with postmodern literary figures such as Don DeLillo, Bret Easton Ellis and aforementioned Chuck Palahniuk. Although, these periods or rather movements have many things in common, yet there is much more to emphasize - differences included.

Starting with Lost Generation, this term was originally used by Ernest Hemingway in his work *The Sun Also Rises*. However, he credited it to Gertrude Stein. According to Hemingway, Stein heard the phrase from a garage owner who repaired her car and the story is cited in a work *A Moveable Feast* which was published posthumously after Hemingway's and Stein's death in 1964. The story continues as a young mechanic fails to repair the car quickly enough, the garage owner shouts at the boy "You are all a *generation perdue*." Stein, in telling Hemingway the story, added: "That is what you are. That's what you all are ... all of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation" (Hemingway 1964, 65). These artists were eager for attention, they wanted to be heard, described what happened to them during the war. Moreover, there is some degree of self-pity in novels written by this generation. They wanted everybody to feel sorry for them. Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) is strict anti-war novel with autobiographical features.

Following another “Lost” author, Francis Scott Fitzgerald, is remembered as a great party-maker and a critic of so called American dream. In his short story *May Day* (1920) readers see his detached view over the Jazz Era and the Roaring 20s. Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), author’s semi-biography which was posthumously considered masterpiece, shows what could happen to a war veteran and his strong effort to get an old love back. Moreover, Jay Gatsby is the embodiment of Fitzgerald himself and the ending of the book is the outcome of living the foolish American Dream.

On the contrary, a movement in the United States notoriously known as Beat Generation used different methods to get attention. The term *beat* was originally used by American poet and drug addict Herbert Huncke. It referred to a state of delirium and in that context it meant tired, even more exhausted. However, later the phrase was connected with John Clellon Holmes who published a novel concerning beat topic called *Go* (1952) and the working title was The Beat Generation. Furthermore, the title was suggested by Jack Kerouac who took an inspiration from Huncke who often said “I’m beat” (Tytell 1996, 35 - 40). Traditional Beat’s work rejects standard narrative values, expresses a portrait of human conditions, mainly after using psychedelic drugs. The Beats also adhere to sexual liberation and exploration. Piece of art, *On the Road* (1957) written by aforementioned Jack Kerouac, pictures the main character free from any convention who enjoys life on a journey, especially with help of marijuana or other narcotics. The Beat named William S. Burroughs wrote a book *Naked Lunch* (1959). This novel is still recognized by its main feature and that is delusion. In addition, he was influenced mostly by death of his own wife and that led to drug addiction and having suicide tendencies which of course influenced his writing, especially during his journey on a drug trip described in the novel *Junkie* (1953).

Due to characteristic style and conventional beliefs, Beats contributed to a rise of the Hippie era. Goals of Hippies were disunited, though their generously known motto included words such as peace, love, freedom and friendship. To fulfil these ambitions they united into groups or rather communes where they often had an unconventional sex. (As Merriam – Webster list on the website www.merriam-webster.com). Alongside the lifestyle, authors had rich period, as well. Ken Kesey

who is already labelled amongst the postmodern writers but sometimes he is considered to be the point between Beats and Hippies. It is an interesting thing to mention that during his studies Kesey volunteered in the research concentrating on psychedelic drug effects (New York Times, 2001). A role of a guinea pig inspired him to write his both first and the most successful novel *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). The novel portrays not only the modern society and but also the borderline between madness and 'normality'. The novel's protagonist McMurphy is considered to be one of the most deviant characters in literary history. In conjunction with the main topic of this thesis it is important to acknowledge the feature that is included in Kesey's novel and that is group sessions which is further discussed in the chapter about Chuck Palahniuk's deviant writing style. It must be noticed that Palahniuk is more or less influenced by these movements mentioned in this chapter.

3.1 Postmodernism and Counterculture

Nevertheless, returning to this century, it must be noticed the new group of authors which is generally known as postmodernists. In general terms, postmodernism is characterized by a broad scepticism, subjectivism and or relativism (As Britannica lists on its website). It is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of scientific or objective efforts to explain reality. As Christopher Butler states (2002), postmodernism is highly sceptical of explanations which claims to be valid for all groups and cultures. Although, it relies on concrete experience over abstract principles, knowing always that the outcome of one's own experience will necessarily be fallible and relative, rather than certain and universal, it is called 'post' because of the reason of denying the existence of any ultimate principles.

As far as language is concerned, it refers to a reality outside itself, in other words it lacks the optimism of there being a scientific, philosophical or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody. This is the characteristic of so called 'postmodern' mind, as Jean François Lyotard discusses in his work *The Postmodern Condition – A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard 1979, 25). In relation

to literature, a postmodern mind focuses mostly on rebellious actions towards mainstream and it is ready to fight for better opportunities.

On the other hand, Richard Rorty claims postmodernism to be something what he calls 'the mirror of nature' (Rorty 1979) Authors combine incompatible incongruous, rather heterogeneous disparate literary techniques; they play with genres and have tendencies to mislead the reader.

However, mentioning postmodern authors leads to explaining the term counterculture. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it is a culture where values and customs are very different from and usually opposed to those accepted by most of society. The term is attributed to Theodore Roszak who mentioned it in his work *The Making of Counter Culture* (1969). In other words, it is practically just the opposite of mainstream society in other words the consumer's society (Rozsak 1969). It is a culture in opposition to the modern conventions; they live outside of the society, mostly on the edge. A good example of a counterculture which has been influencing authors over the years is Hippies era.

While targeting consumerism being the most significant feature of postmodernists, related to this, Joan Celia Lee in her essay about *US-American Satire and Consumerism* (2012) focuses on three postmodern authors including Harry Crews, Douglas Coupland and Chuck Palahniuk, though she stresses that these writers employ satire not to initiate rebellion or cultural change, but to reflect the problematic role of institutions in modern life and, in turn, the potential, even hope, personal growth (Lee 2012, 2).

Referring to these specific authors, Lee also notes that Coupland labelled his literary peers Generation X and his eponymous novel influenced mainly a generation of North American authors, Palahniuk included (Lee 2012, 5). It is an extreme branch of counterculture though with realistic thoughts and sarcastic undertone.

3.1.1 Generation X

Although, authors of this generation want to raise their voice, furthermore, they deny everything connected with aforementioned American dream which is tend to be an incentive to consumerism, as Lee further remarks (2012, 6). Other postmodern authors such as aforementioned Harry Crews, following Don DeLillo and Chuck Palahniuk are living proves of that.

These authors tend to be referred to Generation X, also shortly Gen X. The term comes from the mid of 20th century and it was originally coined by the Magnus photographer Robert Capa. He used it later as a title for a photo essay about young men and women growing up immediately after The Second World War. J. M. Ulrich and Andrea Harris describe Capa's intention in their essay *GenXegesis: Essays on Alternative Youth (Sub) Culture*, Capa said: "We named this generation, The Generation X, and even in our first enthusiasm we realized that we had something far bigger than our talents and pockets could cope with (Ulrich et al. 2001, 15). The authors of Gen X are characterized as authors who were born after Post-World War baby boom, which means those who were born between 1961 and 1981.

However, the term was later popularized by a Canadian author Douglas Coupland who used it in his novel *Generation X: Tales for An Accelerated Culture (1991)*. It is considered to be the Bible to Gen X and comprises features the new literary generation should be rich in. In his work Coupland describes lifestyles of people living in the late 80s. Nevertheless, Coupland presents counterculture through the perspective of Janet, an outsider, whose struggle to adapt to contemporary life provides readers with a unique perspective of consumerism:

I lay myself down on the ground ... and held my breath, there experiencing a mood that I have never really been able to shake completely - a mood of darkness and inevitability and fascination - a mood that surely must have been held by most young people since the dawn of time as they have crooked their necks, stared at the heavens, and watched their sky go out (Coupland 1991, 3).

GenXers express their cynical feelings and satire about consumerism: “Our parents' generation seems neither able nor interested in understanding how marketers exploit them. They take shopping at face value” (Coupland 1991, 68).

Moreover, GenXers also combine satire with fiction. DeLillo's *Running Dog* (1978), very satirically written, portrays a rumoured pornographic film of Adolf Hitler, filmed in his bunker in the era of Berlin's fall. Furthermore, DeLillo resembles Francis Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* in his thirteenth novel *Cosmopolis* (2003) because the main character Eric Parker, a 28-year-old billionaire, cruises around in his limousine, which is practically his office, in order to get a new haircut. Again, there is very bizarre look on today's world. In *Cosmopolis*, the limo is furnished with all technical and protective devices and resembles Parker's whole world, his home. Hence this fact Eric Parker can be resembled to Jay Gatsby. In the limo there is Parker's whole life which he diversifies with meetings with his wife and moreover, with prostitutes, however, everything takes place in the limo. On the other hand, Gatsby distracts himself with parties in order to meet his former love, but still doing so, he is trapped in his giant mansion. Nevertheless, there can still be some similarity seen.

Not only features of critique of consumerism are included in works of GenXers but also question of future comes to their mind. They believe the mainstream society is predicted to be doomed and practically everything is predicted to one simple thing – to be wrecked. Hence this fact, GenXers are strictly anti-consumerists although they add a little satire to all that. Coupland captured it quite precisely in his novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*:

I wonder that all things seem to be from hell these days: dates, jobs, parties, weather...Could the situation be that we no longer believe in that particular place? Or maybe we were all promised heaving in our lifetimes, and what we ended up with can't help but suffer in comparison” (Coupland 1991, 15).

Additionally, there is no precise number of members who, as far as style is concerned, belong to or claimed to be part of this generation, however, one of the GenXers is going to be mentioned more in this thesis. According to this thesis, his

characters are depicted as deviants and the author Chuck Palahniuk is going to be more discussed and analyzed, mainly in the practical part of this thesis.

4 Chuck Palahniuk and the Influence on His Writing Style

Charles Michael Palahniuk, better known as Chuck Palahniuk, represents a huge literary voice in nowadays American postmodern culture, especially because of his promoting the exact opposite of American dream.

In this thesis it should be mentioned author's early years and how he developed such a unique style of writing and an anti-consumerist attitude because Palahniuk's childhood influenced him in a significant way. Starting with Palahniuk himself, all useful life events are described in the article by Joshua Chaplinsky *Strange but True: A Short Biography on Chuck Palahniuk* (2002). Palahniuk was born in the early 60s. He spent most of his childhood in a mobile home in Burbank, Washington. However, when he was about fourteen years old, his parents divorced and Palahniuk was forced to live with maternal grandparents.

During Palahniuk's twenties, he started studying at University of Oregon's School of Journalism. After getting BA and moving to Oregon permanently, Palahniuk continued in his profession as a journalist working for a local newspaper. Nevertheless, working in this field did not last very long, Palahniuk continued working as a diesel mechanic for truck manufacture – a job where he would stay until developing his writing skills (Chaplinsky 2002). Working in many different fields gave Palahniuk experiences that he could use, and still does, in his writing.

Palahniuk returned to journalism only after establishing himself as an accomplished novelist. However, there were quite a few years of struggle relating to writing and during this period the author volunteered at a shelter and hospice to get more real stories and get more authenticity to his work. There he grew a close relationship with one of the patients. Sadly, shortly after acquitting the patient deceased and Palahniuk stopped volunteering. However, there is a silver lining; the death of his friend inspired the author to inscribe one character dealing with the same issue into his cult novel *Fight Club* (1996).

Apart from writing newspaper articles as a journalist, Palahniuk started writing fiction later in his thirties. As a biggest inspiration and mentor Palahniuk considers Tom Spanbauer, an American writer who inspired Palahniuk in a

minimalistic style,¹ including dealing with issues of sexuality, race and sexual identity. Considering Spanbauer as a founder of a dangerous writing,² Palahniuk attended his workshops in order to get more inspiration to his writing and it can be noticed that their styles are very much alike.

Nevertheless, Palahniuk's literary beginnings did not gain any success. His initial works were mostly rejected publication, especially due to the amount of disturbing content. However, struggling with the dark tone felt in his work, Palahniuk managed to get into publication one of his short stories *If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home Already* (1995), which was later added to his most famous novel *Fight Club*.

Later Palahniuk endeavoured to publish his first finished novel *Invisible Monsters* (mentioned further in chapters 5 and 6) however he was refused yet again, still due to aforementioned perversity and antisocialism in his writing. The agents could not embrace the dark tone in his work and until his voice as a writer got some recognition no one was willing to take a chance on him. Publishers still gave him a hope in form of publishing just a part of the novel, namely a short story *Manifesto* in 1996.

All changed when Palahniuk decided to go even darker and off beyond the mainstream. While a short story, a forerunner to *Fight Club*, had a difficult time of finding a publisher, its conversion into a novel experienced the opposite. All of a sudden all publishing houses were willing to give Palahniuk a chance to be successful and influential writer. As a result of *Fight Club's* success filmmakers at Twentieth Century Fox take a risk of adapting novel into a film of the same title (1999).

¹ Minimalistic style, also "writing from the body," is the act of overcoming fear to write to write painful personal truths. Readers of literary minimalism take an active role in the creation of the story, to "choose sides." It is based on oblique hints and innuendos, rather than reacting to directions from the writer. (Chaplinsky 2002)

² Dangerous writing is categorized as a brand of minimalism that utilizes many literary techniques pioneered by Spanbauer. In other words, writing dangerously, it is what scares or embarrasses authors in order to express these feelings honestly. Authors write in a first person and deal with issues of cultural taboos. Chuck Palahniuk is considered to be Spanbauer's student (Chaplinsky 2002).

However, 1999 was a breaking year for the author. The most significant event in Palahniuk's life was a death of his father. He was murdered by the ex – boyfriend of a woman he was dating. Palahniuk immersed himself in writing to cope with the tragic loss. As a result of this tragedy he rewrote his once rejected novel *Invisible Monsters* and he added one more novel, *Survivor* (1999). Publishing houses started breaking taboos and Palahniuk became one of the new wave of authors, alongside with aforesaid Harry Crews and Don DeLillo.

As of Palahniuk's significant writing style, there are many other elements that have influenced the author over the years. As this thesis mentioned before, his parents separated when he was fourteen years old and that left a huge impact on him and it is obvious in his writing. In *Fight Club* it is a lack of a father figure and question of masculinity. Moreover, Palahniuk never knew his parental grandparents. The story goes that grandfather shot and killed his grandmother after their argument over the cost of a sewing machine (Palahniuk 2003, 30). There is no surprise all of his novels have dark tone relating to human relationships and lack of human understanding.

Nevertheless, his membership in so called Cacophony society influenced his writing regarding his attitude towards consumer society. The Cacophony society was dedicated to experiencing things of the mainstream and performing large – scale pranks in public places. As Ali Smith notes in his article: “Like a noxious Douglas Coupland, Palahniuk charts new – felt and totally contemporary categories of despair (The Guardian, 2003).” Experiences Palahniuk gained during the cacophony period influenced him into inscribing *Fight Club's* Project Mayhem (see chapter 7.4). In addition to this, this thesis must state differences between his work before and after September 11, 2001. Further it is specified in the next chapter.

5 Chuck Palahniuk In The Light of the Transgressive Fiction

“We all die. The goal isn’t to live forever; the goal is to create something that will.” (Chaplinsky et al. 2003). This is how Chuck Palahniuk launched his lecture at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania which was captured on a video camera and later transformed into a documentary picture depicting this deviant author. Mentioning the word ‘deviant’, therefore this thesis remarks and emphasizes this particular postmodern writer, especially because of his style, characters and messages that are sent through his novels.

Starting this chapter with Palahniuk’s quote is meaningful because with every piece of his writing comes a new idea of how to be this recognizable and recognized author of a new era of authors who are often classified as aforementioned Generation X. Palahniuk identifies with this generation already with his feeling and attitude toward postmodern society, nevertheless, unlike DeLillo or Crews, Palahniuk’s characters try to find their purpose of being part of this society and they take an action to get recognition or even more to get above others, hence this thesis notices deviance.

Throughout the years, Palahniuk’s work has been described as transgressive fiction³. It is a genre of literature that focuses on characters who feel confined by the norms and expectations of society and who break free of those confines in unusual or illicit ways. Protagonists may seem mentally ill, anti-social (Babylon, 1997). As Palahniuk put it in the documentary picture, his characters misbehave and act badly (Chaplinsky 2003).

It is debatable to call Palahniuk’s work fiction, considering Palahniuk himself, unlike any other postmodern writers, collects his experiences in different working fields and he applies them to his novels.

³ Considering the fact that this term is basically connected to North American writers, since September 11, 2001 the term “transgressive fiction” is no longer in use because this genre is full of civil disobedience and that is marked as unacceptable. Yet, it must be mentioned that Palahniuk’s novels which are analyzed further in the thesis were written before 2001 and they belong to his transgressive period.

In the field of transgressive fiction Palahniuk is known as the author whose characters attempt freakish even grotesque actions to liberate themselves from dull consumer society. Starting with Palahniuk's very first novel *Invisible Monsters* (written 1995, first published 1999), a story about a model with different aliases who is tired of being pretty so she can shoot her face off but survives. The story further catches glimpses of model's childhood and how she develops a relationship with a woman who, as Palahniuk put it, has the biggest number of plastic surgeries in the world. The story gets even more bizarre when the female protagonist with her companion, pretending to be realtors, steal jewellery for living from other people's homes.

Palahniuk chose a unique method to get some valuable information from people to help him with his writing. As the author describes it in his non-fiction book *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (2004), he would call telephone sex numbers and ask people to tell him their dirtiest stories (Palahniuk 2004, 15).

Before writing his second novel *Fight Club* (1999), which was written before *Invisible Monsters* but published after, he worked as a volunteer in a hospice. The Narrator in *Fight Club*, which this thesis describes further in the chapter regarding it alone, visits group sessions. Palahniuk shows this problematic issue from a different angle. To get his own experience, he would volunteer himself to escort patients to appointments and support meetings to the church and he would sit there with them until the end of the session. However, according Palahniuk himself, he would feel very uncomfortable because anyhow he would try to hide; other patients would always consider him as one of the sick ones (Palahniuk 2004, 20). Palahniuk states satirically: "There was no discreet way to say I was just observing, a tourist waiting to take my charge back to hospice" (Palahniuk 2004, 25). A *tourist* is one of the deviant features which are analyzed further in the thesis. It is a feature portraying passivity and it also embodies an antihero to the society.

His last transgressive novel *Choke* (2001) deals with a sex addict who struggles with money due to bills for his mother's hospital care. In relation to this problem Palahniuk creates a whole new bizarre storyline. The main character comes up with the idea of choking on food in restaurants to get insurance money from his

“rescuers.” Moreover, there is also a motif of self – pity, another deviant feature regarding social deviance. To create his *Choke* characters Palahniuk would sit on sex addict therapy sessions, twice each week for six months, Wednesday and Friday nights (Palahniuk 2004, 22).

In addition to this, Palahniuk would still collect his inspiration to write in random rather interesting places; however, after September 2001 there has been sort of a twist in his writing, especially adding fantasy and supernatural features.

5.1 Chuck Palahniuk Beyond Transgressive Fiction

On the contrary to preceding work, Palahniuk defines three of his novels; *Lullaby* (2002), *Diary* (2003) and *Haunted* (2005), a “horror trilogy” for its supernatural elements, yet, it is still mixture of fiction and true story.

As it was stated earlier, Palahniuk’s influences are vast. Ironically, at birth of Palahniuk’s *Lullaby* there was a violent death of his father that inspired the author produce a story about a journalist Carl Streator who, by doing his work, gets mixed into a string of strange, more likely supernatural deaths, seemingly the sudden infant death syndrome. However, the cause of every deceased baby is a “culling song” which has the power of putting a baby not just to sleep, but to death. It is significant in this novel that Palahniuk deflected his work from his criticism and sarcasm to serious problems and via Streator he deals with his own loss.

With *Diary* Palahniuk shows the absurdity and here he returns to criticizing the society. The novel has a form of a diary, written by a washed – up artist nicknamed Misty. In order of taking care of her comatose husband who failed in committing suicide, Misty starts working as a maid on a tourist island. Shortly, after husband being dead, she returns to her gift – painting. However, stuck on a strange island which Palahniuk portrays as a huge consumerist territory, “they” lock her in the room, give her a catheter to be fed through a tube, in order to make her paint more and get even more attention from tourists who are willing to pay for that. By “they” Palahniuk highlights the insanity and foolishness of consumer

world where no one stands as an individual and “they” will do anything in favour of greater good, however in fact it is only about quantity not quality.

As being All Palahniuk’s early novels started as short stories, therefore it is important to mention his short story *Guts* (2004) which is now a part of *Haunted*. As the thesis mentions earlier, his work is mixture of fact and fiction, so is *Guts*. This story focuses on a skinny man who, following an experiment relating to masturbating method including swimming pool pump, loses a big part of his intestine.

Palahniuk is an expert of creating a deviant character. Although there are other interesting novels including *Snuff* (2010), portraying a porn star trying to break a world record of having a sexual intercourse with six hundred men in one single day, *Damned* (2011), focusing on a twelve-year-old girl dying from overdosing on marijuana and ending up in hell, and last but not least, his published *Beautiful You* (2015), this thesis focuses on his transgressive period which is fulfilled with Palahniuk’s early deviant writing style.

6 Deviance in Chuck Palahniuk's Writing Style

As it was noted earlier, everything Palahniuk writes is a mixture of fact and fiction. In his non – fiction stories collection *Stranger than Fiction* (2003) Palahniuk reveals that through his fiction he is trying to imitate certain aspects of real life: “The world is made of people telling stories. Look at the stock market. Look at fashion. Any long story, any novel, is just a combination of short stories” (Palahniuk 2003, 19). He obviously wants to draw an attention to the shallow consumer society and through his novels there have been significant signs that go against that mainstream feeling.

Although, it has been stated that Palahniuk's work can be slightly divided into two different eras, in other words novels published before and after September 11, 2001, his writing style has many similar elements that can be vividly seen in every piece of Palahniuk's work.

This thesis focuses mainly on Palahniuk's transgressive period, which is before 9/11 2001, however, there is very similar pattern to all his work. Palahniuk has a very distinct expressing that is textually characterized by exposition in medias res⁴ and mostly with retrospective narration. These techniques are commonly used in postmodern fiction. Palahniuk's novel usually begins with some event that the reader would expect at the end of a story. The main protagonists have the tendency to reminisce. They recall certain episodes of life that led up to the situation they are in now.

This feature can be found in all Palahniuk's transgressive novels. The Narrator in *Fight Club* goes over his actions when he is stuck with his alter - ego Tyler Durden on the roof of the building that is about to explode. *Invisible Monsters* begin with the wedding party and the main protagonist, a nameless faceless woman, lit the match and the whole house burns in flames with her and her transgender companion, even though she is well aware of consequences. After the

⁴ The term “in medias res” means “into the middle of a narrative” and it is usually combined with retrospective narration. Apart from postmodern novels, *Hamlet* can be used as a good example with this atypical narrative exposition.

first chapter the reader only gets to read the preceding actions. In Palahniuk's *Choke* there is the first line that sarcastically describes the whole point and gets the reader continue in reading even more: "If you're going to read this, don't bother" (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 2001, 1). Palahniuk unintentionally draws reader's attention since opening the book.

Furthermore, Palahniuk uses uncommon a second - person narrative. As Lars Bernaerts in his essay *Fight Club and the Embedding of Delirium in Narrative* (2009) notices, working with English pronoun "you" takes control over the reader and gives a book a tempting flow. In *Fight Club* the pronoun "you" is accompanied by messing with the time, hence the reader intentionally loses track of it. "You wake up at Air Harbor International." "You wake up at O'Hare. You wake up at La Guardia. You wake up at Logan." (Palahniuk, *Fight Club* 1996, 25). Naming different airports in United States explains different time zones The Narrator, within his employment, travels through. Palahniuk also plays with switching the second – person to the first – person narration: "You wake up at LAX. You stretch out, zigzag, knees bent, waist bent. I set my watch two hours earlier or three hours late. You lose an hour, gain an hour. This is your life and it's ending one minute at the time" (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 29). That is when the reader starts to see the absurdity and irony following The Narrator to fight with his split identity. In *Choke* Palahniuk directly urges the audience from the beginning not to read his novel: "Forget it. Get out while you're still at one piece. Save yourself. You're not getting any younger (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 2001, 1)." However, it has the exact opposite reaction and influence on the reader.

Another Palahniuk's speciality is adding protagonist's attendance in group sessions. This element also origins in Palahniuk's various working experiences, volunteering in a hospice included. Palahniuk also attended group sessions in order to get inspiration for his novels, as it was noted before (see chapter 4); *Fight Club* and *Choke* are no exception. The Narrator in *Fight Club* suffers from insomnia and in order to get some sleep, he needs to feel pain of others thus a doctor recommends him to attend men with testicular cancer in Trinity Episcopal basement. Sadly, the protagonist becomes addicted and without sitting there and listening other guys' pain he cannot sleep hence he begins to attend other kinds of group sessions - blood parasites, tuberculosis or brain parasites. Obviously, the

irony in all this is that he does not suffer from any illness he only supervises and listens, a waiting tourist. While writing *Choke* Palahniuk chose only one kind of therapy, namely sex addicts meeting. The main protagonist Victor Mancini vaguely appears in these meetings but not exactly to be healed. Instead of being serious about his addiction he sits there to get more sexual practices and to have sexual intercourse with other 'patients'. Both novels, both characters The Narrator and Victor have the same intention. They do not want to be redeemed, they are tourists – just observing and feeding from other people's pain to satisfy themselves.

Palahniuk's BA degree in journalism is perfectly identified within the structure of his novels. He writes sharp, mostly short sentences with the strict point. He precisely uses English language and he manages appropriately a crude language, as well.

Generally, Palahniuk's heroes live at the edge of the society. They comment they do not perform. While writing his transgressive novels, Palahniuk focuses on critique of consumerists. *Invisible Monsters* mock the fashion world, the main protagonist figures out that the beauty brings power over humans and the public becomes its sacrifice. *Fight Club's* hero is a collector of IKEA furniture which, after an accident, ends up in flames, ironically. *Choke's* Victor is employed in a theme park and his occupation is useless: "I just happen to be the backbone of early colonial America." "Which is?" "An Irish indentured servant (Palahniuk, Choke, 23)." The main protagonist is a servant, who is prepared to serve his purpose and go against the mainstream society.

Palahniuk does not try to create a hero, he does just the opposite. His antiheroes are outcasts, they are reshaped. Some transform themselves into women or monsters (*Invisible Monsters*), some transform reality into catastrophe (*Fight Club*).

As aforementioned earlier, this thesis focuses on deviant characters in selected Palahniuk's novels, as notable, *Fight Club* and *Choke*. Palahniuk created some of the most rejected human individuals and it is important to mention features of deviance they perform in novels. The thesis further analyzes more elements connecting with deviant behaviour included in both novels – a question of

masculinity, woman as a femme fatale in connection with searching for sexual identity, a split personality and who exactly is the winner or loser. All these symbols are illustrated in further chapters.

7 Fight Club

Starting with the first written novel (1996) which brought Chuck Palahniuk into the light of public recognition It became a worldwide phenomenon, especially because of a Hollywood blockbuster *Fight Club* (1999) directed by David Fincher and starring Edward Norton and Brad Pitt.

Taking the whole content of the novel, there is no point of searching for anything pleasant in Palahniuk's novels. From the beginning the reader can expect sarcastic punch lines, a lot of crude language and sharp sentences.

The novel is written in the second - person narrative combined with frame storyline. The story is narrated by a typical consumerist who is nameless so it is appropriate to only call him The Narrator. Palahniuk created an antihero of the society. The Narrator is one of many white collar workers and he likes to call himself a recall campaign coordinator. Although The Narrator lives in a condo and he does not hide his obsession with IKEA furniture, he cannot enjoy any of it so he starts to look for thrills. Plus he suffers from insomnia. The story gets even more bizarre at the point when The Narrator starts to attend support groups in order to feel other people's pain to help him sleep. The issue with the insomnia plays a huge part in the novel, because this sickness is related to the twist when The Narrator meets Tyler Durden. All of a sudden, he gives up his condo life (in fact because 'someone' lit his apartment on fire) and together with Tyler they stay on Paper Street in an abandoned house. Out of boredom they found a fight club. It becomes a symbol of anti-mainstream branch whose task is to rebel and make something useful for the world. Taken the fact that the first fight club is only two guys beating each other on a parking lot, now the whole project runs worldwide, in Palahniuk's sense, within United States.

7.1 The Issue of Masculinity

The thesis has mentioned before how Chuck Palahniuk creates his antiheroes to the society and *Fight Club* has as many deviants as one can count. The main topic for most of his novels deals with masculine crisis and questioning of male gender.

As an impact on consumerism, Palahniuk more likely mocks the main protagonist. The Narrator himself has the least pleasant occupation one can imagine. A white collar worker, a recall coordinator for a car company, bored out of his job, though he lives in a condo equipped with the latest IKEA furniture. On the other hand he suffers from insomnia he cannot get rid of and he feels like he is in pain. Thus his doctor recommends him to visit a support group to see real pain. Palahniuk leads the reader from one addiction to another. The Narrator starts to attend a support group focused on men cured from testicular cancer. Palahniuk gives the first hint about questioning masculinity in the novel. During the group session, The Narrator meets a former bodybuilder Bob whose testicles were removed and Palahniuk also describes his appearance through The Narrator: “Bob’s big arms were closed around to hold me inside, and I was squeezed in the dark between Bob’s new sweating tits that hang enormous, the way we think of God’s as big (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 18).” With indicating Bob to have breasts like a woman Palahniuk notes that men have lost something along the way to the top. Taking Bob as an example, he used to be a bodybuilder who took a big amount of steroids only to be on the top in business. Fame and perfect world make humans slave, another critique of consumerism from Palahniuk. As the analysis in the thesis continues, Palahniuk by being a homosexual obviously switches the roles of men and women.

Furthermore, returning to the Narrator’s insomnia symbolizes the stereotype and repetitiveness in life but in slow motion:

“Three weeks and I hadn’t slept. Three weeks without sleep, and everything becomes an out- of- body experience.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 19)

Throughout the book it is being revealed the real reason of this sickness, and that is Tyler Durden.

7.2 Split Identity

Talking about Tyler Durden, Palahniuk created just the opposite character to The Narrator, the character who is the representative of male gender. The story of how The Narrator gets to meet Tyler cannot be anymore absurd – on a nude beach. Yet, it must be noted that “Tyler had been around a long time before we met.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 32).

Palahniuk gives the reader hints from the beginning that Tyler Durden is only alter – ego of The Narrator which is why the main protagonist stays nameless the whole time. In Tyler Palahniuk designed a man exactly the opposite to any other male character appearing in the novel. Tyler with his handsome looks and multiple jobs – a movie projectionist, who stuffs a two second porn flick into children movie without anyone seem to notice; further a banquet waiter who pees into the soup while nobody is watching, and at last a soup – maker who with help of chemicals and soup creates a nitro-glycerine, a bomb in use of seeing the world in flames.

Returning to the point with insomnia, The Narrator in fact does not sleep at all. From the get go he is a well aware of Tyler being inside of him: “This is how it is with insomnia. Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can’t touch anything and nothing can touch you.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 21) Tyler Durden acts strictly against the mainstream society and “modern” world hence “he” burns The Narrator’s condo and all IKEA furniture in it in order to get the main protagonist a new life without boundaries. In fact, as the reader understands, The Narrator lit the match himself because he subconsciously wants to be somebody stronger, not just a rat in cage which is manipulated with. Together with Tyler they raise the men’s ego in form of founding a fight club.

Not to mention, Palahniuk puts stress on repetitiveness, while creating rules for fight club: “The first rule of fight club is you do not talk about fight club. The second rule of fight club is you do not talk about fight club (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 48).”... “And the seventh of fight club is if this is your first night at fight club, you have to fight.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 52) It is obvious that if the first

two rules are the same the member is eager to pass the information about the event on. Tyler and The Narrator put together street losers, other white collar workers who only serve the system in order to transform them into deviants of the society and to be as much extraordinary as they can be. Everyone wants to be Tyler, so does The Narrator.

However, Palahniuk always brings love in the form of a pervasive sex, as well. Yet, characters face a contradiction between spiritual and physical love. Despite of Palahniuk being a gay author, he perfectly shows difficulties among heterosexual relationships. For The Narrator love appears in form of Marla Singer.

7.3 Marla Singer as Femme Fatale

The Narrator meets Marla at one of the support groups, namely testicular cancer. How absurd it can be to see a woman at typically men's problem. Palahniuk still switches gender roles throughout the whole novel. The Narrator feels Marla does not belong there, that she is just a tourist observing and intruding Narrator's healing process with insomnia. As it was stated before, a tourist in Palahniuk's novels represents a slave of the system, everyone who gets along with everything, just observing, not doing anything for a change.

Although, The Narrator does not feel sympathy for Marla, he is drawn to her in form of Tyler. Marla develops a kinky sexual relationship with Tyler and that is the moment The Narrator starts to be jealous. Somehow Marla, a self-destructive depressed girl who used to work in a funeral home to feel good about herself, becomes stronger personality, even more self-confident than The Narrator, thanks to Tyler. Towards The Narrator Marla feels kind of desperate: "You fuck me, then snub me. You love me you hate me. You show me a sensitive side then you turn into a total asshole. Is this a pretty accurate description of our relationship?" (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 155). Suddenly the main protagonist feels alone, again.

Although, love does not bring anything positive out of Palahniuk's novel, it is more likely about having someone by each other's side and physical contact. Palahniuk does not even use the word 'love.' Regarding to Marla's relationship towards The Narrator and Tyler, he writes: "It's not love or anything," Marla shouts, "but I think I like you, too." Marla likes Tyler. "No, I like you." Marla shouts. "I know the difference." (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 205) Yet The Narrator is ready to die for her at the end of the novel. The reader senses through the novel that Marla can only love herself and she keeps relationship mostly towards Tyler because he is the man everyone (not only every woman) wants to be with and she is beyond everybody else.

7.4 Tyler as the Saviour and the Devil

Tyler Durden is alter – ego men should worship and exorcise at the same time. He is God and the Devil in one person. The Narrator creates him out of the desperation to be someone people would admire. Here Palahniuk highlights destruction of the society - admiration. People seek it every day, at home, at school. They would do anything to get recognition. There is a Tyler's line in the book that pretty much explains The Narrator's doing: "All the ways you wish you could be, that's me. I look like you wanna look, I fuck like you wanna fuck, I am smart, capable, and most importantly, I am free in all the ways that you are not" (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 189).

The main reason for founding fight clubs is to be someone behaving off the rules, outside of the world that was created by "the higher power" and to form an army to stand up against the consume, even in extreme form of Project Mayhem. Moreover, people try to find their own meaning. That is the result of creating communities, to find themselves and to break conventions. People become desperate to seek solidarity and respect among strangers, even if the club is based on violence. An extreme part out of a fight club but formed by selected men from fight club is Project Mayhem. It was formed in order to destroy the consumer's society, specifically to install a bomb in symbols of modern world – skyscrapers where the national corporations have their seat. However, at the end of the novel The Narrator realizes that there is no point of destroying everything because there

would be nothing left: “And the fight goes on and on because I want to be dead. Because only in death do we have names. Only in death are we no longer part of Project Mayhem.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 201).

However, at the very end of the novel, The Narrator takes action to exorcise Tyler in form of pulling trigger inside of his mouth. However he survives with injuries and storyline stays open: “We miss you Mr. Durden, we are looking to getting you back.” (Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 208).

8 Choke

On the other hand, Palahniuk's first true bestseller *Choke* (2001) does not analyze social deviance in the large extent as *Fight Club*, though it highlights the sexual deviance in all its beauty. Yet there are similarities in both novels.

The novel is mixture of switching the first and the second-person narrative combined with retrospective composition. Apart from *Fight Club*, the main protagonist is not nameless. Victor Mancini works in a theme park as an Irish servant. In the meantime he attends support group, because he is sexually addicted. Different from *Fight Club*, the absurdity is that Victor is not there to be healed, just the opposite. He searches for new sexual practices and techniques. Moreover, he mocks people inside of support group: "...Well, she's real. The legendary woman who gives head to guys who are driving only the guy loses control of his car and hits the brakes so hard the woman bites him in half, I know them. Those men and women, they're all here." (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 11). Palahniuk goes even deeper. Victor also goes to a hospital where his mother, Ida Mancini, stays because of the dementia. Victor develops bizarre method to get money for his mother's hospital care. He intentionally chokes on food in restaurants so that a person who saves him feels like a debtor and as the Good Samaritan act they pay Victor insurance money. Palahniuk created another anti-hero with a boring job and no one to look up to. Sadly, Victor stays that way all the novel. On the other hand, he is accompanied by his buddy Denny who is also a sex addict but, unlike Victor, he is trying to be cured. With this character Palahniuk portrays another Tyler Durden.

8.1 The Issue of Masculinity

In *Choke* Palahniuk catches the atmosphere of a missing father figure. Unlike in *Fight Club*, there are certain flashbacks which show the relationship between Victor and his mother. Palahniuk from his own experience tries to eliminate a father figure in order to highlight a female role in Victor's life, sadly not with the happy ending. The reader learns about how Victor's mother was a convict and

how Victor was placed from one foster family to another during his whole childhood.

Despite of Ida Mancini not being a loving and caring mother, Victor still pays her hospital care in order to get her in a better condition. Yet he is trying so desperate to be a good son towards his mother, he is looking for cheap thrills towards other women. During a group therapy dealing with his sexual addiction he mocks other patients because he does not realize he is one of them, maybe even worse: “Here are the prostitutes and sex criminals out on a three-hour release from their minimum-security jail, elbow to elbow with women who love gang bangs and men who give head in adult bookstores. The hooker reunites with the john here. The molester faces the molested.” (Palahniuk, Choke, 15). Ironically, Palahniuk puts more humour in this as he did in his earlier novels, especially when describing how Victor experiences a role – playing of a rapist with a very sexually perverted woman.

Sex is a weapon Victor uses to hide his depression that he is nothing but a complicated fraudster who fails in every way of being a man: “The truth is, sex isn’t sex unless you have a new partner every time. The first time is the only session when your head and body are both there. Even the second hour of the first time, your head can start to wander. You don’t get the full anaesthetic quality of good first-time anonymous sex.” (Palahniuk Choke, 186). Besides, his intentional choking is only an element of being felt sorry for: “Why I do this is to put adventures back into people’s lives. Why I do this is to create heroes. You gain power by pretending to be weak” (Palahniuk Choke, 50). Palahniuk creates a character who does not want to be a star, although he is trying to make one. Self-pity origins also in Victor’s childhood because he did not have a father to be proud of him and mother who only showed up for money and comfort. Throughout the novel Victor visits his mother in a hospital he pays for her and through her diaries written in Italian that he finds in their house he desperately tries to find his origin and his ancestors. The problem comes when he brings the diary to the personal mother’s doctor Paige Marshall because she seemingly speaks fluent Italian and through her Victor finds salvation.

8.2 Dr. Paige Marshall as Femme Fatale

In *Choke* Palahniuk specifies only physical love with kinky subtext. Dr. Marshall offers Victor a way to cure his mother's Alzheimer's disease. She is willing to have sex with Victor in order to get pregnant and the tissue from the living embryo can be further put into Victor's mother brain: "She is going to scramble its little unborn fetus brain and suck the mess out with a big needle and then inject that stuff into the head of somebody you know who has brain damage, to cure them. She thumbs my pants off my hips and says, 'I need you to put your faith in me.'" (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 91). According to a Dr. Marshall this way should cure all diseases. Ironically, Victor, without having problems with erection before, cannot 'get it up,' commonly speaking, when it comes to an act: "I want to fuck you so bad I can taste it." (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 117). Surely, there is Victor subconscious working. Palahniuk reveals the reason: "And no, I don't want anybody to die, but I don't want my mother back the way she's always has been." (Palahniuk, *Choke*, 117). There is a reflection of Victor's childhood.

It would not have been Palahniuk if there had been some absurdity inscribed into characters. Dr. Marshall is in reality one of the patients from the hospital Victor goes to visit his mother Marshall only pretends to be a doctor and her aim is not to help him, but only to help herself, specifically to satisfy herself. Palahniuk inscribed Marshall into the story not to help Victor but to torture him because Palahniuk more likely punishes his characters than give them any hope. And again, there is seemingly nothing left for Victor beside his best friend Denny.

8.3 A Rebel Versus A Tourist

As it was illustrated above, Victor meets his best friend Denny at sex addict group session. At the beginning Denny is a typical loser with no views. He is single, pathological masturbator who lives with his mother. At the first sight Victor and Denny are the same. On the other hand, Denny wants to make everything better.

Palahniuk follows the similar pattern as in *Fight Club* while writing this novel. Victor and Denny are like brother, just as The Narrator and Tyler Durden. They work together, go out together and masturbate together. Victor states regarding to relationship to Denny: "I don't have to pretend to know myself very well." (Palahniuk, Choke, 21). With Denny Palahniuk kind of created a man who is ready to give up a boring life he leads and somehow he wants to change and serve some purpose. As one step from the pathological masturbation he collects stones on his backyard, to keep his hands occupied at night.

Palahniuk does not reveal much about Denny's character. It is only what the reader can sense from his doing. However, Palahniuk creates a character similar to Tyler Durden. Although, in some way a loser to the society but a god to his peers who do not have the strength to rebel alone. Denny gives up his job in the theme park and as a healing process he starts to build a wall from stones he collected. All these things seem very unrealistic to Victor. Nevertheless, the turning point in the novel comes near the end when Victor chokes on food in the restaurant and the only person to save him is Denny. Denny who has known Victor's scam from the beginning gives his friend a hand. In return for really saving him, Victor helps Denny with building a wall. Palahniuk shows how easy it is to do something without a deeper purpose because work ennobles man.

Moreover, Palahniuk strictly separates his characters by giving them a personality which labels them into rebel category and tourist category. Returning to *Fight Club*, The Narrator does not take any action until he realizes that he has a serious problem regarding to personality disorder. At the end of the novel he tries to finish Tyler Durden for good. On the other hand, Victor in *Choke* stays the same throughout the whole story:

We live and we die and anything else is just delusion. It's just passive chick bullshit about feelings and sensitivity. Just made-up subject emotional crap. There is no soul. There is no God. There's just decisions and disease and death. What I am is a dirty, filthy, helpless sexaholic and I can't change, and I can't stop, and that's all I'll ever be. (Palahniuk, Choke, 156).

Through the novel, the reader notices the passivity and lack of action in Victor. He wants to help his mother but not really. He wants to give up sexual thrills but

not necessarily. Palahniuk does not have sympathy with his characters and he never tries to make something easy for anyone. It is up to them which one decides to rebel and which one stays an observing tourist.

9 Conclusion

The present bachelor thesis targets deviance in modern terms, as well as deviance in literature and it is mainly focused on postmodern American author Chuck Palahniuk.

First of all, the first chapter has analyzed the deviance in modern terms, and focused on an individual in the contemporary society. The thesis further continues with specific branches of deviant behaviour, namely social and sexual abnormalities. In relation to literature the thesis notes a view on the pornography consumption in the society. The most used features of deviation for Palahniuk's characters were a targeted individual in the consumer's society trying to break from conventions as Milgram discusses (see chapter 2.1), further a sexual perversion and a relationship between genders, and most importantly the idea of how Palahniuk agrees with Jean Francois Lyotard about the postmodern mind and how easy the psyche can be broken and can easily lead to multiple identities.

Chapter 3 focuses on unique rather deviant eras in literature. It portrays literary periods and groups of authors who are inscribed in the history because of their uniqueness and saying their opinion out loud without worrying about consequences in case the opinion would not correspond with the public thinking. Because Palahniuk being a contemporary author, the thesis necessarily mentions features of postmodernism and with that connected omnipresent counterculture which goes against the mainstream feeling.

Related to this, the chapter 3.1.1 of the thesis specifies the origin of Generation X, one of the extremist counterculture where Chuck Palahniuk belongs. Furthermore, Palahniuk's transgressional period is described and the selected novels *Fight Club* and *Choke*. Apart from this, other work within transgressional era and beyond is mentioned because there are some important elements that have influenced the author over the years (see chapter 4). While targeting transgressive fiction, the thesis leads to explanation of how Palahniuk got his deviation twist into his writing, mainly because of pathological tendencies from the side of his

family, he experienced death of his father in a morbid way that lead to the primary deviance.

There is a reason for picking this significant author. In the Czech Republic there are very few people who are aware of this novelist. Although, Palahniuk's style lacks optimistic storyline with happy endings, it deals with more important issues of everyday life which is lived mostly by young people all over the world. Young people tend to rise up and enforce their opinion. Palahniuk creates an antihero to the society, strictly denies living the American dream and most importantly leaves his protagonists go through a difficult path with a mere hope and help, however he tries to put everything in ironic and sarcastic way that at the end the hero finds his stairway to salvation even if it is not happy ending. Palahniuk's aim is to break from conventions. The reader would not want to meet anyone from Palahniuk's characters. He has created as many deviants as one can count – from a former mannequin who shoots a half of her face off because beauty brings damnation (*Invisible Monsters*), a schizophrenic with violent tendencies (*Fight Club*), to the choking fraudster and sex addict in one person whose mother thinks he is a new Christ (*Choke*). Most of all, some of Palahniuk's protagonists try to find a way from ordinary life, yet some are just tourist wandering around as rats in cages waiting to be served. From all points mentioned, the author shows the world full of hypocrisy, lies and failures set in the consumer's society. He wants to emphasize what could happen when the person is lonely it can really damage the psyche with anything just this simple.

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