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**Man versus Self: A Psychoanalytic Study in Chuck
Palahniuk's Selected Novels**

A Thesis

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Abstract

In recent times, there are less explicit academic concerns that give the psychological significance of the "man versus self" conflict in the field of literature. Thus, the present study sheds light on the concept of the "man vs. self" conflict in selected narratives due to its importance in real life and in literature alike. It examines the role of conflict of "man vs. self" in Chuck Palahniuk's novels, *Fight Club* (1996) and *Invisible Monsters* (1999). At the same time, it deals with the most prominent types of internal and external conflicts in real life and in literature, with literary work as a sample for each type. It presents both psychological and social perspectives of conflicts that are of equal importance in this study as their direct influence is evident in the behaviours of the selected protagonists.

In general, conflict is inevitable for humans. It is part of human nature. In particular, internal conflicts are an integral part of the daily life of a human being. For example, one may want to invest in his job and at the same time he wants to be with his family. The concept of internal conflict is considered the basis of all traditions of psychology, including the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud (1923/1942). Hence, psychoanalytic theory is used as a primary method in this study.

The psychoanalytic applications upon literary works have been gaining importance nowadays. Therefore, psychoanalysis theory is a very effective method for analysing the "man vs. self" conflict in the selected novels. Both novels are analysed through the theories of psychoanalysis proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Based on these analyses, it is proposed that the main characters in the above novels suffer "man vs. self" conflict.

This thesis includes five chapters. In the first chapter, there are the thesis' introduction, the statement of the problem, the aim, the hypothesis of the study, methodology, and literature review. The second chapter, which is entitled "Psychoanalysis Theory", is divided into five sections. The first section deals with an overview to psychoanalytic theory. The second section revolves around Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan as pioneers of psychoanalytic theories. The third section tackles the concept of conflict and its major types in real life and literature. Moreover, the section provides categories of internal and external conflicts with literary examples for each type. Psychoanalytic therapy and its techniques are presented in the fourth section. Finally, in the fifth section, the researcher gives a general overview to Chuck Palahniuk, the novelist of both novels. This section also contains information for his personal life and his career journey in writing novels.

The third chapter is entitled "*Fight Club: The Struggle for True Self*", it concerns with *Fight Club* novel. This chapter includes three sections. The first section is an introduction. The second section discusses the protagonist's journey, which is full of struggles in searching for "true" self". Finally, the third section deals with the "man vs. self" conflict in *Fight Club*'s narrator.

The fourth chapter is entitled "*Invisible Monsters: The Objectification of Women*", it deals with *Invisible Monsters* novel. This chapter falls into three sections, the introduction section, a section entitled "*Invisible Monsters: The Importance of Being Invisible*", and the third section examines the "man vs. self" conflict in the novel's narrator.

Finally, the fifth chapter gives conclusions and findings to the thesis. It also contains recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

From Hamlet's famous monologue, "To be or not to be," (*Hamlet* 63) to Katniss Everdeen's struggle between reluctance to kill and the desire to be a warrior in *The Hunger Games* (2008), the "man vs. self" conflict ignited the fires of creative expressions. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, a German writer and statesman, best known for his novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), describes this conflict as "Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast. And each will wrestle for the mastery there" (qtd. in Jal n.pag.).

Conflict is as old as mankind. It is a prominent feature of the human society. From birth, a child starts the journey of conflict with crying, a flash of conflict. As he gets older, he bites his teeth or scratches his little fingers' nails when he is upset. This assumes that humans will continue to struggle as long as they have feelings likely to love or hate; to be happy or sad; to be pleased or angry.

Saint Augustine, a theologian, philosopher, and the bishop of Hippo Regius in Numidia, Roman North Africa, states that from a religious perspective, conflict represents the "evil" side of human nature. The opposite to conflict is the cooperation which embodies the "good" nature of human (Dueweke n.pag.). Thus, conflict manifests itself in disagreement, anger, quarrels, hatred, destruction, killing, or war. Any undesirable situation capable of charging the political or social environment is likely to culminate in conflict. Covetousness, greed, self-centeredness, exasperation, envy, arrogance, rudeness, impunity, among others, cause a breakdown in human relationships. In a way, these vices are innate features of human's "conflict nature".

In politics, conflict exists between two or more groups that are engaged in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which adversaries aim to neutralize, harm or eliminate opponents (Jeong n.pag.). Goal incompatibility indicates opposing or diametrically opposed motives or pursuits. This leads to reach a climax, actual hostility or clashes can be demonstrated.

Many experiences in human society have shown that there are degrees of variation in conflicts. Conflicts are in types. For instance, psychological discipline focuses on intrapersonal conflict which occurs within one's self. This conflict arises as a result of two or more motives or goals to be achieved at one time, like the sources of winning or losing. This type of conflict corresponds to the "man vs. self" conflict in literature. Sociology identifies interpersonal conflict which occurs between two or more individuals. Intrapersonal conflict (inner conflict) cannot be understood separately without accounting the external environment and situation in which a person is placed. Therefore, the internal and external conflict categories cannot be separated from each other as they are used to understand human's behaviours. The present thesis tackles mainly the internal conflict "man vs. self", and the external type of conflicts like "man vs. society" with their intermingling effects.

There are several psychological theories that have been dealing with the human mind and the mental processes as a way to examine and analyse his internal struggles. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory are two theories that deal with the human mind and the human personality. These two highly influential theories are adopted in this thesis to investigate the "man vs. self" conflict in the personalities of the protagonists of the two novels, *Fight Club* and *Invisible Monsters* written by Chuck Palahniuk.

In general, psychoanalysis theory studies the relations between the conscious and unconscious mind, and then it cures mental disorders within the personality. It focuses also on the mental processing of personality or mind, especially the internal conflicts within the personality. Different psychologists have proposed theories that try to explain the behaviours of personality and the outcome of inner inconsistencies. Among them is Freudian psychoanalytic theory which interprets human mind as having three main elements that shape the personality behaviours: the id, the ego, and the superego. A conflicted person feels a tension resulted due to the interaction of these three parts. Lacan has his terms of the “Symbolic”, the “Imaginary”, and the “Real” orders in correspond to Freudian terms. Besides, the present thesis adopts the Lacanian “the mirror stage” and its influence in forming one’s identity.

Conflict also denotes different perceptions that may not necessarily lead to hostility. In this sense, conflict simply refers to a different perception or viewpoint of an issue or situation (Barash and Webel 32). This perception includes religion, customs, cosmologies or values. These differences may not reach their peak in direct and intense confrontations. On the other hand, different perceptions, values, or viewpoints may transcend the "differences" between individuals, and may lead to an extreme connotation of conflict.

In literature, it becomes appropriate to mention words or terms that are synonyms of the conflict. These contain struggle, fight, strife, battle, contrast, antagonism, clash, feud, contention, discord, disharmony, rivalry, contest, fisticuff, brawl, controversy, combat, war, etc. While there are some arguments about how many kinds of conflicts are evident in literature, the most generally accepted number is six different kinds. Most conflicts in literature are external. These include “man vs. self”, “man vs. man”, “man vs. society”, “man vs. nature”, “man

vs. supernatural”, and “man vs. technology”. Postmodern literature features the “man vs. self” conflict as involving characters with internal conflicts over difficult decisions, morality, what to do, fears, etc. Worth to mention that in these literary terms, "man" implies "human" so it is not restricted to the male gender.

Having internal conflicts in life represents renewed challenges within human’s mind, which are very important to confront and solve for human development. If a person lives life without problems, he or she will live his entire life without experiencing struggles, and die without knowing the appreciation of happiness. Novelists usually portray their fictional characters with several kinds of conflicts from real life. As a result, conflict creates tension and interest in any story through adding doubts and frustrations in the characters’ minds.

Humans in the postmodern world live with psychological dilemmas, confusion, and wrong choices. The complications, frustrations, distress, tensions, anxiety, pain, fear, isolation and so on, are experienced by fictional characters to varying degrees and at different times, as they are in real life. In general, “man vs. self” conflict is one of the basic dynamic factors in the individual's adaptation. This means there is a conflict between two motives that insist on satisfaction, but cannot be satisfied at the same time. Conflicts in the lives of individuals are many, but these conflicts are not on the same degree of severity of their pressure on the individual. This depends on the importance of the conflicting motives on the one hand, and the ability of an individual to make difficult decisions on the other hand. The “man vs. self” conflict arises every time a person confronted with making a decision or he is involved in a struggle between doing what he thinks he ought to do.

1.2 The Statement of the Problem

The study proposes to identify the unhealthy and unstable social and psychological environments that discourage encountering and challenging human's own conflicts.

1.3 The Aim of the Study:

The study suggests targets for psychoanalytical interpretations in approaching positively self-confrontation and self-appreciation.

1.4 The Hypothesis of the Study:

The study hypothesizes that "man vs. self" conflict holds the own choice of self-evaluated consideration to develop positively self-appreciation.

1.5 Methodology

In a textual analysis, the thesis uses Modern Language Association (MLA) style that is most commonly used to write papers and cite sources within the liberal arts and humanities. This thesis depends on the strategy of division of chapters. It relies mainly on a thematic approach through psychoanalytical interpretations, and referencing to the concept of "man vs. self" conflict in two selected works by Chuck Palahniuk.

1.6 Literature Review

The appearance of psychoanalysis theory in the twentieth century has guided scholars to deal with the beneficial aspects of the theory. The main focus of the theory centers on treating the mental disorders of the human psyche. However, it also can be used for "normal" human beings. Nowadays, many scholars, thinkers, and researchers have been doing their utmost to apply the conceptions of psychoanalysis theory in many fields of study. Literature has a considerable share

because a literary work represents a perfect atmosphere to psychologically analyse literary characters, who in turn represent real human beings. As far as this study is concerned, this section presents a review of some of the previous studies.

In a thematic study entitled *Manhood in Crisis: Powerlessness, Homophobia and Violence in Fight Club* (2011) published by Amirhossein Vafa and Rosli Talif, it is obvious that the power of the masculinity theme is found to demonstrate the destiny of the protagonist of Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Vafa and Talif propose that the protagonist is located in several conflicts especially concerning his manhood due to his opposing experiences of power with the hegemonic masculinity. Their study shows how the narrator finds it difficult to live between his experiences and his inherited language of masculinity. As a result, the protagonist faces his buried feelings, homophobia, and aggression by starting to live with a nostalgic backlash to struggle with these conflicts. Vafa and Talif argue that "such struggles do not resolve the crisis of manhood" (449). They tend to analyse an individual's experience of masculinity rather than studying how society has emasculated the narrator. Further, they conclude that redefining the order in a new framework is the best means to ease the crisis of manhood.

The researcher Anders Westlie from University of Oslo, in his thesis *The Disturbing Victims of Chuck Palahniuk* (2012), refers to a large variety of strange and interesting of the protagonists of Palahniuk's novels, *Fight Club*, *Invisible Monsters*, and *Choke*. Westlie aims at asking if there is any basis in reality for some of the situations and fears that happen to the protagonists. Westlie's thesis has done through an abundance of versions and changed shape and content very many times over the years; from being all psychoanalysis to pure close reading. It ended with a study of victims, fears and reactions. Westlie shows that Palahniuk, through his writings, attempts to unsettle his readers in order to show them what

they fear, why they are afraid of the wrong things, and how fears, real and fake, create victims that have to decide on what paths to take from there. Westlie aims at showing how he does this, what the basis of those fears are in society, and how these fears are often unfounded, perhaps rather redirected from other issues that people would be right to worry about. The present thesis aims at showing the conflict side within the protagonists more than showing their fears or the reasons of their fears.

Francisco Collado-Rodriguez in his book entitled *Chuck Palahniuk: Fight Club, Invisible Monsters, Choke* (2013) puts his editing of a collection of several essays on Chuck Palahniuk's fictional works. This book has a considerable impact on increasing the academic interest in Palahniuk's works. The essayists in this book, such as Cynthia Kuhn, Lace Rubin, and Jeffrey Sartian, intend to expand the focus of earlier studies which gave almost exclusive attention to Palahniuk's debut novel, *Fight Club*. The book consists of an equal number of essays on Palahniuk's novels. Collado-Rodriguez maintains that the three novels selected for study are "highly representative of the writer's particular style and insights" (1). James R. Giles's essay "Violence, Spaces, and a Fragmenting Consciousness in *Fight Club*", for instance, investigates the narrator's problematic identity about the Oedipal Complex. The significance of Collado-Rodriguez's collection is that it adds more depth to the literature on Palahniuk's works. This is by providing a sequence of analyses that are linked by their common concern for themes such as trauma, identity and postmodern aesthetics. Moreover, several articles in this collection provide dynamic readings of Palahniuk novels.

In a master thesis entitled *Chuck Palahniuk: Beyond the Body: A Representation of Gender in Fight Club, Invisible Monsters and Diary* (2013), Kjersti Jacobsen discusses how Palahniuk presents the concept of gender in his

three Palahniuk's novels, and how his presentation of gender often involves the deconstruction of terms such as body and gender. Jacobsen aims at showing how Palahniuk deals with different aspects of gender in American society, and the dichotomous relationship between femininity/masculinity and gay/straight. Jacobsen also shows that Palahniuk intends to show how his writing unfolds an underlying critique of American society as a whole. Jacobsen's thesis concentrates on the protagonists of the three novels. It depicts the protagonists' deconstruction of gender normative notions as a way to achieving both physical and spiritual freedom, and thus authenticity. Jacobsen states that "By going beyond the limitations of the body, Palahniuk's texts opens up an exploration of a world that goes beyond categorization, labels, class and race, thus displaying the ultimate beauty in difference" (v). The present thesis implicitly contains the gender role of both masculine and feminine, and its influences on the selected novels' protagonists. Despite this fact, the present thesis' main interest is not a gender study as with Jacobsen's thesis.

Desiring Machines/Bodies without Organs: The Concept of Body in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club, Invisible Monsters and Choke (2014), a master thesis written by Emine Şarkdemir, interprets the concept of body and its relation to "desire" concept in these three novels. The protagonists are presented respectively with features of schizos defined by Deleuze and Guattari who place schizoanalysis against psychoanalysis in their collaborative work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. Şarkdemir presents the novels' protagonists as wishing to destroy the social control on their bodies, and directing violence to their bodies in schizophrenic, masochistic and psychotic ways. The protagonists set out mental and physical journeys leaving behind the impositions of social institutions. They resist the idea of being docile bodies of the capitalist system although it is

capitalism that produces such schizos. Şarkdemir's thesis aims at proving that the protagonists of these novels are schizos. They desire to control their own bodies to arrive at the body without organs, a state of being in which the body is regarded as an abstraction rather than a concrete entity. Şarkdemir states that "To violate the codes implemented by the society, these characters seek 'lines of flight,' ways of escape from the social orders and choose violence as the best practice to break the chains" (vii). The present thesis offers a psychoanalytic perspective of the "man vs. self" conflict in the selected novel.

Hannah Merry's PhD thesis entitled *Fictional Representations of Dissociative Identity Disorder In Contemporary American Fiction* (2016) tackles some of the characters with mental disorders in contemporary American fiction. In this case, mental disorders like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, autism and Asperger's syndrome, Tourette's syndrome, and dissociative identity disorder are highlighted due to their importance in American contemporary fiction. Merry examines fictional characters as examples of dissociative identity disorder in American fiction since 1994. Merry concentrates on a small sub-genre of "dissociative identity disorder texts" including the novels *Fight Club* and Matt Ruff's *Set This House In Order* (2003). From a mental disorder point of view, Merry discusses these novels. Using trauma theory, gender theory, and queer theory, Merry's thesis discusses that metaphorically the texts that employ dissociative identity disorder. It focuses on dissociative identity disorder because, according to Merry, there has been little critical attention paid to fictional texts featuring this disorder, despite a rise in critical work examining the use of syndromes and disorders within fiction in recent years. The present thesis is not an attempt of showing or understanding the mental disorders like dissociative identity disorder or narcissistic personality in the selected novels. Despite the fact the

protagonists are diagnosed as having mental disorders, the present thesis is not a study in the mental disorders. It is rather a study in the internal conflicts of “man vs. self” within the protagonists’ minds.

Existentialism in Chuck Palahniuk’s Novel Fight Club (2016) is a thesis By Agus Salim that explores the thoughts of existentialism, found in *Fight Club*. Existentialism is the philosophical movement in 19th and 20th that centered upon the analysis of the existence and the way of human find themselves existing in the world. Salim argues that Palahniuk demonstrates the theme of existentialism in the story of *Fight Club* through the existential journey of unnamed protagonist where he portrays the identity crisis of modern man, his experience of meaninglessness in life, exercise of freedom in the world driven by consumerism culture. Salim concludes that after doing the research by using the theory, it was found that there are eight ideas of existentialism depicted in the novel including absurdity, authenticity, death, freedom, individuality, passion, rejection-giving meaning narratives, and responsibility. Besides, the element of dark setting and style help to establish the idea of existentialism. The absurdity of the world, a modern world driven by consumerism culture is important setting along the story and the minimalism writing style where it includes the existential implication, often absurd that helps to build the mood of existentialism in the novel.

In a master thesis entitled *The Many Faces of Power: The Portrayal of Hegemony in Fight Club by Chuck Palahniuk and American Psycho by Bret Easton Ellis* (2017), Nella Pihlajaniemi analyses the different ways hegemonic power as depicted in the societies of Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* and Ellis’ *American Psycho*. Pihlajaniemi examines hegemonic power in society and its influences upon individuals. She explains the external forces of the society over the characters that are portrayed in two novels from two novelists. She focuses on three levels of

power, the method that capitalist cooperation's use to control and affect people's consumer behaviours for capitalists' benefits, the use of power to revolt against these cooperations, lastly the people's power within the society over other people. Pihlajaniemi uses the term "power" to refer to hegemonic power specifically. The protagonists' use the means of control range from violence and humiliation to terrorist acts, while the way companies control people is through cultural hegemony and the cultural control of one group over another.

In a descriptive study entitled *Psychoanalytic Theory used in English Literature: A Descriptive Study* (2017) published by Mahroof Hossain, there is an explanation about the relationship between psychoanalysis and English literature. Hossain gives a summary about the psychoanalysis theory including its definitions, its historical developments, and its fundamental principles. In the same vein, he highlights other theories relating to it like Lacanian theory and its conceptions in literature. Hossain's study focuses on psychoanalysis theory which has been used by the writers in their literary works of English literature. Furthermore, Hossain lists the basis of Freudian psychoanalysis as follows: the pre-oedipal stage; the oedipal complex; the unconscious; and id, ego, and superego. Regarding the main goal of Hossain's study, he conducts the connection between the thoughts of psychoanalysis theory and literary work. He explains how psychoanalysis views the literary work, which is in a fictional form, as an expression of the state of mind and the structure of the personality of the individual authors. According to Hossain, psychoanalysis "is not simply a branch of medicine or psychology; it helps understand philosophy, culture, religion and first and foremost literature" (43).

Hossain further makes application of a short psychoanalytic study on several literary works, D.H Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Albert Camus's *The*

Stanger (1942), and Walt Whitman's *The Sleeper* (1855). Thus, he concludes that psychoanalysis is an essential means in the process of critical analysis of literary work. It adds legitimacy to the text. Besides, Freudian concepts connect the text of literary text with the "psyche" of the writer, and they provide a profound insight into the unconscious of the writer. However, this connection improves the quality value and legitimacy of the literary text.

The present thesis is an attempt to understand and analyse the "man vs. self" conflict in two of Palahniuk's novels. It is a thematic study that aims to interpret deeply several themes like masculinity, consumerism, marketing, beauty, and fashion, and their relations to one's psychological conflicts. Additionally, the present thesis deals with studying mental illnesses and disorders of the protagonists as the obvious evidences of the protagonists' "man vs. self" conflict. Besides, the main focus is on a positive conflict which involves a positive self-confrontation between "man" and "self" to make a better life for human beings. Thus, it is a psychoanalytic study with emphasis on specific themes.

The human psyche and its relation to the normality of person whether he is acceptable in his society or not, is the main interests of the present thesis.