

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE MALE SETTING IN *THE FIGHT CLUB* AND *A MAN ASLEEP*

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Abstract

The twentieth century postmodern world not only created an era of a decentered way of life but also tremendously triggered a decentered literary style that somehow achieves to encompass the entire story of human life. Although the term postmodern seems to be a broad concept that has different effects in different geographies, it magically succeeds to unite differences and reflect a common story behind a veil. Chuck Palahniuk's *The Fight Club* (1999) and George Perec's *A Man Asleep* (1967) are marvelous examples for that. While Palahniuk's story is the voice of the reflections of postmodern human life in the United States, therefore American postmodern literature, Perec's story becomes the voice of postmodern human life in France. Although two works signify different geographies, a comparative analysis of these works highlight the reality that two different cultures are bounded with each other in terms of the literary concepts; 'daily life,' 'sleep,' 'headache – pain,' 'depression,' 'addiction,' 'the double' and 'the notion of success.' Perec's and Palahniuk's nameless characters' lives surrounded by cultural codes of abundance at first sight, which later became their captivity that triggers either depression or schizophrenia. At this point, a comparative analysis that acts as a bridge between two different cultures and geographies postulate the idea that in the postmodern world of fragmentation, comparative literature achieves to form a web of wholeness which helps the reader to develop a cultural, historical, social and psychological analysis of stories which are the stories of all of us.

Keywords: *The Fight Club*, *A Man Asleep*, culture of consumption.

DÖVÜŞ KULÜBÜ VE BİR ADAM UYKUDA ESERLERİNDE ERKEK ALANININ KARŞILAŞTIRMALI OLARAK İNCELENMESİ

Öz

1960 yıllara girişle birlikte, sosyo-politik değişimlerin yarattığı dönüşüm yaşamın her alanında post modernizm olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Sanat, tarih, felsefe, sosyoloji ve pek çok alanda yansımalarına tanık olunan bu dönemde elbette edebiyat eserleri de bu yeni döngüye kapılmış ve değişime aynalık etmiştir. Sadece Amerika'yı değil Avrupa'yı da etkisi altına alan bu dönem insan yaşamının değişim karşısında sergilemiş olduğu psikolojik ve fiziksel savaşı edebiyat eserleri yoluyla ustaca yansıtmıştır. Amerikalı yazar Chuck Palahniuk ve Fransız yazar George Perec kurmaca düzlemde post modern yaşamı en etkili biçimde yansıtanların başında gelmektedir. Yeni dünya düzeninde monotonluk, yalnızlık, depresyon ve stres ile çarpışmak zorunda kalan bireyi başarıyla yansıtmışlar ve adeta döneme ışık tutmuşlardır. Perec ve Palahniuk'u dönemin yazarlarından ayıran en önemli nokta ise eserlerinde erkek bedeni ve ruhunu odağa alarak dönemin psikolojik bir açılımını gerçekleştirmiş olmalarıdır. İki eserin karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenmesi Amerikan ve Fransız toplumu arasında bir köprü kurarak farklı coğrafyalardan, farklı zaman dilimlerinden, farklı kültürler üzerinden okuyucuya ışık tutmaktadır. İki adsız kahramanın kahve, televizyon, alışveriş, uyu, uykusuzluk, depresyon, şizofreni ve yalnızlık ile kesişen yaşamları okuyucunun içsel sesine kulak vererek az ya da çok kendi yaşamından bir parça bulabileceği bir düzleme kucak açar. Kurgusal düzlemde pek çok kültürel kod ve temel yapı taşları ile yansıtılan hikâyeler günümüz dünyasında erkek olarak verilen mücadelenin yansımaları haline gelmektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında psikolojik ve sosyolojik olarak 'erkek karakter' olmaktan öte insan olmanın zorlukları aktarılmaktadır. Tarihsel süreç içerisinde Amerikan ve Fransız toplumu üzerinden yansıtılan hikâyeler küreselleşen dünyada her birimizin hikâyesine dönüşür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dövüş Kulübü, Bir Adam Uykuda, tüketim toplumu.*

1. INTRODUCTION: ANALYZING MEDIATIONS BETWEEN TEXT AND CONTEXT

In the twentieth and twenty-first century postmodern¹ world; the glamorous, colorful and simulacra-like² daily life is not so powerful enough to hide what is behind the gilded illusion side of our lives.³

As the postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable (Lyotard 1993: 43).

Chuck Palahniuk⁴ and George Perec⁵ are one of the prominent authors of the age who successfully alludes to our gilded illusion side of our lives. Therefore, the mediation between their texts and contexts underline the significance of the

¹ Postmodernism is a broad term that affected literature, arts, philosophy, etc. in the twentieth century world. It is briefly a dramatic shift from categories, structure and limitations. Jean François Lyotard is one of the prominent intellectuals who define the postmodern condition. According to him; “A postmodern writer or an artist is in the disposition of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*.” (Lyotard in Dockherly 1993: 81).

² The term *simulacra* is used by Jean Baudrillard in order to underline the contemporary culture that has created a simulation of reality. He begins his work with a quotation: “The simulacrum is never what hides the truth - it is truth that hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true. – Ecclesiastes” in order to highlight the fact that everything is a copy of another thing which is also underlined by the narrator of *The Fight Club* and *A Man Asleep*. For further reading see Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulation* (1983).

³ The Gilded Age is a term mentioned by American author Mark Twain in nineteenth century America. Twain uses the term to illuminate the characteristic of the age that was the symbol of morality, wealth and innocence. However, he alludes to the fact that once the gild has been analyzed in detail, the rotten side of the age immediately appears behind the gilded picture that is blended with immorality, social decay and hypocrisy. The age has similarities with the 20th and 21st centuries which were mentioned by Perec and Palahniuk.

⁴ Palahniuk is an American novelist and freelance journalist who mainly focuses on postmodern culture, American Dream and media culture in his works. *Invisible Monsters* (1999), *Lullaby* (2002), *Surviver* (1999) and *Choke* (2001) are some of his other works. For further reading on Palahniuk see Frank Johnson. *Inside the Mind of Chuck Palahniuk* (2014).

⁵ George Perec is a French novelist, documentalist and filmmaker. Just like Palahniuk, his works acts as sociological documents which have achieved to illuminate the inner chambers of French culture. *Which Moped with Chrome-plated Handlebars at the Back of the Yard?* (1996), *A Void* (1994), *The Exeter Text* (1996) are some of his works. For further reading on Perec see David Bellos.: *George Perec: A Life in Words* (1994).

analysis of how literary texts from different geographies achieve to develop a common cultural and historical context for the reader to illuminate a sociological nexus between untouched borders. However, what is untouched becomes a penetrable area through a comparative analysis.

Through *The Fight Club*, Palahniuk gives the reader a symbolic convex lens that enables the postmodern eye to penetrate 1990's American way of life, the realities behind our gilded lives surrounded by consumerism, materialism, monotony and depression.⁶ Palahniuk, through his protagonist, the narrator, illuminates the clash between the historical and the cultural elements. In the novel, the unnamed narrator, which is the voice of all of us, is a traveling automobile company employee who has to combat with insomnia that is a common psychological problem for many people who live in the postmodern world. Spending his life in monotony and unhappiness, he decides to visit a psychiatrist who prescribes him to participate support groups in order to experience 'real pain.' After he has visited the support groups, pretending that he were ill, he meets Tyler Durden, a soap salesman with whom he creates *The Fight Club*. Tyler Durden becomes the double of the narrator, who is, unlike him, strong, rebellious and bold. Later, *The Fight Club* has turned into 'Project Mayhem,' which is an anti-materialist and anti-corporate organization. In order to escape from the banality and affectation way of American life, as an office worker, he transforms himself into the symbol of anarchy and destruction. As a criticism of the American Dream, at the end of the novel, the narrator finds himself in a mental hospital suffering from schizophrenia.⁷ The reader realizes that Tyler is the product of the schizophrenic state of mind of the narrator which is in fact a form of escape from the schizophrenic, monotonous life of the 1990's.

Like Palahniuk, Perec portrays the life of a man in the twentieth century world. His protagonist is nameless like Palahniuk's. This time the setting of the literary text is France, Paris. The reader uses the convex lens that is postulated by Perec through the perspective of a Sorbonne University student who has to

⁶ As the footsteps of postmodernism, historically, "with the twentieth century, we enter the era of modernity characterized by a very strong development of productive forces as the apogee of the industrial system, which means as well as its decline or, better, its overshooting. This period finds its consecration with the *trente glorieuses* (the period of economic growth in Western Europe following World War II... and rests notably on a very strong capitalistic intensity and a continuous rise in education and qualification levels, which have made considerable productivity gains possible (sixfold in France since 1936)" (Sue in Horn 1991: 123).

⁷ The term "American Dream" was first used by the American historian James Truslow Adams in his book "The Epic of America" published in 1931. He underlines the fact that all men and women regardless of their origin will achieve to maintain success, happiness and prosperity. However, throughout the years the Dream has turned into a nightmare that alludes to unhappiness, scarcity and inequality that is underlined by Jerold M. Packard in his work *American Nightmare: The History of Jim Crow*. For further reading see James Truslow Adams (1931). *The Epic of America*. New York: Blue Ribbon Books.

combat with the idea of success, his endless headaches, pain, monotony and unhappiness just like the narrator. In this setting, 'A Man' who is asleep is at the center of the reader's lens. While he, 'A Man,' sleeps most of the time, the narrator suffers from insomnia both of which are the results of depression. In such a depressive world, the narrator finds the escape through creating a dual personality while 'A Man' prefers to sleep. Both of the nameless characters reflect the everyday life of the era that alludes to a kind of robotic and mechanic way of life. In such a robotic life, through developing addictions such as drinking coffee, watching TV and participating support groups, both characters become a victim of the vicious cycle. As a result, they successfully portray the invisible cultural codes of an entire age which all have their reflections in the millennium age.

Where does all this activity actually 'happen'? The popular takes place in the everyday, which is also where we move between repetitive sides of life, which are formulaic and mechanical, and the peculiarities of spirituality and aesthetics. The everyday is invisible but ever-present. It is full of contradictions, and it can be transcended, passed over, and gone beyond, as when the drudgery of the workday is said to be transformed via popular cultural forms and flings (Toby and Mchoul 1998: 9).

As a representative of the machine-like lives, two different geographies and cultures bind the two young men who are struggling with depression and unhappiness which are the results of the expectance for a perfect, successful, idyllic machine-like human life. "The postmodern is seen by Baudrillard as a loss of a mythic and religious past, replaced by alienation, secularization and rationalism..." (Bignell 2000: 32) and the stories of the young men powerfully display 1990's America and 1960's France, both of which experience a life that fosters alienation, depression and unhappiness.

2. THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF PAIN: "THE SUBJECT OF SUFFERING"

Literally, 'pain' has always been a special setting for literature which has borders with both psychology and human body. Especially, in the age of postmodernism, 'pain' has become a crucial terminology to define an entire age which is also exemplified in *The Fight Club* and *A Man Asleep*. In both works, the protagonists try to resist the traumas of their lives through getting over pain. Therefore, for both characters, 'pain' has become a setting that should be both analyzed and reordered. The questions that one need to ask are; Has the physical pain become a symbolic stamp of the postmodern world that is carried by the individuals? How does the physical pain lead to a psychological and political expansion in the texts? The answers are important as they are the answers of 'how the human body and soul create a political sphere of 'pain.'

When the idea of pain as a subject of suffering comes to mind, Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain. The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985) and Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) become the central focus of literary explanation of the setting of pain.⁸ As stated by Scarry (1985),

The physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story, and the story that it tells is about the inseparability of these three subjects, their embeddedness in one another. (p. 3)

In *The Fight Club* and in *A Man Asleep*, the characters experience a psychological and physical pain and the ways which they follow to combat with them⁹. The Narrator states,

a precise and unmistakably conscious pain suddenly starts up, a pain which you recognize starts up, a pain which you recognize immediately as being nothing more extraordinary than a headache (Palahniuk 2006: 15).¹⁰

While the young boy in Percec's work (1990) states,

Your past, your present and your future merge into one: they are now just the heaviness of your limbs, your nagging migraine, your lassitude, the heat, the bitterness of the lukewarm Nescafé (p. 141).¹¹

For both men, physical pain is associated with the human soul rather than the physical body. It is evident that 'headache' turns into a definition of a stamp

⁸ Interestingly but not coincidentally, both intellectuals start their studies by giving examples from Virginia Woolf. "In June 1938 Virginia Woolf published *Three Guineas*, her brave, unwelcomed reflections on the roots of war" (Sontag 2003: 1). "English," writes Virginia Woolf, "which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear Has no words for the shiver or the headache...." (Scarry 1985: 4). It is evident that the terminology of 'pain' is strictly associated with Woolf in literature.

⁹ In addition to physical and psychological pain, both protagonists have to combat with the hidden political pain that is supported by the mainstream culture. The hidden pain forces the characters to obey the rules of the static, monotonous way of life that is surrounded by different forms of addiction such as coffee, television, shopping, etc.

¹⁰ All quotations from *The Fight Club*, unless otherwise indicated, are from Chuck Palahniuk (2006). *The Fight Club*. London: Vintage. The corresponding page numbers are indicated in parentheses as "FC" throughout the text.

¹¹ All quotations from *A Man Asleep*, unless otherwise indicated, are from George Percec (1990). *Things a Story of the Sixties. A Man Asleep*. (Trans. David Bellos and Andrew Leak). Boston: Verba Mundi. The corresponding page numbers are indicated in parentheses as "P" throughout the text. According to World Health Organization; "Not only is headache painful, but it is also disabling. In the Global Burden of Disease Study, updated in 2013, migraine on its own was found to be the sixth highest cause worldwide of years lost due to disability (YLD). Headache disorders collectively were third highest. Headache disorders impose a recognizable burden on sufferers including sometimes substantial personal suffering, impaired quality of life and financial cost. Repeated headache attacks, and often the constant fear of the next one, damage family life, social life and employment. The long-term effort of coping with a chronic headache disorder may also predispose the individual to other illnesses (<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs277/en/>).

that the characters carry on their bosom.¹² The commonness of “the narrator” and “A Man” lies under the fact that their identity loss which is emphasized by the lack of a name is altered by ‘pain’ that gives them a certain form of identity in the postmodern age.

In addition to ‘headache,’ ‘sleep’ becomes a bridge between the two characters. While the narrator combats with insomnia, A Man combats with over-sleep.

AS SOON AS YOU CLOSE YOUR EYES, the adventure of sleep begins. The familiar half-light of the bedroom, a dark volume broken by details, where your memory can easily identify the paths your eyes have followed thousand times (P 133).

For ‘the man,’ sleeping a lot defines a form of psychological escape from the real world. Therefore, the physical pain of headache is tried to be cured by sleep which is a form of defense mechanism. On the other hand, the narrator’s physical pain ‘insomnia’ is juxtaposed with the ‘illusion of safety.’ In *A Man Asleep*, the body finds a solution for the physical pain through spending so much time in bed. As mentioned by the protagonist; “Only the night and your room protect you: the narrow bed where you lie stretched out, the ceiling that you discover anew at every moment; the night in which, alone amidst the...” (p. 144). Therefore, ‘bed’ becomes both a psychological space that protects the body from pain and a physical pleasure setting to combat with the pain. As highlighted by Eco (1987),

We sense dimly that the clichés are talking among themselves, celebrating their reunion. Just as the extreme of pain meets sensual pleasure and the extreme of perversion borders on mystical energy, so too the extreme of banality allows us to catch a glimpse of the Sublime. Nobody would have been able to achieve such a cosmic result intentionally. Nature has spoken in place of men (209).

Evidently, ‘the extreme pain meets sensual pleasure’ for the character through bed “which is soft, horizontal and white...” (P 135). For the character, ‘bed’ turns itself into a psychological space that attacks against the space of physical pain. On the other hand, in *The Fight Club*, ‘the home’ of the narrator which is decorated with *IKEA* furniture acts as a safety-valve to protect the body from pain:

“And I wasn’t the only slave to my nesting instinct... With their *IKEA* furniture catalogue” (FC 43).

We all have the same...lamps, bathroom, clock, shelving unit (FC 43).

¹² It might be possible to say that Hawthorne’s famous protagonist Hester Prynne who carries ‘A Scarlet Letter’ on her bosom in the romantic age has turned itself into ‘headache’ that is used to define the social and political pain that the characters internalize in the postmodern age.

The right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug (FC 44).

May I never be complete

May I never be content

May I never be perfect (FC 46).

While the narrator creates a space to escape from pain via *IKEA* furniture, 'A Man' prefers to use the bed as a form of escape from the pain:

The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space. In other words, we do not live, in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things. We do not live inside a void that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on one another (Foucault 1986: 23).

"The set of relations" that the characters create through their home is the psychological space where they try to create solitude and tranquility. It is evident that the protagonists' portrayal of pain, and the alternative ways they try to find are the reflections of how individuals combat the traumas of the postmodern life. While the dominant power of the mainstream culture forces them to obey the rules of the consumer-oriented society, they somehow find a way to escape from both the physical and the psychological pain.

2.1. The Political Representation of Pain: Analyzing 'Addiction' as a Metaphor for Mobility

In *The Fight Club*, "insomnia is just the symptom of something larger" (FC 19). As the narrator directs us: "Find out what's actually wrong. Listen to your body" (FC 19). In both works, the body defines something larger which is both psychological and political. As mentioned by Scarry (1985),

there is no language for pain that it resists verbal objectification. But the relative ease or difficulty with which any given phenomenon can be *verbally represented* also influences the ease or difficulty with which that phenomenon comes to be *politically represented* (13).

What is politically represented in both works is a psychological area of pain that is created in order to combat with the body in pain. In relation with this, 'addiction' is postulated by the protagonists as a political act that is used for both to rebel against pain and to develop a certain form psychological area that helps them to resist the pain, a kind of hell, triggered by the postmodern society.

In both works, the protagonists attempt to escape from the harsh realities of life through creating an alternative setting to survive the body in pain. It can be assumed that the starting point of both Palahniuk and Perce is the use of 'addiction' as a tool which is created to regard the pain of others in the senseless

twentieth century world. In *A Man Asleep*, the nameless protagonist develops a certain form of addiction through “Nescafé:”

The sun beats down on the zinc flashings on the roof. In front of you, at eye level, on a whitewood shelf, there is a half-empty, rather grubby bowl of Nescafé, an almost empty bag of sugar, a cigarette burning down in a whitish mock opaline ashtray bearing an advertiser’s logo (P 137).

A bowl of Nescafé; you add, as you do every day, a few drops of sweetened condensed milk (P 139).

For the young man, who is the representative of the postmodern world, Nescafé, a form of setting, postulates a psychological and physical space that acts as an alternative world. Therefore, Nescafé becomes the symbol of postmodern urban space.¹³ At first sight, it seems to be that a bowl of Nescafé and TV are symbols of abundance as they are accessible for the protagonist. However, that kind of abundance has later turned into a scarcity behind the veil. As Warren Susman (1984) underlines the term “culture of abundance” in order to highlight the consumer culture: “an older culture, often loosely labeled Puritan-republican, producer-capitalist culture, and a newly emerging culture of abundance”(p.xx). While to consume indicates abundance, its original meaning refers to “to destroy, to use up, to waste, to exhaust’ (Williams 1976: 68). Therefore, the setting of abundance has been altered by the setting of scarcity because the addiction for the character has turned into both a space of freedom but at the same time a space of captivation. That is the reason why as a daily routine the café signifies the robotic actions triggered by the postmodern world:

Robotic actions: get up, wash, shave, dress (P 186).

Like a prisoner, like a madman in his cell. Like a rat looking for the way out of his maze. You pace the length and breadth of Paris. Like a starving man, like a messenger delivering a letter with no address (P 203).

The nameless narrator who is a student of Sorbonne in Paris underlines the deficiencies behind the culture of abundance. He is the student of one of the most prestigious universities around the world, he has his café and tv. Everything seems

¹³ When the website of Nescafé is analyzed, it becomes clear that the brands’ main aim is to create a bridge among all the people around the world through creating an alternative common world of all of us. Parallel to this, Percec’s portrayal of the young man signifies a form of escape from the real world and the body in pain. The more he tries to escape the more he becomes addicted to the consumer culture: “ **IT ALL STARTS WITH A NESCAFÉ.** We love making new connections, friendships, and relationships. And we might be a little biased, but we think the best ones start with coffee! And the best thing about real connections is they can lead to something amazing – to innovations and pioneering experiences that reshape the world we live in. From creating the very first NESCAFÉ in 1938, to joining the first expedition to the top of Mount Everest or being the first coffee on the moon – we’ve been part of great connections that have started with a coffee and lead to even greater experiences!” (<http://www.nescafe.com/our-world>).

to be perfect in Paris.¹⁴ However his illusionary happiness in Paris is the very reflection of the French culture in the 1960's.¹⁵ The scarcity is juxtaposed with the body in pain:

Your past, your present and your future merge into one: they are now just the heaviness of your limbs, your nagging migraine, your lassitude, the heat, the bitterness of the lukewarm Nescafé (P 141).

On the other hand, in *The Fight Club* the addiction of Nescafé has turned into the "support groups." The narrator participates the support groups in order to combat with insomnia and the body in pain. As the narrator tells us:

My doctor said, if I wanted to see real pain, I should swing by First Eucharist on a Tuesday night. See the brain parasites. See the degenerative bone diseases. The organic brain dysfunctions. See the cancer patients getting by (FC 19).

He develops a certain form of addiction to support groups and he identifies this activity as his "vacation" (FC 18). For both characters, the addiction stimulates the feeling of vitality. While the narrator identifies this with the following statement.

Every evening, I died, and every evening, I was born.

Resurrected (FC 22).

The young man in *A Man Asleep* also identifies addiction, Nescafé, with freedom as it is the only activity through which he can escape from migraine and loneliness. As Pierre Bourdieu (1994) highlights:

Some simply sweep it aside, making practice a direct product of economic necessity (workers eat beans because they cannot afford anything else), failing to realize that necessity can only be fulfilled ... because the agents are inclined to fulfill it...Others turn it into a taste of freedom, forgetting the conditionings of which it is the product... Tate is *amor fati*, the choice of destiny, but a forced choice (P 178).

¹⁴ In the text, 'Coffee' is used as a tool to escape loneliness: "A phrase like 'café culture' means not just that people visit cafés but that some people visit them as a way of life, as they presumably do not in the case of their dentists. People who belong to the same place, profession or generation do not thereby form a culture; they do so only when they begin to share speech-habits, folk lore, ways of proceeding, frames of value, a collective self-image." (Eagleton 2000: 37).

¹⁵ "For Walter Benjamin...the new department stores and arcades, which emerged in Paris and subsequently other large cities from the mid nineteenth century onwards, were effectively 'dream worlds.' The vast phantasmagoria of commodities on display, constantly renewed as part of the capitalist and modernist drive for novelty, was the source of dream images which summoned up associations and half-forgotten illusions- Benjamin referred to them as *allegories*." (Featherstone 1991: 23).

“A bowl of Nescafé” (P 139) is frequently used throughout the text just like the Starbucks coffee cup which is used in every scene of the movie *The Fight Club*. The duality of addiction lies under the fact that it is both a forced choice and a selection. Therefore, the protagonist’s way to escape from the pain is also created by the consumer culture. While the Nescafé as a brand promotes a new life, Starbucks postulates obsession and passion. This idea lies under the fact that the logo of the brand is a Siren¹⁶ from Greek mythology.

She stands unbound, sharing our stories, inviting all of us in to explore, to find something new and to connect with each other. She’s a muse –always there, inspiring us and pushing the Starbucks ahead
(<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-meaning-and-story-behind-the-Starbucks-logo>).

A kind of interconnectedness is created by the logo just like Nescafé in *A Man Asleep*. In addition to coffee, IKEA is also another brand that Palahniuk prefers to use to underline the narrator’s life that refers to both freedom and slavery. As the narrator mentions; “And I wasn’t the only slave to my nesting instinct... With their IKEA furniture catalogue” (FC 43). Like Starbucks and Nescafé, IKEA is used to define

a life without surprises. You are safe. You sleep, you walk, you continue to live, like a laboratory rat abandoned in its maze by some absent-minded scientist, and which, morning and night, unerringly, unhesitatingly, follows the path to its food dispenser, turning left, turning right, pressing down twice on a pedal ringed in red in order to receive its portion of homogenized feed (P 188).

That kind of safety achieves to define both protagonists as “Truly a prisoner” (P 149).

3. THE LANDSCAPE OF SUCCESS

In both works, the protagonists’ aim is to create another personality, a kind of shattered self, in order to protect themselves from the monotony of the postmodern world. The reason of that kind of an attempt lies under the fact that the idea of success postulated by the society somehow forces them to encourage either a new, stronger identity, just like in *The Fight Club* or to accept the depressed, unhappy shattered self just as it is represented in *A Man Asleep*. The notion of success in both cases results in how society defines a “successful

¹⁶ “The **Sirens** were beautiful but dangerous **creatures** that lured the sailors with their beautiful voices to their doom, causing the ships to crash on the reefs near their island. They were the daughters of the river god **Achelous**, while their mother may have been Terpsichore, Melpomene, Sterope or Chthon. Although closely linked to marine environments, they were not considered sea deities. The texts mentioning the **Sirens** provide different opinions as to their number and their names; some mention two or three; others mention more.”
(<http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Creatures/Sirens/sirens.html>).

individual.”¹⁷ While the narrator reflects the collapse of the American Dream, the young man illuminates the depressed life of a Sorbonne student. In addition to Nescafé, IKEA or support groups this time the characters develop a certain form of defense mechanism so as to rebel against the notion of success of American and French cultures through creating alternative selves to the alternativeless world.

In *A Man Asleep*, “Paris” and “Sorbonne” become the flesh and blood setting of the idea of success:

The psychic spaces and shapes of building should assist the human memory in restructuring connections through time and space...so that those of us who lead lives complicatedly divorced from a single place in which we can find roots, can have through the channels of our memories, through the agency of building, something like these roots restored (Lash in Gottdiener 1995: 125).

When one hears about Paris or Sorbonne she immediately associates them with either success, as one should be quite successful to be a student of it, or happiness as Paris has always been associated with romance, happiness, and abundance. As he underlines, one expects him to be a “Good husband, good father, good citizen. War veteran. One by one, you will climb, like a frog, the rungs on the ladder of success (P 156). However, the young man’s portrayal of the city and the university turns the well-known definitions upside down. He defines Paris not as a center of vitality, travel, romance or happiness but as a center of monotony and depression. He says:

YOU RETURN TO PARIS and the same room, the same silence....Your room is the center of the world (P 159).

Your cancelled life (P 161).

The reason why he writes Paris with big letters might be an emphasis of the power of the city. However, the city becomes the representative of negative connotations. The bigger it becomes, the unattractive it looks:

You have everything still to learn, everything that cannot be learnt: solitude, indifference, patience, silence (P 162).

You must forget, hope, enterprise, success, perseverance (P 163).

¹⁷ According to Merriam-Webster, success is “the fact of getting or achieving wealth, respect, or fame.” But a new survey from Strayer University suggests that it may be time to update the dictionary’s definition. A whopping 90% believe that success is more about happiness than power, possessions, or prestige. The survey, which was conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Strayer, interviewed 2,011 Americans ages 18 and up and found that 67% of surveyed Americans associate success with achieving personal goals; 66% cited “good relationships with friends and family”; and 60% said “loving what you do for a living.” Meanwhile, just one in five respondents said monetary wealth is what defines success. “I think people will be surprised to hear that the vast majority of this country no longer views traditional wealth- and fame-based notions of success as having ‘made it,’” says Plater (<http://www.businessinsider.com/how-americans-now-define-success-2014-10>).

It is evident that in Paris unlike the common belief, tranquility and hope cannot be achieved or found. The city's negative face is supported by Sorbonne:

No longer do you wander like a lost soul in the great courtyard of the Sorbonne, or pace up and down the long corridors waiting for the lecture-rooms to empty, or go off to solicit greetings, smiles or signs of recognition in the library (P 163).

Evidently, being a Sorbonne University student or living in Paris no longer promote happiness, let alone success. That is the reason why he identifies his life as "a life without surprises" (P 188). He identifies himself as "the nameless master of the world, the one on whom history has lost its hold, the one who no longer feels the rain falling, who does not see the approach of night" (P 189). The lack of happiness and depression results in the lack of identity that is represented through the nameless young man whose name is unknown just like the narrator in *The Fight Club*. The narrator also loses his way in the monotonous life. His depression and hopelessness are so intense that he emphasizes: "I envied people dying of cancer. I hated my life. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things" (FC 172).

The unhappiness of the characters force them to create a dual personality which results in either schizophrenia or severe depression. As a cultural critique of the postmodern world both Palahniuk and Perec strictly underline the fact that addiction and creating a new identity are possible ways to survive in such a decentered world.¹⁸

3.1. Embracing the Shattered Selves: Analyzing the Second Personality

In both works, the second personality is the common idea that binds the protagonists together in different ways. In the postmodern world, in addition to addiction, the concept of the double enters into the lives of the individuals that can either be interpreted as an escape or a kind of extension of the life that postulates monotony. While in *The Fight Club*, the narrator creates his second personality to rebel against the restrictions of his monotonous life, in Perec's work, the second personality is the inescapable shadow of the society that forces the character to live with it. In both cases, the authors underline one of the most significant traumas of the Twentieth century human life which is shaped and altered by the schizophrenic state of mind.

¹⁸ The term decentered means "to cause to lose or shift from an established center or focus; especially: to disconnect from practical or theoretical assumptions of origin, priority, or essence" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/decenter>). The term literally gained a new meaning after it had been used by French philosopher Jacques Derrida. He underlines in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" that the center is no longer signifies the center and therefore everything has a link to another concept in the postmodern world. For further reading see Jacques Derrida (2005). *Writing and Difference*. Taylor & Francis e-Library Press.

As emphasized by Frederick Jameson; “The schizophrenic male world can be identified as ‘isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence” (Jameson 1984b: 119). This perfect definition of the male world is brilliantly reflected by both authors. The protagonist of Perec highlights;

You do not move; you will not move. Someone else, your twin, a ghostly, conscientious double is perhaps performing in your stead, one by one, the actions you have eschewed: he gets up, washes, shaves, dresses, goes out. You let him bound down the stairs, run down the street, leap onto the moving bus, arrive on time, out of breath but triumphant, at the doors of the hall. Certificate of Advanced Study in General Sociology. First written paper (P 138).

It is evident that ‘the double’ that he shares with the reader is a kind of oppression of the culture that he has to live with because it is a kind of burden, a kind of scar that he has to carry both on his body and in his soul. The protagonist facing his double is the reflection of his life that is equal to facing the monotonous self and the way of life in which he is centered:

You are not in the habit of making diagnosis, and you don’t want to start now. What is worrying you, what is disturbing you, what is frightening you, but which now and then gives a thrill, is not the suddenness of your metamorphosis at all, that nothing has changed, that you’ve always been like this, even though you only now realize it fully: that thing, in the cracked mirror, is not your new face, it is just that the masks have slipped, the heat in your room has melted them, your torpor has soaked them off. The masks of unswerving conviction, of the straight and narrow. (P 144).

When the narrator asks us: “What secrets do you expect to find in your cracked mirror? And what truth in your face?” (P 214) he clearly encourages the reader to question the double in our lives. For Perec’s protagonist, the double is the extension of the monotonous human life that he cannot escape from and which is a kind of obligation for him to live with as “the subject is never separate from the social world, is always thoroughly permeated by it and liable to the distortions inculcated by the predominant ideology” (Frosh 1987: 137). The predominant ideology of the age is obviously the schizophrenic state of mind that the human beings face just like for the narrator in *The Fight Club*.

The narrator, unlike ‘A Man,’ creates his double to escape from the dualities in his life. The American culture in the Twentieth century predominantly reflected the technological advancements in all areas of human life. However, this did not represent the happiness of the individuals. At first sight, prosperity signifies the order and happiness of the society however, with a deeper analysis they transform into the symbolization of the culture of depression. As stated by Geoffrey Hartman;

The Fateful Question of Culture ‘camera culture, gun culture, service culture, museum culture, deaf culture, football culture... the culture of dependency, the culture of pain, the culture of amnesia, etc.’ (in Eagleton 2000: 37).

The so-called order, wealth, was in fact a kind of disorder that signified depression.

By the 1950’s, the issue identity had become not only politically and culturally but also psychologically dominant in American Culture, especially among youth. In fact, a new psychological “disorder” was “discovered” among college students, some of whom began to feel anxious about who they were. They apparently worried that their individuality, that which made them unique, was nothing more than the sum of various social groups to which they belonged and the images they took on (Grossberg and Wartella 2006: 220).

The ‘disorder’ that marked the era is the mirror of the narrator. The protagonist creates his double in order to escape from the monotonous daily life and the schizophrenic state of mind that is triggered by the culture that he has to live with. The narrator creates Tyler Durden, a charismatic, bold, handsome young man who is the perfect match for him. In order to rebel against the disorder behind the veil of order, he tries to win the game through supporting the creation of Tyler in his mind who are “identical twins”(FC 114). In addition to Tyler, the narrator creates *The Fight Club* that turns into an organization which gathers people around the city. *The Fight Club* is in fact the fight of the narrator with himself and his culture. It is impossible to read his case apart from the culture he is shaped by as “the priorities of the real become reversed, and everything is mediated by culture to the point where even the political and ideological “levels” have initially to be disentangled from their primary mode of representation which is cultural’(Jameson 1979: 139). It can be assumed that the narrator blurs the distinction between the real and the unreal to rebel against the monotony of the society. He intentionally does this as this ambiguity marked the era. This reminds the reader of Baudrillard’s definition of Disneyland (1983)

It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality, but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, no longer exists... Disneyland is presented as an imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact, all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of hyperreal and simulation (99).

Parallel to Baudrillard’s definition of the real, the narrator even cannot understand whether Tyler is his reality or not; “Here, I’m not sure if Tyler is my dream. Or if I am Tyler’s dream” (FC 138). In the twentieth century; “...there is no fashion: there are only fashions.’ “No rules, only choices.” “Everyone can be anyone.” (Ewen and Ewen 1982: 249-51). In relation, the interconnectedness of Tyler and the narrator is the very representation of an entire age.

At the end of both works the depressive human psyche cannot be altered either by tranquility or happiness. The narrator finds himself in a mental institution and the reader realizes that everything about *The Fight Club* and Tyler is an illusion and the narrator's schizophrenic state of mind is the only and ultimate ending in such an age. The case is not different for the 'man' in Perec's work. The young man who is a student of Sorbonne University finds himself in loneliness and depression and neither television nor Nescafé can help him to survive.

4. CONCLUSION

As mentioned by Kristeva (1987),

Literature reveals a certain knowledge and sometimes the truth itself about an otherwise repressed, nocturnal, secret and unconscious universe... It thus redoubles the social contract by exposing the unsaid, the uncanny... makes a game, a space of fantasy and pleasure, out of the abstract and frustrating order of social signs, the words of everyday communication (207).

What is underlined by her is quite significant in the sense that literary works that has the potential to reveal an alternative world that gives us a certain form of pleasure to face the realities of human life from the perspective of a so-called fantasy world. In relation, comparative analysis stands at the very center of this fantasy world that binds different cultures, times, places and souls that enriches the reading process. In *The Fight Club* and *A Man Asleep* the veil behind the fantasy world is the very realities of human life in the Twentieth century. Through comparative perspective both works act as a bridge to bind different cultures that brilliantly reflect the traumas of being part of a world in which brands, addictions and depression link the individuals. While Palahniuk portrays American society and how it is surrounded by the consumer culture, Percec gives voice to the same culture from France. American and French culture are intersected through the male protagonists of the works both of whom are the victims of depression and addiction. In relation, the sociological and psychological elements help the reader to read the texts as sociological documents to analyze how the Twentieth century world becomes a lighthouse to interpret the 21st century in which we all experience a similar form of transformation created by either consumer culture or our addictions.

Percec and Palahniuk creates a new perspective for the reader as the male protagonists reflect the inner chambers of the journey in a world of consumption and addiction. The protagonists become the flesh and blood symbol of the schizophrenic, depressive and addicted individuals who try to survive in a world of dualities. As nothing is real or singular, the unreal and the double is reflected through the physical and spiritual world of the characters. The reader shares the common cultural elements, the sociological facts and the traumas of an age that binds us together. The internal turmoil of the individuals of the Twentieth century are organically bounded by comparative reading as the comparative analysis promotes not only intercultural sensitivity and but also the ability to develop a certain form of awareness towards other people who experience similar things in different geographies.

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