

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D., thesis supervisor  
Michal Otáhal  
B.A. thesis evaluation  
The Legacy of *Invisible Man*: Ralph Ellison's Influence on *Fight Club*  
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures  
Charles University, Prague

Mr. Otáhal's thesis explores the themes of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) in comparison with Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) through the views of the intradiegetic unnamed first-person narrators of both novels. Although they are of a different race, socio-economical standing, and era, they have a similar mindset which, on the one hand, criticizes U.S. capitalism and the work-oriented, materialistic American Dream, and on the other, reflects an Emersonian combination of nihilism and anarchism. *Fight Club* follows the ideas voiced in *Invisible Man* and adjusts them to the contemporary globalized society. The thesis is divided into three main chapters, each focusing on one major topic pursued by the narrators. The first chapter deals with the idea of dispossession, as both a material and spiritual separation from the world, which is the core of the narrators' process of self-liberation from the norms of society. Only when they lose all possessions, social bonds, and almost erase their identities, can they find their true (Emersonian) selves and freedom. The self is analysed further in the second chapter, focused on the theme of social invisibility. The narrators are taken at face value by society, i.e. people concentrate only on their outward social markers and disregard their individual selves. Thus, they lack their own identity and feel like nobodies—they are invisible in the hive of identical individuals. This is strengthened by their everyman features, omission of their real names, and loss of their original identities, which are overshadowed by those they assume (or receive). The final chapter analyses the manipulation of the organizations which the narrators join. The narrators have no actual power over the organizations—they become mere symbols of their ideologies. When the narrators realize the manipulation, they try to stop them but are considered as traitors and symbolically castrated, which leads to their final dispossession in their quest to find their true Emersonian selves and freedom.

Mr. Otáhal has clearly invested a great deal of thought in this project, and his articulation of both his questions and potential answers is well formulated and reveals the amount of thought and analysis that has gone into them. The thesis's commentary on the psychology of the narrators and the structure of the respective novels is of a high and illuminating quality; and Mr. Otáhal's suggestions regarding the fragmented quality of each narrator's consciousness/personality are particularly insightful and helpful in bringing the reader to terms with them—and through them, with the import of the literary works in which they play a central role. It is also worth noting the originality of Mr. Otáhal's comparative efforts. Neither he nor I have been able to locate any other scholarly work comparing Palahniuk's productions with Ellison's.

In no way to discredit this evaluation, I do want to suggest here several issues (both of which I have previously discussed with Mr. Otáhal in my role as his thesis supervisor) that it might be helpful to address in any future development of this study:

- 1) It would be helpful to have a more developed discussion of "dispossession," which is clearly central to Mr. Otáhal's understanding and exposition of both novels. One comparative example that I have suggested in Emerson's extensive and persistent denunciations of what he

terms "appropriation"; but there are certainly others (including Steinbeck's, in *The Grapes of Wrath*), as well.

2) Comparison of the narrator's mentality in *Fight Club* to alienated, "possessed" individuals of other races (such as Black followers of Marcus Garvey, Black Power, the Black Panthers, etc.; and/or of Asian and Hispanic cohorts) in the U.S.; or, in the case of Ellison's narrator, to potential white counterparts, as well as to James Baldwin, Richard Wright, and, as with Palahniuk's narrator, to potential Asian and Hispanic cohorts in the U.S. In the case of both narrators, it might also be interesting to find similar comparisons among women and/or female literary characters in the U.S. (Kathy Acker, 1947-1997, and her literary creations come immediately to mind).

Because of its (and his) excellent insights and analysis, I believe that Mr. Otáhal's thesis merits an evaluation of "1, vyborne."

Thesis evaluation: "1, vyborne."

Signed:

Prof. David Lee Robbins, Ph.D.  
Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures  
August 28, 2021

If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:David.Robbins@ff.cuni.cz).