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I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero till the end of the night
He's gotta be strong
And he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight
I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero till the morning light
He's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And he's gotta be larger than life

(Bonnie Tyler – *Holding Out For A Hero*)

1. Introduction

Works of American fiction have been permeated by both latent and explicit discourses of masculinity. Especially in the 1990s, gender identities were largely denied realistic aspects and defined as mostly fictional by scholars such as Peter Murphy (*Fictions of Masculinity* 1) and John Beynon (*Masculinities and Culture* 93). In academic studies on American gender identities in literature, various types of masculinity have been identified and traced back to the founding of the US-American nation. The *American Adam*, thoroughly studied and criticized by R.W.B. Lewis, is one of the first archetypal American men. Lewis recognizes him in a number of works of nineteenth-century-fiction. The figure of the American Adam laid the foundation for masculine protagonists that are doomed to tragic heroism in a world of social turmoil and political changes. In *Manhood in America*, an extensive historical study of American masculinity from the mid-nineteenth until the end of the twentieth century, Michael S. Kimmel creates three discursive types of masculinity, namely the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan and the Self-Made Man, the latter of which he also refers to as Marketplace Man. Kimmel models these types after the characters of the play *The Contrast,* which was written by Royall Tyler in 1787. Tyler's male protagonists are shaped by the societal circumstances of that time, which inspired Kimmel to create models of masculinity with telling names that provide an illustrative basis for the social and political perception of masculinity until

the mid-1990s. The fact that Kimmel establishes a discourse with reference to eighteenth-century drama that was based on social phenomena shows that fiction and society have been intertwined when it comes to the discussion of American masculinity.

The constructedness of male archetypes is linked to fictionality via myths that manifest cultural identity. The figure of the American Adam, for instance, keeps the myth of an Edenic new world alive in a number of fictional texts by writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, H.D. Thoreau and Herman Melville. In analogy to Stuart Hall's definition of cultural identity as a construct of "memory, fantasy, narrative and myth [,] made within the discourse of history and culture" (S. Hall qtd. in Campbell, Neil 22), Neil Campbell observes that Americanness has been defined in the form of a "national narrative – a story of agreed principles, values and myths that give the country a coherent sense of identity" (2). This national narrative has its roots in history and the search for and questioning of national identity form integral parts of that identity (2). Campbell further postulates that the definition of "American" is "marked by division and opposition, rather than by agreement and consensus", in so far as the prototypical American as well as most historiographers are white, male, heterosexual members of the middle-class (3). The myths that constitute the national narrative and thereby establish a sense of identity serve the purpose of simplifying the world and rendering it more convenient for a particular (dominant) group of inhabitants (9). Inspired by the definitions of Roland Barthes, Campbell understands myths as ideological because of their concern with "the ways in which particular images of the world are conveyed and reinforced through texts and practices" (9-10). The ideological positions that members of a society with a constructed identity assume are called 'discourses'. They define and organize the texts and practices that disseminate mythical images, "promote meanings, representations and stories, position subjects" and construct our sense of right and wrong (13-14).

A thorough analysis of discourses of masculinity throughout US-American history shall prove that the fictional construction of masculinity as well as of its crisis is based on the social construction of the same and was extended by the addition of the notion of heroism and antiheroism respectively in various works of popular fiction. The purpose of this thesis is to show that ideas of masculinity and the perception of the concept as being 'in crisis' can already be traced back to societal and political phenomena in US-American history but that the existing ideas have been fortified due to the creation of masculine protagonists in a number of novels. It will be shown that many factors that contribute to a character's masculinity are rooted in non-fictional patterns, such as society, family and violence, but that the basic idea of masculinity is a mythical construct. An illustration of various scholarly attempts at defining the term masculinity, which have largely established the concept as a social but also as a fictional construction, is therefore indispensable. The literary analyses will focus on the male protagonists of three different novels, published between 1996 and 2006. The characters in the analytical spotlight will be Tyler Durden of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*[1], Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy of John Updike's *Terrorist*[2] and Conrad Hensely of Tom Wolfe's *A Man In Full*[3]. It will be pointed out how their masculinities are manifested and to what extent their gender identities can be perceived as being 'in crisis'.

[1] The title will be abbreviated as *FC* in this thesis.
[2] The title will be abbreviated as *T* in this thesis.
[3] The title will be abbreviated as *MF* in this thesis.

2. Towards Defining Masculinity

The late seventeenth century constituted the cradle of political modernity and was faced with the intellectual challenge of accounting for the legacy of patriarchal scholars. The attempt at avoiding the patriarchal assertion that men's God-given physique granted men the natural right to rule over women turned the explanation of the fact that men enjoyed greater power, a higher status and easier access to resources into a dilemma for scholars and theorists. A set of beliefs that deviated from the religious one provided a solution. In England, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, the founders of Social Contract Theory, shifted the focus on biological characteristics of human beings to societal ones by claiming that each individual entered several contracts with fellow beings, which clarified their relationship to others and their status in society. According to feminist critics, however, the Contractarian view favored fathers over any other members of society and, for a woman, entering the contract of marriage equalled submission to and dependence on the husband (Pateman and Brennan 100, Pateman 84). With reference to social rather than biological distinctions, Contract Theory implied that there were also differences between members of the same sex as far as their status in society was concerned. Hence, one man could be superior to another and the dilemma of justification (without adverting to patriarchal biological categories) remained (MacInnes 7). Nonetheless, the fact that the self in Contract Theory was considered a social construction also attributed a political component to the individual. Since the Contractarian self defined his/her character via the political institution of the family and socialized its members into accepting a political order, sexual difference was deferred to be socially and politically determined (MacInnes 74).

By means of the concepts of manhood and womanhood social aspects were developed a little further, and the conclusion that the division of labor was thus socially and politically constructed as well represented another step towards a modern and universalist society (MacInnes 7). The social categories "manhood" and "womanhood" were re-defined as "masculinity" and "femininity" at the beginning of the twentieth century,

which signalled the evidence and unaltered topicality of the need to prove the extent of correspondence to a socially constructed ideal (Kimmel, *Manhood* 119-20).[4] In the 1960s, Robert Stoller added the term “gender” as encompassing the social construction of sexual differences with an increasing emphasis on cultural aspects (McCampbell 9).

Despite this intellectual defeat of patriarchal scholars, the most prominent of whom was Sir Robert Filmer, it seems inevitable for some theorists to observe an ideological reunion between culture and nature when it comes to the representation of power. John MacInnes, for instance, argues that in cultural science, the penis rather than the phallus should be used to explain male dominance because women could more easily claim to want to have the phallus as a cultural and ideological symbol of power than a physical organ (71). He illustrates his opposition to a clear-cut separation between biology and culture by means of the example of human speech. Speaking is a skill for which one uses several organs of one’s body but it is also socially learned and practiced (MacInnes 65-66). D.H.J. Morgan pursues a similar line of argument when he introduces the idea of men “doing masculinities” instead of “being masculine” for they display behaviors and not organs (46-47). According to Morgan, those social behaviors are related to the possession of their sexual organs because if they were not, men would not be ‘doing masculinities’ but ‘doing humanities’. If men were only to be defined by means of their biology, they should be referred to as “male” rather than “masculine” (Morgan 46-47). This idea recurs in other scholars’ warnings against equating masculinity with ‘exclusively about men’ (see E. Kosofsky Sedgwick qtd. in Beynon 8) due to the existence of masculine and feminine versions of both masculinity and femininity (see Cornwall and Lindisfarne qtd. in Beynon 9) and the opposition of masculinity as a social and cultural construct and maleness as a biological distinction (e.g. MacInnes 76).

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[4] Many contemporary scholars still use the terms ‘masculinity’ and ‘manhood’ interchangeably; esp. Kimmel seems to prefer ‘manhood’ over ‘masculinity’ (c.f. *Homophobia* & *Manhood*).

It is important to note that several scholars talk about 'masculinities' in the plural rather than about one single masculinity. They thereby wish to divert the attention from the male biological essence as well as to emphasize the multi-facetted cultural aspects of the concept (There is not just one Caucasian-American middle-class masculinity). Those scholars simultaneously try to point out the historical fluctuation of the notion of masculinity and its various meanings to individuals (Whitehead and Barrett 8, Connell, *History* 257, Connell, *Social Organization* 38). John Beynon suggests using the term 'masculinity' as a singular-plural, such as the word 'data', for the above-mentioned purposes (2).

The recognition of the social and cultural construction of sexual difference implies that the concepts of masculinity, femininity and gender exist only in ideologies or fantasies (MacInnes 2, McCampbell 7-8, Beynon 6-7). Michael Kimmel argues along those lines when he states that "manhood [...] is historical [and] socially constructed [...]". The concept being a creation of culture, it means "different things at different times to different people" (Kimmel, *Homphobia* 120; see also Beynon 6). With regard to Contract Theory, Carole Pateman has pointed out that

> The original contract [...] is not an actual event but a political fiction; our society should be understood *as if* it originated in a contract. The natural paternal body of [...] patriarchy is metaphorically put to death by the contract theorists, but the artificial body that replaces it is a construct of the mind, not the creation of a community by real people. (*Genesis*, 102)

Moreover, the constructed, ideological definitions of masculinity and femininity are mutually dependent (Brittan 52). Kimmel carries this argument further by acknowledging that the definition of being a man is an exclusionary practice. It is made "in opposition to a set of 'others'", namely "racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women" (*Homophobia* 120). While manhood is thus defined by what it is not, it has to be proven and asserted in the eyes of its bearers. Femininity as a set of ideals about women, separate from actual female human beings, can function as the

contrastive element by means of which masculinity is defined (Kimmel, *Manhood* 7, Connell, *Organization* 31). In this context, effeminacy is usually the most negative form of masculinity. It designates forms of behavior that are associated with femininity and is therefore considered inappropriate in men. In the context of homosocial definition and assertion, Kimmel extends the term “homophobia” – by which one usually means the fear of homosexuals or of being perceived as gay - to the fear of homosocials; the horror of being unmasked as ‘insufficiently masculine’ by other men (*Manhood* 8). According to R.W.B Lewis, the attempt at establishing an ideal form of masculinity dates back to the founding of the US-American nation (5). The myth of masculinity in America is therefore as old as the idea of the American Dream (the ‘pursuit of happiness’) of starting over and asserting oneself in new surroundings.

3. The History of US-American Masculinity

The male English arrivals in the New World stripped themselves from their European history. By cutting the nautical ropes before embarking on the voyage across the Atlantic, they symbolically cut the umbilical cord of the dark, strained womb of Mother Europe to be reborn as innocent citizens of a promising new country. The American myth created by the eager newcomers saw “history as just beginning”, a God-given chance to start over and detach oneself from the European past (Lewis 5). By the 1820s, the Lazarian idea along with the hopes and prospects that the symbolic American resurrection entailed were molded into an image of heroic innocence, most readily compared to Adam before the Fall. In an ironic fervor, the ideological role model was attributed characteristics elaborated in the Bible from which the ‘newborn’ middle-aged men had so desperately tried to emancipate themselves. Lewis summarizes the archetype as follows:

> [The American hero of the nineteenth century was] an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources. [...]
> [He] was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. Adam was the first, the archetypal man. His moral position was superior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent. The world and history lay all before him. And he was the type of creator, the poet par excellence, creating language itself by naming the elements of the scene about him. (5)

In *Christianity the Logic of Creation* of 1857, Henry James the elder embellished the myth by emphasizing the natural misery inherent in innocence and purity. Considering the unblemished hero too remote from real life, he described the Adamic condition as having originated in tragedy. James thereby initiated a fictional pattern, which dealt with the “helplessness of mere innocence” (Lewis 9).

Based on historical evidence, Kimmel establishes three discursive types of masculinity, namely the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan and

the Self-Made Man, the latter of which he also refers to as Marketplace Man. While Kimmel embeds these archetypes in socio-political and historical surroundings, he also models them after the characters of the play *The Contrast,* which was written by Royall Tyler in 1787. Tyler's male protagonists are shaped by the societal circumstances of that time, but Kimmel's reference to late-eighteenth-century drama allows for an argument in favor of the fictionality of masculinity. The clear-cut ideological separation of the archetypal Heroic Artisan from Europe and the success as well as its pitfalls that the archetypal Self-Made Man experiences, continue the tragically heroic pattern of the Adamic archetype. According to Kimmel, the homosocial practice of excluding and asserting when it comes to defining a 'man' dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the two competing male archetypes of the Genteel Patriarch and the Heroic Artisan were gradually replaced by that of the Self-Made Man (*Homophobia* 123-24, *Birth* 135).

Landownership manifested the identity of those American men whom Kimmel subsumes under the designation "Genteel Patriarchs". Their image of refined, elegant and sensuous men as well as devoted fathers had been defended against reproaches of effeminacy, timidity and whimsicalness by such popular representatives as George Washington. The most influential opponent of the "dandies" with a "weakness for flattery", who took "counsel in [their] feelings and imagination" and displayed a "womanish resentment against England" along with a "womanish attachment to France", was Ralph Waldo Emerson (Kimmel, *Birth* 141). His essays established the independent pursuit of a high position from modest origins as an essential manly virtue, thereby discrediting the Genteel Patriarch, who based his superiority on mere inheritance.

The embodiment of the Emersonian ideal was the figure of the Heroic Artisan. Men that corresponded to this image believed in independence and had an indestructible faith in the honesty of simple laborers. The Heroic Artisan, a strong proponent of liberty and democracy, was most

popularly represented by Thomas Jefferson. The president's recoil from the feminine culminated in the creation of enemies, such as the Bank as a symbol of "Europeanized overcivilization" on an institutional level and Native Americans on a more concrete one (Kimmel, *Birth* 145). The symbolic killing of the European father during the American Revolution had produced a generation of fatherless American sons, whose lack of a role model had triggered off an emblematic gynophobia that was directed against 'Others'. The term 'manhood' designated the completed process of growing up to be independent, politically autonomous citizens of the New World. It equally established a clear distinction between white Americans of British origin and other male dwellers with a different ethnic background, who were infantilized and treated as inferior – an ideological continuation of colonial slavery (Kimmel, *Birth* 138-39, Kimmel, *Globalization* 415).

Marketplace Man or Self-Made Man, the third type of American masculinity that Kimmel traces back to the mid-nineteenth century, used the most vigorously defended ideals of the two models of manliness against them. His economic success, self-reliant achievement and unscrupulous striving outshined the unmerited status of the Genteel Patriarch and ridiculed the dichotomous policies of the Heroic Artisan. According to Kimmel's discourse, Marketplace Man regarded the Genteel Patriarch as an effeminate whimp and transformed the Heroic Artisan into a proletarian (*Birth* 145, *Homophobia* 123). He accumulated wealth and power and thrived in the capitalist system. The urban entrepreneur derived his identity from his economic success and asserted his manhood in an exclusively homosocial environment. He remained absent from the home and managed his parental duties with minimal input. His policy of asserting his masculinity at the expense of his non-male, non-heterosexual and non-WASP counterparts became increasingly paranoid. He developed a "gendered rage" and lived in constant fear of emasculation (Kimmel, *Homophobia* 124, Kimmel, *Birth* 139-40, Kimmel, *Manhood* 17). His ongoing struggle for economic success and peer recognition isolated and disconnected him from his environment (Kimmel,

Birth 139-40). He developed a desperate need to keep everything under control. In a competitive society, the easiest way to reduce the number of antagonists was to exclude them – a practice which yet again narrowed the term 'homosociality' down to a reference not only to men, but to prosperous white men. Every enactment of homosocial competition equally represented an escape from women and domesticity. The impulse to control and to keep everything in order came from the perception of the world as disordered and beyond control. American men of the mid-nineteenth century were "rushing headlong towards an industrial future" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 44), a scary prospect, which Kimmel holds responsible for "the first male American identity crisis" (*Manhood* 45). The urge to control also encompassed self-discipline, which was propagated by advice manuals in the 1830s and 40s. As it was believed that physical energy was finite, personal restraint was vigorously exercised with regard to sexuality. Following the medical creed of the time, American men made an effort to decrease sexual activity, so as to be able to invest more energy in their jobs (Kimmel, *Manhood* 45). As the workplace became tougher, the home became softer. The more time men spent at work, the more decidedly the domestic sphere was feminized. The competitive devotion of men to work increasingly disconnected them from their families, which left the task of teaching boys to be men to women and consequently encouraged the "repudiation of the feminine" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 60). The societal pressure to become a man severely shortened the childhood of many boys. It was during the peak years of identification with the Self-Made Man that the still prevalent image of the nuclear family - with the father as the breadwinner and the mother in charge of the children and the household - was created (Kimmel, *Manhood* 59).

As Kimmel and Michael Egan point out, the Civil War scarred American masculinity deeply (Kimmel, *Manhood* 75, Egan ch. 3). The ideological contrasts between the Union and the Confederate States were reflected in their ideas of manhood. While in the North even those men who did not support their homosocials' campaigns for the aboloition of slavery and the extension of the suffrage to women refrained from open

rejection of the feminine, men in the South were still “trapped in a conservative adoration of the Genteel Patriarch” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 76). Their defeat equalled their ‘emasculation’. Post-war developments, however, did not only crush the Southerners’ male spirits. The formerly unknown extent of industrialization, the invasion of the public sphere by women, free slaves and immigrants and the closing of the frontier eroded the once firmly established roots of masculinity on American soil. Kimmel regards the unleashing of fundamental questions on manhood in the post-war period as a manifestation of yet another crisis of masculinity (*Manhood,* 78).

The trespassing of formerly excluded groups into what had been established by the Self-Made Man as his domain had undermined the achiever’s authority at the turn of the century. The transformation of dependency levels induced by the rapid growth of industrialization crippled the men that corresponded to Kimmel’s archetype even more. At the wake of the new industrial era, any hard-working entrepreneur was struck by the realization that he was no longer his own boss who had several laborers underneath him. He had become a slave to the new machines and was working by the pace of the clock (Kimmel, *Manhood* 83). In order to re-establish their dominant position, those that felt leapfrogged made an effort to distinguish themselves from their increasingly threatening counterparts. The inner values that had formerly sufficed to display male success were transformed into visible physical strength (Putney, *Review* 317). The hours a man spent at a gymnasium became an indicator of his moral and physical discipline. Fighters, such as John L. Sullivan, were hailed as the embodiment of “elemental virility”[5] (Kimmel, *Manhood* 139). The importance of exercise and a healthy diet was emphasized in a series of guidebooks that swamped the market. Another way to ensure one’s bodily well-being was sexual puritanism, which was especially fervently promoted by J.H. Kellogg, the health guru

[5] This desirable feature, however, only extended to white sportsmen. With the emergence of Jack Johnson as the first heavyweight boxing champion of African origin, the fear of triumphant unskilled free blacks became yet again tangible.

at the time. Kellogg's doctrine of abstinence remained influential until the popularization of Freud's ideas in the second decade of the twentieth century. The advice given on how to be strong and masculine also transcended the body and extended the definition of self-discipline to emotional restraint. The display of emotions was yet again declared a taboo for men. Many believed that the masculine spirit could only be retrieved by increased warfare and a re-establishment of the experience of the frontier. At the turn of the century, the frontier was reinvented on a less militant basis as "simply the outdoors" (Kimmel, *Manhood* 136). With regard to fiction, the heroic qualities of the ideological type of man called American Adam were similarly manifested by means of the frontier. As Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* illustrated in 1893, it was the western, rather than the European frontier to which "American heroism and self-knowledge" were attributed (Guha Majumdar 27). The lonesome adventurer became the hero of many late nineteenth century and turn-of-the-century novels that followed the Genteel Tradition. While European writers created their protagonists in a social surrounding, American novels of the time centered around a dislocated individual, who pursued his luck and happiness far away from the place to which he traced back his origins (Kimmel, *Manhood* 142). The tragedy of the lonely quest even had a number of writers turn to the experience of the victim instead of the domain of the victor – a development which bore the literary fruits of James Fenimore Cooper's Native American and Norman Mailer's African American protagonists, even though they were still imbued with racist elements (Guha Majumdar 27, Hughes qtd. in Shamir and Travis 4). As representative works of the genre that had stories evolve around an individual's remote attempt at self-assertion, Western novels and stories about wild and exciting life in urban areas – as opposed to the 'primitivism' of the real jungle far away – were widely read. Not only did the genre of the Western in literature redefine the image of the cowboy as a brave hero, but it also represented the west as a place to start over for the victims of a cutthroat public arena.

The mission of virilization that characterized the new century drew its inspiration from a very influential 'muse'. Theodore Roosevelt had merged the formerly antagonistic images of the successful man in the top social ranks and the animalistic fighter and presented himself as the prototypical Self-Made Man (Leverenz 763, Putney, *Review* 316-17, Egan ch. 2). Having had the stigma of a wimp attached to his persona as a dainty, asthmatic boy and having been referred to as the American Oscar Wilde by the local press when he entered politics in the late 1880s, Roosevelt launched a fervent campaign of masculinization (Kimmel, *Manhood* 182, Beynon 62). He went west to live among the cowboys of the Dakota territory and transformed himself from the laughingstock to the incarnation of strength, self-reliance and determination, the three poles of his ideal vision of masculinity (Kimmel, *Manhood* 82, Connell, *History* 252). Roosevelt feared overcivilization and was vehemently opposed to idleness. He believed that violence and a certain degree of unrefinedness were essential characteristics of a 'real man'. According to his books and speeches, manly virtues could be attained by bodybuilding and exercise, as well as hard work. Although Roosevelt supported women suffrage, he condemned women who bore fewer than four children and chose a college education over their 'natural vocation' as mothers. Under his presidency such women were considered traitors and were thereby assigned the same unpatriotic status as male army dodgers. Roosevelt himself pursued his ideal virility until very late and participated in hazardous expeditions into unknown territories of the Amazon so as to prove his point about the masculinizing effects of the outdoors and the wilderness.

In an attempt to rescue their sons from the feminizing clasp of the mothers and female teachers who had been responsible for their upbringing and education, American men of the new century initiated a number of movements to ensure the masculinization of their male offspring (Kimmel, *Manhood* 159, Putney, *Review* 317). Domesticity formed an integral part of the new fatherhood movement and fathers were competing for time to spend with their sons with the mothers and sisters

of the men-to-be. Fathers sought more connectedness on the matrimonial level, - a development which became known as “companionate marriage” -, in an effort to be granted more influence on their sons (Terry 123). Boys and girls were separated in their spheres of play and debates on segregated schooling were echoing in the walls of public as well as private buildings. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the clothing of boys and girls changed and became color coded[6] and boys and girls were made to play with different toys. Several advice manuals told parents to encourage their boys to fight in the schoolyard. (Kimmel *Manhood* 161).

Kimmel’s as well as Jay Mechling’s research prove that in the course of the 1920s, the pressure on men as fathers was growing and homosexuality was increasingly found under attack. Fraternal organizations and boys’ movements were springing up like mushrooms but their popularity – apart from that of the Boy Scouts - faded just as quickly (Putney, *Review* 317). By 1925, most men had retreated from the institutional sanctuaries and shifted to male bonding at work and during leisure time activities instead (Kimmel, *Manhood* 175). Men also tried to conquer the domain of religion, which had been feminine until the introduction of the movement of Muscular Christianity. The origins of that movement can be traced back to the mid-nineteenth century works of the English novelist and historian Charles Kingsley and the writer and lawyer Thomas Hughes. In their non-fictional works, Hughes and Kingsley criticized the weakening effects of asceticism and effeminacy on the Anglican Church and promoted a revirilization of the image of Jesus as a decisive step towards the remasculinization of the Church (Putney, *Muscular Christianity* §5). The Muscular Christians lamented the dainty representations of Jesus in the churches and exchanged his statues and pictures for those of a hard-working craftsman with “calloused hands and a well-developed physique” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 177). According to

[6] Interestingly, we learn from Kimmel’s account that boys were made to wear pink because it was considered a bright, strong and assertive color, similar to red, while girls were dressed in light blue as an indication of their being flighty. It is unclear why and when the color concept was reversed (*Manhood* 160-61).

Kimmel, they “recast Jesus as the first Heroic Artisan” (*Manhood* 177). While Muscular Christianity in mainline Protestantism had faded by the 1930s, the concept was long used by the Catholic Church as well as a number of evangelical Protestant groups to advertize athletic programs in schools, and by the Ku Klux Klan for various identificatory purposes (Putney*, Muscular Christianity* 7th paragraph, Kimmel, *Manhood* 178).

During the Great Depression of the 1930s most men had a hard time proving their ideals. The new decade was characterized by “racial seclusion and anti-immigrant manhood” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 193). The drawbacks of the Depression had an emasculating effect for most men at work as well as at home. Unemployed men lost their families’ approval and regarded themselves as “impotent patriarchs” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 199). They were pathetically clinging to the American Dream. Two strands of heroic fantasies infiltrated the lives of American men in the 1930s. On the one hand, gangster movies became popular countermyths to Self-Made masculinity. The heroes of the decade were those who struck it rich illegally. The new models of identification were selfish rogues like Rhett Butler from *Gone With the Wind* (Kimmel, *Manhood* 219). On the other hand, the schizoid figure of Superman found its way into comic book stores. Clark Kent, the clerk, represented what the men at the time really were, while Superman was their heroic fantasy, which seemed ever so remote at the time of the Great Depression. While the bespectacled personality was longing for Lois Lane’s attention and yearning for a domestic union with her, his muscular counterpart kept avoiding stability and homely regularity. The two characters depicted the “gendered schizophrenia” that had helped weave a carpet of masculine fantasies for years (Kimmel, *Manhood* 212).

The 1940s did not see much improvement with the Second World War under way. As fathers were absent from the homes, juvenile delinquency increased. Most exemption amandments, which would have enabled the uniformed fathers to spend time with their children, failed because the

popular belief was that exemption from the military service equalled castration (Kimmel, *Manhood* 227).

The pursuit of the American Dream intensified in the post-war era of the 1950s. As Suburbia developed in all its neatness and rich seclusion, many fate-stricken Willy Lomans were faced with what they were expected to but might never be. People made efforts to be ‘normal’ and hid behind the walls of conformity, practicing containment every day of their lives (Baker 4). The dominant values of the 1950s imposed specific role models on men and women alike. The breadwinner would make sure that the house with the lawn could be paid for, while the breadbaker would be wearing pearls for each chore. Any disruptor of the harmonious picture would be hunted down by Senator McCarthy, whose agitational contempt was turned against any forms of deviation, such as Communism, intellectualism and homosexuality[7]. Since the losers of the rat race and their offspring often became Communists or delinquents and the ones who perfectly merged with the norm tried not to stand out, the characteristics of a ‘real man’ were left undefined (Kimmel, *Manhood* 237).

The financial insecurities and the unstable societal circumstances of the time were reflected in the philiosophical tradition of the absurd, in which a new fictional figure gained momentum. The antihero had already been created by Fjodor Dostoevsky when, in *Notes from Underground* of 1864, he bundled existentialist features to raise “a voice from the underground challenging accepted opinions” (Brombert 1). However, the desolate figure did not find its way into US-American fiction until the early 1950s[8]. There is an “element of despair, a destructive element” in this

[7] The reversed color concept must already have been well-established in the 1950s because McCarthy’s image of the enemy was summarized as “pinks, punks and perverts” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 237).

[8] Albert Camus’ *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which David Galloway describes as a milestone in the absurd tradition, was originally published in 1942 and translated into English in 1955. The earliest published novel that David Galloway and Ihab Hassan analyze in their works is J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* of 1951.

figure, but this element is put to a constructive use in his rebellion against victimization (W. Morris qtd. in Hassan 6). The character's individualistic standing gained even more influence at a time when that of traditional Christianity declined. The "exiled individual in a meaningless universe" created around him the philosophical tradition of the absurd, which Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* helped see the light of day (Galloway 5). According to Camus, what is absurd is not merely impossible, but rather contradictory (Camus qtd. in Galloway 5). The hero's existence feeds on the knowledge of the inevitable death, which disrupts the familiar reality. By refusing murder and suicide, the absurd hero succeeds in re-establishing meaning in his life. The rejection of suicide as an avoidance of man's existential problems leaves him with the dilemma of how to lead his life. The one who realizes the absurdity of human life and learns to merge it into his existence, will eventually turn it into a personal reason to live. Man's frustrated search for truth, which made him aware of the absurd in the first place, is satisfied in so far as he incorporates the "truth of the absurd itself" into his life (J. Cruickshank qtd. in Galloway 9). The absurd consists of a complex interplay of intention and reality and exists as a result of incessant pondering of and reflection on the world and the dwelling of individuals in it. Since it is the individual who is concerned with the meaninglessness of the universe and his[9] personal suffering in it, and since this individual is constantly making an effort to defend his truth of life as which he defines the absurd and persists in his claims of that truth against the antagonistic forces of the world surrounding him, one can speak of the individual as an "absurd hero" (Galloway 10). He restlessly pursues his passion of defying the universe, which can be narrowed down to his daily world in most cases (Galloway 10). The intensity of his ambition proves his appreciation of life and his purpose to reach happiness by consciously dealing with the given circumstances. "Happiness [...] can only be tragic" (Galloway 12) in so far as the way to

[9] Galloway talks about the individual as "absurd man", by which he might mean "human" rather than "male person". As my concern here is with male (anti-)heroes, however, and as Galloway's literary examples as well as Camus' Sisyphus are male, I am interpreting Galloway's "absurd man" as an "absurd male" and I am using masculine personal pronouns when referring to the mentioned individual. Galloway uses only masculine pronouns himself (10).

the absurd hero's aim is paved with unpleasant realizations and major setbacks and as the positive most clearly defines itself via the negative. The recognition of tragedy connects with the figure of the American Adam one century earlier. The new antihero equally maintains a certain innocence by not living up to all the expectations that surround him, but contrary to his Adamic forerunner, his innocence becomes radical as he questions those expectations and the assumptions that form the nourishing ground of his society. Whether he is a subversive radical or a pensive outsider, the fictional man of the mid-twentieth century, who learned how to define himself by means of the struggle he was in as a conscious human being, represents a vision of promising honesty (see L. Fiedler qtd. in Galloway 13 and in Guha Majumdar 28). The trouble with his innocence is that it "prevents the self from participating fully in the world" (Hassan 40). The new protagonist is in a constant quarrel with himself, caught up in the dialectic of innocence and experience, of which he is aware as an initiated subject in American society.

This Blakean dialectic with which the new protagonist in the American novel is confronted makes him develop a tendency to rebellion as well as one to self-victimization (Galloway 15, Hassan 40). Ihab Hassan's label of the "rebel-victim" (112) conjures up the image of a Janus-head. It is the connecting part of the two faces that describes the new main character most accurately because he revolts against what he is concerned with and is ready to accept the role of a victim for the sake of his convictions. Hence, the absurd hero or antihero of the mid-twentieth century bears a number of similarities to the ancient hero of Greek mythology. Even though he does not teem with pride and boldness (Brombert 3), he is most successful at surmounting difficulties in "states of fearful madness" (Hassan 112). He "remains outside the very order he has helped found and maintain" because his essence is doused in solitude (Hassan 113). The new fictional hero disavows the unity that Joseph Campbell assigns to the mythological hero and the world (Campbell 386, Lewis 198). The hero and the antihero share passions but they differ in their actions (Hassan 327). While the ancient mythological hero adheres to a "heroic

code" that is "often associated with war, violence, and the cult of manliness", which is based on the repudiation of "the feminine in all its forms" (J. Doyle qtd. in Beynon, 60), and consequently accounts for the hero's temporary "dreadful[ness] [and] monstro[sity]", the antihero is frequently seen to denounce that code (Brombert 3). As the mediation between the self and the world became more difficult in modern times, the hero was left with only two options – surrender and recoil (Hassan 327). It is this very experience that turns the hero into an antihero, a rebellious victim, an absurd incarnation of existentialist features, and adds the distinctive ingredient of humanity to to the fictional works of the mid-twentieth century. The rebel-victim is someone who "renounces and is rejected, [...] who opposes and is oppressed" (Lundblad 763). The protagonist whom Experience has made aware of his former innocence desperately seeks to defy time and history, recreate his innocence and deny death as a solution to his struggles (Hassan 329). For innocence in America entails that the frontiers never close and that every generation begins its tasks afresh in spite of past events. Experience as the "urge to reflect on the past and redeem it" runs counter to the idea of ever renewable innocence (Hassan 36). The absurd hero accepts the world as tragic but as necessary and inescapable at the same time (Hassan 42). At times his search for innocence may occur simultaneously with disaffiliation and apathy (Hassan 65). The American novel of the mid-twentieth century, which deals with the "schizoid figure of the hero", seeks the meaning of reconciliation and the meaning of being in his victimhood (Hassan 60). The existentialist hero reveals demonic grins in his sainthood and displays a grotesque criminality at the time when his ambition to act reached its peak, but he readily affirms the human sense of life (W. Morris qtd. in Hassan 146).

Even though the social flaws and insecurities of the Americans of the 1940s and 50s had been exhibited relentlessly by means of existentialist fiction, ideal visions of manhood and the adamant pursuit of the American Dream had prevailed. The subversive developments of the 1960s, however, exposed the masculine ideals of the previous years as an

illusory fraud. The groups on whose suppression American masculine identity had been built went to the barricades (Kimmel, *Manhood* 262). The Civil Rights Movement had gathered momentum and the Freedom Riders rung the bell for the new decade. Native Americans followed the example of their African American fellow-sufferers and founded the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1968. The years to come saw increasing Hispanic political participation. The publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* marked a milestone of the feminist movement in 1963. Among other inequalities Friedan illustrated the gender-wage-gap and helped raise awareness of men's greater power and higher status in the public as well as in the private sphere. The introduction of the pill granted women more sexual liberty and in 1973, abortion was legalized. (*From Revolution to Reconstruction* ch. 12-14). With the women's movement as an obvious menace to masculinity, men began writing about their status as members of a sex that had difficulties in expressing their emotions, their experiences as fathers and their endurance of stereotypes. Their style was often therapeutic and confessional and lacked sensitivity to gender relations (Coltrane 41). It was under these circumstances that Masculinity Studies originated as a discipline in academia. The defensive mode of writing remained prominent and widely read until the 1990s, but it ignored men who suffered from their inferiority to more privileged males (Coltrane 41).

In the 1960s and 70s, a growing concern with environmental issues unsettled people all over the world. Any environmentalist measure would signal a step against the industrial sector in which Self-Made men had so painfully established themselves. As children were rebelling against their parents, sons were rebelling against their fathers, undermining their ideas of traditional masculinity. Young men let their hair grow, paid no heed to color- and dress codes and engaged in multiple sexual relationships. The 1970s clearly lacked virile role models; the Western heroes had become obsolete and – due to the Watergate scandal, in which President Nixon had been involved, - politicians were considered untrustworthy (Kimmel, *Manhood* 292). The military was no longer a symbol of masculine

heroism, since women and homosexuals had entered to fight in the Vietnam War. Magazines and movies foreshadowed the breakthrough of the “warm, sensitive, cuddly and compassionate man as the new hero of the 1980s”, but the model was rejected by men and women alike (Kimmel, *Manhood* 292).

The presidency of Ronald Reagan began a “retrieval of cowboy masculinity” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 300) and a simultaneous “Wimp Hunt” (Kimmel, *Manhood* 292) that would nip any sign of the supposed emphatic, compassionate ideal in the bud. The progress that had been achieved with regard to the recognition and acceptance of minorities was crumbling again. Literary works written in or dealing with the 1980s, such as Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, draw parallels between Reaganite politics and the gender roles and societal attitudes of the 1950s. Some critics lamented the “wimpiness” of the male protagonists in the works at the time of Philip Roth, John Updike and Leonard Michaels (Kimmel, *Manhood* 294). In the fields of economics, men were faced with the inexorable developments of globalization. They had to work harder for less payment and most families were required to generate two incomes, which unleashed yet another wave of females on man’s sacred marketplace (Kimmel, *Manhood* 299). In their private lives, men refrained from flirting for fear of their gestures being misinterpreted as sexual harrassment. Moreover, with AIDS and the Epstein-Barr syndrome (a herpesvirus) as emerging threats, they had to take on more responsibility than ever before (Kimmel, *Manhood* 299). The male body was subject to the public gaze – scrutiny related to possible assaults on the one hand, but admiration due to its recognition as a sex object on the other (Beynon 103). By the end of the 1980s, a new adaptation of the heroic figure of Superman re-introduced the idea of a sensitive, emphatic hero. According to Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin,

> it [was] not the phallic Man of Steel who [was] the hero and who [came] to occupy the center of the stories. It [was] rather the [protective, supportive, temperamental and petulant figure of] Clark

> Kent who emerge[d] finally in 1986 as the real hero in the Superman legend. (253)

4. The Contemporary 'Crisis of Masculinity'

Kimmel and Beynon identify the stock market as the terrain to prove one's manhood in the 1990s (Kimmel, *Manhood* 307, Beynon 105). The bulging muscles that were flickering across the screens could be substituted by a bulging wallet (Kimmel, *Manhood* 307) – provided that the attempt at marking the financial territory turned out a success. Along with several other historians, Kimmel (1996) and Beynon (2002) discuss a crisis of masculinity that has been prevalent since the 1990s. While Beynon perceives the notion of crisis as "ill defined and elusive" due to the absence of field based evidence (75), he still lists a number of factors that have been eroding traditional masculinity in Great Britain and the United States. In accordance with Anthony Clare (2000) and John MacInnes (1998), he exposes traditional masculine traits as discarded. Clare observes characteristics that were usually categorized as 'feminine' - such as emotionality, spontaneity, intuition, expressivity, compassion and

empathy - to be indicative of maturity and health in men (215). MacInnes points out that former manly virtues, namely

> heroism, independence, courage, strength, rationality, will, backbone [and] virility [...] have become masculine vices [and are now interpreted as] abuse, destructive aggression, coldness, emotional inarticulacy, detachment, isolation, an inability to be flexible, to communicate, to empathize, to be soft, supporting or life-affirming [...] (47).

Beynon attributes the crisis-laden elements to a too narrow gender script for males and the loss of former male prerogatives, especially in the labor market. He acknowledges the role of violence as a predominantly masculine phenomenon as part of the crisis (80). To Kimmel, violence – or “rather [...] the willingness to fight, the desire to fight” – “is often the single most evident marker of manhood” (*Homophobia* 132). Statistics prove that male involvement in violent crimes exceeds that of females (Beynon 81, De Keseredy and Schwartz 354). The details on statistical numbers vary, however, and the explanations, ranging from essentialist arguments to belligerent traditions in certain societies, are frequently subject to mere speculation (Beynon 81, De Keseredy and Schwartz 354). Beynon notes that competitive tendencies seem to play a major role and that violence is associated with masculinity because men do not only commit it, but they are also its victims (81). Other, more psychoanalytical approaches perceive interpersonal violence as rooted in aggression toward the self and recognize destructive elements in individuals that arise from “[t]he basic struggle [...] between the primal instincts of Life and Death, between love and aggression in their manifold disguises”, which is then projected onto society (S. Freud qtd. in Hassan 13). Some go so far as to claim that “[t]he male masochist [...] leaves his social identity completely behind – actually abandons his ‘self’ – and passes over into the ‘enemy terrain’ of femininity” (Silverman 25). Some historians relate masculine violence to the dichotomous division of labor at the beginning of human civilization. They draw parallels between women giving birth and growing crops and oppose these life-affirming notions of fertility to the lethal activity of hunting carried out by men (Zola 63-65, Mies 26).

A collision with the terrain of femininity was observed at various points in history with regard to parenting (see 3. above). The domain of fatherhood constitutes yet another element by means of which the contemporary crisis of masculinity is frequently demonstrated. While co-parenting has become an indispensable part of modern family life in some households (Cabrera et al. 128), many sociologists as well as politicians have deplored the increasing absence of fathers and the social malaise resulting from it (Baskerville 695). In the United States, fatherlessness has been associated with poor school achievement, criminality, early pregnancies, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide among adolescents (Cabrera et al. 128, Baskerville 695, A. Phillips qtd. in Beynon 129). Cabrera et al. add gender identity problems to this list of negative impacts (128). Similarly, Scott Coltrane deduces from his research that "exclusive child rearing by mothers produces young men with psychological needs to differentiate from women and denigrate the feminine in themselves." (49).

Modernization has largely been identified as the source of paternal absenteeism (Zola 270). It has triggered off a new desire for freedom and self-realization which was put into practice at the expense of harmonious marriages and traditional family life (Zola 270, Baskerville 695). Modern global markets have required a reconstruction of masculinities and thinned the thread of violence on a global scale (Connell *Globalization* 77, Kimmel *Globalization* 414). With regard to the events of September 11th, 2001, Kimmel points out a link between the disillusionment of the American and the Muslim middle class. In comparable fashions, the anger of the first is triggered off by the increasing pressure of a consumer society in a globalized migrant context, and the frustration of the latter results from a female push on the market and US-American cultural hegemony (*Gender* 1). Kimmel draws parallels between the blowing up of the Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City by the former GI Timothy McVeigh in 1994, and the Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center by postulating that the middle class men involved in both terrorist acts, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, share the need for an ideological

“recovery of manhood from the emasculating politics of globalization” (4). McVeigh, a white supremacist, as well as most of the men held responsible for the attacks on September 11th, such as Mohammed Atta, had been well-educated members of the middle classes in their respective societies until the gradual erosion of their status drove their feelings of inadequacy to a violent climax. Kimmel recognizes “a rhetoric of masculinity” as the common denominator of the racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-government tendencies that the small group of white supremacists, to which McVeigh belongs, exhibits (2). In an attempt to defend themselves against the threatening emasculation by the government and the non-white, non-male intruders into what they consider their domains, they restore their manhood by militarizing it and bond with their white supremacist fellows to form a masculine militia against the destructive forces to their homoerotic Eden. This John Rambo-fantasy of male middle class bonding reminds Kimmel of the political practices of the Taliban (3). According to his research, most suicide bombers from the Middle East did not display typical medically diagnosed signs of depression but were rather caught in a downward spiral of economic malaise and gender identity problems attributed to the middle class in a globalizing world. Muslim women are increasingly seen to be crossing the threshold into the former male world by doing low-paid labor, and a large number of the men involved in 9/11 had college degrees of engineering but no jobs (4). On a political level, those men were fighting the humiliating influence of Western culture, bringing down the Twin Towers in an act of symbolic castration. Kimmel’s comparison of the terrorists in both societies culminates in the assumption that “[t]hey accepted cultural definitions of masculinity, and needed someone to blame when they felt that they failed to measure up” (5). He speaks of a “massive male displacement that accompanies globalization” (7).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the issue of masculinity was approached from a different angle when US-American firefighters and policemen were hailed for their incessant work and their bravery (Lorber 380). While the Muslim suicide bombers were celebrated as glorious

martyrs in their home territories, the uniformed Americans were praised as heroes in times of a tragedy. Those who had formerly been regarded as brutes or machos, started attracting the attention of the media and transformed into objects of sexual desire for women (Lorber 380). Although some journalists introduced the idea of female heroism with regard to female helpers as well as victims, few refrained from using conservatively imbued gender-specific attributes to heroism and reinforced the notion of muscular heroism by writing about "the nurture and fellowship of women [and] the command and courage of men" (P. Drexler qtd. in Lorber 380). In *Declarations of War*, Kimmel challenges this obverse interpretation of heroism and points out the loving and caring attitudes that a number of men showed towards their families and disabled friends when they were worried or endangered by the attacks (Kimmel qtd. in Lorber 383). What the historian considers positive in American men, however, was reversed into undesirable features of weakness and wimpiness in the depiction of the Muslim aggressors (Lorber 383). The dichotomous gender-policy was perpetuated between members of the same sex of different cultures in order to construct an archetypal enemy, who shared the characteristics that had once been repudiated in women and American homosexuals (Lorber 384).

Despite the perturbing effects of globalization and modernization described above, Beynon maintains that the recently frequently mentioned 'crisis of masculinity' is not new but was experienced comparably in earlier decades (89; see also Kimmel's arguments summarized in 3. above). Most of the contemporary insecurity, he argues, can be traced back to popular culture and the mass media, for it is predominantly writers of fiction and directors of movies who have been creating unstable masculine characters (93). Peter Murphy pursues an analogous line of argument, writing about masculinity (and femininity) as a "fictional construction", of which "[myths] have been perpetuated in

literature, art, popular culture, and the politics of our daily lives"[10] (1). British sociologist Wendy Hollway has taken up the idea of the Jungian archetypes of masculinity and femininity, which Jung traced back to ancient myths and religious beliefs, by arguing that gender identities are fragile and subject to change because various discourses overlap in the life of one person. According to Hollway, gender is organized in symbolic practices which may last longer than a lifetime. One of the examples she gives for such a symbolic practice is the construction of heroic masculinity (Connell, *Der gemachte Mann* 93). The heatedly discussed crisis is not a crisis of men as real human beings but a crisis of masculinity as a social construct put into communicative practice because as such, it is never stable, hard to grasp and easily attacked by means of the very arguments that define it[11] (J.A. Mangan qtd. in Beynon 90; Knights 13, MacInnes 45-46).

[10] While Beynon mainly talks about the influence of the media in the 1990s, some contributors to Murphy's book refer to nineteenth century literature, such as James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*.

[11] MacInnes claims that if masculinity is socially constructed, it can be reversed and women should equally be able to acquire the characteristics associated with it. If masculinity is beyond the social, one would have to revert to biological arguments and legitimize the innate superiority of one sex over the other (45-46).

5. The Representation of Masculinities in Selected Works of American Fiction

5.1. Plot Summaries

5.1.1. Fight Club

Chuck Palahniuk's famous novel *Fight Club*, which was first published in 1996, is the story of a frustrated thirty-year-old American taking revenge on the capitalist society he lives in by means of his split personality Tyler Durden. The protagonist, who is also the narrator of the story, remains nameless throughout the novel. Even when he learns that he and Tyler Durden are one and the same person, his real name is not revealed. In his dull job for a hypocritical, capitalist insurance company he has to fly across the country and several time zones on a regular basis, which causes insomnia. He discovers that the only way for him to relax and unwind is to listen to participants in self-help groups, who suffer from lethal diseases. His sanctuary is being intruded by Marla Singer, a masochistic breast cancer patient, who engages in a sexual relationship with Tyler Durden. During the narrator's phases of insomnia, his alter ego Durden declares war on the well-off members of society. He threatens entrepreneurs and rouses simple laborers to violent action directed against their bosses and all those who manifest their superiority by degrading others. He founds fight clubs – organized beating events in which men can vent their anger and aggression -, which eventually transform into guerrilla-like associations (the units of Project Mayhem) that terrorize the country. When the narrator becomes aware of his schizophrenia, he kills Tyler Durden.

5.1.2. Terrorist

Published in 2006, *Terrorist* is John Updike's penultimate novel. Its readers accompany eighteen-year-old Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy on his path of initiation to his final goal of near-extinction. Born to an Irish-American mother and abandoned by his Egyptian father, Ahmad abhors

being part of what he considers a degenerate society and he refuses to adapt to the American way of life. A fervent student of the Q'ran, Ahmad appears a promising candidate for terrorist acts to his Muslim teacher. He is assigned to blow up a bridge in New Jersey – an undertaking with the certain result of martyrdom. Ahmad's guidance counselor Jack Levy, a melancholic Jew in his sixties, who tries to spice up his pathetic life and unsatisfactory marriage by engaging in a sexual relationship with Ahmad's mother, manages to talk the young man out of his plan.

5.1.3. A Man in Full

Even though the title of Tom Wolfe's second novel (published in 1998) clearly refers to the character of Charlie Croker, the story has four male protagonists, whose lives Wolfe eloquently twists into a compelling, lengthy plot about elitism, racism and masculinism in the American South. Croker is a former high school football star and an Atlanta entrepreneur. At the age of sixty, he is faced with the realization that neither his twenty-eight-year-old second wife nor his offensively lavish attempts at asserting his position among the Atlanta elite can save him from bancruptcy and dwindling health. Raymond Peepgass, who works for Croker's main creditor, hopes to find a way out of his own pecuniary plight – inflicted upon him by a divorce and a paternity suit - by forming a syndicate that plans to buy Croker's companies at a bargain price. For reasons that are financial rather than passional, Peepgass marries Croker's discarded ex-wife. In order to avoid racial tensions in the city of Atlanta, Croker is offered a deal by the Atlanta mayor and his attorney-friend Roger White. On condition that Croker puts in a good word at a press conference for an African American college athlete, whom the daughter of a wealthy friend of Croker's accuses of date-rape, his monetary problems will be solved over night. In the course of the negotiations, White experiences a jump in his career as an African American attorney. After agonizing over the ethical nature of the deal, Croker backs out and leaves all his possessions to his creditors. He becomes a preacher of Stoic philosophy and is offered a contract by a television company. Croker had his eyes opened to the

futility of materialism by his home care aide Conrad Hensley. Hensley used to work in the freezer unit of one of Croker's food companies but he was fired due to cost-cutting measures. A series of unfortunate events following Hensely's dismissal makes him lose his temper and he is charged with physical assault. For reasons of personal pride, he refuses to have the bail money paid and accepts a sentence of imprisonment. During his time in jail, he reads a book about the Stoics and the teachings of Epictetus. He becomes a fervent believer in the philosophy of the Stoics and his newly acquired faith in Zeus gives him enough strength to assert himself in the harsh reality of life in prison. When an earthquake makes the prison walls collapse and he manages to escape, he interpretes the turn of events as Zeus' will. A former colleague helps him to get forged papers and a new identity and Hensley finds a job as a home care aide, which is how he enters Croker's life. At the press conference, he realizes the extent to which his spiritual spark has ignited Croker's mind and decides to surrender to the police. He is conceded two years on probation and rejoins his wife and children.

5.2. Society as a Constricting Element in the Lives of the Characters

Ahmad – the protagonist of John Updike's *Terrorist* - and Conrad, one of the main characters in Tom Wolfe's *A Man in Full,* are members of the US-American middle class. They can afford what they need but no luxury. Even though Ahmad is only a high school student in the beginning of the novel, he works part-time at a store so that he can pay the dry cleaner's bill. His obsession with purely white and perfectly starched shirts hints at his aspiration to a higher societal status. His mother works as a nurse's aide because her paintings do not sell.

Conrad leads a modest life with his wife and two children in a very small apartment in Pittsburg, California. When he loses his night-shift job as a packer in the freezer unit at Croker's food company, he has to struggle to make ends meet and look for a different employment. His pride keeps him from turning to his parents-in-law for help, knowing that in their eyes he will always be a failure (*MF*, 186). He is determined to prove his ability to correspond to the masculine ideal of the breadwinner and support his own family.

The narrator of *Fight Club* does not have a family to make an income for but his thankless job of talking in numbers and statistics to survivors of car accidents on behalf of higher insurance agents as well as his awareness of affordable decorative must-haves – i.e. IKEA-furniture – (*FC*, 43-44), render evident that he is not a member of the upper-class. The odd jobs his alter ego works, especially the one as a banquet waiter for people who spend more money on one ounce of perfume than a waiter makes in a year (*FC,* 83), indicate his position in society even more clearly. Nonetheless, the social rank in *Fight Club* is more complicated than in the other two novels. While the narrator arranges his life around his possessions, collects food supplies without ever intending to consume them and uses trendy objects for identificatory purposes - "Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinets were me. The plants were me. The television was me." (*FC*, 111) -, he fervently boycotts materialism by recluding into a ramshackled, deserted house when he turns into Tyler Durden during sleepless nights.

Both Tyler and Ahmad despise the materialism prevalent in their society to the point of wanting to take violent action against it. They are unhappily aware of the importance of material possessions to their status as middle-class American men – although Ahmad pronouncedly strives for the dissociation of the two adjectives with his name (e.g. *T,* 1).

Palahniuk, Wolfe and Updike portray modern US-society as a stifling element that hinders their characters from discovering and developing their full potentials. Tyler (as well as the narrator), Conrad and Ahmad have been assigned a place in the societal system in which they feel trapped.

The apartment of the narrator of *Fight Club* is indicative of his societal suffocation; he lives in a newly built condominium with thick concrete walls and air conditioning, in which

> you [cannot] open the windows so even with maple flooring and dimmer switches, all seventeen hundred airtight feet would smell like the last meal you cooked or your last trip to the bathroom. (*FC*, 41)

Before Tyler appears, the narrator "felt trapped" in his "tiny life" because "[he] was too complete [and] too perfect" (*FC*, 173).

Twenty-three-year-old Conrad has been stuck in his role as a family-supporter since he impregnated his girlfriend at the age of eighteen. His love of his wife and children does not prevent the occasional mental excursions into a life without them (e.g. *MF,* 266). Inspite of having been a promising student at a Community College, his parental and conjugal duties left him little choice but to perform manual labor in the freezer unit. The resulting development of the muscles in his arms and hands seem to leave him unfit for different jobs (He fails a typing test because he cannot coordinate his big strong fingers (*MF,* 268)).

Ahmad yearns for a peaceful (after-)life outside the narrow world of his vain peers, which is merely

> a noisy varnished hall lined with metal lockers and having at its end a blank wall desecrated by graffiti and roller-painted over so often it feels to be coming closer by millimeters (*T*, 1).

All three protagonists experience social grievances that constitute negative side effects of modern socio-political developments – eroding forces of stability and identity, “emasculating effects of white-collar work and culture” (Friday §5). In a country of devoted consumers, which Conrad sardonically subsumes under the designation “7-Eleven-Land”[12] (*MF*, 182), Conrad’s constant need of pecuniary resources forces him to face his dwindling ability to assert himself in the competitive arena of the labor market. He becomes a vestige of the Heroic Artisan, afraid of losing his position as an economic subject, developing a rage directed against any possible adversary, which eventually propels him behind the curtailing bars of Santa Rita Prison. After his flight, he briefly experiences life as a literal no-name person in America, finding himself in an actual identity crisis because he cannot use his own name any more and has not been given a new, safer identity yet. His status is equal to that of the destitute illegal Cambodian immigrants with whom he is temporarily sharing an apartment.

Determined not to let his fellow sufferers sink into the capitalist quicksand that effaces their masculine footprints, Tyler takes drastic measures to teach them to appreciate their lives. He points a gun at a young man working night shifts at a gas station and threatens to pull the trigger unless the man starts pursuing his dream of going to college and becoming a veterinarian.

Ahmad experiences the emasculating effects of his society in so far as he perceives the Americans around him as godless slaves to the consumer and entertainment industry, who seek to ridicule the only domain in which he feels strong and superior – his religion (*T*, 1-2). Ironically, the mosque at which Ahmad is taught the Q’ran by a passionate hater of Western culture, is situated amidst ‘concrete’ examples of Western materialism: “on a street of stores, above a beauty shop and a place where they give you cash” (T, 35). Beth Levy, the guidance counselor’s wife, is Updike’s fictional caricature of US-American

[12] *7-Eleven* is a US-American grocery store chain.

overconsumption. An allegory of gluttony, she worships her deity the television from her *La-Z-Boy* armchair. The woman's immobility is less a sign of devotions than of her physical inability to peel her layers of body fat out of her most beloved piece of furniture (*T*, 118).

Tyler shares Ahmad's aversion to the luring effects of television. He despises the chimerae it creates in young people's minds (*FC*, 166) and makes advertisements, which suggest unrealist images of happiness and success, responsible for the "great depression" as which he regards life (*FC*, 149). As far as female overconsumers are concerned, Tyler's spiteful creativity appears to be unlimited. He sells the women back their own body fat by stealing it from the medical waste dumps of liposuction clinics and making soap out of it. Most women are willing to pay a high price for a fancy bar of soap – unaware of going through rituals of daily hygiene with their own extra pounds. The juxtaposition of such women with Marla Singer adds a sadly realistic notion to Tyler's dissatisfaction with the lamentable state of American society. Marla's diagnosis of breast cancer seems even more frightful in a waiting room crammed with destitution, which is where she ends up because she does not have health insurance (*FC*, 108).

5.3. History as a Possibility for the Characters to Escape the Stifling Present

The historical outline of US-American masculinity above, including Kimmel's observation of "manhood [being] historical" (see 2. above), corroborates Krister Friday's argument that "[a certain notion of masculinity] needs [...] both a time and, eventually, a history in order to become visible to itself" (15th paragraph). Wendy Holloway's idea of gender identities as symbolic practices that might exceed the life span of individuals supports this theory (see 4. above). It is therefore legitimate to talk about various masculinities with regard to time and history.

Tyler Durden has a somewhat ambiguous attitude towards history. On the one hand, he wants to "blast the world free of [it]" (*FC*, 124) but on the other hand, he "wants to be legend" (*FC*, 11). In order for something or someone to become a legend, remembrance, for which history is a necessary precondition, is indispensable. In fact, the narrator tells Tyler so himself when they are up on the Parker Morris Building and he says: "[Y]ou want to be a legend, Tyler, man, I'll make you a legend. I've been here from the beginning. I remember everything." (*FC*, 15). At the moment the narrator utters these thoughts, Tyler is holding a gun into his mouth and the Parker Morris Building is about to explode. The narrator believes that he has only three minutes left to live (*FC*, 15), which stresses the importance of his memory for Tyler's wish to become a legend. The narrator is also aware of the fact that the detonation of the Parker Morris Building "will go into all the history books" (*FC*, 14).

The ambiguity of Tyler's attitude dissolves if one considers his societal position as one of "God's middle children, [...] with no special place in history and no special attention" (*FC*, 141). He desires to turn the world into a historical tabula rasa in order for his own history to begin. History shall serve him as an identificatory means because "the identity crises afflicting the (white) male subject [is a] result of a postmodern 'present' bereft of historical distinctiveness or identity" (Friday, 21st paragraph). The way the world perceives Tyler is such that he has to take

responsibility for the evils of history, the mistakes that men before him made:

> For thousands of years, human beings had screwed up and trashed and crapped on this planet, and now history expected me [i.e. the narrator] to clean up after everyone. I have to wash out and flatten my soup cans. And account for every drop of used motor oil. (*FC*, 124)

Tyler's guerrilla acts against society represent his resentful feelings for having been assigned such unmerited tasks and his refusal to fulfill them. He would rather strip himself of history and be able to see it as "just beginning" (Lewis, 5) – not much unlike the first settlers in the country that he is to call his home. When the narrator beats up the angelic looking boy at fight club, he says to himself that "[t]his is [his] world now [...] and those ancient people are dead" (*FC*, 124). He reclaims what he was forced to forfeit within the stifling walls of a conformist consumer society.

History similarly becomes a means of identification in Conrad's case. Before going to jail, the young Californian defined his personality in an exclusionary manner. Having experienced the incongruity of the casual, drug-doused hippy-lifestyle of his parents with the decent upbringing of a child, he was determined to become everything his parents refused to be. He rejected the questionable code of morality and the lack of responsibility that his mother and father displayed and set himself the goal of becoming a law-abiding citizen and devoted breadwinner for his own children. He therefore cast off his history as a dependant of his parents and stroke the path of a bourgeois, aiming at personifying everything that his parents hated (*MF*, 180). Conrad fervently pursued his American Dream of working hard enough to earn money for a house in a wealthier neighborhood for him and his family. Despite his determination, he was faced with the Tyleresque realization of getting "no special notice or attention" (*MF*, 132). In the freezer unit, Conrad faded to the transparency of one of many icicles. He happened to succeed in becoming a legend, however, when he saved his colleague Kenny's life in an accident at work.

To the other laborers, his legendary story continues when he escapes from Santa Rita and remains the only convict unaccounted for. By that time, Conrad has already discarded the American Dream as an illusion. When he was sentenced to prison, he had to learn the hard way that fate can easily turn against you. In jail, he familiarizes himself with an ancient period of history when he reads the works of the Greek philosopher Epictetus. For Conrad, masculinity thus becomes visible in a different time frame. He regards the Stoic Agrippinus, who accepted his fate nonchalantly, as a real man (*MF*, 754). Material possessions are no longer worth struggling for to Conrad, for he adopts the Stoic idea of his body merely being a "bit of clay" (*MF*, 491) as opposed to his soul, which is immortal.

Ahmad shares Conrad's spiritual attitude in so far as he believes in an afterlife of the soul and is therefore ready to dispose of his mortal coil. In Ahmad's case, the historical allusions emphasize his disaffiliation with American society. The young man's hometown New Prospect is portrayed as a site of decay and demise. The unpleasant impression that Updike's verbal elaborations create, provides fertile ground for repulsion – especially for an opponent of the American way of life as strong as Ahmad. Once a prospering community, the town was named New Prospect "for the grand view from the heights above the falls but also for its enthusiastically envisioned future" (*T*, 9). The eventual destiny of various bancruptcies and outsourcing underscores Ahmad's conviction of the evils of Western materialism and capitalism. The description of Ahmad's high school is reminiscent of his and Conrad's perception of the human body as a disposable *hyle*. As a material casing, the building – similar to the human body - is subject to outer influences:

> Now the building, rich in scars and crumbling asbestos, its leaded paint hard and shiny and its tall windows caged, sits on the edge of a wide lake of rubble that was once part of a downtown veined with trolleycar tracks. (*T*, 9)

Updike's use of "scars" and "vein[s]" as well as of the verb "sit", evokes a bodily image. An association with a masculine body is not given, which might be yet another indication of Ahmad's personality being stifled and suppressed within a materialist consumer society. The time frame that is available to Ahmad for the display of his masculine identity is too small for him to be assertive. As in Tyler's case, Ahmad's existence in a "postmodern 'present'" (see Friday above) gives him very little leeway to define his personality and awaken to his identity. Similar to Tyler, who launches various projects in oder to "blast the world free of history" (*FC*, 124), and Conrad, who embarks on a literary journey to a different period in history, Ahmad needs to expand his time frame and "move on to something bigger" (*FC*, 123). His intended suicide-bombing would grant him his personal history.

5.4. The Assertion of Identity and Masculinity With Regard to the Characters' Homosocials

On top of a psychological schizophrenia, the narrator of *Fight Club* and his alter ego Tyler exhibit a "gendered schizophrenia" comparable to Kimmel's analysis of the Superman legend mentioned above (Kimmel, *Manhood* 212). While the narrator "used to be such a nice person" before he met Tyler (*FC*, 98), he becomes a violent renegade when he thinks he is asleep. The narrator used to go to work on a regular basis and accomodated himself within his own four walls of bourgeois luxury, which culminated in his petty plan to "buy a dog and name it 'Entourage'" (*FC*, 146). Perceiving his own life as "tiny" and "single-serving" (*FC*, 146), he prays to Tyler for deliverance (*FC*, 46). He wants Tyler to rescue him from his consumer goods and all the futile values he has accumulated during his life. Tyler's function can therefore be interpreted as the narrator's attempt at re-asserting his masculinity - a hope for deliverance from the castrating forces of a materialist society. Tyler has the power to cut the figurative elastic band around the narrator's testicles before the cold metal blade of a vain society sinks into them (c.f. the actual castration threats e.g. on pages 187-189). Just as the heroic figure of Superman emodies all the qualities that the bourgeois Clark Kent desires but lacks (physical strength, courage and determination), the narrator concedes that Tyler is everything that he himself is not. In his initial disbelief of him and Tyler being one and the same person, he openly admits his admiration for the other man by saying that

> [he] love[s] everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free and [the narrator is] not. (*FC*, 174)

The narrator's description of Tyler as free as opposed to himself, refers to his alter ego's readiness to rebellion against social and moral constraints. Tyler has the backbone to fight for his convictions and he is bold as well as ruthless enough to accept the consequences of his deeds. The fact that these consequences often involve blood, explosives and even casualties (such as Robert Paulson, Patrick Madden, and the narrator's

boss) makes Tyler the fictional example of MacInnes' hypothesis that manly virtues such as courage and strength have been turned into vices and are now regarded as abuse, destructive aggression and lack of empathy on various levels (see 4. above). The narrator never seems to tire of mentioning that Tyler is the one who comes up with 'creative' ideas to boycott the system and who knows how to make explosives out of ordinary househould supplies (e.g. *FC*, 12). Even when it comes to physical strength and visible muscularity, the narrator never talks about himself, but only about Tyler's habit of doing two-hundred sit-ups in a row. In his function as an instrument to stress Tyler's virility, all the narrator does is hold Tyler's feet while the latter works out (*FC*, 66). Worse than that, whenever the narrator's physical appearance is mentioned, it is described only by means of the injuries that have been afflicted upon him at fight club:

> The hole punched through my cheek doesn't ever heal. I'm going to work and my punched-out eye sockets are two swollen-up black bagels around the little piss holes I have left to see through. (*FC*, 63)

By idolizing Tyler, the narrator belittles himself, thus making Kimmel's concept of the assertion of masculinity as an exclusionary practice suit Tyler rather than himself (see 2. above). The narrator does not establish his masculinity as superior by excluding others from it. Instead, he overrides his masculine prowess by constantly emphasizing Tyler's. The differences between the two men are crucial to their essence. They depend on each other and neither of them would be able to define himself without his opposite. Even before the narrator realizes that he and Tyler share the same body, he is aware of "Tyler's words coming out of [his] mouth" (*FC*, 98).

Conrad also defines himself by means of opposites, although his way of coming to terms with what he is not, is prouder than that of the narrator of *Fight Club*. Conrad knows that he is different from the men that surround him at various stages of his life and he cherishes that fact. His goal of setting himself apart from his father has already been described

with regard to history (see above). Even after Conrad reached maturity, he seems to have every reason to be ashamed of his parents, who refuse to talk to each other and keep asking their son for money. Conrad doubts that his father, who has not been able to hold a job, would endure the freezer unit (*MF*, 118).

Charlie Croker, who would be old enough to provide experienced guidance to a young man like Conrad, is rendered incapable of filling the position of a fatherly figure by his narcissistic obsession with being the center of attention in the top social ranks of Georgia. He is so preoccupied with wealth and status that he blindly believes in masculine values that Conrad cannot identify with. At the age of sixty, Croker still basks in his former glory as a high school football star, to which he owes his sobriquet The Sixty-Minute Man. He has his employees call him 'Cap'm (Captain) Charlie' and he never skips an opportunity to point out his muscles to his young wife (*MF*, 3). Croker is described as a "brute", an "absolute bull" with a neck "wider than his head and solid as an oak", a man whose

> baldness [is] the kind that proclaims *masculinity to burn* [sic] – as if there was so much testosterone surging up through his hide it had popped the hair right off the top of his head (*MF*, 37).

Conrad is referred to as tall and slight but "strong enough" and athletically built (*MF*, 116). His only pronouncedly muscular body parts are his hands and forearms due to the work he performs at the freezer unit. Although he sometimes longs to point out his strength in order to assert himself as a capable man, he often feels ashamed of his bulging upper limbs. He finds them "stupendous [...] and grotesque at the same time" (*MF*, 129). His surge of pride at his mother-in-law's observation of his visible force subsides when she advises him to wear a long-sleeved shirt for his interview for an office job in order to cover up the telling signs of his manual labor. The dichotomous self-perception in which Conrad's physical appearance plays a decisive role, is indicative of his insecure position as the man of the house. According to the traditional family image, he is the breadwinner and his wife Jill looks after the children.

However, Jill loudly reprimands him for being too lenient with the children and undermining her authority in front of them, thereby establishing her authority over Conrad. He makes an effort to be as strict with his son as Jill so as not to increase the humiliation he receives from her but his frequent absence from the home weakens his position as an authority figure (*MF*, 184). His mother-in-law's latent disapproval aggravates Conrad's situation. In spite of occasionally infantilizing his wife in the form of thinking about her as "little Jill" and as looking younger than she really is (*MF*, 184), Conrad is aware of his dependence on her (*MF*, 117-118). This awareness distinguishes him from Charlie Croker, who is constantly fishing for recognition and never ceases to demonstrate his superiority. Croker's seemingly philanthropic act of financing his African American servant's children's education is more an act of self-adulation than of generosity (*MF*, 299-300). Whenever Croker notices a threat to his status, he finds ways to demonstrate his masculine strength and courage. He catches a poisonous snake with his bare hands and thrives in vulgar jokes that are the by-product of male bonding at his estate (*MF*, 301-304). Croker takes a voyeuristic pleasure in being present at the mating of his tallest and strongest horses and he considers the display of his wildest, giantly-penissed stallion mounting a mare appropriate entertainment for his guests (*MF*, 317-328). The entrepreneur's pathetic belief in his youth entices him to divorce his first wife, without the help of whom he would not have been able to establish himself among the Atlanta elite, and marry an attractive twenty-eight-year-old, who leaves him when he loses his possessions. For a loyal soul like Conrad, such a step is unthinkable. Even though he occasionally regrets having married so early, he adores his wife and children and he panics considering his wife's option of divorce when he is a convict (*MF*, 374).

While for Croker, the loss of his wealth and property equals a symbolic castration, Conrad – similar to the narrator of *Fight Club* – suffers from the constricting forces of materialism and has to deal with monetary difficulties and shattered illusions of success as emasculating elements (see 5.2.). The narrator of *Fight Club* prays to Tyler for deliverance (see above) only to find that if he remains incapable of delivering himself

(since he and Tyler are one and the same person), he cannot be delivered at all. Conrad, on the other hand, finds his salvation in the teachings of the Stoics and his faith in Zeus. Unlike Charlie Croker, he acquires his virility by discarding his material possessions. Conrad accomplishes what the narrator of *Fight Club* is unsuccessfully trying to do with his prayers for deliverance and his occasional escapes into Zen-Buddhism: He reaches a spiritual level on which he transcends the notion of masculinity prevalent in his society and manifests his own ideas of what it means to be a man. Following the teachings of his idol Agrippinus, Conrad believes in the acceptance of fate (i.e. God's will) for the sake of one's peaceful afterlife as the essence of man (*MF*, 457). Croker, although inspired by Stoic philosophy after his official bancruptcy, does not arrive at such a level because he commercializes the spiritual knowledge and abuses it to make money as a television-preacher. His initial ignorance of the religious philosophy constitutes another aspect of his inability to correspond to a paternal figure for Conrad; it is Conrad who teaches Charlie about the Stoics and not the other way around.

The circumstances under which Conrad starts reading page after page about the Stoics are very likely to have influenced his opinion of the book. The edition of *The Stoics* was sent to him by mistake and he did not have any appealing alternative for a pastime in prison. Conrad had been and abiding citizen and and correct and dutiful person before he was imprisoned, but his newly acquired insights about the futility of materialism and the importance of the soul might have intensified his feeling of not belonging in Santa Rita. Whatever his convictions may have been before he got hold of the book, reading it certainly made Conrad aware of values like integrity and morality. His spiritual clarity about the essence of man (especially in the sense of a male human being) makes him "reject[] the [prison] pod's code of false manliness" (*MF*, 482). The inmates are described as "paragon's of manhood" (*MF*, 481) but Conrad detects their violence and hypocrisy – an exposure of vices that is not much unlike MacInnes' observation (see above).

Conrad's new masculinity manifests itself in a more concrete than spiritual way when he defeats Rotto, the ruler of the pod who is physically strong and ruthless enough to claim dominance by intimidating everybody else and setting examples by committing homosexual rapes. Conrad aroused Rotto's anger by calling the nurse to help one of Rotto's rape victims but when approached by the brute, Conrad draws the strength to confront him from his faith in Zeus. When his cellmate's advice to "use da mouth" - i.e. to defy somebody (*MF*, 484) - fails, he puts his muscular hands and forearms to use and crushes Rotto's hand (*MF*, 486).

Although Conrad is thankful for his cellmate's confidence and pieces of advice, the small Hawaiian convict represents yet another opposite by means of which Conrad learns to appreciate his personality. The fellow inmate brags about the necessity to confront adversaries but he basks in Conrad's glory rather than proving his own strength. Of course, failing to stick up for somebody is an understandable act of self-protection in prison. However, the Hawaiian turns out to be a coward who depends on Conrad's rational decisions when it comes to crawling to safety at the time of the earthquake (*MF*, 497-498).

The two other major male characters of the novel, the banker Raymond Peepgass and the attorney Roger White, do not affect the character of Conrad. Still, they represent opposites to the young Californian rather than role models. Peepgass' seemingly insatiable desires of the flesh and his fascination with the 'exotic' result in his committing adultery with a Finnish woman and consequently, in a paternity suit. Coupled with the alimony for the betrayed wife and their children, Peepgass' life has turned into a pathetic existence, a constant attempt at being accepted into the orbit of the Atlanta elite. His celebration of a marriage of convenience with Croker's ex-wife is presumably not a step Conrad would appreciate. The financial background of Peepgass' proposal does not coincide with the anti-materialist attitude of Stoic philosophy.

White's motivations, though ambitious, are of a similarly materialist nature. He does make his mark by pointing out the social malaise of

African Americans in Atlanta, but by politically fraternizing with the corrupt mayor of Atlanta he lives up to his nickname Roger Too White.

Ahmad, whom – according to his mother – his religious convictions allow to be "above it all" (*T*, 83), also takes a certain pride in being different from the ones that surround him. His adversary at school, the African American Tylenol, was named after a painkiller which his mother had seen advertized on television and considered melodious (*T*, 13). Tylenol is a fitting example of the vain consumerism and TV-addiction that Ahmad despises. Although Ahmad is athletic, his height makes him appear rather skinny and dainty. Tylenol, in contrast, is a football player whose "hands are iron-strong" (*T*, 13). Regardless of his counterpart's physical strength and his readiness to use it on any occasion, Ahmad does not shy back from countering sarcastically when Tylenol approaches him, spoiling for a fight (*T*, 13). Similar to Conrad, who is disgusted with Rotto's conduct, the young Muslim has probably exposed his adversary's "code of false manliness" (*MF*, 482) by being aware of Tylenol's use of violence against weaker peers. The African American does not argue without inflicting physical pain upon the other party at the same time (*T*, 13) and he practically forces his girlfriend Joryleen into prostitution (*T*, 215). Had the confrontation between Tylenol and Ahmad in the beginning of the novel remained exclusively verbal, Ahmad would have triumphed over the bully thanks to his eloquence and quick-wittedness. Tylenol seems to be aware of his humble verbal competence with which he is incapable of competing with the model student. He tries to compensate for his lack of articulacy by giving Ahmad verbal abuse. Ahmad does not fully descend to his adversary's level by equally succumbing to the use of swear words, but he adapts to the other boy's language by reverting to the African American Vernacular. Knowing that words will not be an efficient enough weapon because the crowd of students that is gathering around the boys is intellectually more on Tylenol's level than on Ahmad's, the Muslim procures some distance by pushing his opponent away from him. So as not to lose face, Ahmad surrenders to his fate of a fist fight with Tylenol, which is interrupted by

Mr. Levy, the guidance counsellor (*T*, 14-15). Inspite of wanting to be "above it all" (*T*, 83), Ahmad gives in to the dominant code of manhood and fights fire with fire. He tries to defend his pride in front of people whom he usually thinks of as "computer nerds", "do-nothings", "Miss Populars" and "little whores" (*T*, 14). Ahmad does not derive his strength from the support of a crowd of peers like Tylenol, but the African American nevertheless seems to have offended his manly pride. As much as Ahmad despises the vanity of his superficial school mates, "he does not wish his body marred" by an outbreak of Tylenol's rage for he "cherish[es] his ripened manhood" (*T*, 16).

Mr. Levy, the guidance counselor at Ahmad's high school, is aware of Ahmad's intellectual superiority to most of his peers. He is therefore suspicious of Ahmad's refusal to apply to college and sit a truck driver's test instead. Following his intuition to confront Ahmad's mother with the youngster's plans, he falls in love with Teresa Mulloy and engages in a sexual relationship with the woman, who is more than twenty years his junior. The combination of his concern with the bright student's future and his desire for the Irish-American woman entails various attempts at establishing a fatherly bond from Levy's side (e.g. *T*, 77, 292), which almost ridiculously culminates in the counselor's striking up a conversation about sports when headed towards presumable death in the dynamite-loaded truck (*T*, 290). Ahmad respects Levy as a teacher but he considers the elderly man rather pathetic and too pushy on the subject of his education and well-being (e.g. *T*, 284). With regard to matters outside school, Ahmad regards Levy as inferior to himself as all the other American "[d]evils [who] seek to take away [his] God" (*T*, 1). Ideologically speaking, the Jewish guidance counsellor represents a politico-religious enemy to Ahmad (e.g. *T*, 211). Levy has never been a devoted, practicing Jew, which directs Ahmad's slight animosity to that which he feels towards infidels and unbelievers in general (e.g. *T*, 66) – a negative sentiment that is conveyed throughout the entire novel. Even though Levy remains the only male attachment figure in Ahmad's life at the end of the novel, he fails to fill the paternal gap in the lonesome boy's life. His Jewish melancholy and moroseness inhibit many an emotional

attachment (e.g. *T*, 113, 158). To the correct and orderly Ahmad, who wears black trousers and perfectly starched, speckless white shirts for any occasion, the reflection of Levy's emotional dullness in his careless clothing renders the elderly Jew a target to ridicule rather than identification:

> There had been a father who vanished before [Ahmad's] memory could take a picture of him, and then Charlie [Chehab] had been friendly and shown him the roads, and now this tired Jew in clothes as if he dressed in the dark has taken their place, the empty space beside him. (*T*, 286)

Although Levy is bold enough to commit adultery as well as to jump into Ahmad's truck right before its detonation, Ahmad manages to challenge the guidance counselor's knowledge and courage (*T*, 92), which represents another indicator of failure to live up to the expectations of a role model for Ahmad. The counselor's sullenness is alleviated briefly by his liaison with Teresa Mulloy, during which rediscovers long forgotten carnal desires and masculine attributes (*T*, 163). His re-gained awareness of his sexual organs makes him feel like an animal whose main purpose is to mate. This new self-perception grants him a fleeting moment of dominance over his mistress. Experienced with short-term relationships, however, Teresa disputes his masculine supremacy and pushes the sensitive Jew into the self-diminishing act of uttering sentimental last words to her (*T*, 206-207). When the woman breaks up with him, he falls back into his usual pessimism and becomes weary of life. Even the rudimentary fondness that remains in Jack and Beth's marriage has become routine (*T*, 157) and he is pathetically aware of the fact that "nothing is going to bring [him and his wife] back [to] when [they] were young" (*T*, 299). In his marriage run out of passion, Jack Levy's masculinity is curtailed to the lack of energy of his declawed and spayed cat. He wanders about restlessly at night, having been pushed out of the marital bed by his wife's enormity (*T*, 20). His juices have dried to the point of his inability to function as a masculine role model for anyone.

Contrary to Jack Levy, Charlie Chehab, a man in his mid-thirties and the son of Ahmad's boss at a furniture store, appears to be a rich source

of masculine wisdom and sputters information about sexuality. As a married man, Charlie is loyal to his wife, but he is very alert to sexual allusions in commercials (*T*, 168). He talks openly about an issue Ahmad has been too prudish and religiously adherent to address and he even expresses a concern about Ahmad's abstinence so deep that he hires a prostitute to devirginate him (*T*, 173). Given the fact that Charlie turns out to be an undercover CIA-agent, it is hard to say whether he really shares Ahmad's religious and political views, which are among the subjects of their discussions when they deliver furniture in a truck together (*T*, 155). Predictive of Charlie's concealed identity, the image that Ahmad most frequently sees of him is only half of his face due to Charlie's sitting in the passenger seat next to Ahmad. Charlie's views on the United States are indeed ambiguous. While in his introduction to the plot he is presented as a realistic but proud American citizen, the intimacy of the truck reveals the Islamist side in him and a certain wariness of American consumerism (e.g. *T*, 210). Regardless of the man's actual convictions, the ideals that seep through to Ahmad impress him to an extent that encourages his trust and confidence in Charlie. Being strong (*T*, 147) cheerful, casual (*T*, 145) and experienced (*T*, 151, 173), Charlie represents features that Ahmad lacks. Devoid of a masculine example, Ahmad views Charlie in part as a brother (*T*, 147), a father (*T*, 169) and a mentor (*T*, 185). The older man amicably jokes with Ahmad but he also teaches and inspires him. Charlie's political allusions and historical lectures encourage Ahmad to read the paper so as to contribute to the male bonding that takes place in the truck (*T*, 162). Ahmad's final opinion of Charlie remains unclear to the reader as well as to the protagonist himself. Ahmad becomes wary of Charlie's ambiguous conduct and fears his superiority due to the upcoming martyrdom threatened by the other man's casual remarks (*T*, 246-247). But the murder of Charlie by some of the Islamist puppet masters of the detonation comes as a surprise to both the reader and Ahmad. The young Chehab's intentions are left unexplained and evoke therefore no biased reaction on Ahmad's part. Charlie's motives notwithstanding, the time at the furniture store endows Ahmad with physical strength and a resulting different perception of himself as a man

– not much unlike the development of Conrad Hensley as induced by his muscular hands and forearms (*T*, 164, 300). To some extent, Charlie gave Ahmad an opportunity to deal with his confusion about women and sexuality because he casually addressed issues that Ahmad had been trying to suppress as sordid. Charlie's attempt at getting Ahmad devirginated also brings the adolescent closer to Joryleen. She is a girl the fondness of whom Ahmad had been unable to deal with in high school and she happens to be the prostitute chosen for the task of sexual initiation.

At a point at which Ahmad's perception of Charlie is on the verge of disillusionment with the otherwise highly appreciated homosocial, Ahmad compares him to his imam at the mosque (*T*, 196). Although Ahmad respects his religious teacher, to whose dogmas he has been exposed since, at the age of eleven, he decided to dip his toe into the deep waters of Islam, the association of the imam with the protagonist's rather apprehensive mood is indicative of the character's ambiguity. As eloquent as the imam appears to be in the foreign language, he speaks English in spite of considering it the language of the devil (*T*, 100). It is never mentioned that he does so because his student is not yet fluent in Arabic. The only reason given is that he does not wish to sully Ahmad's pronunciation with his Yemeni dialect, which – given the fact that he seems to be perfectly at ease when it comes to quoting from the Q'ran – has the overtone of a rather lame excuse. When Ahmad agrees to commit the suicide bombing in the New Jersey tunnel, the imam does not pressure him into doing it, but he does not inform Ahmad that the deal collapsed either (*T*, 296). Although the imam has a strong influence on Ahmad's adolescent mind, especially with regard to women (e.g. *T*, 217), his student - although not openly disagreeing – does not share all of his views (e.g. *T*, 74). Not only the imam's occasionally "two-edged voice" (*T*, 229) but also his dainty, feminine appearance (*T*, 142-143), which renders him an inappropraite candidate for a masculine role model, corroborates Ahmad's preference of Charlie (*T*, 143).

5.5. The Role of Women

When Marla Singer enters the scene of *Fight Club*, she does so as an intruder to the narrator's relief-giving, relaxation-promising sanctuary of support groups. Since she shows up at all the meetings he goes to, and since she does not even skip testicular cancer, he unmasks her as a faker (*FC*, 18, 35). Feeling exposed himself, the narrator is unable to unwind and cry with her watching. He plans to assert his superiority to Marla by telling her to keep away from the support groups, but the two of them end up splitting the dates. As much as Marla acts as a perturbing force in the support groups, she also represents a disruptive element to the homosocial Eden that the narrator and Tyler have established in their deserted house on Paper Street. When Tyler hears the masochistic woman talking on the phone about wanting to commit suicide and rushes over to her place to save her life (*FC* 59-61), he engages in a sexual relationship with her, which arouses the narrator's jealousy – of Marla for having Tyler at least as much as vice versa:

> Long story short, now Marla's out to ruin another part of my life. Ever since college, I make friends. They get married. I lose friends. [...]
> Tyler asks, is [his relationship with Marla] a problem for me?
> I am Joe's clenching Bowels.
> No, I say, it's fine.
> Put a gun to my head and paint the wall with my brains.
> Just great, I say. Really. (*FC*, 62)

The narrator disapproves of Marla's coming and going at the house in Paper Street, which he openly displays by reducing his conversations with her to the absolute minimum (e.g. *FC*, 90). Tyler vanishes as soon as Marla comes by and has the narrator convey messages to her, which the latter hates because it reminds him of his life as a child with his parents (*FC*, 66). Tyler is only present when he and Marla are having sexual intercourse. When the narrator becomes Tyler, he uses Marla in every possible way – be it for sex, or for making soap out of the fat she was given by her mother. As his normal self, however, he realizes that everything he does as Tyler Durden is really about Marla (*FC*, 14). The narrator loves Marla (*FC*, 199), who – until he tells her – does not know

the difference between the two personalities (*FC*, 193). After learning that he and Tyler are the same person, it dawns on the narrator that Tyler occurred because "some part [of the narrator] had needed a way to be with Marla" (*FC*, 198). Tyler is the strong, nonchalant, virile projection of the narrator that encouraged him to approach Marla in a way that exceeds ordinary friendship or mere acquaintance. The narrator becomes Tyler whenever he has sexual intercourse with Marla (*FC*, 65), but he remains himself when he has serious talks with her (e.g. *FC*, 108 when they talk about cancer). Tyler, the muscle-bound, sexually potent personality, represents the part of the narrator that is masculine in the way that society would define it because the world around the narrator is not permissive and soft enough to let just anybody assert himself as a man. Tyler displays his masculine traits in Marla's company and his identificatory dependence on the female counterpart is observed by the narrator when he states that "[w]ithout Marla, Tyler would have nothing" (*FC*, 14). If the narrator had not been insecure of his virility vis-à-vis the woman, his need of conjuring up Tyler would have been less urgent. Marla, weary of life because she is a victim of the vain consumer society around her, triggers the narrators protective instincts, which he as his old self feels incapable of providing. The "gendered schizophrenia" (see Kimmel above) that Tyler and the narrator display, indicates an uncertainty about the shift or blurring of masculine and feminine characteristics described by Clare and MacInnes (see 4. above). While Clare and MacInnes perceive gender boundaries as overlapping with regard to emotional behavior, the narrator is unsure which characteristics to appropriate for himself as a man. On the one hand, society has left his masculine identity ill-defined, but on the other hand, society's expectations of men are – though elusive – still high and demanding:

> I [i.e. a random man recruited by Tyler for his projects] am the all-singing, all dancing crap of this world. [...] I am the toxic waste by-product of God's creation. (*FC*, 169)

The insecure narrator shows empathy with Marla at various points in the novel. He helps her look for lumps in her breasts (*FC*, chapter 13), he

hides the remaining teeth of one of the victims of Project Mayhem's[13] guerrilla-acts from her (FC, 136) and he tries to protect her from the evils that Tyler's space monkeys[14] are planning to commit by sending her away (*FC*, 196). This rather sensitive conduct, along with the clear depiction of his alter ego as the embodiment of everything that he himself is not (*FC*, 174, discussed under 5.4. above), the narrator represents a second feminine element next to Marla, by means of which Tyler's masculinity is defined in an exclusionary manner.

The "gendered schizophrenia" that the narrator exhibits in his mind, is physically incarnated by the character of Robert "Big Bob" Paulson. Bob, whom the narrator meets at the support group for patients with testicular cancer, used to be a bodybuilder who lived to pose as an exaggerated example of masculine strength. Due to the cancer, Bob's testicles were removed and he underwent hormone support therapy. His body tried to balance the testosterone he was given by producing more estrogen and as a result, the former emblem of physical virility grew breast-like excrescences (*FC*, 17).

Apart from Marla, there is no other female protagonist in the novel. Chloe, one of the dying patients at a support group, is merely mentioned in connection with death and ugliness. She is described as the exact opposite of physical attraction, as "a skeleton dipped in yellow wax" (*FC*, 20). There is only one brief incident in which one of the space monkeys talks to the narrator about his girlfriend, actually asking Tyler's opinion of her (*FC*, 140). The space monkey wants the advice of his masculine idol. He remains the only one even though Project Mayhem exclusively consists of young men whom one might consider to be involved with women. The absence of potential women in the lives of so many men intensifies the impression of a homosocial Eden in Paper Street. The space monkeys are all former members of fight club, so it is their experiences as discontent men rebelling against the hypocritical codes of

[13] Tyler founds Project Mayhem when he feels he needs "something bigger" than the fight clubs (*FC*, 123)
[14] The narrator refers to the members of Project Mayhem as "space monkeys".

society by engaging in physical fights that welds them together. Following their dominant role model Tyler, they denigrate the feminine:

> The guy on the porch [i.e. an applicant for Project Mayhem] is mister angel face whom I tried to destroy [at fight club the other night]. Even with his two black eyes and blond crew cut, you see his tough pretty scowl without wrinkles or scars. Put him in a dress and make him smile and he'd be a woman. (*FC*, 128)

A similarly condescending attitude towards the feminine is displayed by the inmates of Santa Rita prison, when they anticipate Rotto's destructive revenge on Conrad by rapping that "he [i.e. Conrad] [is] gon' switch from him to her" (*MF*, 492).

In *A Man In Full*, women play a minor role in so far as they are only mentioned with reference to men. Unlike Marla in *Fight Club*, there is not even one female character in Wolfe's novel that could be considered a protagonist. The ninth chapter is almost entirely dedicated to the introduction of Charlie's ex-wife Martha Croker, merely for her to function as an aide to Peepgass' advancement and as an emphasis to Charlie's virile triumphs. Martha makes her first appearance as a middle-aged woman trying to burn off calories in an expensive fitness studio so as to get in shape and look like "a boy with breasts", which Charlie's new wife does (*MF*, 223). The chapter in which she is introduced is significantly titled "The Superfluous Woman". Discarded by Charlie because of her age, she makes an attempt at getting back into the elite community of Atlanta, only to realize that people do not even recognize her without Charlie by her side. Even though the woman in her mid-fifties is still good-looking, Peepgass tries to overlook various telling signs of her age by reminding himself of her wealth (e.g. *MF*, 649).

The descriptions of Serena are almost exclusively of a physical, if not sexual nature. She is Charlie's attractive second wife and her sight even arouses Conrad when he starts working as Charlie's health care aide (*MF*, 701). If Serena did not relieve Charlie's dilemma by telling him that the supposed date-rape victim let her know that she had been the one to make advances to the African American athlete, she could be regarded

as a mere trophy of virility for Charlie. Inspite of occasionally representing a reasonable counterpart to Charlie's debauchery - she warns him to choose his words more carefully in the company of refined guests (*MF*, 304-305) -, she leaves him when he loses everything, which belittles her reason and puts her superficiality to the foreground.

Not only does the pretty sight of Serena fascinate Conrad in a way that makes the women in the novel appear to be simple means of reassurance of the male characters' manliness. Conrad is equally dazzled by the cuteness of the secretary that takes his typing test (*MF*, 265-267), the lasciviousness of his teenage Asian neighbor (*MF*, 178-179) and the altruistic warmth that radiates from the prison nurse (*MF*, 479). Conrad's enchantment with the prison nurse is likely to stem from the homosocial overdose in Santa Rita. He is practically craving for softness and empathy amidst the violent brutes in jail. Especially in comparison to Serena and the typing-test girl, the nurse is described as rather unalluring, but her benignant female contrasts set her apart from the animalistic males around her, to an extent that makes her seem attractive:

> This much-mocked [nurse] was in fact a rather sweet, plump woman about forty. Conrad had never seen her up close before and he was surprised. Not even her mannish uniform could detract from her complexion, which was so smooth and milky white, or her hair, which was a reddish gold and pulled back into an elaborate plaited bun. [...] Before [the nurse and the deputies left with the rape-victim], she turned and gave Conrad a look. It wasn't exactly a smile. It was a look of such warmth... [...] He wanted to embrace her. He wanted to hold her and put his cheek next to hers. (*MF*, 479)

Conrad's perception of the nurse suggests her representation of a motherly figure. Having experimented with various lifestyles, the young man's own mother did not raise her son in a loving and caring way. When Conrad was a child, his mother indulged in her husband's habit of smoking marijuana and sharing the marital bed with other couples (*MF*, 180). After Conrad's father had left for good when the boy was fifteen, his mother became a radical feminist and she and Conrad moved in with five other women (*MF*, 181). Not exactly the most representative example of

the “generation of men raised by women” (*FC*, 50), Conrad readily inhales the appreciation he receives from the nurse for calling her to the rape victim’s help. The nurse’s recognition seems to be a welcome change to the disapproving looks he gets from Jill and the condescendingly twisting lips of his mother-in-law, who turns into “Patience on a monument smiling at Grief” when conversing with Conrad (*MF*, 367).

The enticement of the Asian teenager and the woman taking the typing test are of a different nature than that of the nurse. Rather than compensating for the maternal absence, they illustrate Conrad’s occasional regrets of having married too early (e.g. *MF*, 118). The two young women as well as Serena cause stirring sensations in his loins, which were suppressed by the everyday problems of marital routine. Conrad’s love of his wife cannot prevent such sudden feelings of arousal. These women represent a change to his dismal life, in which it sometimes

> occur[s] to Conrad, sadly, as he look[s] at [his wife], how hard it must be to try to keep on being a California Girl when you [are] a mother with two small children. (*MF*, 184)

As mentioned above, Jill is less of a devote and ancillary wife than Serena. Contrary to Serena and the young woman who takes Conrad’s typing test, she is never described as sensuous or womanly. She is depicted as a challenge to Conrad’s masculine authority (*MF*, 184, 188, 190), which makes the other women appear even more exciting and voluptuous. They embody the attraction of the unknown and, far from humiliating or even symbolically emasculating Conrad, they bear him out in his manliness.

Ahmad’s religious fervor restrains him in having sexual fantasies but it cannot fully prevent them. He is aroused by the forbidden, embodied by the voluptuous curves of his schoolmate Joryleen (*T*, 64, 68, 70). Ahmad considers her lifestyle sinful, for the girl has pierced ears, revealingly tight clothes and a boyfriend (*T*, 6). The luring effect that the ‘fallen girl’ has on

Ahmad is illustrated in a seemingly cross-religious reference (to the forbidden fruit) about Joryleen "serving up all her roundnesses like fruit on a plate" (*T*, 64). While Ahmad initially offends Joryleen and has arguments with her about purity and religion, he grows to respect her and confides in her (*T*, 221, 227). Due to her sexual experience, she exhibits power over Ahmad as her client when hired to devirginate him. The cigarette that she extinguishes at Ahmad's arrival at the bed conjures up a phallic symbol, as it "stands up like a piece of sculpture, slowly twisting" (*T*, 214). Since she is paid to serve men's needs, however, the power soon shifts over to Ahmad, who "has never had power over anyone before, not since his mother, without a husband, had to worry about keeping him alive" (*T*, 221). Joryleen, similar to the women in Conrad's life, evokes the bodily, the carnal – images that meander through the novel, not only with reference to women, but also as an indication of the mere fact of being alive:

> His self-sacrifice: it is becoming a part of him, a live, helpless thing like his heart, his stomach, his pancreas gnawing away with its chemicals and enzymes. (*T*, 232).

Thanks to Joryleen, Ahmad relinquishes the idea about the human body being a prison to the immortal soul, which the imam suggests on the basis of the Q'ran. With Joryleen sharing secrets with him, lying naked at his side, it dawns on Ahmad that there might be something to the human body that descends chemical functions:

> [W]hen she laughs, her whole naked body jiggles against his, so he thinks of all those intestines, and stomach and things, packed in: she has all that inside her, and yet also a loving spirit, breathing against the side of his neck, where God is as close as a vein. (*T*, 222)

To some extent, Joryleen's role in *Terrorist* is comparable to that of Marla in *Fight Club* and that of the young women that briefly enter Conrad's life, for they all render a man aware of his virile attributes and bodily functions or sexual potency. Moreover, similar to Tyler's having nothing without Marla (*FC*, 14), Joryleen knows that "[w]ithout [her], [Tylenol] doesn't have much. He'd be pathetic [...]" (*T*, 220).

Ahmad's mother fulfills the role of arousing sexual awareness in Jack Levy. Her son's (initial) notion of women being unclean (e.g. *T*, 154) represents her as a slutty and selfish woman, whose pathetic obsession with finding comfort in a man makes her neglect her maternal duties (e.g. *T*, 138-139, 164-165). Both, Teresa and Ahmad, see the reason for their unhealthy relationship in having shared the confined space of their apartment for too long (*T*, 79, 166). To Ahmad, his mother is yet another victim trapped in the eroticized, godless consumer society (e.g. *T*, 164), which makes her a part of the stifling elements that impede Ahmad's development as a self-dependent man.

5.6. The Importance of Fatherhood for the Characters' Masculine Identities

Although Kimmel exemplifies that men's real experiences as husbands and fathers and the "quotidian compromises" that these experiences entail, comprise the "stuff of everyday heroism" (*Manhood*, 328), other scholars extend the idea of masculinity as a social or fictional construction to fatherhood as a similarly created concept. Jeff Hearn and David Collinson, for instance, write about fatherhood as a "social institution, a hypothetical concretization" (106). By differentiating between men as actual human beings and masculinities as social practices, they argue along the lines of MacInnes, Morgan, Beynon et altera (see 2. above). Hearn and Collinson describe "men [as] existing and persisting in the material bases of society" and oppose this idea to that of "masculinities exist[ing] and persist[ing] as ideology" (106). From these definitions they deduce that

> the father may persist as a figure of power even though some individuals, women and men, do not know a father of their own, biological or otherwise (Hearn & Collinson 106).

This argument of Hearn's and Collinson's becomes visible in all the three novels discussed. Though physically absent, father figures that are associated with either positive power in the form of role models, or negative power in the form oppressive rivals, hover above the protagonists' lives.

To Ahmad, his father represents a positive figure of power. The adolescent admires the man of whom he has only vague memories because the Egyptian left the family when Ahmad was three. Even though his mother has been very explicit in her opinion of her ex-husband to Ahmad and thinks that her son despises his father in a fashion similar to hers (*T*, 87-88), Ahmad's respect for his mother as a Western woman is so low that he lifts his father above anybody else. Ahmad turned to religion at the age of eleven, in the hope of finding a "trace of his father" in Islam (*T*, 97) and his imam's negative attitude towards women seems to have made an impression on the young boy. Given his mother's account

of a failed relationship due to cultural and emotional misunderstandings (*T*, 87), the words Ahmad finds to describe his parents in a conversation with Jack Levy reveal a certain creativity when it comes to filling gaps:

> My father well knew that marrying an American citizen, however trashy and immoral she was, would gain him American citizenship, and so it did, but not American know-how, nor the network of acquaintance that leads to American prosperity. Having despaired of ever earning more than a menial living by the time I was three, he decamped. (*T*, 33)

Ahmad's idealization of his father is rendered obvious by the facts that his mother is very unlikely to have been the one to talk about her ex-husband's motivation for marriage in a self-degrading way and that it is impossible for the boy as a three-year-old to be aware of his father's dissatisfaction with his career.

In *Fight Club*, the theme of paternal power draws on Freudian elements, evoking psychoanalytical interpretations (Kennett 50). According to Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, the primal horde of human beings was subject to the authority of the primal father, who was their master and patriarch, unlimited in his power, which he imposed violently upon the horde of mothers and sons[15]. Those sons, who were brothers to one another, lived in constant fear of death, expulsion or castration as threatened to be carried out by the father. They rebelled against their primal father; they symbolically killed and ate him and replaced him with a totem (Freud 89). The murder of the primal father granted the brothers (sexual) power over the women of the horde (Pateman, *Genesis* 103).

The narrator's relationship to his father has suffered from the older man's absenteeism and his lack of understanding of his son's life (e.g. *FC*, 65-66). The narrator's father's habit of "start[ing] a new family in a new town about every six years" parentally qualifies him for nothing more than giving useless advice via long-distance phone calls (*FC*, 50-51). His quasi-fatherlessness seems to have scarred the narrator so deeply that, when he becomes Tyler, he claims never to have known his father (*FC*, 49). Tyler's

[15] Freud does not mention daughters.

utterances about his father contain Freudian as well as socio-critical elements:

> I asked Tyler what he'd been fighting in the parking lot. Tyler said, his father. (*FC*, 53)
>
> If you're male, and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And sometimes you find your father in your career. (*FC*, 186)

Tyler rebels against his father by assembling a horde of brothers around him – men who are frustrated with the system and desperately try to make themselves heard; men who feel the need to prove their masculinity and secure themselves a position which is superior to that of "middle children" in the history of an unequal society (*FC*, 141). More than two hundred years after the achievement of liberty by means of the symbolic killing of the British father figure, a new day of rebellion is dawning. Tyler and his proponents feel bound by the social, political and economic ropes of the US-American state. Perceiving the system as a castrating force, they defy their symbolic father, the state.

But before Tyler and his companions arrive at their goal of complete destruction, a similar rebellion occurs on an individual level. Despite the narrator's assumption that "[m]aybe we [don't] need a father to complete ourselves" (*FC*, 53), his imagination of Tyler as the embodiment of everything that he himself is not, assumes elements of compensation for the absence of his biological father. The way a son admires his father, the narrator looks up to Tyler in order to learn from him (e.g. *FC*, 112: "I know this because Tyler knows this."). When Tyler does not appear to him, he compares the abandonment to the paternal one of childhood years: "I'm Joe's broken heart because Tyler's dumped me. Because my father dumped me." (*FC*, 134). Like a child who is desperate for paternal recognition, he perceives Marla as a threat to his and Tyler's homosocial haven on Paper Street:

> After Tyler and Marla had sex for about ten times, [...] Marla said she wanted to get pregnant. Marla said she wanted to have Tyler's abortion.
> I am Joe's White Knuckles.

How could Tyler not fall for that. [...]
How could I compete for Tyler's attention.
I am Joe's Enraged, Inflamed Sense of Rejection. (*FC*, 59-60)

As much as the narrator wants Tyler, he also wants Marla, whom he loves (*FC*, 199). In a Freudian sense, Marla represents the woman for whom the narrator competes with the dominant father figure Tyler. The threat of symbolic castration that the primal father poses to his sons is given in the novel in so far as Tyler, an emblem of virility, disables the narrator to claim any socially accepted traits of masculinity for himself. The relationship between the narrator and the woman he loves remains platonic, while Tyler brags about his physical contact with her (*FC*, 58-59). The sexual relationship between Tyler and Marla thus becomes an element of emasculation with regard to the narrator. Up on the Parker Morris Building, the narrator commits the murder of his primal father figure – Tyler Durden.

For Conrad, his father neither functions as an identificatory role model, nor as a symbolically castrating force. On the contrary, his father's inability to fulfill his parental role unleashes in Conrad a desire for self-realization as a man who is pronouncedly different from the one who begot him. During his childhood and youth, Conrad often "tried to work out in his mind that somehow his father was an admirable person" (*MF*, 179-180). He would have needed a figure of power to guide him in the years that were to shape his future, but, as discussed above, Conrad despised his parents' insouciant, promiscuous lifestyle, and even after the heydays of hippy-culture, he does not think too highly of his father. The familial disconnection renders Hearn's and Collinson's argument inapplicable in the case of Conrad and his father. It gains importance, however, when considered with regard to Conrad as a father to his own son, Carl. Having had to pretty much raise himself, Conrad wishes to share all of his knowledge with the five-year-old. He wants to be a lenient dad and teach his son about what is right and wrong at the same time. His obligation to make an income deprives him from being in charge of child rearing, which undermines his domestic authority to the benefit of his exhausted wife. Conrad's attempt at persisting as a positive power in the house even

though he is occasionaly absent, threatens to fail. Most probably inspired by his personal lack of a male role model, Conrad feels a need to bond with his son. He wants someone on his side in case his “terrible vision of three generations of Otey women, [his mother-in-law], Jill, and [his daughter], arrayed against him at [a] low point in his life” becomes reality (*MF*, 190). On being charged with assault, Conrad refuses to plead guilty and accept the probation so as not to lose his pride and honor and “bargain away [his] soul”, of which he seemed aware even before he started reading the book about the Stoics (*MF*, 372). He envisions himself telling his children that he “went into prison a man, and [...] came out of prison a man” (*MF*, 372). Inspite of directing this message to both of his children, his primary concern seems to be with his son, for whom he asks his cellmate to write down the events on the day of Rotto’s possible revenge in case Conrad does not survive the brute’s rage. It is crucial to him that Carl know about his father’s boldness and bravery (*MF*, 493).

Regardless of the slight age differences, all three protagonists belong to what the narrator of *Fight Club* terms “a generation of men raised by women” (*FC*, 50).

In Project Mayhem, the members are given specific tasks and drilled to endurance and perseverance. Tyler provides them with an education on how to be the kind of men society expects them to be – men corresponding to his mirror image. American males all across the country seem to be willing to follow Tyler’s words at all costs, so desperate is their need for a father substitute.

Although Conrad was more or less forced into self-dependence, he spent most of his teenage years with his mother after his father had left when the boy was fifteen. His mother having turned into a “radical feminist” who lived in a commune with five “California Granola women”, Conrad was most probably exposed to strongly anti-masculine ideas, which might have intensified his wish to have his masculine virtues pointed out to his son (*MF*, 181).

Ahmad is raised by a representative of “[w]hat [i]s holding [the US-American] society together” – a single mom (*T*, 87). The reason for his

disapproval of his mother is never explicitly stated, but it is probably a combination of several factors. The adolescent is caught in a vicious circle of influences, which leave a significant imprint on somebody of his young age, who still lacks the experience to filter those impressions and form his own opinion. Teresa Mulloy has gone through a number of relationships, which must be rather disturbing to her son. He rejects the Western mentality that permits his mother to experiment with interpersonal relationships at the expense of a harmonious family life, ignoring the fact that his father was the one to act disruptively to their original unity. The imam uses Ahmad's confusion to impose his derogatory viewpoint of women on him. The religious teacher is having a walk-over, since Ahmad is eager to absorb the doctrines of which he hopes to gain insight into the life of his father. Even though Ahmad does not agree with everything the imam says (*T*, 74), he is still receptive to most of his ideas, one of which is to propagate the haughtiness of women (*T*, 7-8). Envisioning his father as an exotically handsome man, Ahmad cherishes his looks, which (due to his black hair and olive complexion as opposed to his mother's Irish features) he is convinced of having inherited from him. Despite his father's absence, the adolescent has a very clear perception of his manhood, which is likely to result from the opposed views of the feminine that the imam shares with Ahmad (e.g. *T*, 16, 33).

Ahmad does regular track practice in order to keep in his highly valued shape. Conrad grew a mustache in an effort to appear tougher (*MF*, 116). The narrator of *Fight Club* conjures up his strong, ruthless alter ego Tyler. Having been reared almost exclusively by mothers, they all attempt to "differentiate from women and denigrate the feminine in themselves" (Coltrane, 49).

5.7. The Influence of Religion on the Characters' Lives

From a Lacanian perspective, Paul Kennett argues along the lines of Hearn and Collinson when he maintains that "the ideological construct of the father" has found its way into culture, and adds that it has done so "via religion" (50). Scott Coltrane extends his findings on the psychological effects of exclusively motherly child rearing by means of the observation that

> [s]ocieties with distant fathers told myths about distant, sky-dwelling, all-powerful male gods like Zeus, whereas societies with nurturing fathers tended to tell stories about both male and female gods. (49)

Zeus plays a major role in Conrad's life. Following the introduction of the King of the Gods to the lonesome, desperate inmate via the teachings of the Stoics, Conrad regards every subsequent event as Zeus' will and Zeus' work (e.g. *MF*, 504). He has found his figure of power to guide him after having missed such authoritarian, educating qualities in his biological father for twenty-three years. He even perceives his muscular hands and forearms, which helped him to his victory over Rotto, as a gift from Zeus, seemingly ignoring the fact that he had used to trace the strength back to ordinary labor before he got hold of the book about the Stoics (*MF*, 485). His belief in Stoic philosophy and in the religion of Ancient Greece confirms his self-perception as a man, for the book was obviously written for a male readership: *Has* [Zeus] *not given you greatness of mind, has he not given you manliness?* (Conrad's pondering over Epictetus' words before reacting to Rotto's approach; *MF*, 485 – original in italics). As brave as Conrad might have become thanks to his newly acquired faith, he occasionally makes Epictetus' words fit his personal situations when he is too cowardly for immediate action. Before rushing to one of Rotto's rape victims' help, for instance, he recites Epictetus' warning against acting selflessly to the point of endangering oneself. The fact that he summons up enough strength to help the injured inmate anyway, turns his initial hesitation into yet another example of his reason and common sense (*MF*, 477). Conrad's parents ventured into Buddhism in the course of their counter-bourgeois experiments but their insincerity with the Oriental

religion made Conrad dismiss anything spiritual as part of his parents' aimless imitation of trends. The agony he experienced in prison provoked his concern with the soul and due to his fascination with Stoic philosophy, he "[becomes] a vessel, yearning only to receive the divine" (*MF,* 482).

What Conrad sees in Zeus, Tyler Durden epitomizes for the "generation of men raised by women" (*FC*, 50) – a father-substitute, a persistent power that promises guidance. To the members of the fight clubs and of Project Mayhem, the paternal absence they experienced equals the absence of the divine and the spiritual:

> If you're male and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out or dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God? (*FC*, 141)

The men that gather around Tyler Durden seek a compensation for the deprivation of support and attention. Fight Club represents a "new religion" to them (Mathews 92) in so far as they lose their fears there and gain a different sense of self-perception (*FC*, 54). Tyler is the founder of this religion. "To everybody [at fight club], [Tyler is] the Great and Powerful. God and father." (*FC*, 199). To emphasize his God-like status, the narrator's plea for deliverance to Tyler assumes the characteristics of a prayer (Mathews 91, *FC*, 46), and Marla refers to the space monkeys as Tyler's "disciples" (*FC*, 160).

In an article entitled "Diagnosing Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*", Peter Mathews applies the ideas of the French philosopher Georges Bataille about fascism being the combination of religion and militarism to Palahniuk's novel (91). Tyler uses his followers' admiration for him to have them carry out tasks for Project Mayhem. None of the space monkeys knows the entire plan. They are all trained to do their little jobs perfectly (*FC*, 130, 193). The men's craving for a father figure must be intense enough for them to ignore their unawareness of what they are actually fighting for. Tyler's persistence as a power figure merges into that of a figure of absolute power. In his fervent attempt to confront the world with

the limits of capitalism (Mathews 93), Tyler abuses his God-like status to establish a conformist dictatorship on Paper Street. As much as he is concerned with coming to terms with his own identity, the narrator's/Tyler's intention to "blast the world free of history" (*FC*, 124) in order to recommence seems to require a preceeding temporary loss of identity for the sake of the greater good. The space monkeys are all clad in black and shave their heads; they burn their fingerprints off with lye (*FC*, 157) and their faces have been distorted beyond recognition by the numerous fights. They dissociate themselves from their families, for "[t]here are no more names in fight club" (*FC*, 200). The narrator himself never gives away his name. He uses pseudonyms at the support groups, and when Marla incredulously tells him that he is Tyler Durden, he shows her his driver's licence on which it says a different name that the reader never finds out (*FC*, 172). Since nobody uses names at fight club or in Project Mayhem, "the anonymity, the loss of self that the narrator first encounters at the support groups," remains (Mathews, 92).

At a loss with his personal identity, the narrator/Tyler seeks to re-establish a collective masculine identity, to which the members of fight club and Project Mayhem contribute. Tyler wants to remind the men, who do not amount to much in real life but can be "god[s]" when it comes to fighting (*FC*, 48), of "what kind of power they still have" (*FC*, 120). His aim requires his positioning himself in a way that will grant him influence over a large audience. Apparently, he can only achieve this dominance by assuming authoritarian, and even totalitarian, features. In a society in which the importance of religion wanes, Tyler accredits himself a Christ-like status (Mathews, 95). Even after the narrator's submission to a mental hospital, Tyler's fans worship him as a savior (*FC*, 208). At various points in the novel, religious allusions confirm the narrator's/Tyler's position as a Christ-like figure. Evoking the imprint of Jesus' face in Veronica's Sudarium, the narrator recognizes the "wet mask of how [he] look[s] crying" on Big Bob's T-shirt at one of the support groups that takes place in the basement of a church (*FC*, 22). Similarly, he discovers the bloody impression of half of his face on the concrete floor after a fight (*FC*, 51). Just as for Jesus, these

facial imprints represent stages on the way to “martyrdom” – as Tyler would have it (*FC*, 203). In addition, Mathews finds references to “the apostle Peter’s threefold denial of Christ during the night of the passion, and Peter’s threefold affirmation of his love for the risen Christ” (95) in Tyler’s reminding the narrator of his promise not to tell Marla about him: “Now remember, that was three times that you promised” (*FC*, 72); and to a Judas kiss of betrayal in the kiss that Tyler burns into the narrators hand with lye (Mathews 95). To Stefanie Remlinger, the numerous religious metaphors in the novel insinuate

> the Christian topos of purposeful, redeeming violence and the connection of
> (self-)sacrifice, resurrection and the coming of a better world – after the apocalyptic Flood of violence they are trying to turn loose. (Remlinger qtd. in Mathews 84)

The notion of sacrifice inspires Mathews to bring in the theme of cleanliness. Tyler’s aim to “blast the world free of history” (*FC*, 124) entails the idea of wiping the world clean from previous sins. Tyler represents a Christ-like savior in so far as he “instills in his followers the dream of recreating the Garden of Eden” (Mathews 96), but his fascist features become visible in his acceptance of human sacrifice. The idea of cleansing recurrs in fascist history with regard to minority groups and social outcasts. According to Mathews, “the images of soap that pervade the page [sic.] of *Fight Club* are emblematic of this fascist ideal” (96). Tyler explains to the narrator that soap -, which was originally made of ashes, fat and urine, - was invented when people discovered that their clothes got cleaner when they wrinsed them at the spot into which the rain washed the remainings of the human sacrifices that had been made on the hills above the rivers (*FC*, 76). The fascist in Tyler is revealed in his opinion of human sacrifices being a prerequisite for cleansing. In his obsession with starting anew from a societal and historical *tabula rasa*, he literally goes over dead bodies.

As a self-proclaimed Protestant writer, Updike linked “religious orthodoxy and a pattern of responsible fatherhood” in his fiction (Verduin 254). Since many paternal characters in Updike’s works remain either

silent or completely absent, "Updike's typical protagonist [...] looks to every quarter for the consolidation of some sort of authoritative, admonitory voice" (260). Faith thus becomes a crucial means to make sense of the universe and to perceive it as orderly and protective (261). Ahmad's Islamic convictions do not falsify these observations. Despite his different confession, he corresponds to the description of a main character who is desperate to compensate for the paternal void in his life by means of a strong faith. Ahmad idealizes his bailed out father, who was never religious himself. His admiration of him does not entail imitation, however, since Ahmad is a devoted believer and his interest in his father's ethnic background does not exceed the domain of religion – the "exploration of his Islamic identity ends at the mosque" (*T*, 97). While Jack Levy followed the example of his non-absent father and renounced religion (*T*, 39), Ahmad attempts to find a father-substitute in the Holy Q'ran. His religious beliefs deepen his hatred of the US-American way of life. Ahmad's perception of his fellow citizens is one of people who have been led astray from the virtuous path of honesty and restraint by the luring effects of capitalism. With his guidance counsellor Jack Levy impersonating unbelief (*T*, 1), his mother and Joryleen representing the uncleanness of women (*T*, 154) and Tylenol embodying violence as well as consumerism (see 5.4.), Ahmad is confronted with the living proofs of what his imam vilifies as demoralization on a daily basis. Ahmad reflects on Allah and the purpose He has given human beings in life intensely. His thoughts, which he manages to share with Joryleen, are indicative of the "inner struggle" as which he interpretes the Jihad (*T*, 146). The young man's reverence for his god increases his fear of blasphemy (*T*, 220) – a feeling that distinguishes him from his Christian friends, who take the Lord's name in vain (*T*, 222). While Teresa Mulloy has turned away from religious doctrines and taken to regarding spiritual beliefs as inspiring, life-affirming attitudes (*T*, 89), her son aspires the afterlife his religion promises (e.g. *T*, 222) to an extent that makes him doubt his full awareness of and undivided attention to his mundane surroundings (*T*, 142). His unshakable faith gives Ahmad a sense of superiority to the people around him, which is likely to affect his masculinity in the sense that he considers Levy weak and pathetic and

Tylenol brutish and dumb (see 5.4.). Charlie, on the other hand, whom he looks up to, he believes to be a practicing Muslim. Despite Ahmad's identification with his religion, a feeling of doubt creeps over him on his assumed last evening among the living. He briefly asks himself whether his faith is not merely a vain way to distinguish himself from his peers. His mental reference to them as the "doomed, [...] the lost, the already dead" can indeed be read as self-adulation (*T*, 267-268). Ahmad does not realize until very late that the Muslims he is introduced to after his consent to the terrorist act, commit atrocities under the guise of religion as they "fight for God against America" (*T*, 245).

5.8. Chaos, Violence and Masochism as Recurring Elements of Assertion

The narrator of *Fight Club* had been a prey entangled in the societal web before he met Tyler. His condominium was new and air-conditioned, meticulously refurbished according to the latest IKEA-catalogues, and - most probably - clean to the point of sterility. His detonation of the apartment building in the beginning of the novel was a foreshadow of his intention to blast the whole world free of what he is discontent with. At various points in the novel, he states that “[n]othing is static. Everything is falling apart” (e.g. *FC*, 108, 112). His claim hints at the chaos that his and Tyler’s wave of violence induces. Jeffrey A. Sartain, who has examined the use of scientific themes in popular literature and the media, observes that

> Tyler Durden’s quest to destroy the infrastructure of society and build something anew from the resultant anarchy is predicated on the vocabulary and concepts of emerging from chaos theory as well as those essential to an understanding of thermodynamic and information entropy. (26)

In thermodynamics, entropy is a measure of disorder that refers to the random ways in which molecules connect. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that within any closed system, in which energy cannot be exchanged with the surroundings, entropy never decreases, which inhibits perpetual motion. Thus, physical parameters such as temperature or pressure equalize into a state of homogeneity. In the late 1860s, the Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell formulated a thought experiment called “Maxwell’s Demon”, by means of which he attempted to work against the Second Law of Thermodynamics by separating hot and cold molecules to increase energy. Applied to the entire universe, the theory of entropy predicts an eventual heat death, provided that the universe is a closed system in which an exchange of energies cannot occur infinitely. Postmodern writers – most influentially Thomas Pynchon – have transferred the idea of heat death to a cultural level, fearing that in an increasingly uniform society, the readiness and ability to convey ideas is finite, with the eventual consequence of ceasing intellectual motion. In the fields of information theory, entropy occurs because there are numerous

different ways to encode and de-code information. With regard to the passing on of information for the purpose of communication, entropy used to have a negative connotation as an element that can cause a loss of distinctiveness and uniqueness of messages within a closed communicative system and result in noise from which no meaning can be derived.[16] In the twentieth century, the function of entropy in communications theory was re-interpreted as increasing the potential of information: "The more chaotic a system is, the more information it produces" (N.K. Hayles qtd. in Sartain 32). Consequently, "[e]ntropy still signals a shift away from order, but in the case of cultural systems, it signals a shift away from rigorous homogenization, devoid of meaning" (Sartain 32). Much of what Tyler Durden does, "fall[s] within an understanding of entropy as a force for renewal and meaning" (Sartain, 32). Tyler rigorously attempts to keep the narrator from succumbing to the homogenizing, conformist forces of a consumer society. Before the narrator met Tyler, he had been the personification of order, going to work everyday and living "on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise, a sort of filing cabinet for widows and young professionals" (*FC*, 41). The narrator's first encounter with Tyler occurs in a moment of perfection, when Tyler creates a work of art on the beach, which looks the way it should only for the short time at which the sun stands in the right angle to cast a certain shadow. Tyler's teaching the narrator that "a moment [is] the most you [can] ever expect from perfection" (*FC*, 33) becomes a self-evident truth as soon as that moment has passed, when Tyler dedicates himself to disorder and destruction (Sartain 38). The house he rents on Paper Street is "a living wet thing on the inside from so many people sweating, breathing [and] [...] moving" (*FC*, 133), with rain trickling down through the roof and rusting nails sticking out of swelling and shrinking wood (*FC*, 57). Within his four walls of entropy, Tyler establishes himself not only as a dictator and a deity (see above), but also as Maxwell's Demon, separating suitable candidates for Project Mayhem from unsuitable ones, thereby reverting to a quasi-eugenic discourse (*FC*, 128-129). Similar to the energy-enhancing purpose

[16] The information given on entropy in this paragraph was derived from various souces, namely Sartain, Seed and Padgett.

of Maxwell's thought experiment, Tyler aims at increasing the potential of his space monkeys to counteract the homogenizing elements that surround him. He reveals only parts of his plan to his followers in order for them to work more effeciently for the greater good of promoting cultural entropy. Project Misinformation, a sub-group of Project Mayhem, represents an ironic example of chaos producing more information (see Hayles' quote above). Offering a foretaste to the increase of chaos by means of initial order, the narrator refers to the scheduled meetings for the sub-groups of Project Mayhem as "Organized Chaos. The Bureaucracy of Anarchy." (*FC*, 119). With Tyler being a part of the narrator that exceeds his control, the two personalities do not operate within a closed system, which enables Tyler to induce as much disorder as he pleases. When the narrator learns that he himself is responsible for the chaotic violence because Tyler and him share the same body, he closes the system, thereby nearly provoking his own 'heat death'. Unable to transmit the piece of information about the Project being a mistake and wanting to end it, the narrator is faced with devoted space monkeys who threaten to cut off his testicles (*FC*, 187-191). The narrator remains intact because at that point he has not fully gotten hold of Tyler and because by the time he becomes aware of his involvement in the Project, he has lost control of it and "[i]n a hundred cities, fight club goes on without [him]" (*FC*, 180). The system remains open.

The fight clubs and Project Mayhem are support groups to their male members, who, like the narrator, are at a loss with their identities. Big Bob, an androgyne social outcast with neither a job nor a family, regards fight club a better support group than the one in the church basement (*FC*, 100). Tyler manifests his masculine identity by setting loose chaos and confusion. His habit of splicing pornographic images of erect penisses into children's movies, for instance, assures a remembrance by the audience – if only unconsciously perceived. The short

> moment of masculine prowess [that Tyler exhibits] is deliberately projected and framed as the marginal, as the erased, as a form of identity that is as imperiled as it is transient. (Friday, §3)

Knowing that “a moment [is] the most [one can] ever expect from perfection” (*FC*, 33), Tyler seeks to assert his masculine prowess in a different way. Obsessed with the idea of counteracting the transience of his masculine identity, his pranks turn into acts of terrorism. Kimmel’s argument about “[v]iolence [being] [...] the single most evident marker of manhood” is fittingly illustrated by the character of Tyler Durden. It is Tyler’s “willingness to fight”, his “desire to fight” that distinguishes him from his orderly counterpart, the narrator (Kimmel, *Homophobia* 132). The favor that Tyler asks of the narrator for letting him stay at his place in Paper Street is to “hit [him] as hard as [the narrator] can” (*FC*, 52). The narrator, who never hit anybody before, is introduced to a new masculine identity by Tyler. Ironically, since Tyler and the narrator are the same person, the narrator beats himself up when hitting Tyler. His aggression towards society is temporarily funnelled into an aggression towards the self. Considered from the psychoanalytic viewpoint of Kaja Silverman, according to which “[t]he male masochist [...] leaves his social identity completely behind – actually abandons his ‘self’ – and passes over into the ‘enemy terrain’ of femininity” (25), the narrator’s masculinity is indeed unstable. While Tyler inflicts violence on people other than himself, masochism – i.e. violence directed against the self – is performed by the female character of Marla. The woman’s “philosophy of life [...] is that she could die at any moment. The tragedy of her life is that she doesn’t” (*FC*, 108). She attends the support group meetings because she needs something to contrast her life with in order for it to make sense (*FC*, 38). Similarly, the narrator’s craving for the support groups stems from the observation that “if people [think] you [are] dying, they [give] you their full attention” (*FC*, 107).

As has been demonstrated with regard to the narrator of *Fight Club*, the initial order in the lives of Conrad and Ahmad also gets disrupted. Conrad wears “meticulously pressed” shirts – even to work, which is exhaustive manual labor -, as a sign of his “want[ing] order in his life” (*MF*, 117). He cannot identify with his nonchalant peers, who spend the little money that they have as if there was no future to worry about (*MF*, 124). Conrad’s

breadwinner-masculinity has been stable since he made the decision to become "bourgeois" (*MF*, 180). When the young man loses his job and – due to a series of unfortunate events that follows his application for a new employment – is arrested, entropy finds a way into his life. Feeling treated unjustly, he fights for his rights, going so far as to commit physical assault against a man working at the pound to which his car was towed away. Conrad's use of violence as a "marker of manhood" (see Kimmel above) remains doubtful in this case. Dedicating an entire chapter to the illustration of Conrad's despair, Wolfe went to great pains to evoke the reader's empathy, which gives Conrad's outbreak of rage a connotation of fighting for justice rather than fighting to assert one's masculinity (Chapter XI: *This is – Not Right!*). The dismissal sets loose anguish and confusion that eventually break free through his fists and indicate the chaos that disrupts the familiar orderly reality. As in Tyler's case, chaos represents a confirmative aspect of masculine identity. Conrad's acceptance of his sentence is due to his new self-perception as a man and his intensely felt need to serve his son as a masculine role model (*MF*, 372, 493 – quoted under 5.6.). When Conrad's life still followed its usual pattern, his masculinity did not always seem evident to him, for he had to admonish himself to "[b]e a man" (*MF*, 119).

Santa Rita prison denotes a closed space in which most of the inmates have already equalized to some kind of uniformity. They either form ethnically homogenious groups, which entropically oppose each other, or they try to stay invisible so as not to attract attention. Rotto and his Nordic Bund, Vastly and his African-American adherents, and the Mexicans exemplify the first category, while Pops, an eldery inmate who always keeps to himself, "his head down and his eyes nearly shut, doing his Sinequan Shuffle", is one of the few representatives of the latter (*MF*, 402). Reading his book in the pod room, Conrad wishes to dissolve in the eyes of the brutes, but as a "new fish" he sticks out despite his efforts (*MF*, 365). Conrad's cellmate, an experienced inmate, advises him not to stay "eenveesible" but to merge with his surroundings by adapting to them. He tells Conrad to defy any wranglers by using his mouth (*MF*, 391-394). Conrad's audacity in the face of Rotto is a display of his newly acquired

masculinity, which on the one hand, originates from the formerly unknown chaos and on the other hand, can be traced back to his faith in Zeus as a father figure endowing his believers with manliness (*MF*, 485 – quoted under 5.7.). Conrad's 'heat death' lurks with Rotto's desire for revenge. It is suggested rather palpably by means of the stifling heat in the prison cells:

> Conrad was so hot, he had a slick of oily sweat where the underside of his upper arm lay against his rib cage and another where the underside of his chin met his neck. He had finally taken off his felony pajamas and was wearing only his shorts [...] even though he didn't want to be that naked if the onslaught began. [...] Sweat was collecting in his eyebrows, his mustache, and the stubble of his beard [...]. Absentmindedly he pressed his mustache on either side with his thumb and forefinger, as if to wring the moisture out. (*MF*, 495-496)

The earthquake breaks open the formerly closed system of Santa Rita and gives Conrad a chance to escape. Even though he washes away his prison-identity in an actual shower, shaves his mustache and assumes a new identity under the name of Connie deCasi, he has to revert to combining the strength in his forearms and the jail jargon he learned, to frighten off a man who blackmails an elderly couple Conrad (Connie) starts to work for. As he did with his defiance of Rotto, Conrad attributes his brutishness towards the blackmailer to the "spark of Zeus" (*MF*, 689). He does not seem comfortable with the rather violent side-effects of his newly acquired masculinity, which is probably why he discards the chaotic developments he was subject to and (according to Kenny) falls back into his orderly habits (*MF*, 640).

Keen on order, immaculacy and silence, Ahmad opposes the vibrant, buoyant US-American culture. According to his point of view, the adherents of this way of life have already died a cultural heat death, in so far as they have merged into a state of conformism and uniformity. In this respect, Ahmad desires cultural entropy as long as it does not interfere with his purity and faith. Similar to the disorder in the life of the narrator of *Fight Club*, which, though attributed to Tyler, was originally caused by Marla due to her being the reason for Tyler's existence (*FC*, 198), Joryleen is the one to induce chaos in Ahmad's life. She arouses his sexual

fantasies, which completely overthrows his convictions of chastity and cleanliness. Her talking to Ahmad gives Tylenol a reason to fight the Muslim, which permits the disorderly element of violence to to enter the scene. Joryleen also helps Ahmad realize the life-affirming physical as well as spiritual functions of the human body (*T*, 222 – discussed under 5.5.), which confuses him in the religious beliefs that used to be the firm grounds on which the order in his life was built. Joryleen's influence might only constitute a part of the force that encouraged Ahmad to refrain from his atrocious deed of killing the people in the tunnel along with himself. But Ahmad's initial death fantasies, caused by a yearning for the infinite afterlife promised in the Q'ran, are replaced by a will to live (*T*, 302).

5.9. The Representation of Heroism and Antiheroism by the Characters

The character of Tyler Durden is reminiscent of a deity in so far as he can create and destroy. He creates a temporarily perfect work of art on the beach (*FC*, 33), a generation of men re-raised by a dominant masculine power, and the explosives that hold his annihilating powers. His followers worship him. To them, he is a leader, a father-substitute, a god, a hero. The notion of heroism becomes evident when Tyler's 'debris', the narrator, receives letters from hundreds of men affected by Tyler's utopian vision. They continue the 'mission' and tell the narrator (who is Tyler to them) that he is "remembered. That [he is] their hero" (*FC*, 207). Heroism comes into play with regard to both personalities in this last chapter because of the narrator's earlier observation that "[i]n death we become heroes". At the point at which the letters are written, Tyler has been killed and the narrator perceives the hospital he was committed to as "heaven" (*FC*, 207). Comparable to Camus' absurd hero, the narrator knows about the inevitability of his own death – an awareness that permeates the entire novel, from the initial ponderings of a plane crash to the "near-life experience" in the car that the mechanic drives far above the speed limit on the wrong side of the highway (*FC*, 149): "This is your life and it's ending one minute at a time" (*FC*, 29). What crucially differentiates the narrator from Camus' and Galloways absurd hero, as well as from Hassan's antihero, however, is that the narrator does not deny death as a solution to his struggles. On the contrary, death is a prerequisite for him to achieve a status somewhat elevated from average man. The narrator prays for a plane crash and seeks the presence of death by attending the support groups. During the car ride with the mechanic, the tangibility of death makes him wish and "wrestle to [...] die" (*FC*, 146). To some extent, Hassan's "schizoid figure of the hero" (60) is applicable to the schizoid figure of the narrator, for he and Tyler exhibit a strong tendency to rebellion against the victimhood to which they have been subjugated by society. The "demonic grins" and "grotesque criminality" that Hassan mentions, form an intregral part of the plot in *Fight Club* (W. Morris qtd. in Hassan 149), and in the end, the narrator even readily affirms the human

sense of life by realizing that, if human beings are not “sacred unique snowflakes of special unique specialness”, then at least they “just are” (*FC*, 207). Nonetheless, Tyler has moved beyond demonic grins. His rebellion equals manslaughter. He has not used the Dostoevskian theme of “an alienated individual going underground to rage against a dehumanizing society” (Bennett 68) to defy time and history (Hassan 329), but to blast the world free of it. The utterance made by the character of Batman in Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight* of 2008, appears to fit perfectly when applied to the protagonist(s) of *Fight Club*: “You either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain.” It remains questionable whether the main character of Palahniuk’s novel really has attained a greater good that qualifies him as a hero, or whether his achievements are limited to his own personality. Tyler/the narrator is too old, too experienced and too violent to pass as Hassan’s antihero. If, rather than antiheroism, the heroic is the commonplace (Eagleton, 74), however, he has accomplished to win the admiration of hundreds of men, and without admirers, heroes would be inexistant.

Conrad, who used to be one of many laborers slaving away in the freezer unit, is similarly proclaimed a hero by his colleagues who admire him – first, for saving Kenny’s life, and later for successfully escaping from Santa Rita. Humbly and rather antiheroically, Conrad does not take pride in his colleague’s approval; instead, he regards it as unmerited (*MF*, 138). His increasing religious awareness and his growing faith in Zeus allow him to discard his existentialist struggles and they give him a purpose in life. When he stands up to Rotto in prison, he feels like Hercules fighting “*unjust and brutal men*” [sic.] (*MF*, 485). His cellmate admires him enthusiastically. Conrad is the character who most evidently turns the commonplace into the heroic. He is a caring father, an alert colleague, a man with convictions and principles, and – although occasionally not immediately detectable – a man of honesty. His belief in the supernatural endows him with courage and bravery, but most of his deeds still remain acknowledgeable when stripped of the imagined superiority. It is his readiness of mind and common sense that make him react to Kenny’s

accident and crawl to safety after the earthquake. It is his will to achieve something in life for his family that helps him endure the freezer unit as well as prison. Blinded by his belief, Conrad fails to realize these attributes and equates achievement with manliness based on god-given strength (*MF*, 485).

Due to his adolescent innocence and the coming-of-age story behind his character, Ahmad fits Hassan's description of the antihero of the 1950s. His being caught between two cultures that appear to be of an unsurmountable inconcruity to him, reflects his juvenile confusion, his difficulty with coming to terms with the changes affecting his life: "*The world is difficult*, he thinks, *because devils are busy in it, confusing things and making the straight crooked*" (*T*, 8). Not infrequently do Ahmad's attempts at dismissing the non-Islamic influences by means of quoting from the Q'ran fail because the abstract words are more remote to him than the flowing juices. In his spare time, he is faced with the realization that idleness, consumerism and the fictions that Hollywood projects onto huge screens for entertainment arouse inside him a feeling of excitement (*T*, 140, 149). An account of Jack Levy's ungrateful job as a guidance counselor illustrates the disorientation of teenagers and the lack of parental counteraction to this aimlessness in the twenty-first century:

> Now, routinely, Jack Levy interviews children who seem to have no flesh-and-blood parents – whose instructions from the world are entirely imparted by electronic ghosts signalling across a crowded room, or rapping through black foam earplugs, or encoded in the intricate programming of action figures twitching their spasmodic way through the explosion-producing algorithms of a video game. Students present themselves to their counselor like a succession of CDs whose shimmering surface gives no clue to their contents without the equipment to play them (*T*, 31).

Ahmad, of course, proudly claims to have unplugged the connecting cable between himself and his peers, but his mostly absent parents, his interest in Joryleen and the occasional delight he gets from indulging in Western entertainment uncover him as a rather 'ordinary' teenager. Representing a jet of water in the "fountain of youth" that the New World

symbolizes (Robertson qtd. in Campbell, Neil 232), Ahmad's character can be interpreted as a Hassanesque embodiment of radical innocence. He questions the societal expectations he is confronted with on a daily basis by decrying Western morality. His repulsion of the physical as well as his permeability to mental manipulation by the imam attest to his adolescent innocence. The representation of the protagonist as an outsider who keeps recoiling into solitude are reminiscent of Hassan's rebel-victim. By constantly denouncing the US-American way of life, he rebels against the society by which he feels victimized. In the beginning of the novel, Ahmad practically makes an effort to affront Joryleen (*T*, 6-8). He soon realizes the importance of conversing with Charlie, for the older man is his only friend (*T*, 194). When he drives the truck on his own, he feels closer to God, whom he believes to lead a solitary existence (*T*, 207). The truck, of which Ahmad takes meticulous care, does not only represent a refuge into his cherished solitude, but, given the facts that the vehicle is the site of male bonding between him and Charlie (and – to some extent – between him and Levy in the end of the novel) and that it has been driven and maintained by exclusively male vendors, whose odors it has taken on (*T*, 151), the delivery truck also symbolizes Ahmad's exposure to adult manhood. His difficulties in identifying with the new stage in his life is indicated by means of a reference to Timothy McVeigh (*T*, 244; for McVeigh see 4. above). Utterly perturbed by the crisis-laden effects of globalization, Ahmad reverts to violence, which, due to the religiously imbued hatred of women that the imam inflicts on him, is on the verge of becoming his marker of masculinity. Initially regarding death as a solution to his cultural and pubertal struggles on earth (e.g. *T*, 172), it dawns on Ahmad that "[God] wills life" (*T*, 302). As indicated by Ahmad's sympathy for insects and his inability to harm them (*T*, 74, 249-250), the protagonist's attitude becomes life-affirming.

5.10. The Authors' Styles That Bring the Characters to Life

Fight Club is "a narrative of identity" (Friday 8th paragraph), written from the point of view of a first-person narrator with a personality disorder. The unreliable narrator's unawareness of being Tyler Durden when he thinks he is asleep becomes obvious at various points in the novel:

> And I ran off to Melanoma. I came home early. I slept.
> And now, at breakfast the next morning, Tyler's sitting here covered in hickies and says Marla is some twisted bitch, but he likes that a lot. After Melanoma last night, I came home and went to bed and slept. And I dreamed I was humping, humping, humping Marla Singer. (*FC*, 59)

> [...] I am not sure if Tyler is my dream.
> Or if I am Tyler's dream. (*FC*, 138)

Palahniuk's fragmented style and his use of short and sometimes incomplete sentences symbolize the split identity of the protagonist. The narrator's insomnia leads him to Tyler, who, as analyzed above, represents a crucial aspect of his masculinity. Friday argues that the insomnia, which a fictional doctor diagnosed as "just the symptom of something larger" in the beginning of the novel, results from "a crisis of masculinity in contemporary American culture" (4th paragraph), and indeed, the narrator's adoption of Tyler's identity is his way of dealing with the condition of a postmodern consumer culture. With regard to the author's style, the narrator's personality and present-day Western society, "[n]othing is static. Everything is falling apart." The reason why the narrator conjures up Tyler is that he perceives his masculine identity to be threatened by the outer influences of a conformist consumer society. Stylewise, he attempts to affirm his endangered aspect of identity by means of frequent repetitions and simple sentence structures, so that his story can easily be remembered and "become a legend" (*FC*, 15). Tyler's words are taken up and repeated by the narrator as well as by the mechanic throughout the novel. These verbal imitations are partly indicated - e.g.: "Tyler's words coming out of my mouth." (*FC*, 114); "The mechanic starts talking and it's pure Tyler Durden." (*FC*, 149) -, and partly, they just occur - e.g.: "'This is our world, now, our world,' Tyler

says, ‘and those ancient people are dead’” (*FC*, 14); “This is my world now. This is my world, my world, and those ancient people are dead.” (*FC*, 124). One example of the repetitive sentence structure is even reminiscent of Gertrude Stein: “A criminal is a criminal is a criminal.” (*FC*, 142). Plotwise, the narrator asserts what he fears to have lost by means of various antagonistic acts, ranging from pranks against the US-entertainment industry and people who financially benefit from it to guerrilla-like warfare. He feels stifled as an individual and, more precisely, as a masculine individual, which is implied in various scenes, such as the one in which Tyler splices sexual organs into children’s movies:

> A single frame in a movie is on the screen for one-sixtieth of a second. Divide a second into sixty equal parts. That's how long the erection is. Towering four stories tall over the popcorn auditorium, slippery red and terrible, and no one sees it. (*FC*, 30)

Although present, the symbol of masculine prowess remains unnoticed. Since the male protagonist’s identity is fragmented and unstable, Tyler’s attempts at rendering masculinity visible are limited to the insertion of bits and pieces into the large entity of a movie that constitutes an example of an entertainment-bound society.

Both, *A Man In Full* and *Terrorist* are written from the points of view of omniscient third-person narrators. Neither Conrad nor Ahmad talk about themselves, but their thoughts and feelings are described in detail by the narrators. Examples of such a narrative style as it is applied in both novels would be Conrad’s and Ahmad’s perception of women:

> There is an endearing self-confidence in how compactly her coacoa-brown roundness fills her clothes, which today are patched and sequinned jeans, worn pale where she sits, and a ribbed magenta shorty top both lower and higher than it should be. [...] Joryleen persists in still standing there, too near him. Her perfume cloys in his nostrils; the crease between her breasts bothers him. (*T*, 6-8)

> [The girl that was going to take Conrad’s typing test was] a sunny creature with milky white skin and bouncy reddish-blond hair, a bit

> plump but with a perfect dimple in her chin and absolutely marvelous dimples in her cheeks when she smiled, which was constantly. [...] When the girl twisted her body to sit down, her little skirt gripped the curve of her thigh. She had such a ... libidinous presence! Confused, a-tingle, blushing, Conrad smiled at her. (*MF*, 266)

Both women are described as perfectly feminine, with curvy bodies, unblemished skin and tight clothes that accentuate their shapes. They arouse forbidden feelings in the men – forbidden to Conrad because he is married, and forbidden to Ahmad because of his religious convictions. The omniscient narrators of both novels lay these sentiments bare and reveal that the feminine characters bear the protagonists out in their manliness.

Another element that the two novels share is intertextuality. Ahmad and the imam quote from the Q'ran and Conrad recalls passages that he read in *The Stoics*. The texts provide the protagonists with guidelines and orientation in their lives. They help them gain an awareness of themselves as individuals – at times especially as masculine individuals:

> Conrad felt a dreadful fear and then a terrible rage. *[...] O Lord Zeus, how am I to be rid of anxiety? [...] Fool, have you no hands? Did not Zeus make them for you? Has he not given you greatness of mind, has he not given you manliness? When you have these strong hands to help you – My hands!* In that instant – a fiery energy. (*MF*, 485)

> *He that fights for Allah's cause,* the twenty-ninth sura says, *fights for himself*. (*T*, 225)

> *Separate yourselves therefore from women and approach them not until they be cleansed. But when they are cleansed, go in unto them as God hath ordained for you. [...]* (*T*, 154, 276)

Updike also uses non-Islamic religious references as metaphors to embellish his style:

> Real life now commences, [the graduating students] are informed; the Eden of public education has swung shut its garden gate. A garden, Levy reflects, of rote teaching dully ignored, of the vicious and ignorant dominating the timid and dutiful, but a garden nevertheless, a weedy patch of hopes, a rough and ill-tilted seedbed of what this nation wants itself to be. (*T*, 108)

Due to its references to various denominations, *Terrorist* represents a religious mosaic. The religious metaphor in the above-quoted passage is likely to function as a counteractive device to the waning faith in modern Western society that Ahmad deplores. The fact that the metaphor is employed by Jack Levy, who has turned away from religion, highlights the misuse of religious elements for profane purposes.

While Wolfe and Updike use long, elaborate sentences, those employed by Palahniuk tend to be short and incomplete. Palahniuk's style draws attention to the instability of society, which his schizophrenic protagonist embodies. His fragmented mode of writing is indicative of the chaos of the plot. Wolfe and Updike, on the other hand, seem to find in their verbal embellishments a way to counteract the chaos to which their protagonists are subject. The style of Updike's narrator is congruent with the main character's eloquence. It also parallels the highbrow language of the intertextual references and it reflects Ahmad's desire to be above the average and the ordinary. Similarly, Wolfe's verbal elaborations describe the Atlanta elite as well as Conrad, who strives for a spiritual goal that transcends the commonplace.

6. Conclusion

All three protagonists perceive their masculinities as threatened by the stifling forces of a postmodern consumer society. They feel limited in their abilities to develop their full potentials as masculine individuals because the present-day situation in which they are entrapped is devoid of identity-generating history. The men fear suffocation analogous to a cultural heat death in the conformist reality of the world that surrounds them. In a culture that lacks male role models due to waning religion, paternal absenteeism and a general societal instability, attributed to the depersonalizing effects of rapid globalization and a capitalist logic that follows the Darwinistic credo of Survival of the Fittest, they experience what Kimmel terms “a massive male displacement” (*Gender*, 7). While the narrator of *Fight Club* counteracts his masculine malaise by conjuring up the virile personality of Tyler Durden, who asserts himself by unleashing chaos and violence as a response to forces that challenge his masculinity, Conrad’s newly acquired spirituality helps him transcend the socially dominant notion of masculinity, and Ahmad similarly distinguishes himself from his surroundings by recoiling into the religious realm.

In their novels, Palahniuk, Wolfe and Updike all suggest a crisis of masculinity in so far as they do not only create unstable characters that are socially unmoldable in general, but they also intersperse their pages with symbolic threats to manhood. In *Fight Club*, for example, the hazard of castration lurks everywhere, as tying rubber bands to men’s testicles and waving large knives in front of sweating faces is a method commonly employed by the space monkeys. In addition, the question of sexual potency is raised when Tyler/the narrator spots the dildo in Marla’s bedroom (*FC*, 61). Towards the end of the novel, when the narrator has discovered that Tyler is his virile projection, he averts that “[he is] not cross-dressing, and [he is] not putting pills up [his] ass” (*FC*, 182).

Conrad’s masculine steadfastness is disputed by his wife and his mother-in-law as well as by the dominant inmates of Santa Rita. In both contexts, he comes across as too young and as too inexperienced to pass for somebody manly enough to live up to outer expectations. Moreover,

when his car is towed away and he lacks the money to pay his fine, it becomes obvious that his breadwinner-masculinity has failed.

Ahmad is represented as somewhat alienated from the Western teenage reality of the twenty-first century, which is turned into a threat to his masculinity when his "iron-strong" counterpart Tylenol calls him a "weird queer" and a "faggot" (*T*, 13-14). In the light of the caressing care he takes of the delivery truck, his virginity seems almost ridiculous.

The three protagonists are aware of the crisis that affects them because they actively deal with it. It remains questionable, however, to what extent they will be able to defeat it. As dominant a role as death, violence and masochism play in the three novels, all the literary works turn out to be essentially life-affirming. The narrator of *Fight Club* seems to be content with the realization that human beings "just are" (*FC*, 207). The teachings of the Stoics have given Conrad a new meaning in life. And Ahmad has learned that life yields beauty and that "God wills [it]" (*T*, 302). Despite these seemingly positive finales, the endings of the novels remain open and the issue of masculinity is partly left unsolved. The letters that the narrator of *Fight Club* receives in hospital render the prospect of returning from the clinic as Tyler Durden rather than his old self quite appealing. If he does return as Tyler, he might not be able to achieve more than in his first attempt, in which his own project threatened to castrate him because he had lost control of it. He was left with no other choice but to kill Tyler, whose masculinity was thus merely single-serving. In Conrad's case, the question that remains unanswered is whether he will be able to maintain his spiritual equilibrum and anti-materialist attitude in a society that boycots these very ideals. Ahmad, too, is going to have to come to terms with Western entertainment and consumerism if he does not wish to continue a life in solitude. Most importantly, however, in all three cases, the means by which the protagonists try to assert their masculinity are fictional, imagined and unreal. Tyler is the result of a personality disorder. He

> is not a generational spokesperson; even within the fiction of *Fight Club*, he is a fictional character, a hallucination, another kind of copy of a copy of a copy, his own simulacrum. (Kavadlo, 8)

The ideals of masculinity to which Conrad adheres originated in Ancient Greek philosophy and are mainly embodied by deities and mythical figures, such as Zeus and Hercules. Similarly, Ahmad draws his strength and the values and moral code by which he lives from Allah and the words of the Holy Q'ran.

The crisis that the three men experience bears resemblances to those that Kimmel identifies with regard to earlier decades. Similar to the plight of Self-Made Man, the crisis prevalent in the twentieth and twenty-first century results from societal incoherence, economic and political malaise and identity problems. The masculine character of these elements, however, is myth-based. Comparable to the discursive idea of (US-)Americanness that Neil Campbell unveals, (US-American) masculinity has been established by means of exclusion and opposition. Figures like Tyler Durden, Conrad Hensley and Ahmad Ashmawy Mulloy are fictional descendants of the American Adam, who keep the myth of masculinity alive and try to adapt it to present-day circumstances. This myth is a "story of agreed principles [and] values" (Campbell, N. 2), a narrative of "marker[s] of manhood" (Kimmel, *Homophobia* 132), which encompass such elements as violence, the denigration of the feminine and the function of the father as a role model. Since myths provide people with a sense of identity (Campbell 9), identity crises, from which the three protagonists suffer, must stem from inconsistencies in those myths. In a world of social and political turmoil, myths are subject to change. Tyler, Conrad and Ahmad illustrate the difficulties that may arise from unstable myths. The pressure that is put upon them because they are expected to correspond to a mythical ideal makes them emerge from their creators' pages as insecure fictional heroes.

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Abstract

This thesis uses the concept of masculinity as a myth that establishes collective identity to analyze three contemporary US-American novels, namely *Fight Club* by Chuck Palahniuk, *A Man in Full* by Tom Wolfe and *Terrorist* by John Updike. A historical outline of masculinity in the United States, which focuses on the decisive role of fictional archetypes, illustrates the long-established connection between socially, culturally and fictionally created manhood. In academia, this very construct has been perceived as being 'in crisis' and there are various explanations why. First, social and political turmoil has been identified as the source of uneasiness for male dwellers in a globalized world. Second, a lack of concrete definitions of what the term masculinity actually comprises has rendered the concept rather elusive. Third, some scholars have held the creation of unstable characters in fiction responsible for masculine identity problems. The idea of masculinity per se as well as of its instability is exemplified in a literary analysis of three male protagonists. It is shown how various factors such as society, history, women and violence are depicted to affect those characters' self-perception as well as their being perceived as masculine and to what extent those factors contribute to the 'crisis' of their gender identity. The protagonists' masculine identities can largely be identified as mythical and fictional.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit bedient sich der Idee von Männlichkeit als einem Mythos, der eine kollektive Identität schafft, zur Analyse dreier zeitgenössischer US-Romane: *Fight Club* von Chuck Palahniuk, *A Man in Full* (*Ein ganzer Kerl*) von Tom Wolfe und *Terrorist* von John Updike. Ein historischer Abriss US-amerikanischer Männlichkeit, in der literarisch geschaffene Archetypen eine entscheidende Rolle spielen, zeigt den lange bestehenden Zusammenhang zwischen gesellschaftlich, kulturell und literarisch konstruierter Männlichkeit. In der Wissenschaft wird das Konzept der Männlichkeit aus verschiedenen Gründen als 'in einer Krise befindlich' beschrieben. Einerseits wird die gesellschaftliche und politische Unruhe, die aus der Globalisierung hervorgeht, als Identifikationsübel für Männer dargestellt. Andererseits gilt der Begriff der Männlichkeit als schwammig definiert und deshalb problematisch. Einige Wissenschafter erklären die Autoren von Romanen mit instabilen männlichen Hauptfiguren zu den Verantwortlichen für die geschlechtsspezifische Malaise. Der Idee, Männlichkeit und deren Krisenanfälligkeit wären literarisch erschaffene Konstrukte, wird mit der Analyse dreier Protagonisten nachgegangen. Es wird gezeigt, inwiefern verschiedene Faktoren, wie die Gesellschaft, Geschichte, Frauen und Gewalt, deren Eigen- und Fremdwahrnehmung als männlich beeinflussen, und in welchem Ausmaß diese Faktoren zur 'Krise' der maskulinen Identität beitragen. Die maskulinen Identitäten der Protagonisten können als literarisch geschaffene Mythen entlarvt werden.

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Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung	Abschluss des Bakkalaureats Internationale Entwicklung
Datum	September – Dezember 2007
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung	Auslandssemester an der bilingualen University of Ottawa (Université d'Ottawa), Kanada
Datum	11. Juli 2007
Auszeichnung	Erhalt des Top-Stipendiums des Landes Niederösterreich
Datum	12. Februar 2007
Auszeichnung	Erhalt eines Leistungsstipendiums der Universität Wien
Datum	14. Dezember 2006
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung	Abschluss des ersten Studienabschnitts des Diplomstudiums Internationale Entwicklung
Datum	01. März 2006
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung	Abschluss mit Auszeichnung des ersten Studienabschnitts des Diplomstudiums Anglistik und Amerikanistik
Datum	03. Juni 2005
Auszeichnung	Auszeichnung für „besonderes Engagement" im Fach Englische Sprachgeschichte vom Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik der Universität Wien
Datum	16. Februar 2005
Auszeichnung	Erhalt eines Leistungsstipendiums der Universität Wien
Datum	Juni 2003
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung	Matura am Bundesgymnasium Gänserndorf
Datum	Juli 2002
Name und Art der	Teilnahme am Hochbegabtenförderungsseminar Englisch des

Bildungseinrichtung niederösterreichischen Landesschulrats

Datum
Auszeichnung

Datum März 2002
Auszeichnung Erfolgreiche Teilnahme am niederösterreichischen Fremdsprachenwettbewerb für Englisch und Französisch

Datum März 2001
Auszeichnung Erfolgreiche Teilnahme am niederösterreichischen Fremdsprachenwettbewerb für Englisch

Datum Juli 2000
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung Teilnahme am Seminar des Stafford House College

Datum September 1995 – Juni 2003
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung Bundesgymnasium Gänserndorf, neusprachlicher Zweig

Datum September 1991 – Juni 1994
Name und Art der Bildungseinrichtung Volksschule Groß-Enzersdorf

Persönliche Fähigkeiten und Kompetenzen

Muttersprache	Deutsch
Sonstige Sprachen	Englisch: fließend in Wort und Schrift (Universitätsabschluss, mehrer Auslandsaufenthalte) Französisch: fließend in Wort und Schrift (Universitätsniveau, mehrer Auslandsaufenthalte) Spanisch: Fortgeschrittenen-Niveau (Kurse an in- und ausländischen Schulen, sowie an inländischen Universitäten) Türkisch: Anfänger-Niveau
Computerkenntnisse	Grundkenntnisse
Führerschein	B