

THE MESSIANIC MODEL OF SUBJECT FORMATION IN CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S NOVELS "SURVIVOR" AND "CHOKE"

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This article offers a new reading of Chuck Palahniuk's philosophical vision through the analysis of the messianic model in his novels "Survivor" and "Choke". It focuses on the formation of the subject amid a crisis of traditional authority, as religious, social, and familial structures no longer sustain a stable personal identity. The article shows that the messianic motif in Palahniuk's fiction extends beyond religious themes, serving as a universal framework for understanding freedom, responsibility, and self-determination. A comparative reading of the two novels traces a shift in the textual representation of the sacred: from the publicly constructed figure of the prophet to the internal space of family memory, psychological dependency, and traumatic experience. The findings position "Survivor" and "Choke" as two stages in the development of Palahniuk's concept of subjectivity, in which the search for autonomy is linked to a reconsideration of the symbolic mechanisms that shape the human self.

Key words: *Palahniuk; messianic discourse; subject formation; postmodernism; identity*

Introduction

Contemporary literary scholarship has increasingly turned its attention to the ways in which modern fiction reimagines subjectivity in the aftermath of the crisis of traditional religious and value systems. Current research is concerned not only with the processes through which personal identity is constituted but also with the literary reconfiguration of the cultural frameworks that have historically shaped the relationship between the individual, authority, morality, and transcendence. Within this context, the transformation of messianic discourse in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century literature has emerged as a particularly significant field of inquiry. Detached from its strictly theological foundations, the messianic paradigm becomes a means of exploring freedom, responsibility, and the conditions of human selfhood.

Chuck Palahniuk's fiction occupies a distinctive place within contemporary American literature and has attracted sustained scholarly interest. His novels have most often been examined through the lenses of consumer culture, simulation, identity crisis, corporeality, violence, addiction, mass media, and post-secular sensibility. While these approaches have

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Ստացվել է՝ 15.07.2026

Գրախոսվել է՝ 20.07.2026

Հաստատվել է՝ 22.10.2026

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generated substantial insights, they have largely concentrated on individual novels or isolated thematic concerns. As a result, the underlying philosophical coherence of Palahniuk's fictional universe – one that connects separate works into a broader conceptual framework – has received considerably less attention. This is particularly true of “*Survivor*” and “*Choke*”, which, despite their evident thematic and structural affinities, have rarely been studied as complementary stages in the development of a single vision of subject formation.

This article offers a new reading of “*Survivor*” and “*Choke*” by approaching them as two successive phases in the formation of the modern subject. Rather than treating messianism as either an autonomous religious narrative or another instance of postmodern engagement with biblical tradition, this study examines it as a philosophical and anthropological mechanism through which subjectivity is constituted. From this perspective, the motif of the substitution of God acquires a fundamentally different meaning, functioning as a metaphor for the subject's acceptance of responsibility in a world where stable transcendent foundations have disappeared.

The central hypothesis of this study is that the messianic dimension of “*Survivor*” and “*Choke*” constitutes a unified conceptual structure that represents different stages in the emergence of the subject. In “*Survivor*”, the messianic role is constructed within the sphere of public representation and is associated with the acquisition of symbolic authority and social power. In “*Choke*”, by contrast, it is relocated to the domains of family memory, psychological trauma, and personal identity. This shift reveals Palahniuk's systematic re-interpretation of the figure of the messiah, transforming it into a philosophical paradigm of becoming rather than a religious category.

The aim of this article is to identify the distinctive ways in which messianic discourse operates in “*Survivor*” and “*Choke*” and to determine its significance for Palahniuk's conception of the subject. To achieve this objective, the study examines the transformation of the messianic paradigm across the two novels, analyses the mechanisms through which subjectivity is constructed in relation to freedom and responsibility, explores their dialogue with the philosophical thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Paul Ricoeur, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard, and situates these works within the broader intellectual architecture of Palahniuk's fiction.

Methodologically, the study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines comparative analysis, structural-semiotic interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics, and literary analysis. Drawing on contemporary philosophy, psychoanalytic theory, and narrative studies, it interprets Palahniuk's novels as a coherent exploration of the processes through which subjectivity is negotiated under the cultural conditions of late modernity.

Main Part. From Submission to the Substitution of God: The Hero's Messianic Transformation

Chuck Palahniuk's novel “*Survivor*” (1999) holds a special place in the writer's oeuvre, as it is precisely here that one of the central philosophical problems of his artistic world is most consistently formulated – the problem of freedom as the necessity to accept responsibility for one's own existence. Despite the sustained interest of English-language Palahniuk studies in this work, the research tradition predominantly views it within the context of religious themes, the media construction of personality, post-apocalyptic narrative, and the critique of mass culture. Researchers' attention is focused primarily on the phenomenon of the enclosed religious community, the mechanisms of symbolic power, and Tender

Branson's transformation into a public figure existing according to the laws of modern media reality¹.

Such a research perspective is legitimate; however, it leaves aside the philosophical dimension of the novel. Meanwhile, it is this very dimension that unites the religious, social, psychological, and media levels of the narrative into a single model of personality development. At the center of the work is not so much the story of a person who survived the destruction of a religious community, but rather the process of the subject's gradual liberation from any external structures that define their existence. Therefore, it seems productive to consider the novel primarily through the categories of freedom, responsibility, and self-determination, which acquire particular significance in the light of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy.

A special role in such a reading is played by the author's own commentary. While Palahniuk's fiction is built on a complex system of satire, grotesque, and deliberate provocation, the book "Stranger Than Fiction" allows us to see the internal logic behind the emergence of these plots. The author shows how life experience is transformed into narrative, and how personal experience becomes a method for the artistic investigation of contemporary reality. Thus, "Stranger Than Fiction" functions as a kind of key to the interpretation of "Survivor", allowing the novel to be viewed not as a collection of shocking situations, but as a philosophical model of human existence. Significantly Palahniuk himself defines his characters as "a lonely person looking for some way to connect with other people"². This observation provides the starting point for understanding the character of Tender Branson. The protagonist of "Survivor" is not a rebel in the traditional sense of the word. On the contrary, he represents a person completely shaped by a system of collective subordination in which individual choice is practically excluded. His existence is determined by pre-established rules, and the ability to make independent decisions is lost even before the narrative begins.

No less significant is another of Palahniuk's observations, which is connected to the constant alternation between two opposite states of human existence. Describing his own life and creative process, the writer speaks of an endless movement between voluntary solitude and the need to return to people once again – a kind of cycle: "Alone. Together. Alone. Together"³. This pattern determines not only the author's biography but also the internal structure of his fictional world. A person simultaneously strives to preserve their own individuality and to rid themselves of the burden of freedom by dissolving into the collective. This internal contradiction forms one of the philosophical foundations of the novel "Survivor".

¹ See: Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature. (2005). Fall/Winter. Vol. 2, No. 2: The Fiction of Chuck Palahniuk / Ed. by Erik M. Grayson. – Binghamton: Binghamton University. – 152 p. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://clck.ru/3UTyVX> (Accessed: 04.07.2026); *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*. (2009). Ed. by Jeffrey A. Sartain. – Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. – 240 p. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://clck.ru/3TQRC2> (Accessed: 04.07.2026); **McC Campbell Mary W.** (2009). "Paradigms Are Dissolving Left and Right": Baudrillard's Anti-Apocalypse and Chuck Palahniuk's Survivor. In: *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk* / Ed. by Jeffrey A. Sartain. – Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. – P. 146–158.

² **Palahniuk Chuck.** (2004). *Stranger Than Fiction* (True Stories). – New York: Doubleday. [Electronic resource]. Available at: https://openlibrary.org/works/OL18932W/Stranger_Than_Fiction (Accessed: 04.07.2026).

³ Ibid.

Particularly telling is Palahniuk's description of the mechanism behind the creation of his own works. Reflecting on his work on the novels, he uses the concept of "crowd seeding"⁴, which denotes the gradual gathering of a future text from casual conversations, everyday observations, and individual human stories. By the author's own admission, this is how the concept for "Survivor" emerged. However, everyday material becomes merely the starting point of the narrative. By combining daily experience with the fundamental questions of human existence, Palahniuk creates a work in which the story of Tender Branson is transformed into a philosophical investigation of freedom, responsibility, and the search for one's own identity.

The question of freedom acquires a fundamentally different meaning in the novel when Palahniuk shifts his focus from external forms of control to a person's internal readiness to relinquish responsibility for their own choice. In this respect, the philosophical problem space of "Survivor" proves to be significantly broader than a critique of religious fanaticism or mass culture. The central situation becomes one where the subject, having formally obtained freedom, continues to seek an external force capable of making decisions on their behalf.

Meanwhile, Nietzsche, who "had suffer our present ills more than generation in advance"⁵, captures not the disappearance of the transcendent as such, but rather a crisis of responsibility and meaning in a world where compassion and morality substitute for the necessity of personal choice. In this regard, the philosopher does not destroy faith, but diagnoses the spiritual state of culture, anticipating the crisis of faith of the 20th and 21st centuries.

If we recall Dostoevsky's famous formula, "if God does not exist, everything is permitted", it becomes evident that it is not only the place of God that becomes vacant, but also the place of the one who makes decisions and bears responsibility for human destiny⁶. The vacated space is inevitably filled by new authorities, and it is precisely this process, rather than the "death of God" itself, that occupies the center of Palahniuk's artistic attention. In the world of "Survivor", freedom paradoxically turns into a refusal of responsibility, and the possibility of choice becomes a desire to shift the consequences of one's own decision onto another.

For this reason, it is that Tender Branson's admission becomes so telling: "I can't even say doing crisis intervention was my own idea"⁷. Already in this phrase, the protagonist absolves himself of any involvement in his own actions. His participation in the destinies of other people is presented as the fulfillment of an imposed role rather than the result of a free choice. Characteristically, responsibility for the consequences of the spoken words also turns out to be projected outside the subject himself.

This logic reaches its peak concentration in the protagonist's self-definition: "My job is most of the time I work for a housecleaning service. Full-time drudge. Part-time god"⁸. The paradox of this formula lies in the fact that Tender calls himself a God not in an ontological or religious sense, but exclusively as the bearer of a function. He gains the ability

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hesse H. (1969). *Steppenwolf* / Translated by Basil Creighton; with suggestions by Hellmut Frenz. – New York: Bantam Books, p. 25. – 248 p.

⁶ For more detail, see: Гончар-Ханджян Наталия, Товмасын Катя. (2020). Проблематика романа Палаханика «Уцелевший» в соотношении с философской концепцией Ницше. *Foreign Languages in Higher Education*. Vol. 24, No. 2 (29). – P. 121–131. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://surl.li/crf-poh> (Accessed: 04.07.2026).

⁷ Palahniuk Chuck. (2003). *Survivor*. London: Vintage Books, p. 280. – 294 p

⁸ Ibid., p. 281.

to influence human lives not due to moral authority, personal charisma, or spiritual experience, but as a consequence of a random coincidence, when people in a state of extreme psychological crisis begin to perceive his word as the ultimate truth.

Importantly, such power is almost completely devoid of personal content. Tender does not act – he speaks. However, it is the word that acquires a decisive force, as it is spoken by a figure to whom society has already attributed the right to define the meaning of what is happening. In this respect, the novel resonates with the concept of Michel Foucault, who viewed power not exclusively as coercion, but as a system of discursive relations in which the status of the speaker determines the force of the utterance⁹. Influence arises not as a result of the truthfulness of speech, but as a result of the recognition of the subject to whom this speech belongs. Therefore, responsibility in the novel does not disappear, but is constantly transferred from one bearer to another, creating the illusion of its absence.

This mechanism manifests itself with particular clarity in the episode where a random mistake by the telephone company turns Tender's phone number into the number for a crisis hotline. People who find themselves in a state of utter despair turn to him not because they know him personally or trust his life experience, but because the situation itself endows him with the status of a person capable of providing the ultimate answer. Thus, Palahniuk shows how easily modern society constructs new forms of authority and how willingly a person voluntarily relinquishes the right of choice to an external authority.

However, the accidentally acquired power does not bring Tender a sense of inner freedom. On the contrary, as those around him increasingly perceive him as the bearer of truth, he becomes more clearly aware of the artificiality of his imposed role. Public success becomes a new form of dependency, in which the former subordination to the religious community is replaced by subordination to a media image. The liberation of the individual proves impossible as long as the right to define the meaning of one's own life remains with an external authority.

The climax of the protagonist's internal crisis comes with the words: "I can't bear the thought of being free"¹⁰. Freedom is experienced by Tender not as a long-awaited liberation, but as a state of ultimate uncertainty that demands independent decision-making. Somewhat later, this thought is further developed in the protagonist's admission: "There are better things than freedom. There are worse things than living a long bored life and then dying"¹¹. At first glance, this statement looks like a rejection of freedom, but in reality, it captures the crisis of the former understanding of freedom as a state that does not imply responsibility for one's own choice.

In this respect, the fictional logic of the novel resonates with Judith Butler's concept of the subject, according to which the subject does not precede the system of power relations but is formed within it, gaining the opportunity to rethink the mechanisms of their own subordination¹². Tender's liberation becomes possible not through stepping outside of

⁹ The novel proves to be consonant with Foucault's understanding of power as a productive force that shapes the subject through a network of social relations and discursive practices. See: **Foucault Michel**. (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* / Translated by Alan Sheridan. – New York: Vintage Books, p. 223 – 333 p. The disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate. **Foucault Michel**. (2021). *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 4: Confessions of the Flesh* / Translated by Robert Hurley; Ed. by Frédéric Gros. London: Penguin Books, p. 11. – 396 p.

¹⁰ **Palahniuk Chuck**. (2003). *Survivor*. – London: Vintage Books, p. 160. – 294 p.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹² **Butler J.** (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. – Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, pp. 37, 59. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://surl.li/hgjkmw> (Accessed: 04.07.2026).

power, but as a consequence of changing his own attitude toward it. The overcoming of dependency in the novel therefore does not imply a rejection of the social world, but rather a gradual acceptance of responsibility for one's own existence.

It is telling that the outcome of this process is not the protagonist's external success, but a change in the way he narrates his own life. While at the beginning of the novel Tender exists exclusively as a performer of imposed roles, in the finale he becomes the author of his own story for the first time. Such an understanding of personality formation correlates with Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity¹³, as well as with Jerome Bruner's observation that narrative constitutes one of the fundamental ways of organizing human experience. In turn, Judith Herman, in her analysis of traumatic experience, emphasizes that the sequential telling of one's own story is a necessary condition for the restoration of agency.

In this context, the final thought of the novel acquires special significance: "And after you can tell your life story and walk away from it"¹⁴. The narrative acquires not only a retrospective but also a constitutive function, allowing the subject to rethink their own experience and distance themselves from it. The opportunity to tell one's own story means the ability to no longer define oneself exclusively through past trauma, collective identity, or externally imposed roles. The novel "Survivor" reveals the process of the formation of a subject who arrives at freedom only when they accept responsibility for their own life. This conceptual field receives further development in the novel "Choke", where the search for agency is shifted into the space of corporeality, family memory, and traumatic experience.

In the case of "Choke", the research landscape proves to be different. The novel is already included in the body of work on corporeality, addiction, simulation, transgression, and the crisis of the subject; these aspects are examined in the edited collections "Reading Chuck Palahniuk: American Monsters and Literary Mayhem" and "Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk", as well as in doctoral dissertations dedicated to the simulative nature of Palahniuk's writing. However, what is of fundamental importance for the present article is not the provocative surface of the novel, but the narrative thread that connects "Choke" with "Survivor": the transformation of the messianic motif. In this novel, the sacred does not disappear, but shifts its form of existence, moving from the sphere of public recognition into the space of family memory, maternal projection, and psychic symptom.

This transformation is directly linked to the central artistic device of the novel – the recurring act of choking. By staging his own helplessness, Victor Mancini reproduces time and again the exact same situation in which a random restaurant patron is forced to become his savior. Formally, such behavior is explained by financial gain; however, the internal logic of the novel is significantly more complex. Each act of choking represents an attempt to restore a lost connection with the Other, to receive confirmation of one's own existence through a repeated scenario of salvation. Therefore, choking ceases to be a mere everyday episode and turns into a stable model of the protagonist's relationship with the surrounding world.

Against this background, the psychoanalytic understanding of repetition acquires special significance. In the work "Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through", Sigmund Freud notes: "He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course, knowing that he is repeating it"¹⁵. This thought allows for a more precise definition

¹³ **Ricoeur Paul.** (1992). *Oneself as Another* / Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Electronic resource]. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/1767103/Oneself_as_another (Accessed: 04.07.2026)

¹⁴ **Palahniuk Chuck.** (2003). *Survivor*. – London: Vintage Books, p. 178. – 294 p.

¹⁵ **Freud Sigmund.** (1958). *Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II)* // *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*

of Victor's behavior. The protagonist does not return to the traumatic past by means of memory; on the contrary, he reproduces it time and again in the form of action. The staged choking becomes not a conscious strategy, but a symptomatic repetition of the very model of dependency that defined his relationship with his mother.

The repetition of this scenario acquires a broader philosophical meaning as well. Tellingly, the protagonist himself admits: "We don't live in the real world anymore... We live in a world of symbols"¹⁶. Reality in Palahniuk's fictional world proves to be mediated by a system of signs, social roles, and pre-established behavioral models. In this respect, the novel reveals an obvious proximity to Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum, which defined simulation as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality"¹⁷. The choking scene is reproduced not because a real danger arises, but because the procedure itself already guarantees the expected result. Salvation turns into a social ritual that exists independently of any genuine experience.

Such logic extends to the space of the novel as a whole. The 18th-century historical theme park where Victor works is not merely a theatrical set, but a model of artificially frozen time. The protagonist remarks: "We're all trapped. It's always 1734. All of us, we're stuck in the same time capsule..."¹⁸. The space of the St. Anthony's clinic is organized in a similar manner, where, in the protagonist's words, "...everybody at St. Anthony's is trapped in their past"¹⁹. The historical park fixes cultural memory, while the psychiatric clinic fixes traumatic memory; however, both institutions reproduce the exact same mechanism: the past ceases to be an object of reflection and turns into an endlessly repeated present. In this framework, choking emerges not as an accidental episode, but as a meaningful expression of a world in which the subject loses the ability to step outside a role once imposed upon them. The absence of the father figure in "Choke" represents not a biographical detail, but one of the most crucial conditions for the formation of the subject. Victor Mancini's origin remains undetermined, and his identity is constructed not through a recognized system of kinship, but by means of maternal writing, subsequently interpreted by Paige Marshall. Crucially, Paige herself occupies an equally unstable position: while claiming the role of a doctor, she simultaneously turns out to be a patient at the same clinic. As a result, the narrative consistently eliminates the possibility of an ultimate authoritative reading. The protagonist's origin exists not as an established fact, but as a chain of interpretations, each of which depends on another voice. "It is in the Name-of-the-Father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function..."²⁰. The paternal function introduces the subject into the space of law, separating them from the enclosed maternal field and securing their place in the symbolic order. In the fictional world of "Choke", this support is missing. Victor's origin receives no definitive confirmation; therefore, his presumed chosenness exists not as a recognized social role, but as a private family construction, preserved exclusively through maternal discourse.

of Sigmund Freud. Vol. 12. London: Hogarth Press, p. 150. – P. 145–156. [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://clck.ru/3T8LoG> (Accessed: 04.07.2026).

¹⁶ **Palahniuk Chuck.** (2002). *Choke*. – New York: Anchor Books, pp. 145, 158. – 272 p.

¹⁷ **Baudrillard Jean.** (1994). *Simulacra and Simulation* / Translated by S. F. Glaser. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, pp. 98–99. – 164 p.

¹⁸ **Palahniuk Chuck.** (2002). *Choke*. – New York: Anchor Books, p. 37. – 272 p.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁰ **Lacan Jacques.** (1966). *Écrits*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil. [Electronic resource]. Available at: https://mudrac.ffzg.hr/~bmikulic/Filoz-Psy2012/JL_0393329259.pdf (Accessed: 04.07.2026).

Another Lacanian formula is no less telling: “man's desire is the Other's desire”²¹. Victor's desire is never formed autonomously. It arises within someone else's expectation, someone else's interpretation, and someone else's faith. Therefore, the protagonist's messianic identity is not the result of his own choice. It is sustained first by his mother, then by Paige, gradually turning into yet another form of dependency. Even the desire to be a savior turns out to be conditioned not by inner freedom, but by the need to conform to an imposed image.

This explains the protagonist's internal contradiction. From early childhood, Victor simultaneously internalizes two mutually exclusive mindsets. On the one hand, he is convinced of his own worthlessness: “And sure as hell, this little brat deserved to get spanked. He deserved whatever he got”²²; later, this mindset finds its continuation in the readiness to admit: “I'll take everybody's load”²³. On the other hand, the exact same subject turns out to be the bearer of the idea of his own exceptionalism, as it is precisely to him that the messianic function is attributed. Humiliation and chosenness do not alternate with one another, but coexist simultaneously, forming a stable internal splitting of the personality. The logic of this split accounts for why Victor's need for recognition is invariably accompanied by a drive towards punishment, and why every attempt to gain independence returns him once again to dependency on someone else's gaze.

This model differs significantly from the one Palahniuk develops in “Fight Club”. There, the absence of the father is compensated for by the creation of a new authority figure that assumes the functions of law and discipline. In “Choke”, no such compensation occurs. Neither the maternal projection, nor the staged salvation, nor Paige's faith are capable of taking the place of the symbolic instance. As a result, the messianic motif is preserved, but it completely loses its institutional foundation, turning into a form of internal psychological compensation.

In this respect, “Choke” logically continues the thematic field of “Survivor”. Tender Branson is also formed within a system that deprives the subject of autonomy and substitutes a pre-prescribed role for personal choice. However, while in “Survivor” such a model is sustained by a religious institution and subsequently by the mass media, in “Choke” its source becomes the family history. The messianic function ceases to be an element of public discourse and is preserved only as part of a personal myth that explains the protagonist's origin while simultaneously holding him within the space of psychological dependency. The novel continues the narrative line that was traced out in “Survivor”. The shift from the institutional to the familial, from public recognition to internal projection, shows a consistent transformation of the sacred in Palahniuk's fictional world. Messianism is no longer linked to a religious community or social legitimation; it becomes a way of existence for a subject attempting to overcome internal splitting and achieve wholeness under conditions where stable symbolic supports have been lost.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that “Survivor” and “Choke” can be read as two interconnected stages in the development of one of the central concerns of Chuck Palahniuk's fiction: the formation of the self in a world where stable symbolic and transcendent foundations have lost their authority. In both novels, the messianic plot is deprived of any traditional religious closure. It does not affirm salvation in a directly sacred sense, but instead reveals the dramatic position of the individual who is compelled to occupy the place of an

²¹ Ibid.

²² Palahniuk Chuck. (2002). Choke. New York: Anchor Books, p. 13. – 272 p.

²³ Ibid., p. 73.

absent or inaccessible higher authority. The motif of the substitution of God thus emerges as a means of exploring identity formation under conditions in which transcendence has been destabilized.

In “Survivor”, this problem is articulated primarily through the public dimension of the messianic role. Tender Branson is shaped by a system that determines his place, conduct, and range of possible choices in advance. His departure from the religious community, however, does not lead to genuine liberation. Rather, one form of dependence is replaced by another: he becomes absorbed into a media apparatus that produces symbolic authority and turns his speech into a source of seemingly final meaning. The novel therefore shows that modern individuals may reject inherited forms of submission while still reproducing the need for an external instance capable of deciding on their behalf. Tender’s messianic position is profoundly paradoxical: he gains power over the lives of others, yet lacks the inner freedom required for responsible existence.

In “Choke”, the same issue is relocated to the sphere of family memory and psychological dependence. Victor Mancini does not become a public messiah in the way that media culture imposes such a role on Tender. His chosenness emerges instead as a private myth sustained by maternal discourse and later reinterpreted through the figure of Paige Marshall. The absence of a stable paternal function, the repeated choking scenario, an external locus of control expressed in the hero’s dependence on external validation, and the need to have his existence validated all form a structure in which messianism turns not into a mode of power, but into a form of psychological compensation. If in “Survivor” the hero is placed in the position of God by society, in “Choke” that position is produced within a traumatic family narrative and therefore never receives final legitimation.

The comparison of the two novels demonstrates that Palahniuk consistently shifts the messianic motif from the institutional and public sphere to the realm of inward, personal, and traumatic experience. This movement reveals a significant transformation of the sacred in his fiction. The sacred is no longer anchored in a stable religious system, yet it continues to exist as a desire for meaning, a need for recognition, and a striving for wholeness. Palahniuk’s protagonists do not attain messianic fullness; rather, they encounter the impossibility of occupying such a position without accepting responsibility for themselves and for others.

Thus, “Survivor” and “Choke” disclose two different but mutually illuminating forms of the crisis of subjectivity. The first novel shows how a person released from an earlier system of submission may become incorporated into a new order of symbolic power. The second demonstrates that even outside public mechanisms of control, the subject may remain bound to family myth, traumatic repetition, and external interpretation. In both cases, freedom is not given at the outset; it emerges only through a difficult inner movement from an imposed role towards the ability to recognize one’s own story, one’s own desire, and one’s own responsibility.

For this reason, the messianic model in Palahniuk’s novels cannot be reduced either to a play with religious imagery or to a postmodern rewriting of biblical narrative. It functions as a way of investigating how the modern subject is formed in a world where the former foundations of faith, authority, and identity have lost their self-evidence, while the need for them has not disappeared. Palahniuk shows that the place of God may be symbolically occupied by the individual, society, the media, family myth, or traumatic repetition. Yet none of these substitutions leads to liberation if the subject continues to evade responsibility for their own life.

This is the broader significance of “Survivor” and “Choke” for understanding Palahniuk’s fictional system. Both novels reveal that beneath the provocative surface of his prose

lies a sustained inquiry into the mechanisms of self-formation in late modern culture. The hero's messianic transformation is not a straightforward progression, but a dramatic process in which the individual passes through submission, dependence, false chosenness, and a crisis of self-definition in order to approach the possibility of speaking in their own name and assuming responsibility for their life.

The results of this study suggest that the model identified here should not be regarded as a feature of two isolated works, but as one of the recurring principles of Palahniuk's artistic thought. These conclusions are consistent with the findings of research on other works by the writer, particularly "Lullaby" and "The Adjustment Day", where messianic discourse assumes new narrative and philosophical forms. Considered together, these works suggest that messianic discourse constitutes a stable component of Palahniuk's philosophical and artistic conception rather than an isolated narrative strategy. Such an expanded perspective not only deepens our understanding of Palahniuk's authorial worldview, but also contributes to broader discussions of the transformation of the sacred and the reconfiguration of subjectivity in contemporary American literature.

ԿԱՏՅԱ ԹՈՎՄԱՍՅԱՆ – Սուբյեկտի ձևավորման մեսիական մոդելը Չակ Պալանիկի «Փրկվածը» և «Շնչահեղձություն» վեպերում. – Հոդվածում առաջարկվում է Չակ Պալանիկի գեղարվեստական փիլիսոփայության նորովի ընթերցում, որն իրականացվում է «Փրկվածը» և «Շնչահեղձություն» վեպերում մեսիական մոդելի վերլուծության միջոցով: Ուսումնասիրության առանցքում սուբյեկտի ձևավորման գործընթացն է ավանդական հեղինակության ճգնաժամի պայմաններում, երբ կրոնական, սոցիալական և ընտանեկան կառույցներն այլևս ունակ չեն ապահովելու անհատի կայուն ինքնությունը: Ցույց է տրվում, որ Պալանիկի ստեղծագործական աշխարհում մեսիական մոտիվը չի սահմանափակվում սոսկ կրոնական թեմատիկայով, այլ հանդես է գալիս որպես ազատության, պատասխանատվության և ինքնորոշման ընկալման համընդհանուր եղանակ: Երկու վեպերի համադրական քննությունը հնարավորություն է տալիս հետևելու սակրալի տեքստային մարմնավորման ձևերի փոխակերպմանը՝ հրապարակայնորեն կերտվող մարգարեի կերպարից դեպի ընտանեկան հիշողության, հոգեբանական կախվածության և տրավմատիկ փորձառության ներքին տիրույթ: Հիմնավորվում է, որ այս գործընթացն արտացոլում է սուբյեկտայնության մոդելի փոփոխությունը, որի շրջանակում ինքնավարության որոնումը կապված է ոչ թե բուն իշխանության հաղթահարման, այլ մարդկային «ես»-ը ձևավորող խորհրդանշական մեխանիզմների վերաիմաստավորման հետ: Ստացված արդյունքները թույլ են տալիս «Փրկվածը» և «Շնչահեղձություն» վեպերը դիտարկել որպես հեղինակային սուբյեկտայնության հայեցակարգի ձևավորման երկու հաջորդական փուլեր, որոնք բացահայտում են մեսիական մոդելի էվոլյուցիան հետմոդերնիստական մշակույթում:

Բանալի բառեր – Պալանիկ, մեսիական դիսկուրս, սուբյեկտի ձևավորում, հետմոդերնիզմ, ինքնություն

КАТЯ ТОВМАСЯН – Мессинская модель формирования субъекта в романах Чака Паланика «Уцелевший» и «Удушье». – В статье предлагается новое прочтение художественной философии Чака Паланика через анализ мессинской модели в романах «Уцелевший» и «Удушье». В центре внимания находится процесс формирования субъекта в условиях кризиса традиционных форм авторитета, когда религиозные, социальные и семейные структуры последовательно перестают обеспечивать устойчивую идентичность личности. Показано, что мессинский мотив в творчестве Паланика не ограничивается религиозной проблематикой, а

выступает универсальным способом осмысления свободы, ответственности и самоопределения. Сопоставление двух романов позволяет проследить трансформацию способов текстового воплощения сакрального: от публично конструируемой фигуры пророка к внутреннему пространству семейной памяти, психологической зависимости и травматическому опыту. Полученные результаты позволяют рассматривать романы «Уцелевший» и «Удушье» как два этапа развития авторской концепции субъектности, в рамках которой поиск автономии связан с переосмыслением символических механизмов, формирующих человеческое «я».

Ключевые слова: *Паланик, мессианский дискурс, формирование субъекта, постмодернизм, идентичность*

Ethics Statement

The author confirms that all ethical requirements regarding the research have been met.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author confirms that there is no conflict of interest.

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