

A Silent World: The Dystopic Vision in Chuck Palahniuk's Lullaby

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## Introduction

What does one do, when one realizes that he has the power to give anyone anywhere a cold, quick and clean death simply by singing to them? What does one do, when one realizes that this power can be found in the unlikeliest forms? Chuck Palahniuk explores this question and more in the novel Lullaby, which follows the story of Carl Streator – an unfortunate victim of a killing song’s curse – and the gallery of strange and broken people who join him in his quest to stop the song from spreading. In the process, he tackles the subjects of power in all its forms, and challenges our common notions of humanity, goodness and the traditional family. What this paper is most interested in, however, is the sort of world (and possibility *of* a world) that Palahniuk paints during the course of the novel. This scholar believes that the sort of vision Palahniuk paints is one of a dystopia – that is, a broken and totally imperfect world, the dark reflection of a utopia.

On the onset, it is difficult to classify what genre of speculative fiction Lullaby falls under. On one hand, it may count as fantastic fiction; on another hand, it may be viewed as some sort of form of magic realism<sup>1</sup>. What is certain is that Palahniuk’s work does not fall within the rubric of science fiction, which is loosely defined as any work of fiction that involves the use (and sometimes application) of scientific concepts in the course of its narrative. Part of the exploration done in works of science fiction is that of utopias and dystopias. Lullaby may *not* classify as science fiction in a satisfactory manner: about the only element that may be considered as science fiction in the story is how the novel fields the possibility that Sudden

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that this scholar uses the term ‘magic realism’ deliberately. While marvelous realism is the more widely accepted term for the genre, this scholar feels that it is better applied to works of the genre written by their ‘original forerunners’ – that is, Latin-American fictionists. In using magic realism, then, she wishes to distinguish Palahniuk’s work (and, in effect, the works of writers outside of Latin America) from the works of the marvelous realists.

Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is caused by unnatural means, and even this is questionable, as it is implied that those means are magical in nature.

In spite of the fact that Lullaby may *not* classify as science fiction in a satisfactory fashion, this scholar will use the concept of utopias and dystopias to frame the discussion of the novel, as she views it appropriate to do so given the plot of the book and the ideas explored throughout the course of the story. This scholar will apply a textual analysis of the novel, and attempt to identify the sort of dystopic vision that Lullaby presents its readers with. The analysis will also, of course, cover other ideas related to the dystopic vision in the story, and, as an aside, explore literary techniques and other speculative elements that supplement the ideas at hand.

### **Summary of the Source Text**

Lullaby revolves around the character of Carl Streator, a middle-aged journalist looking into the possible causes of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), or crib death. Near the beginning of the novel, however, readers discover that his reasons for looking into the story are personal: he found his wife and child dead twenty years ago, and he is now looking for the possible reasons why they died. He suspects that it is due to the fact that he read a particular lullaby to them out loud prior to the night of their deaths, one he picked out from a book of rhymes and poems for children. This fear is later confirmed after he discovers the same book in the possession of parents who had lost their children to SIDS, and after he tests the lullaby – later identified as an African culling song, designed to kill the listener instantaneously – on his editor and realizing that it works on whoever happens to be listening to it.

It should be noted at this point that Streator's investigation led him to a woman named Helen Hoover Boyle, a real estate agent that made a living cheating people out of their money by

selling them haunted houses – her son had apparently died because of the curse, just like his wife and daughter. It is to Helen that Streator runs to for assistance when the song gets out of hand (he begins to kill whoever happens to irritate him almost instinctually), and – together with Mona, Helen’s secretary, and Oyster, Mona’s boyfriend – the four of them proceed to take a road trip across America in an attempt to destroy all remaining copies of the book and to find the grimoire that the culling song was originally recorded in. Suffice to say, all four of them have different reasons for wanting the grimoire: Helen wishes to keep it to further her own interests, Streator wishes to destroy it in order to protect the world, and Mona and Oyster want to use the grimoire wipe out humanity and “reset” Earth with a clean slate and absolutely no human beings.

The story of Lullaby ends with Oyster and Mona tricking both Streator and Helen by seizing control of the grimoire, but not before Helen manages to take some of the spells in the grimoire for herself. Helen, as a result, is stuck possessing the body of an old police officer, and the book implies that he/she and Streator are stuck chasing Oyster and Mona all across the American continent as they unleash spells upon the populace. It is also implied that they are in a gay relationship, as they had fallen in love prior to the climax of the book and since Helen is in the body of the man, there is no other way to consummate it.

### **Perceptions of Objective Truth & the Dialectic of Power and Control in Lullaby**

Initially, a reader of the novel will notice how Palahniuk examines the idea of truth, fiction and reality, and how there always appears to be two or more sides to everything. What knowledge one has about a subject or a person, Palahniuk seems to say, is never the complete picture. Furthermore, one’s knowledge of something can be almost entirely fabricated by external forces, namely mass media and the relativity of opinions taken from a whole crowd of

other people. This theme is further emphasized by one of the central ironies of the story – that Streater is a journalist by profession, and journalists, as he puts it, are supposed to be cameras: “trained, objective, detached” (Palaniuk 25). The “objective truth”, however, about anything presented in the course of the novel is always questionable, especially since Streater, in spite of the fact that he is amazingly good at detailing everything about his surroundings, is the narrator of the story, and may be further classified as an unreliable narrator due to the emotional state of his character during the book. Readers are forced to view the world through his eyes, and, as the story reveals, his world view is colored by all of the loss and helplessness that he has experienced. One of the biggest ways that this plays out in the story is his perception of people and society, which is explored at great length in Chapter 3.

People who would never throw litter from their car will drive past you with their radio blaring. People who'd never blow cigar smoke at you in a crowded restaurant will bellow into their cell phone. They'll shout at each other across the space of a dinner plate.

These people who would never spray herbicides or insecticides will fog the neighborhood with their stereo playing Scottish bagpipe music. Chinese opera. Country and western.

Outdoors, a bird singing is fine. Patsy Cline is not.

Outdoors, the din of traffic is bad enough. Adding Chopin's Piano Concerto in E Minor is not making the situation any better.

You turn up your music to hide the noise. Other people turn up their music to hide yours. You turn up yours again. Everyone buys a bigger stereo system. This is the arms race of sound. You don't win with a lot of treble.

This isn't about quality. It's about volume.

This isn't about music. This is about winning.

You stomp the competition with the bass line. You rattle windows. You drop the melody line and shout the lyrics. You put in foul language and come down hard on each cussword.

You dominate. This is really about power. (16-17)

The extensive selection prior to this paragraph best captures the message of the Chapter, and the theme we mentioned above – that things of our human are never what they seem, and that there are always two sides to the human condition, to human identity. This idea can also be found in smaller sections of the later parts of the book, particularly in sections where Streator describes how news reports described the people he had killed using the culling song; these reports, often positive and portraying the people as model citizens, are always underscored by his thoughts on the matter, and how they had been “deserving”, in a way, of their deaths because they had upset or angered him. It is also our first entrance into the motif of noise, which is reiterated throughout the rest of the book through Streator’s perspective: he often describes people, be it the human race in general or any one of the other characters (Oyster, more often than not) as “quietophobics”, “talkaholics” and other similar derivatives related to the idea that human beings cannot live without noise. Palahniuk, through Streator’s voice, even states how George Orwell, writer of the dystopic science fiction work 1984, “got it backward”, and that Big Brother *isn't watching*. He is

...singing and dancing. He's pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brother's buisy holding your attention every moment you're awake. He's making sure you're always distracted. He's making sure you're fully absorbed.

He's making sure your imagination withers. Until it's as useful as your appendix.

He's making sure your attention is always filled.

And this being fed, it's worse than being watched. With the world always filling you, no one has to worry about what's in your mind. With everyone's imagination atrophied, no one will ever be a threat to the world. (18-19)

The constant bombardment that people suffer (and bring upon themselves) through the media, Streater seems to say, is not anything particularly new – what makes it dangerous, however, is that people believe that they do not actually need all of the noise that they produce, and are acting of their own volition, uninfluenced by the information that they are fed. “Now people hear a commercial for sour cream potato chips,” Streater says, “and rush out to buy, but now they call it free will” (Palahniuk 20). This very curious reversal, in the opinion of this scholar, is a very apt description of what appears to be happening at present times. The other implications of this idea and its relation to this paper's position on the dystopic vision of the novel, however, will be returned to in later sections of the paper. A final point depicted by the sections above also goes into the idea of power and control, which appears to be a primary concern of the narrative in question.

The dialectic of power and control is one that perhaps all of us are familiar with: one has individuals controlling other individuals on the smallest scale, societies controlling whole bodies of individuals on a larger scale, and humankind in general attempting to control the rest of the world, most especially the environment, on the largest scale. In order to stay in control, however, one must have the power to do so. According to the novel, the ultimate power appears to be that of having the ability to determine whether one lives or dies. The lullaby that Streater and the other characters spend most of the book looking to stop is a reflection of this – it can, as stated in

the introduction of this paper, kill whoever hears the song. The song, however, is defined as a magical spell in the story, and to quote the character of Mona: “All a spell does is focus an intention. . . .If the practitioner’s intention is strong enough, the object of the spell will fall asleep, no matter where” (Palahniuk 79). It is further elaborated upon by explaining how spells are fueled by bottled up emotions. All of the rage, sorrow and helplessness that Streater feels over his situation are thus the reason why he eventually reaches a point in the story where he can almost instinctually kill whoever irritates or threatens him in any fashion. Helen also knows the culling song, but she manages to control herself by moonlighting as an international assassin who accepts payments in jewels – what the novel calls “constructive destruction” on several occasions (Palahniuk 148). She also claims that by directing her power against other people and only doing it for pay, she won’t end up killing the ones that she loves. Ironically, this serves to be her downfall later, as her sentiments for Mona and Oyster prevent her from stopping the pair before they caused any real damage in the story.

For our second point and as a sort of segue into the idea of power as control, let us look to the idea of intention in relation to the concept of the culling song. In Chapter 5 of the book, Streater describes the culling song for what it literally is:

In some ancient cultures, they sang it to children during famines or droughts, anytime the tribe has outgrown its land. You sing it to warriors crippled in battle and people stricken with disease, anyone you hope will die soon. To end their pain. It’s a lullaby. (36)

We can see two levels at work in that statement. On one level, we have the idea of a subject in pain, and, therefore, in need of some form of release. On the next level, we have the singer of the lullaby, who, with the culling song, can provide the sort of release that the subject

in pain is in need of. In essence, one can see some sort of mutual exchange of benefits for both parties – in fact, it is entirely possible that in some cases, the benefits experienced by the singer outweigh the benefits experienced by the subject, as one must note the use of the words “anyone you hope will die soon” in the passage above, and the function of the culling song is to kill the listener.

Let us examine the last sentence. The culling song is described to be a lullaby, and the formal definition of a lullaby (also called cradlesong and berceuse) is “a quiet song intended to lull a child to sleep”. It can be inferred, then, that the primary function of this exercise is to soothe the listener (usually a young child) and keep him or her entertained, quiet, and easier to manage. Helen paints this in a very different light by claiming that the singing of a lullaby is an exercise of control:

This isn't about love or hate... People don't sit down and read a poem to kill their child. They just want the child to sleep. They just want to dominate. No matter how much you love someone, you still want to have your own way. (148)

The singing of a lullaby to a child, then, appears to be synonymous to the assertion of one's authority upon another individual. The deadliness of the culling song lies, then, not in the fact that it is fatal to the listener, for if there were no listeners and no knowledge of the song, then it would not be able to cause any harm. The deadliness lies in the fact that if the intention to control is there, then the power *will* be used against other people, to benefit the singer, and as people are unaware of the fact that the song kills, the problem continues to escalate in the story with the spike in crib deaths across the country.

We can see the idea of control expanded beyond the actual case of the culling song in question – Palahniuk plays with the idea on several fronts, with the most significant ones being

that of the traditional nuclear family and their relationships with one another, and that of what appears to be something that, for Palahniuk, defines the human condition: the desire to “play God”, to have some sort of control over one’s surroundings.

### **Lullaby and a Critique of the Nuclear Family**

It is already clear from the prologue of the book that the Carl Streater, Helen Hoover Boyle, Mona and Oyster are *not* the usual protagonists that one is used to, most especially if one is accustomed to reading speculative fiction of any kind – they are closer to the antiheroes of the cyberpunk and steampunk genres, with questionable moral character and painfully apparent weaknesses in their personalities. Strangely, however, Palahniuk seems to imply that we must view them as a family. This is most evident in two ways: Streater’s own view of the group as something like the family he may have had twenty years down the line, and the way that the four characters interact during their journey to disarm all remaining copies of *Poems and Rhymes from Around the World*.

And across the room is Mona. ...She’s the age my daughter would be, if I still had a daughter. Helen stumbles back into the room. ...She watches Oyster circling me. He’s the age her son, Patrick, would be. Helen’s the age my wife would be, if I had a wife. Hypothetically speaking, of course. This might be the life I had, if I had a life. My wife distant and drunk. My daughter exploring some crackpot cult. Embarrassed by us, her parents. Her boyfriend would be this hippie asshole [Oyster], trying to pick a fight with me, her dad. And maybe you can go back in time. ...Maybe this is my second chance. This is exactly the way my life might have turned out. (Palahniuk 101-102)

This excerpt is positioned curiously in the last segment of Chapter 17, two chapters away from the start of the strange road trip that Streator takes with Helen, Oyster and Mona – it seems to imply that it was this scenario that solidified Streator’s belief that he must take the other three with him, and live out the “hypothetical” family life that he may have had had he not killed his real wife and child with the culling song twenty years ago. There is nothing wholesome, however, about his relationship with his new family: the characters are, in fact, are constantly on guard around each other, and there is a remarkable level of distrust between the characters that is not dissipated until the very last chapters of Lullaby in spite of the fact that they end up working together to destroy the remaining copies of the book. This is best illustrated in Chapter 25, where Mona works to remove the pieces of broken model houses from Streator’s foot – it is revealed, in this chapter, how Streator and Helen, at different times, told Mona that they needed to the other was not to be trusted. Oyster gives a rather fitting description of this sort of relationship in the last half of Chapter 23:

...the “dads” have all the power so they don’t want anything to change. He means me [Streator]. ...all the “moms” have a little power, but they’re hungry for more. He means Helen. And young people... have little or no power so they’re desperate for any. Oyster and Mona. (142-143)

Yet another interesting dysfunction that is played upon throughout the novel is the fact that Streator feels sexually attracted to Mona (evidenced in how large chunks of narrative are focused upon describing her physical features, most especially parts that most readers will view as erotic or obscene; an interesting contrast to how he describes Helen, which is hardly ever erotic in fashion), and how it seems to hint at the fact that Helen finds Oyster sexually attractive herself (evidence of this can most likely be found in Chapter 17, and is perhaps one of the

reasons why Helen fails to kill Oyster in spite of his betrayal in Chapter 30). Streator later claims, in fact, that when he sleeps with Helen (who, due to the events in the novel, is possessing the body of a grizzled police officer), he imagines that he is sleeping either with his deceased wife Gina, or with Mona (Palahniuk 258). In lieu of viewing the four characters as a satire of the traditional nuclear family, one can view the attraction that Streator and Helen feel for their younger companions as incestuous, and an interesting reversal of the traditional Oedipal and Electra complexes posited in Freudian psychology<sup>2</sup>.

Beyond the two samples cited above, this reading of the four characters as a dysfunctional counterpart to the traditional American family manifests in smaller ways, with Oyster's deliberate habit of calling Streator 'Dad' and Helen 'Mom' throughout the novel – he never once calls them by their first names. We also note that Streator himself refers to Helen and Mona as his wife “in this creepy new way” and the daughter he might have had throughout the novel, respectively. Oyster, on the other hand, seems to retain his position as “the boyfriend” all the way until the end of the novel. Furthermore, the way that the four characters interact with each other throughout the novel reads remarkably like the bickering of a more traditional family system, albeit with a more overt and clearly malicious undertone to it.

### **Lullaby and “The Virus of Information”**

In his first appearance in Chapter 17, Oyster seems to make an extra effort to insult Streator, going out of his way to accuse Streator of being evil simply because he “hurts Nature” by eating meat and therefore perpetuating the cruelty and injustice towards animals – this is triggered by the fact that Streator shows up to the witch's gathering in the chapter with a bean

<sup>2</sup> The Oedipus Complex, according to Sigmund Freud, is the innate sexual attraction that all boys reportedly have for their mothers – they wish to sleep with their mothers, but their fear of the father figure in the family keeps them from acting on it. The Electra Complex, on the other hand, is the innate sexual attraction that all girls reportedly have for their fathers, and they thus view the mother figure of the family as competition.

salad that uses animal bi-products in its sauce. In the succeeding parts of the Lullaby, this habit is underscored by Oyster constantly talking during the road trip that the four characters take together, in which he highlights different instances of manmade cruelty towards the environment. He also throws in examples of how human intervention drastically altered the flora and fauna of the world, with the country of America being a prime example of “the biological pandemic” spread either deliberately or accidentally by human beings (Palahniuk 110). One of the longest and most extensive descriptions of this can be found in Chapter 19, the first chapter tracking the road trip of the four characters – it is an extensive treatise on plants that were traditionally believed to be native to American soil and how they were, in fact, harmful imports from the Age of Exploration that are systematically destroying the ecosystem in the country. Another extensive treatise on this topic can be found in Chapter 23, although Oyster’s examples in this chapter are of how different people throughout human history wiped out the populations of different native fauna by introducing a species not native to the ecosystem, and he draws comparisons from these species to human kind, although he never directly states it. “Either a species learns to control its own population,” Oyster says, “or something like disease, famine, war, will take care of the issue” (Palahniuk 142).

Oyster is also engaged in a practice that he reportedly calls “anti-advertising”, according to Mona in Chapter 25. Throughout the novel, we are assaulted by the ads that he puts in the paper, insinuating that the subject of the ad of the moment is somehow responsible for spreading life-threatening diseases or incredibly debilitating physical conditions – they also rally people together, attempting to get them to participate “in a class-action lawsuit” that doesn’t actually exist. The companies or parties in question then pay Oyster in order to get him to cancel the ad, and “how much they pay... reflects how true the ads actually are” (Palahniuk 152). Mona’s

explanation posits how Oyster is not doing any actual harm, but is simply letting people think what they will the moment they see the ad – “Other people fill in the blanks”.

If Oyster’s exercise with ‘anti-advertising’ wasn’t enough, there is the fact that his constant tirades have a very adverse affect on the other characters, most notably Streator.

“Imagine a plague you catch through your ears.

Oyster and his tree-hugging, eco-bullshit, his bio-invasive, apocryphal bullshit.

The virus of his information. What used to be a beautiful deep green jungle to me, it’s now a tragedy of English ivy choking everything else to death. The lovely shining black flocks of starlings, with their creepy whistling songs, they rob the nests of a hundred different native birds. Imagine an idea that occupies your mind the way an army occupies a city. (Palahniuk 157)

Through the narrative of the chapter, it becomes obvious to the reader that Streator can no longer view anything normally, as Oyster’s information, regardless of whether it is completely true or not, has permanently colored his perception of the world. “After listening to Oyster”, nothing that Streator eats is healthy, nice or harmless – it is “cows forced to stay pregnant and pumped with hormones” (milk) or “a pig, stabbed and bleeding, with a snare around one foot, being hung up to die screaming as it’s sectioned into chops and roasts and lard”, and others (Palahniuk 158).

If Oyster’s constant barrage of (mis)information was not enough, there is also the fact that dialogue appears to be the main cause of tension between the characters in Lullaby.

Dialogue takes on a special role in the novel, functioning not just as a vehicle of action or a characterization technique, but also as the main instigator of conflict, most especially since the majority of the novel appears to be dedicated to depicting conversations between the four main

characters in the story. Each of the characters speak to each other *about* each other just as much as they talk *to* each other, and what they say does not always match up to the way that they interact during the road trip. The best evidence one has of this sort of dynamic is Chapter 25, which was already mentioned in the previous sections of this paper.

Underscoring the dialogue and the action is Streater's narrative – it may be said that he is simply speaking to the audience, which may also be viewed as a sort of dialogue in itself given the fact that he is the one narrating the events in Lullaby. As to whether we can consider him a reliable narrator or not is another question; his designation as a journalist, a profession that emphasizes objectivity (or so Streater says on several instances in the novel), is but a small reassurance.

We have, in this section and in the ones before it, discussed some of the more prevalent themes and ideas that can be found in Lullaby – it was important to go into these ideas because all of them contribute to the dystopic vision that Palahniuk brings to our attention through the narrative of this story.

### **Dystopia: Definition by Difference**

Prior to fully understanding what a dystopia is and what it implies, one must be familiar with the concept of a utopia. The term comes from a novel by Thomas More, which occupies itself with describing “a fictive ideal society based around the notions of equality, social harmony, economic prosperity and political stability”. It is, in essence, a ‘perfect world’, one completely balanced within and beyond itself. If we are to base our definition of dystopia on this, then, it is safe to assume that a dystopia is an incredibly *imperfect* society, which “lacks the harmonious and egalitarian qualities of life depicted in utopias” (Hoffpauir).

At this point, one may assume that dystopias and utopias are opposites of each other – this is not entirely true. In fact, in dystopic science fiction, it is evident that the dystopia in question sometimes contains many of the same elements as utopias. The most repetitious common factor that can be found between dystopias and utopias is their remarkable level of social control; the difference lies in the magnitude and application. Where a utopia uses social control in order to assure perfect equality across all members of its society, a dystopia takes social control to “horrific extremes”, completely destroying not only the individuals trapped within its social system, but the environment of the world in question in itself.

There have been a number of examples of dystopic science fiction, with works like Huxley’s A Brave New World, Gibson’s Neuromancer and the movie Blade Runner to name some of the more famous ones, but perhaps one of the most famous and “classic” works of dystopic science fiction would be George Orwell’s 1984, which is, quite aptly, an interesting launching point with which to discuss the dystopic vision in Lullaby.

In a previous section of the paper, it is mentioned how Palahniuk reverses the traditional idea of Big Brother as a figure that watches and polices everyone through the power of fear – the concept is, itself, derivative of French philosopher Michel Foucault’s idea of the Panopticon, the prison tower that assures maximum obedience among the inmates by its mere presence. In Lullaby, Palahniuk implies that instead of a silent watcher, one has a noisy and entertaining overlord that tirelessly works day in and day out to completely occupy the minds of its citizens. The “Big Brother” in Lullaby is the embodiment of the virus of information tackled in the section prior to this one, a plague of ideas that influence every living being’s actions. Free will, according to Palahniuk is an illusion of modern society – all of our thoughts have never been our own since the beginning of time, in as much as we would like to believe that they are.

The assault of information is just one of the many dystopic characteristics to consider: one must also look at how this plague, according to Palahniuk, destroys the traditional nuclear family. Since we thrive in a world where power and “volume” are everything, Palahniuk seems to say, the power struggle trickles down into the most intimate of relationships. Regardless of how one may try to isolate one’s family from the bombardment, one will inevitably lose their loved ones to the world (Palahniuk 101-102, 205). With that being the case, the whole narrative of the novel seems to imply that the only “ideal” family left is one structured much like the dysfunctional team that Streator, Helen, Oyster and Mona comprise – a group based on watching each other, talking about each other, pitting one against the other, and cooperating insofar as studying each other’s movements in order to counteract them when the time comes.

The control, of course, extends beyond the nuclear family. Using the character of Oyster, Palahniuk exposes what human beings, either working as individuals or as a collective society, have altered and destroyed the environment – it does not matter whether some of the accounts are false or if certain parts are grossly exaggerated. That humans exercise an amazing amount of influence upon Mother Nature is more than enough to imagine what could happen should things go out of hand. This sort of environment combined with the idea that free will is illusory is, in itself, an already frightening image of the world as we know it at present.

With that said, we turn towards the culling song and its function in the novel. In Chapter 7 of the novel, Streator engages in a lengthy description of what the world may be like should the culling song – something he describes as “a plague unique to the Information Age” – be made known to the public and used as a weapon, a world of “white noise”:

Imagine a world of silence where any sound loud enough or long enough to harbor a deadly poem would be banned. No more motorcycles, lawn mowers, jet

planes, electric blenders, hair dryers. A world where people are afraid to listen, afraid they'll hear something behind the din of traffic. Some toxic words buried in the loud music playing next door. Imagine a higher and higher resistance to language. No one talks because no one dares to listen. (Palahniuk 43)

Later, in Chapter 11, Palahniuk (through the voice of Streator) implies that maybe a world afraid of the culling song will be a world where peoples' thoughts can finally be theirs, "dangerous" and "frightened" as it may be. Without Big Brother filling human beings, our "minds would become our own" (Palahniuk 60). Given Streator's very obvious bias against the noise of humanity and the kind of society that the Information Age has, it may be possible to say that the possibility of a silent world cannot be any better than the noise that human beings are currently familiar with, but it is a very, very tempting thought.

Is the dystopia in the silent world that Streator speculates on, or is it in the current world that the characters of Lullaby live in? The world of the reversed Big Brother exhibits total control of its subjects through the constant onslaught of information and the illusion of free will; a silent world created to combat the power of the culling song exhibits total control by censoring or outright destroying sources of information and suppressing all noise. Is the culling song, then, the catalyst that heralds the coming of a new and better status quo, or is it something that must be eliminated at all costs? The novel never answers the question, and in Streator's own words, he is not sure whether they are trying to prevent a world that lives in fear of the culling song and information in general or if they are trying to create it (Palahniuk 160).

## **Conclusion**

Everywhere, words are mixing. Words and lyrics and dialogue are mixing in a soup that could trigger a chain reaction. Maybe acts of God are just the right combination of media junk thrown out into the air. The wrong words collide and call up an earthquake. The way rain dances called storms, the right combination of words might call down tornadoes. Too many advertising jingles commingling could be behind global warming. Too many television reruns bouncing around might cause hurricanes. Cancer. AIDS. (Palahniuk 245)

It is important to note that works of dystopic science fiction have the tendency to reflect the fears and anxieties of the cultural context that they emerge from (Hoffpauir). They describe “Doomsday scenarios”, exploring what would happen should a society perpetuate its mistakes along a natural progression until the society in question collapses upon itself. Given the fact that we, as human beings, are immersed in the Age of Information, it is a very real fear to our thinkers that certain individuals, if not entire nations of people, will use technology in order to commit crimes or in order to control others through the manipulation of data or through the abuse of personal information.

The most compelling vision that Chuck Palahniuk’s Lullaby leaves its readers with is that of two worlds: a world where information is currency but noise dominates everything, and a world where people come to reject all manners of information and live inside their own minds in silence. It explores the possibility of a culling song come true, “the power of life and a cold clean bloodless easy death”, and how perhaps it is not just the culling song that can ruin things but words in themselves, in the right sequence, at the right moment.

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