

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLOMOUCI

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**'I AM JACK'S BROKEN HEART'- TRANSGRESSIVE SEX
AS A REFLECTION OF CHARACTERS' PERSONALITY IN
CHUCK PALAHNIUK'S *SURVIVOR, LULLABY, CHOKE*
AND *FIGHT CLUB***

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma: 'I am Jack's broken heart' - Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of Characters' Personality in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*, *Lullaby*, *Choke* and *Fight Club* vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucí práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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“Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everybody I’ve ever known.”

- **Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters***

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INTRODUCTION

There are not many things that could be said about transgressive fiction and which would be shared by the majority of academics interested in the genre. There are discussions about the time it originated and about the intention and the demanded effect of the novels within the genre. But what can be said for sure is that Chuck Palahniuk is an author of transgressive fiction.

This thesis is an attempt to address the issue of Palahniuk's writing in the context of transgressive fiction. The main theoretical premise is that sex plays a major role in his writing and it will be demonstrated on the analyses of the selected novels. But sex is not the most important aspect in his novels, not even in *Choke* (2001), where the protagonist Victor Mancini is a sexual addict, who frequently describes his sexual adventures, including an instructed rape attempt. What is vital is the nature of characters, their emotional state of mind, their dysfunctional lives that are full of transgression - the dysfunction includes their upbringing, their families and their love lives. The hypothesis is that sex is only the tip of the iceberg, mirror that reflects who they really are and what they have come through. Also, a part of the hypothesis is that Palahniuk created a character type, which will be specified in the last chapter, and such character type expresses his frustrations via his sexual relationships.

In the first chapter, there will be an overview of transgressive fiction, an explanation of the genre and its connection to transgressive sex. The focus will be given on the problematic aspects and simplifications and it should eventually provide the following analyses with a proper theoretical background and explanations needed. It is followed by information about Chuck Palahniuk, about his life, work and his willingly accepted label of the author of transgressive fiction. There are not many authors whose life story would be so remarkably important for understanding his writing, but also, whose life would be sometimes forcibly implemented in his novels by a large number of critics.

Furthermore, in the analyses provided, there will always be an overview of a particular novel and its analysis, with the focus on characters' sex life in context of their personality, upbringing and other factors, which caused them to end up as dysfunctional individuals, whose sex life is dysfunctional as well. All

these analyses will be supported by corresponding quotes from books, which should end up supporting the premises. Consequently, in the last chapter there will be a comparison of the characters and their transgression in the novels in the way which should explain and reveal their mutual similarities and support the premise that Chuck Palahniuk created a character type.

TRANSGRESSIVE FICTION: HISTORY, TERMINONOLOGY AND PROBLEMS

The aim of the first chapter of the thesis is to outline the history of transgressive fiction, to define it as a literary term and to discuss the potential problems. Since transgressive sex plays an important role in the selected works of Chuck Palahniuk, it is paramount to define not only the concept of transgressive fiction as such, but also transgressive sex.

1.1 What is Transgressive Fiction: Terminology and History

“Subversive, avant-garde, bleak, pornographic - and these are compliments.”¹ This is how Rene Chun introduced transgressive fiction in his article, published in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1995. In this particular article, Chun came up with a brief history of the genre, which has been defined and examined before by Michael Silverblatt. During the radio broadcast on National Public Radio, it was revealed that the concept itself has been existing for centuries. Silverblatt also wrote an article published in *Los Angeles Times* in 1993 “Shock Appeal: Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us? The New Fiction of Transgression,” where he presents the core idea of the genre. Although it was called “The New Fiction” and the concept was taken into consideration mostly after the Silverblatt’s article, it cannot be called new. Silverblatt points out that the main goal of this type of fiction is to violate – norms, humanity and body.² “Silverblatt characterized transgressive novelists as those who deliberately include unpleasant content.”³ Admittedly the article focuses mostly

¹ John Young, “Transgressive Tickets,” *New York Times*, April 23, 1995, accessed January 27, 2017, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/202/300/nwhq/NWHQ-1/WIRE/April/0078.html>.

² See Michael Silverblatt, “Shock Appeal: Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us? The New Fiction of Transgression,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 01, 1993, accessed January 27, 2017, http://articles.latimes.com/1993-08-01/books/bk-21466_1_young-writers.

³ Robin Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

on one of the most prominent figure of the genre - Marquis de Sade - and his impact on the future generations of writers (such as William Burroughs or Kathy Acker)⁴, the existence of the article was provoked by the publication and the best seller status of *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis in 1991. It was mostly the popularity of this particular novel, which was the impulse for taking the existence and impact of transgressive fiction seriously. The article has become widely cited for over a decade, together with the highly influential essay “Preface to Transgression”, written by Michel Foucault in 1963.

With the idea of violation of norms and body, plus de Sade being one of the most prominent figures of the genre, it is no surprise that the most crucial books within the genre were facing various problems, from censorship to trials of obscenity. One of the most well-known cases is the trial concerning Allen Ginsberg’s *Howl and Other Poems* published in 1957 by Ferlinghetti’s publishing house City Lights Press. The court was concerned with Ginsberg’s use of explicit language and how he explicitly discussed sexual practices, addictions and criticism of contemporary American values. City Lights Press went on trial for selling obscene material; nevertheless, it was supported not only by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the popularity of the trial, which caused the incredible growth in sales and Ferlinghetti winning the case later.⁵ Despite the fact *Howl* as a poem does not belong to the category of transgressive fiction, it was only the beginning of the latter coming obscenity trials of, for example, William Burroughs (for *Naked Lunch* (1959 in France)) or Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* (1934 in France) ban in America lasting for almost 30 years.⁶ Moreover, according to many critics, it was the post-war authors, mostly the beat generation and new lost generation writers, who can claim the biggest credit as an influence on the contemporary transgressive fiction. Their influence, together with de Sade’s one, is more or less explicitly reflected in the works of the following generation, such as taboo sex with

⁴ See Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction*, 1.

⁵ See Lauren Nesworthy, “The Role of the Obscenity Trials of Grove Press and City Lights Press in Liberalising American Publishing,” accessed March 01, 2017, 2-5, <http://journalpublishingculture.weebly.com/uploads/1/6/8/4/16842954/nesworthy.pdf>

⁶ See Nesworthy, “Obscenity Trials,” 4-6.

violent practices in Anne Rice's books.⁷ The unifying pattern of the books considered transgressive can be problematic, but Robin Mookerjee proposes the solution. He suggests that transgressive novelists treat taboo subjects and transgressive behavior "without taking any kind of a moral stand and treat bizarre behavior as if it were absolutely normal."⁸

1.2 Transgressive Fiction as a Problematic Genre?

The shock appeal is possibly one of the reasons why transgressive fiction genre gained its popularity, nevertheless, it is only one aspect of the genre. Transgressive fiction does not necessarily have to be obscene, but it definitely should be appellative and many books within the genre use controversy or obscenity to achieve the demanded effect.

But the genre definitely is much more complex to be summed up simply as an effort to be controversial, although scholars often provide different proposals what transgressive in literature actually means. Foucault, inspired by Nietzsche's existentialism, says the God's death is the most core matter of fact. Not as a murder of the higher authority the author has committed, but as an inevitable act of freeing the individual, not from the authority itself but from the limitations brought by the idea of the authority.⁹ Usually, there are various concepts to be found transgressive in the novels – from sex to family and human values. Many authors of the genre rely on transgressing the religion. How deeply the Christian practices are settled in an individual is being put on trial in some works, such as *Choke* (2001), where the sexual addict Victor Mancini declares himself as a true son of Jesus Christ. M. Keith Booker, in the book *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnavalesque* (1991) possibly provides an explanation for

⁷ See Robin Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan), 1.

⁸ Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction*, 1-2.

⁹ See Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 32.

the pattern – Even Adam and Eve were disobedient to God’s law.¹⁰ According to another scholar, an art critic for *National Review* James Gardner, the popularity of the genre is closely tied to the development of theatre¹¹ – and for this reason, the controversy might seem to be theatrical in nature. In the previous decades, the competition in form of the increasing popularity of movies brought some playwrights to the exploration of transgressive themes to arise the appeal on the audience. Gardner also adds that the popularity stems from the fact readers recognize the main characters as “one of us.”¹²

Given the above, there are differences in opinions. According to some critics, transgression is a tendency connected to religion, some would say it is rather philosophical or existential issue. What most of them agree on is that long lasting tendency to rebel and to transgress is probably as old as literature itself. Another point of view is provided by Jonathan Dee in the “Ready- Made Rebellion”, an essay published in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 2005. While Booker proposed that transgressive tendency stems from *The Bible*, Dee simply says that it is human tendency to transgress or to examine the possibilities of one’s failure in transgression. According to him, fiction has nothing to do with morality; human’s behavior sometimes does not follow patterns set up by cultural standards – in such cases, the fiction should provide us with the explanation an individual cannot find in himself. However, the problem is when there are none or vague reasons for a specific act done by a particular character.¹³

The impact of this type of literature differs from reader to reader and the perception is often contradictory. Transgression can be an end in itself, if the focus is on controversy only, and following Newman’s opinion, a tawdry or even vulgar attempt to push the limits of the reader’s perception of sexuality, religion and values and principles of human existence. However, this point of view has shifted from Foucault’s or Georges Bataille’s (the author of *Erotism*,

¹⁰ See M. Keith Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnavalesque* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991), 1.

¹¹ See James Gardner, “Transgressive Fiction,” *National Review*, June 17, 1996, 54.

¹² Gardner, “Transgressive Fiction,” 54.

¹³ See Jonathan Dee, “Ready-Made Rebellion: The Empty Tropes of Transgressive Fiction,” *Harper’s Magazine*, April 1, 2005, 87-88.

Death and Sensuality (1962)) idea – not to test reader’s patience in acceptance of the fall of basic human values and limits; but rather in pointing out how fabricated and meaningless those values often are. An example can be seen in, for example, Anne Rice’s books. Although it technically fulfills the requirements of transgressive fiction (her books includes, for example, masochism and other forms of sexual deviations), she is just scratching the surface and the lack of the depth in her books prevented her from gaining a status of transgressive classic and, for example, her portrayal of gays is just stereotypical.¹⁴

To define transgressive fiction can be problematic, how Phil Jordan pointed out: “Transgression is a very difficult concept. I’ve found that in conversations about Bret Easton Ellis or Chuck Palahniuk, it’s rarely made clear what exactly is being transgressed.”¹⁵ The problem in that is apparent – the end of the authority as the end of the dictate and the inevitable need to expand human possibilities, mostly in a negative way, seems at least vague. Moreover, it only causes questioning the importance and the depths of the cultural and social background of the concrete book. But the effort is mostly contradictory – if transgressive features were dependent on a particular cultural phenomenon, such as religion, a historical event or a particular social value, it would be probable, that sooner or later the change is going to come. In other words, what was transgressive in the 18th century does not have to be necessarily perceived with the same effect nowadays. For this reason, it is the timelessness that is bound to the books that can be takes as classics of the genre; their transgressive potential has to be boundless of a simple effort to be controversial.

As described, it is very tricky to try to define this genre with any simplification. Megan Dutriou says:

¹⁴ See Robin Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1-2.

¹⁵ Phil Jourdan, “Transgression in Theory: The Idea of a Fight Club,” *Lit Reactor*, February 29, 2012, accessed February 12, 2017, <https://litreactor.com/columns/transgression-in-theory-the-idea-of-a-fight-club>.

“Go beyond the bounds of a moral principle or other established standard of behavior. Transgressive literature used to be about breaking all the rules. The taboo subject matter of Transgressive lit is meant to bring you face to face with the very ugly, very violent, diseased and debauched members of our society.”¹⁶

In other words – this type of literature deals mostly with the characters, who act in a contradiction with a general consensus of society and their behavior is treated as a standard. This idea is most likely applicable to any work of transgression – from the violent behavior of the main character of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) Alex or the dysfunctional male characters of Palahniuk’s novels. Robin Mookerjee claims that the popularity of Ellis’s books is not only for their controversial nature, but also for “making a socially relevant statement.”¹⁷ Mookerjee’s presents the idea that moral principles have been formed in human society for centuries. For the long term character, they are not easily changeable and so the books of transgression can have the same effect on the reader for centuries. In other words, de Sade’s books still have the same shock appeal as they had at the time it was written, because the values of society, concerning sexual deviations, have not changed. The basic recognition of good and evil is a part of human psyche that has its roots deeply. For this reason, the violation has to be serious to make a corresponding impact. Mookerjee also points out that the main focus has to be on middle class to be taken seriously.¹⁸ But not necessarily so. Many characters that inhabit the established transgressive novels represent a variety of classes, not just the middle one. Chuck Palahniuk deals mostly with the dysfunctional members of the working class, and their status is a necessary part of their frustrations, reflected in every sphere of characters’ lives. Ellis’s Patrick Bateman works as a successful banker, so here he is the representative of upper-class and de Sade’s protagonists are wealthy aristocrats.

¹⁶ Megan Dutriou, “Genre School: Transgressive Fiction,” Mahala, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://www.mahala.co.za/culture/genre-school-transgressive-fiction/>.

¹⁷ Robin Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction: The New Satiric Tradition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1.

¹⁸ See Mookerjee, *Transgressive Fiction*, 1.

The obvious fact is that the genre is enormously miscellaneous. It can be found throughout several centuries and also it appears in various literary movements – from gothic fiction to beat generation. The genre has its major works, like *120 Days of Sodom* (1905) (in which not only the neologism sadism was acquired but it turned its author into an immediate celebrity), *Naked Lunch* (1959) or *The Wasp Factory* (1984) but at the same time, it somehow lacks the leading writers and firm theoretical background, the definitions are often vague, and the simplifications often lead to misinterpretations and make the genre easily shattered by argumentation. What brings all the authors together and provides their books with transgressive label are the reoccurring themes in their fiction, such as homosexuality, violence, sexual orgies, immorality – although each of the authors deals with them differently, in case their works include these topics, treated as a standard behavior and not violations, they will belong to the category. Also, all of them managed to achieve an emotional or shock appeal. While de Sade's book is often used as the starting point of transgressive fiction, scholars like James Gardner, a critic writing for *National Review*, pointed out that the genre emerged from the tradition of Euripides's *Bacchae*, through Christopher Marlowe and Webster it came to de Sade as a form already existing.¹⁹ So, despite the fact that de Sade is undoubtedly a prominent author of the genre (many authors, actually, have been calling him the pioneer of the genre, such as Silverblat or Chun) he is definitely not the first author presenting transgressive treatment of his characters. Transgressive fiction is also frequently understood only as fiction/writing that is purposely controversial, with the focus on the above mentioned shock appeal, and the result is that the term has been perceived negatively; as a lesser form of fiction. Reviewers and critics tend to despise and simplify the books labeled as transgressive, while the mainstream readers are very often fond of them and many books within the genre, especially in the past decade, such as *Less Than Zero* (1985) by Bret Easton Ellis, *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace or *Fight Club* (1996) by Chuck Palahniuk, gained the status of the best sellers.

¹⁹ See James Gardner, "Transgressive Fiction," *National Review*, June 17, 1996, 54.

1990s is considered a golden era for transgressive fiction, mostly thanks to *American Psycho* which not only inspired other writers but also provoked critics, who started to write studies on transgressive fiction.

Phil Jourdan adds that because of the lack of the theoretical background concerning transgressive fiction, in practice it is fundamental to focus on the repetitive patterns, which can be taken as transgressive or subversive parts of the literary work. This approach should be helpful not only in the understanding of a particular book but also in understanding of the genre.²⁰ As an example, we can use *The Wasp Factory* (1984) where the protagonist Frank kills three of his relatives. The repetition of a particular pattern can then be taken as a new standard for a particular character, and this new standard is definitely appellative. In Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, the characters fight themselves on a regular basis and it creates the story-world full of violence that eventually leads almost to the destruction of the civilization. The *Fight Club*'s protagonists are not being judged for their violence, their fight clubs eventually expand and become popular. The repetitive pattern appears in the cases, where the violation can have the most significant influence, such as violence, sexuality, psychopathology, addictions, and religion. In most cases, it results in the revelation of the worst in humanity and sometimes it does not have the age limitation (as an example, we can take *Lord of the Flies* (1954) where the central characters are young boys who act animalistic and violent when they suppress the education and standards of the modern society with a lack of authority to tell them they are acting wrong).

Transgressive fiction has an appeal on the primal parts of the human character, reveals animalism in human psyche and by this animalism it suppresses the acquired standards of behavior, the learned patterns and values of the humanity. On one hand, there are the efforts of Anne Rice, on the other hand, the writing of Ellis deals with murders driven by a lapse in the mind of a successful man. Palahniuk deals with topics of necrophilia, terrorism or a deep

²⁰See Phil Jourdan, "Transgression in Theory: The Idea of a Fight Club," *Lit Reactor*, February 29, 2012, accessed February 12, 2017, <https://litreactor.com/columns/transgression-in-theory-the-idea-of-a-fight-club>.

religious transgression. Both authors rather go against stereotypes. Strong topics, psychological appeal and memorable characters also go against the simplification of the genre as a simple attempt to be controversial. Such works can achieve a status of transgressive, but not the status of transgressive classic. According to Booker, transgressive attitude is vital for literature in general. It reflects and impacts the real world,²¹ but it also opens the door for the future generations. Obscenity accusations leading to the trial Ginsberg and Ferlinghetti were facing caused the fall of the American censorship. Even though *Howl and other poems* is not a fiction writing, the explicit treatment of the sexuality inspired the future generation of poets and fiction writers and it definitely helped to establish transgressive fiction as a genre, even though there are still gaps in grasping it as a concept. The attitudes toward the genre differ and the variety of influences, such as its philosophical nature affiliated with existencialism, are often suppressed, ignored or simplified. And most of the scholars are aware of that, just like Booker, who admits that the concept is difficult to define. Yet he claims that the starting point can be in Mikhail Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and His World* (1965)²², where carnivalesque is defined as: "unmasking and disclosing of the unvarnished truth under the veil of false claims and arbitrary ranks."²³ It actually corresponds with the basic idea of transgressive fiction, where the effort is to allow others to see what is under the veil of one's personality that would be hidden otherwise (violence, sexual and religious deviations) and to treat non-standard behavior the way standard would be treated. And as was demonstrated on examples, not every reader or critic is ready for what the disclosure can bring.

So far, only a few things can be taken as a general agreement regarding what transgressive fiction is. The concept of the genre is not simple; it has no direct leading representative, whose lifespan would make any kind of a timeline possible. It could be said that the idea to transgress has been present since the

²¹ See M. Keith Booker, *Techniques of Subversion in Modern Literature: Transgression, Abjection, and the Carnavalesque* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991), 3.

²² See Booker, *Techniques of Subversion*, 5.

²³ Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), x.

very beginning of the literary tradition. The emergence of the attention given to the classification of the genre appeared after *American Psycho* was published and the 1990s were full of attempts to grasp the idea and define the genre. And that is the point where the opinions start to differ. It is unclear, what causes transgressive tendencies or if it should be looked upon as a philosophical religion-rooted phenomenon or simply a basic human tendency. What has been proven though is that in a successful transgressive classic, simple effort to shock the audience or just being controversial is not enough. It is the effort to push the limits as far as possible, using the themes of violence, sex, religion, human values. The comfort zone-crossing is a vital concept and it is not something every reader is willing to explore. But there are still features of the genre that can be taken as a general consensus – treating violation as a standard and the emotional appeal are the inseparable parts of transgressive fiction.

1.3 Transgressive Sex

Georges Bataille in his book *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1962) discusses in greater detail various spheres of human mind with the focus on the erotic aspect of a man. With the premise of the unlimited potential of a man, the erotic urges can also be unlimited. The sphere of transgression or, in other words, the urge to go beyond standards, can result in sexual urges that violate the general idea of what is approved and what is not. Crossing the standard zone can lead to the sphere, which is unknown, and in many cases, can result in a fear of one's capability. "Man goes constantly in fear of himself. His erotic urges terrify him."²⁴

There seems to be no compelling reason to argue that sex is an inseparable part of transgressive fiction. Although discussing sex is no longer considered something a good author is not supposed to write about, human urges can lead

²⁴ Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 7.

to the point that is considered transgressive – usually in form of a sexual deviation.

Bataille uses the term eroticism rather than sex or sexuality. According to the author, eroticism is a psychological process; while sex is primarily taken as a reproductive process with the only goal, to conceive a descendant.²⁵ Eroticism, on the other hand, can be a deviation in itself; erotic desire is not limited by a capability or intention to conceive a child. This is a solid ground for sexual deviations and starting point for many themes of transgressive fiction, such as male/female prostitution, because here the purpose of having a child is logically suppressed, but also pedophilia, necrophilia and, in this sense, homosexuality.

The basic premise is that man's needs can be, with certain limitations, compared to animals'. But human primal needs partially differ, especially in the aspect of eroticism that includes the choices and the extent of the sexual activity. Simply, not everyone has urges, that could be called transgressive and if so, the urges can have various character. Humans are expected to follow a certain path and recognize which sexual choices are just less preferable and which are, beyond any doubt, out of question. And those choices can lead to taboos.²⁶ Namely, if there is a choice which is unacceptable, it becomes a limitation, a taboo. Bataille, among other scholars, sees the connection between eroticism and religion (not only Christianity),²⁷ so where there are no religious limits, there are no erotic ones either.

Simple as that, this thwarts the proper scientific methodology or research considering transgressive sexual activity. Although certain observations are possible, Bataille discusses Kinsey's approach and studies in his essay "Kinsey, the Underworld and Work," where the scientific approach brought numbers and data, but said nothing about emotions, intentions, or motives of the choices.²⁸ Another valid argument is that science can hardly formulate what is transgressive or not. In the context of the reports done by Kinsey and his

²⁵ See Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, 11.

²⁶ See Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, 28-29.

²⁷ See Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, 31-32.

²⁸ See Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, 154.

followers, Bataille highlights: “For the authors, sexuality is a normal and acceptable biological function in whatever form it appears. But religious principles restrict this natural activity.”²⁹ In terms of the defining transgression, there are not only complications in what science cannot successfully measure, but also in that religion simply forbids many forms of sexual activities. In other words, there are many points of view from which transgressive sex can be taken and they are often remarkably different, or even completely contradictory.

For the above mentioned, we will go back to the basic principle of transgressive fiction. The premise is that the author does not judge the action of his characters, he treats them as their action is standard. It is the individual member of the audience; it is the reader, who will judge transgressive behavior and who will decide how it appeals to him. Homosexuality, according to Bataille, is transgressive act because it goes against the basic premise to conceive a child. But it will be perceived differently in David Leavitt’s short story “Territory”, where a son brings his partner to meet his mother, who struggles with the same sex orientation of her only child; and for example *The Cutting Room* (2002), a book written by a contemporary Scottish novelist Louise Welsh, where the main protagonist goes to the park to have a public encounter with a man. “Guts”, a short story written by Palahniuk in 2004, made people faint, because it includes sexually motivated injury. “Territory”, *The Cutting Room* and “Guts”, are all a part of transgressive fiction, because of the topic of homosexuality. However, the reception will differ in author’s treatment of it; in “Territory”, the protagonist’s mother cannot handle her son’s orientation, so the transgression here is being pointed out. On the other hand, “Guts” does not provide any clarification or judgment for the homoerotic practices plus the extent of the transgression is larger, because the injured boy is still a child.

To conclude the chapter, it is apparent, that there is number of factors, which unable the simple definition of transgressive fiction. It deals with a non-

²⁹ Bataille, *Death and Sensuality*, 156.

standard behavior, but it is up to the writer, how he deals with it, and up to the reader, how he accepts it. Sex itself cannot be transgressive, if the choices are not against standards, but the point of view on what the standards are differs. As it was shown on the example of Palahniuk's "Guts", there can be a combination of factors – age, gender and an aspect of sexual behavior, which is considered a non-standard – to deepen an appeal on readers. But it is also the timelessness mentioned in the previous chapters what has an important role, sex itself does not make a deep impact on the reader, unless it transgresses. And, most importantly, it is always the reader's perception of transgressive and his will to go on reading what makes transgressive fiction so popular and the authors motivated to push the limits even further. And the most importantly, transgressive sex in transgressive fiction has to be treated in agreement with the requirements of the genre – it should be appellative and treated as the standard, without any judgment of the author.

For the purpose of demonstrating transgressive sex in the thesis, the Bataille's idea will be used – sexual behavior that is not intended for a conception of a child and is not treated as a violation by the author. Also, despite the Bataille's division of sex and eroticism, the term transgressive sex will be used to fully illustrate the idea of the thesis and to avoid confusion.

2 CHUCK PALAHNIUK

The aim of the following subchapters is to briefly describe life and work of Chuck Palahniuk and also his involvement in transgressive fiction.

2.1 Chuck Palahniuk: Life

In *The Independent* interview released in 2012, the interviewer Arifa Akbar called Palahniuk “one of America's most contentious cutting-edge writers.”³⁰ As it has become a tradition, the article’s opening paragraph reminds the reader of the famous story that is conjoined with Palahniuk’s short story “Guts,” published in *Playboy* magazine in 2004, which in 2005 became a part of the Palahniuk’s short story collection *Haunted*. Between 76 to 200 people fainted³¹ during public readings because of the overly explicit sexual content of the story. “Guts” deals with the various masturbation techniques of underage boys, usually ending up with a minor or severe injury, like in case of the one who tries to masturbate sitting on the pool filter, which results in him losing a part of his large intestine.

Haunted was not received well. Tom Shone in his review for *The New Yorker* summed up that Palahniuk follows “a long tradition of high morbidity that links recent nihilists like Will Self and Bret Easton Ellis back to Ballard and William S. Burroughs, and beyond them, to the original literary Skeletor, de Sade - in whose writing a roiling disenchantment with the world is underpinned by a vivid, pimple-squeezing self-disgust.”³² Shone pointed out what readers and critics are either fond of Palahniuk’s writing or despise his works; the general consensus seems to be that the author never stops pushing

³⁰ Arifa Akbar, “Chuck Palahniuk: ‘I Shy Away from Non-Consensual Violence’,” *The Independent*, June 15, 2012, accessed February 5, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/chuck-palahniuk-i-shy-away-from-non-consensual-violence-7851425.html>.

³¹ Akbar, “Chuck Palahniuk: ‘I Shy Away from Non-Consensual Violence’.”

³² Tom Shone, “‘Haunted’: Gore Values,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2005, accessed February 6, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/books/review/haunted-gore-values.html>.

the limits of his readers' acceptance and willingness to forget about their personal moral codes.

Born on February 21, 1962 in Pasco, Washington, Chuck Palahniuk never missed a chance to use his personal experience in his works. His grandparents were originally from Ukraine, and the unusual surname Palahniuk sparked the discussion about its pronunciation. Later, Palahniuk himself admitted he is not sure about it himself, but he uses Paula and Nick, the combination of his grandparents' names. As a paradox, he never met this side of his father's family – his grandfather killed his grandmother in an argument concerning the amount of money she spent on the sewing machine.³³ As he recalls in the autobiographical collection of essays *Stranger than Fiction* (2004), his father was hiding under the bed while Chuck's grandfather was calling his name, holding a rifle in his hands.³⁴ Even in his non-fiction, he describes the situation the same way he writes his novels; detailed but emotionally detached descriptions so typical, for example, for the leading figures of the New Journalism like Truman Capote.

In 1999, during the groundbreaking year for Palahniuk, when David Fincher's movie based on his Palahniuk's most acclaimed novel *Fight Club* was made, his father was murdered by the former boyfriend of his girlfriend, Dale Shackelford. After Palahniuk was asked by a coroner to identify the burnt body of his father, he openly called for the death penalty for the murderer.³⁵

That Chuck Palahniuk is gay is no secret among his readers. But in 2003, it caused quite a commotion when, in an interview for *Entertainment Weekly*, he admitted he had been in a relationship with another man for 11 years. What the audience was shocked, not by the coming out of the author, but the way it leaked to public. Palahniuk, who unintentionally mentioned that he is not married and he had been living with the same sex partner, became afraid of the

³³ Joshua Chaplinsky, "Strange but True: A Short Biography of Chuck Palahniuk," chuckpalahniuk.net, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/author/strange-but-true-a-short-biography-of-chuck-palahniuk>.

³⁴ Chuck Palahniuk, *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), PDF version, 15.

³⁵ Sean O'Hagan, "Fright Club," *The Guardian*, May 8, 2005, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2005/may/08/fiction.chuckpalahniuk>

possibility that the interviewer, Karen Valby, could publish this sensitive detail of his private life. Not long after the interview, he placed an audio record on his webpage (www.chuckpalahniuk.net), where he not only set things straight but also had a few unflattering comments about Valby. At the end it was revealed, Valby never intended to mention this particular detail about his private life and Palahniuk apologized.³⁶

However, it is obvious that in spite of the fact Chuck Palahniuk is a public figure, who often participates in interviews, public readings and supports the official webpage called “The Cult”, run by Dennis Widmyer, his privacy is revealed rather through his short stories and novels, which usually contain autobiographical features, than through the interviews.

2.2 Chuck Palahniuk: Work

It has been mentioned that *Fight Club* published in 1996 is the author’s most successful and first published novel, but certainly not his first written piece. His literary beginnings can be traced to the very beginning of the 1990s, when he participated in the creative writing workshop of Tom Spanbauer, “Dangerous Writing”. Spanbauer, a prolific gay writer and author of *The Man Who Fell in Love with the Moon* (1991), *In the City of Shy Hunters* (2004) or *I Love You More* (2014) does not avoid the topic of sexuality in his novels and this topic is explicitly discussed in his narrations. As Monika Drake, Palahniuk’s classmate from the course, says, Spanbauer was trying to teach his students “how to take something damaged, neglected, maybe ruined, and make it gorgeous, make it meaningful. We could take the stories of our lives and make them serve in our favor. We are the stories we tell ourselves.”³⁷ In the collection of essays *Stranger than Fiction*, particularly in the essay “Consolation Prizes”

³⁶ See Zach Dundas, “A Hazardous Outing,” *Willamette Week*, September 30, 2003, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-2498-a-hazardous-outing.html>.

³⁷ Monica Drake, “Foreword,” in *Sacred and Immoral: on the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*, edited by Jeffrey A. Sartin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), xiii.

Palahniuk reveals that almost any key moment in *Fight Club* was inspired by a real life event of his or of his friends'.³⁸ With such life stories like two murders in a family, the audience can be easily puzzled about what is actually taken from author's life and what simply is a work of fiction.

The impact of *Fight Club* was enormous. The book was turned into a movie 3 years after it was published. The 1999 movie was directed by David Fincher, starring Edward Norton, as the nameless narrator (in the movie called Jack) and Brad Pitt as his alter ego Tyler Durden. Despite the changes in monologues, mostly by Norton, who changed many of his lines³⁹ and a major change of the ending, also the book earned a cult status with the movie – and it gave a playful name to Palahniuk's webpage "The Cult". The book was appraised by the critics and admired even by the significant names within a genre of transgressive fiction, like Bret Easton Ellis. In the same year, 1999, the success of the movie enabled the author to publish his early version of *Invisible Monsters*, which was originally rejected by the publisher and with a few changes it was published that year. It is a social satire, a criticism of the widespread beauty standards, based on fashion magazines. The main character, Shannon McFarland, deals with the problem of identification of her true identity and beauty. She was shot in the face, which not only ended her modeling career, but also her life as she knew it and she is deprived of her beautiful face forever. What inspired Palahniuk in case of this novel was the power of the images in the *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar* that replaced language completely⁴⁰ and which commonly manipulate with the reception of one's appearance.

Because *Invisible Monsters* was originally written before *Fight Club*, the third Palahniuk's published novel in 1999 is *Survivor*. Palahniuk's literary production clearly shows what a prolific writer he is, publishing practically a

³⁸ See Chuck Palahniuk, *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), PDF version, 148-150.

³⁹ See Palahniuk, *Stranger than Fiction*, 149.

⁴⁰ See Matt Kavanagh, "Of Failed Romance, Writer's Malpractice, And Prose for The Nose: A Conversation with Chuck Palahniuk," in *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*, edited by Jeffrey A. Sartain (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 183.

novel a year: *Choke* (2001), *Lullaby* (2002), *Diary* (2003), *Snuff* (2008), *Pygmy* (2009), *Tell-All* (2010), *Beautiful You* (2014) *Make Something Up* (2015). In case of most of these books the receptions vary and none of these novels has achieved the status of a cult novel as *Fight Club* did. In 2015, *Fight Club 2* was published and it is a graphic novel/comic book sequel *Fight Club*.

Palahniuk himself claims that his works belong to the category of transgressive fiction, his writing style has been called minimalist, even postmodern, and he is often compared to writers such as Don DeLillo (Palahniuk is being called “an American ironist in the tradition of DeLillo”⁴¹) or Thomas Pynchon. In the interview with Matt Kavanagh “Of Failed Romance, Writer's Malpractice, and Prose for The Nose: A Conversation with Chuck Palahniuk” he admits he was not inspired by those two (he actually never finished reading of any of their books) but he rather took an inspiration from Dennis Johnson, Mark Richard, Arthur Miller, Nathaniel West or Truman Capote.⁴² According to Kenneth MacKendrick, the hateful attitude towards Palahniuk is similar to the reception of the works of New Journalists. “(Palahniuk)’s been identified as misogynist, a nihilist, and an American pornographer (...) Interestingly, the criticism of Palahniuk’s writing bears an uncanny similarity to the criticism New Journalists receive.”⁴³

2.3 Palahniuk’s Involvement in Transgressive Fiction

Palahniuk’s works spark controversy not only among the readers of his novels, but critics as well. “No one would call Chuck Palahniuk a writer’s writer. He isn’t even, strictly speaking, a reader’s writer. He’s the sort of author who’s

⁴¹ Jose Kavadlo, “The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist,” in *You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I Am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, ed. Read Mercer Schuchardt (Dallas: BenBella, 2008), 17.

⁴²See Matt Kavanagh, “Of Failed Romance, Writer’s Malpractice, And Prose for The Nose: A Conversation with Chuck Palahniuk,” in *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*, edited by Jeffrey A. Sartain (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 182.

⁴³ Kenneth MacKendrick, “Chuck Palahniuk and the New Journalism Revolution,” in *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*, ed. Jeffrey A. Sartain (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 4-5.

admired by people who don't usually care for literature, and correspondingly scorned by those who do."⁴⁴ Sandra Newman in her review of Palahniuk's short story collection *Make Something Up* expressed the frequent perception of transgressive. Although the author herself claims she is aware of Palahniuk's transgressive efforts, according to her, his writing style is primitive and full of the "gross-out humor: at some point in each story, some character or other will be drenched in urine."⁴⁵ It is essential to mention that books like *120 Days of Sodom* written in 1787 (but published officially in 1905), deals with all kinds of sexual deviations and even the child molestation by aristocrats, *Moll Flanders*, which was published in 1722, expresses an open point of view of prostitution et cetera. Both books mentioned use with topics beyond the moral standards of their time and both are parts of literary canon. And both were published hundreds of years before Ellis, Wallace or Palahniuk were even born.

The fact that Palahniuk's works belong to the tradition of transgressive fiction is supported by two facts, the first one being that together with other two editors, Richard Thomas and Dennis Widmyer, he put together *Burnt Tongues: An Anthology of Transgressive Stories* in 2014, a collection of short stories written by aspiring writers. In the introduction he wrote for the book, he reveals his own point of view on transgressive writing; that now, as a grown up, he considers the books he could not read before he achieved the certain age, the best. The editors' intention was simple, to select stories which can have the same impact on the reader as Palahniuk's "Guts" had. The publisher of *Burnt Tongues* summed up Palahniuk's effort which appeared also in *The Guardian*:

"Transgressive fiction authors write stories some are afraid to tell. Stories with taboo subjects, unique voices, shocking images – nothing safe or dry. These stories run

⁴⁴ Sandra Newman, "Make Something Up Review – Chuck Palahniuk at the Height of His Powers," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2015, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/10/make-something-up-chuck-palahniuk-review-short-story-collection>.

⁴⁵ Newman, "Make Something Up Review."

the gamut from horrific and fantastic to humorous and touching, but each leaves a lasting impression. Some may say even a scar.”⁴⁶

This is the second reason why Palahniuk can be labeled as the author of transgressive fiction. He presents the main idea of the genre by his own definition: according to him, accessible and appraised by one generation can be forgotten by another. But the readers will remember strong narratives and “bold storytelling.”⁴⁷ The fact that Palahniuk uses the stories from real life and transforms them into his narratives has several effects. First, his storytelling has a real basis and for the reason these are not just made-up events, the readers can find them approachable. Transgressive fiction is based on pushing the limits further and Palahniuk’s contribution to the genre is definitely the involvement of autobiographical features and real-life events. Also, he is well known for his approach to provoke and to hurt through his writing.⁴⁸ By including topics of violence, sexual deviations and even reversed ideas of religion presented without a judgment, he follows the general idea of the genre. But Palahniuk does not reject the shock and controversial appeal of his books via his bold storytelling.

Although Palahniuk’s novels deal with many forms of transgression, from religion to deviation of the family concept, in the following chapters the focus will be on his characters’ personalities reflected via their sexual intercourses. The aim is to describe the sexual transgression as a part characters’ behavior. But again, sex is supposed to serve the purpose of the mirror, which reflects their previous experience and expresses their frustrations. The focus will be on the premise that Palahniuk has created a character type whose sexual relationships corresponds with the character’s personality.

⁴⁶Alison Flood, “Fight Club Author Chuck Palahniuk to Co-edit Transgressive Fiction Anthology,” *The Guardian*, April 10, 2014, accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/apr/10/chuck-palahniuk-coedit-transgressive-fiction-anthology-burnt-tongues>.

⁴⁷ Chuck Palahniuk, Richard Thomas, and Dennis Widmyer, *Burnt Tongues: An Anthology of Transgressive Stories* (Saint Charles: Medallion Press, 2014), Kindle edition, 7.

⁴⁸ See Richard Olehla, “Ukazuji čtenářům, že životní tragédii lze přežít. Chuck Palahniuk o násilí, církvi, 11/9 a významu řeckých komedií,” *Host*, 1 (2017): 12.

3 SURVIVOR

3.1 An Overview of *Survivor*

The main character of the 1999 novel is Tender Branson. The opening chapter reveals two major pieces of information: firstly, Tender hijacked a plane and now he speaks for the record on the black box, secondly, the focal point is in the fact that his death is not important and it is his life story that must survive. The black box is one of the very few things in Branson's life that are indestructible, together with his life adventures. The book is built up as a countdown, and not only it starts at the end and gradually discloses the events preceding the first chapter, also the pagination starts with the page 289 at the beginning of the novel, which enhances the idea of a retrospective narrative. It does not only reveals when exactly Branson's story ends, but there is also a parallel with the limited amount of time the main character has left to live, concerning the black box tape and gradual damage of the plane caused by the absence of the fuel and a pilot. And the most importantly, it is clear that Tender Branson is the one who controls his own death and for the first time in his life, makes a decision on his own.

In the course of the following chapters, he reveals how he spends his leisure time – mostly by encouraging people to commit a suicide. By a typo in the newspapers, his phone number was printed in an article about a crisis hotline. After it was corrected and the number of the phone calls declined, he figured out the way how to make desperate people commit a suicide again. His advice is always the same – kill yourself. As he says, it gives him the God-like power to relieve their pain of their miserable lives. In other words, he can make this decision for others but not for himself: “I work for a housecleaning service. Full-time drudge. Part-time god.”⁴⁹ This urge to make the callers kill themselves has the roots in Tender's history. He comes from the Creedish Death Cult, whose members committed an organized suicide when the officers received a denouncement they are using their children for a child labor. Just a

⁴⁹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Survivor* (London: Vintage, 2003), 281.

few people survived the suicide attempt, including Tender, and as he later finds out, his twin brother Adam, who continuously works on killing the other surviving members of the cult.

This particular novel is dealing with a suicidal cult which doctrine transgresses religion. Especially in this case, where the members act against the sacrament of life by committing a suicide, so they basically violate one of the Ten Commandments and undermine one of the pillars of Christianity. Then again, transgression appears in sexuality, which will be discussed in the following subchapter. Tender is used to being given orders, like other Palahniuk's characters, he is at the very bottom of the chain of command in society. The hierarchy was given at his birth; his brother, even though he is only a few minutes older, according to the Cult dogma, he is the oldest man in the family, so he was named Adam. All the other sons are named Tender and all the daughters are named Bidy. This fact not only deprives the main character of an individual identity, but it also indicates the practices of his church. In the Creedish cult, Tender and other younger sons are forced to go outside the community and will be serving and cleaning houses until they die, or possibly, until they will be given instructions to kill himself.

This explains the character's recklessness about death. Tender was prevented from killing himself several times, so all his life, he could not decide about his own death. When almost every member was ordered to kill himself, Branson's social worker put him into the Survivor program, which was established to save the members of the cult outside the community. So Tender works as a servant and due to the crisis hotline, for once, he is allowed to give a piece of advice to the others. His way of solving the problems of the callers corresponds with the way of thinking familiar to him: that they should kill themselves

When later in the novel his brother Adam manages to kill the remaining members of the suicidal cult, and also murders his brother's social worker, Tender becomes a sensation, as the last survivor of the cult. With his celebrity status he gets an agent, who turns him into a symbol, or better, into a ready-made product that is used for making profit. On the outside, he becomes a messiah, but he is rather a product, intended to sell religious items. His body is

transformed by steroids into a Hollywood star celebrity shape, which helps his agent to raise the profit. When he reveals the Super Bowl score before the game, a piece of information he has been given by a girl with prophetic dreams, Fertility, the crowd and the public become furious, because he ruined the game and he becomes a refugee. Together with the false accusation of murder of his social worker, he has to escape. With Fertility's and Adam's help, he manages to escape, but at the end, Branson ends up sitting in the plane.

3.2 Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of Tender Branson's Personality in *Survivor*

The prominence of sex as a theme in this novel, in the discourse of Palahniuk's other works, is unusual. Tender Branson is a virgin and the way he thinks about sex is enormously influenced by his upbringing. At the beginning of the book, he mentions his previous job interview at McDonald's, where he admits his interest in this particular job opportunity stemmed from the number of females working with him. In addition to this, he appreciates the fact McDonald's workers cannot be employed if they have any disease, so under such circumstances, they would be virgins (as Tender) or at least sexually responsible. This is the first time when the reader reveals the clash between Branson's sexual urges, as a grown up man, and his church's dogma, which discourages the cult members from having sexual intercourse, unless they are the first born sons. "I only wanted to talk to them,"⁵⁰ Tender says when he discusses the potential female co-workers. For his lack of experience with women, on one hand, he is looking for those, who are young and clean. On the other hand, he cannot really see the difference between them and the suicide girls calling him for help. In both cases, he can only apply his rhetoric ability; for the lack of sexual experience, he cannot (and does not want to) offer anything else. Tender is not interested in sexual intercourse but he actively looks for a contact with females. Such behavior brings up the idea of Branson's

⁵⁰ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 279.

naivety concerning women, on one hand, he presents signals, maybe unconsciously, expressing his need to meet a female counterpart. On the other hand, he cannot offer much, because speaking of sex, he seems to dislike the concept.

The protagonist, as every grown up man, has sexual urges. He admits he fights them with shoplifting. Unusual as it may sound, Tender is willing to do anything to suppress, or find a relief from these urges, except for having the actual intercourse. He is aware of his sexual needs, despite the fact that he does not know how to perceive the concept of sex or how to relieve them otherwise; on one hand there is his sex-starved body, on the other, there is an immense naivety with which he perceives sex in general. “Call me a sexual predator, but when I think of predators, I think of lions, tigers, big cats, sharks.”⁵¹ In this case, Tender expresses how naive and unaware of his own position he is, for calling himself a sexual predator. He is obviously not a sexual predator; he is quite the opposite. His submissive behavior prevents him from taking any control over his life. At first he was controlled by the cult, then by the social worker and later, his life was planned by his new employers. Even his first and only sexual intercourse happens because it was his brother’s last wish.

A common pattern considering sex in the novel is its connection with death. As a former member of a suicidal cult, this connotation is brought up frequently, starting at the beginning – “Live or die. Sex or death.”⁵² The idea is closely connected throughout the novel, with hints like:

“This is fish number six hundred and forty-one in a lifetime of goldfish. My parents bought me the first one to teach me about loving and caring for another living breathing creature of God. Six hundred and forty fish later, the only thing I know is everything you love will die. The first time you can count on them one day being dead and in the ground.”⁵³

⁵¹ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 278.

⁵² Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 278.

⁵³ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 277.

As shown above, the protagonist's attitude to emotions is rather pragmatic. Not only is his perception of sex deluded, but so is his perception of death and emotions. He cannot see the difference between a replacement of one fish by another and he does not value human life either. He cannot see the difference between the artificial and real, like when he comes to the cemetery, where he steals artificial flowers to put them in the garden of his employers, who never go outside to the garden themselves; so for them, from the distance, it looks real. There is no difference between life and death as well. It can be one of the explanations, why his advice is "kill yourself" in case of every caller. Among other things, this can also be blamed on the church, because he explicitly claims there were no strong bonds in the community and parents were willing to let their kids go to the outside world with an ease. "Any emotion was decadent."⁵⁴ Tender was obviously raised to be emotionless, he got used to it by the fish experiment, and it is reflected not only in his reckless attitude to the others, but also in his view of himself. Bearing that in mind, considering emotions decadent, the character type is detached, submissive and emotionless. This attitude continues in the world outside the religious community he has been living since he left, his employers are anonymous; they only talk to each other via telephone. There is no space for any kind of relationship and his servant job combined with his upbringing prevents him from any emotional bond with anyone, so the emotional detachment is reflected via his rather stoic attitude to other people as well as himself. He does not have any opportunity to consider any sexual relationship that would not be somehow transgressed – Firstly, after the Creedish community members kill themselves, the property turns into a repository for outdated porn. Secondly, and the porn collection his employers own consists of tapes of anal sex or porn versions of fairy tales. This type of compromised material is actually the only thing Tender is surrounded with.

With the focus on the compromised, the reader witnesses how dysfunctional Tender's surrounding is. No emotions, no personal space,

⁵⁴ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 274.

nothing genuine. The pretence is omnipresent, Tender pretends he follows his manual precisely, he pretends he plants the real flowers, and acts like a perfect servant – just the way he was raised in the community. His employers, despite being the upper class members, do not know how to behave among the other members of the upper class and they call him to teach them how to act distinguishably at their friends' parties. Tender is well trained to pretend and to serve, and he is able to teach his employers how to act properly and pretend they actually belong to the higher class society. Later he pretends he is a messiah, while he is the artificial ready-made sensation, made by his agent, willing to marry a woman he does not even know. Once again, he is a perfect servant of his agent. He was raised and trained to follow."Everything is beautiful but none of it works."⁵⁵ Tender is well aware of the pretence and artificiality, everything in his life is made to look beautiful but is actually dysfunctional – the flowers, his employers and his transformation to the messiah.

The main character's life is full of manuals; he precisely knows what to do with any kind of stain or how to act in a particular situation. He has been trained as a servant and he acts like one, giving up on his own will. He strictly follows the orders of his employees, doing every bizarre thing they ordered him to do in a special calendar, a daily planner, where his work duties are structured hour by hour, or at least pretends it in a way they could not see the difference. He obeys his social service worker, when she decides to save his life or later, when he is the only survivor (besides his brother Adam) he is instantly turned into messiah with a celebrity status. The only time when he decides to act on his own, to a small extent, is when he meets Fertility Hollis. When he told her brother Trevor to kill himself, he comes to the graveyard to see his grave, where he meets her. Fertility is a female caller, who asked him to have sex with her before (and she made him feel humiliated afterwards). As Palahniuk made a clear connection between death and sex, their first encounter is on the graveyard. Again, the line between sex and death concerning their

⁵⁵ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 44.

relationship is blurred throughout the whole novel. Firstly, he meets Fertility, the girl he is about to have the first sexual intercourse, at the graveyard, and for a moment, he wants her to be dead. "I hope she's dead. My secret wish is right now to be romancing with this dead girl. A dead girl. Any dead girl."⁵⁶ His fantasies are anything but common, obviously transgressive, and he has this kind of an interior monologue at the moment she is coming closer to him. As she is moving forward, and her shape becomes clearer and bigger than a small silhouette in the horizon, she seems to be smaller than she actually is; this stimulates his imagination again, into what it would be like to be a pedophile. This particular scene reflects another form of relief of his sexually frustrated mind. Fantasizing about her in transgressive way is the inevitable result; he does not have experience with any standard relationship or with any standard emotions.

Fertility is the main female character in the novel and her relationship with Tender reflects all the flaws in Tender's upbringing. Even though she obviously cares about Tender, even though she is probably not sexually attracted to him, she does her best helping him with his new role of the messiah. She can predict the future and is able to provide him with prophecies he can later share with the entire world and keep the celebrity status. But even though Tender feels an attraction to her, she is compromised to him, due to her job – she works as a surrogate mother, who took the name Fertility, despite the fact she is sterile, so for her, it's only easily earned money. This is another reason, among many, why sex is being seen as compromised by Tender – it is just pretence.

Another idea connected to sex comes to Tender with his brother. According to Adam, Tender suppressed his sexual needs because he suppressed certain memories from the Creedish Death Cult. As everything he knows about life has been passed on him by someone else, sex is no difference. Adam explains to him the way how religion treats sex to manipulate people, as he talks about castrations or other form of making sex unpleasant or even

⁵⁶ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 258.

painful, which is practiced in other churches.⁵⁷ This gives an impression that suppressing natural sexuality in a human being makes the individual suppress the other parts of his character, as it is in Tender's case:

“If you never have sex,” Adam's saying, “you never gain a sense of power. You never gain a voice or identity of your own. (...) If you never break the rule against sex, you won't break any other rule.”⁵⁸

From this quote, it is apparent that by deprivation of sex one can be deprived of his power. Tender is not only deprived of his individuality, having the same name as his other brothers or the other sons of the community; the church he grew up in has its own way how to make sex unpleasant. Tender, as every child in the community besides the first born sons, was forced to watch his mother giving birth, every time she was pregnant with a child. Together, with the claims that sex is nothing but a sinful act, he was supposed to lose interest in the intercourse, and with the idea of power, it should be a means how to keep him obedient, humble and satisfied in the position of the servant.

However, as we can see, it did not work this way for Tender. He connected the idea of the painful, sinful sex with death he was an inevitable part of. He developed his very own idea of transgression, so he cannot perceive sex without violating the standard idea – because he has never come across the non-transgressive form of intercourse. This is the reason why he fantasizes about dead girls, thinking about pedophilia or necrophilia.

Even his church is compromised when it becomes a disposal site for outdated porn. When his brother Adam dies in a car crash at the estate, he is surrounded by sex toys and porn magazines, which is another mixture of death and transgressive form of sex. Adam was the first born son, the one who was actually supposed to have sexual intercourse in his life, to have a family and to stay in the cult. But he left the church when he found out how the Creedish cult prevents Tenders and Biddies from having sex and he announced the practices of the church to the authorities – which led to the suicide of its members, inside

⁵⁷ See Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 39.

⁵⁸ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 37.

the community and outside as well. And it also turned Tender into the Survivor program member. Adam then tracked the members, who were prevented to kill themselves and killed them instead, and this action brought him to his brother. His dying wish was for Tender to stop living according to the false church's ideas and to finally free himself from the deprivation of Tender's individuality. Adam is then buried under the soil, sex toys and magazines. So he is freed from the cult's doctrine, by this bizarre burial, but only after he dies.

When Tender again follows his brother's last wish and has sexual intercourse with Fertility, the reader can observe several things. Firstly, Tender changes in a significant way in his relationship to Fertility. Even if it was not his decision and even though he definitely has urges buried under the layers made by his previous experience, he starts expressing romantic feelings, and despite his previously transgressive experiences, he, for example, calls their intercourse making love - "She doesn't give me a second shot at making love,"⁵⁹ or "I watch her and wonder about her dreaming (...) And if she is dreaming it about me."⁶⁰ But when she comes to him in the morning, realizing she is pregnant (possibly due to her prophetic dreams) and deciding to fly to Australia to abort the child, he is emotionless. Secondly, their intercourse was right after she had sex with Tender's former employer as a part of her job. After that, she does not treat Tender any differently and for her it does not make any difference. The fact she conceived a child leads to the decision to kill the child, so sex and death are interconnected once again. And last but not least, it comes back to the beginning, because this is the day Tender Branson kidnaps a plane to share his story via black box – and as long as he is not a pilot, he is about to die at the same day he had his first sexual intercourse. But the result is only one – Sex did not set him free but death will. "In Tender's world, not only death is alive, but God is dead."⁶¹ His attempt to free himself from his past was a failure. The church compromised itself, so the message it was supposed to deliver was in vain, and the rules Tender was following were

⁵⁹ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 15.

⁶⁰ Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 15.

⁶¹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Stranger than Fiction: True Stories* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), PDF version, 146.

pointless. With this in mind, also the entire existence of Tender was. The only real thing, which never let him down, was death.

In the last chapter, as Tender recounts his life, he mentions the conversation with Fertility earlier that day: “And according to Fertility, if I could only figure out how I could escape. I could escape being up here. I could escape the crash. I could escape being Tender Branson. (...) the trick was to just tell people the story of how I got to this point, and I’d figure a way out.”⁶² She also promised him they could be together, have better sex and live as a couple. But of course, because Tender is sitting in the plane which is about to crash, there is no escape. To him, the world he has been living was too compromised, he was being chased by the police after his career as a modern day messiah failed and death is inevitable due to the damage, which is irreversible in his case. At the end he follows the piece of advice he was giving to the people on the phone.

To sum the chapter up, sex does not set Tender free. He is extremely submissive and dysfunctional, unable to act on his own most of the time. He is surrounded by artificiality and pretence and for that reason he cannot turn himself into a functional member of the society. His perception of sex is transgressed for he has never witnessed a single instance of a standard. And the way he thinks about it reflects his own emotional state – detached, transgressed, without emotions. Even in sex, he follows someone’s order. When he fantasizes, he does not think about a romantic bond with someone else; his fantasies are deviated, twisted by the practices and attitudes of his church. Sex means death, love means death. Everything you love must die, from a goldfish to a person. When sterile Fertility gets pregnant, she decides to get in a hijacked plane, but she is stopped by Tender, who is the only person on the plane, after he politely asked all the passengers and crew to leave. Even in his case, sex brings death, after he was finally intimate with a woman, he has to die. At the end, the only survivor is his life story.

⁶² Palahniuk, *Survivor*, 3.

4 LULLABY

4.1 An Overview of *Lullaby*

In this chapter, the main focus will be on two characters, starting with rather minor character, a paramedic John Nash, and gradually shifting to the protagonist, a journalist Carl Streator. Streator accompanies Nash at work while writing an article on sudden infant death syndrome. The novel's main character Streator is the narrator at the same time and several chapters of the novel are accompanied by italicized digressions which describes the various miracles by an eye-witness. Later on, it is revealed that the digressions are actually flash forward experiences, narrated by Carl Streator.

When he and Nash visit the houses where an infant has recently died, Streator spots a book called *Poems and Rhymes around the World*, always opened at the page 27. He finds out that anyone, who has been told or sung the lullaby, or rather a cuddling song, from this particular page, dies. He also comes across the name Helen Hoover Boyle, a merciless real estate agent, who focuses on haunted houses, so she can keep reselling them all over again. Her son Patrick was also classified as one of the victims of SIDS as well, so she almost lost her son, Patrick, due to the cuddling song. He is kept in the hospital in a vegetative state.

The protagonist, unable to forget the song, starts killing people every time he even thinks of it – later he finds out that it is because of his sexual frustration, which makes him nervous and absent-minded. Together with Helen, Mona, Helen's secretary, and her boyfriend Oyster, they start a journey whose goal is to destroy all the existing copies containing the lullaby. Helen has the same ability as Carl, but she can control the killings and she actually makes a lot of money by killing dictators and other people, ordered by various governments.

On one hand, *Poems and Rhymes around the World* contains the dangerous lullaby, but as the characters find out, the song is originally from the ancient book of spells. So, at the end of their quest to destroy *Poems and Rhymes around the World* should be a grimoire – the book of spell from which

the dangerous lullaby was originally copied. Everyone wants the grimoire for a different reason; Carl wants to destroy the book, Mona and Oyster want to keep it. Later Mona finds out the grimoire is actually Helen's diary – she got it with the rights to one house. After a few arguments, Mona and Oyster are given the book. At the end of the novel, Helen dies with her son, who was kept at the hospital, but she manages to reincarnate into a police sergeant, and she/he and Carl are trying to catch Mona and Oyster, who are the originators of those bizarre miracles Streater was describing in the italicized digressions.

4.2 Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of John Nash's and Carl Streater's Personality in *Lullaby*

As it has been announced, firstly, the focus will be on John Nash. The narrator provides a very little information about him, for example, the only description of his appearance is that: "He's a big guy in a white uniform."⁶³ Throughout the book, the reader gradually discovers more about the character, mostly for his significant similarity to Streater, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The protagonist starts to reveal Nash's character, when Nash gives him a call about death of a married couple. Streater is supposed to write an article, so he joins the paramedics and Nash calls him on the pager every time an infant dies. Apparently, Streater was called by a mistake this time, because there was no dead child. Anyway, Streater stays to observe and despite the fact, there are no signs of what the cause of their death could be, Nash presents his theory to Streater: "You eat a girl out and you blow some air inside her, or if you fuck her too hard, either way you can force air into her bloodstream and the bubble goes right to her heart."⁶⁴ This is actually the first time Nash reveals his transgressive way of thinking. Even though there are dead bodies lying in front of them, which should not be sexually attractive in any way, Nash's attitude to

⁶³ Chuck Palahniuk, *Lullaby* (London: Vintage, 2003), 25.

⁶⁴ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 46.

death is bizarre, it seems like he enjoys fantasizing about the couple's sex life. When he and Carl talk later in the bar, he is not only sure that the woman and her husband died in the middle of intercourse, but he expresses the attraction to her, in his own way.

Because the narrator works as a journalist, besides the description of Nash's physical appearance, Streator also expresses disgust in his behavior. The paramedic eats with his bare hands, his hair is messy, and he uses general speech – far away from erudite Carl. This gives reader an impression that Nash is a rather primitive, animalistic character, who does not express any emotions whatsoever. This is reflected in a conversation between Carl and Nash; Carl tries to investigate the details of the couple's death, but Nash cannot stop talking about the woman's beauty – during the conversation, Carl becomes sure that Nash is a necrophiliac.

There is no wife or a girlfriend mentioned, but likely, Nash lives alone. He commonly deals with corpses at work and he is a loner in general; he eats alone, acts and talks detached from any emotions concerning death of others. Like in *Survivor*, death does not carry any emotions with it; Nash has seen so many dead children and women that he transformed them in a sexual object – and he demonstrates also possible homosexual tendencies (“The husband had a fine looking ass”⁶⁵), because Streator is convinced that Nash should not be present when Streator's boss Duncan died – for the possibility Nash could be sexually interested in him. During one particular conversation between Nash and Streator, Nash explains his deviation to Carl:

“If you could have any woman you wanted,” he says, “if you could have he any way you wanted, wouldn't you do it?”

I say, what he's talking about is rape.

“Not,” he says, “if she's dead.” (...) “If I'd been alone, alone and had a rubber...,” (...)

No way would I let the medical examiner find my DNS at the scene.

Then he's talking about murder.

“Not if somebody else kills her,” Nash says, and looks at me. “Or kills *him*.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 47.

⁶⁶ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 47.

It is not surprising that such talk does not get any emotional response from Streator. Just like in *Survivor*, death is one of the major themes. When Carl and Helen first meet, they have a conversation about old furniture, discussing how the beauty of each piece will last much longer than its owner. This can be seen as a hint to what Nash is doing, there can be a potential parallel between Helen's commentary and Nash's behavior: "I love it, but I'll only have it on my own terms."⁶⁷ – That is how Helen comments on the drawers and tables she likes. Corresponding with Carl's description, Nash is far from being attractive, so there is a possibility, that due to his rather repulsive commentaries, his personality is not attractive as well. He does not have the same comment on a living woman; one explanation could be he rarely meets any, the other is that he is aware of the fact this is the only way he can have intercourse with an attractive woman. In both cases, Nash can have sexual intercourse only on his own terms; when his sexual counterpart is dead.

Later on, the narrator tells the story of Waltraud Wagner, a nurse from 19th century. She was reported to give overdosed amount of morphine to her patients, first to relieve the pain, then just because she could control when and who will die.⁶⁸ Streator compares Helen, Nash and Wagner as people, who "can't control themselves."⁶⁹ In Nash's case, he seemingly can't stop himself from having post mortem intercourse, but this is only a half a truth. The paradox is, that Nash never loses the control over himself, unlike Streator, he is aware he has to wear a protection to prevent his arrest. On the other hand, it is Streator who reflects his frustration through the culling song and cannot control himself, killing randomly every time he feels a negative emotion towards anyone. Control is actually one of the biggest differences between these two characters. Other similarities and differences are going to be commented on later in the chapter.

⁶⁷ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 63.

⁶⁸ See Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 56-57.

⁶⁹ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 57.

Let us focus on the protagonist, Carl Streator. He is a journalist, so not a blue-collar worker like Nash, but he belongs to the category of frustrated, unsatisfied employees Palahniuk uses in his novels – it is akin to the *Fight Club's* unnamed protagonist or Victor Mancini from *Choke* (the detailed description will be provided in the last chapter). When Streator's boss dies, or rather, when he is killed by Carl, he is automatically replaced by another and nothing changes for the protagonist, because he is at the bottom of the chain of command. Admitted by him, he has not had sex since his wife died – which was almost 20 years ago. His first sexual intercourse after his wife's death is with Helen, when she learns the levitation spell and Carl is still not sure, if his affection for her is a result of a spell or not. Prototypical detachment of Palahniuk's character is apparent in this case as well – Carl rather blames the emotion on a spell than to admit that he actually cares about Helen. When he interacts with Nash it seems that they are very different from each other, but the more the story develops, the more similarities between them are evident.

Firstly, Streator's wife Gina and daughter Katrin died at the same day. But because Gina was lying next to him, covered by sheets, her body temperature did not change and he did not notice that she is already dead. Then he had intercourse with the corpse of his wife with a comment: "It was the best it had been since before Katrin was born."⁷⁰ Despite the fact he claims he realized she was dead just when he came back from work later that day, it is improbable he would not realize that she was not breathing. So he basically admits his best sexual experience was with the corpse of his own wife, which could be another explanation, why he has not had sex ever since she died – there was no opportunity for him to repeat this kind of sexual experience. But the most probable scenario is that Streator has a strong sense of a family, which will be discussed later. This is also the first time he explicitly compares himself to Nash: "The police report would call it postmortem sexual intercourse. Nash comes to my mind."⁷¹ So even though the narrator tries to point out the difference between them, he did the same thing as Nash years ago, admitting it

⁷⁰ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 178.

⁷¹ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 179.

was his best sexual experience. But Nash is the one who admits he enjoys this kind of sex and is actively seeking for it. Nash is even smart enough to wear protection, so it could mean that Carl is the one who cannot control his lust, in sexual stupor not even noticing that his wife has already died. Despite it was his only sexual experience of this kind, while Nash does it on a regular basis, Streator admits it was the best sexual experience in their entire marriage. Plus, at the end, as he admits, they both did the same thing.

Secondly, while they both have experience with necrophilia, Carl's sexual preferences are affected by his loss deeply. Because he lost his family, he easily accepts Mona's comment: "You know, you and Helen are so much like my parents."⁷² Ever since, they are addressing each other like mom and dad, son and daughter. Because Mona is more or less the same age as Katrin would be, if she was still alive, Carl often comments on her as if she was his own daughter, calling her: "a little girl playing dress-up."⁷³ In spite of Streator bringing up the idea of a new family they created, he is attracted to Mona since he saw her naked during the coven meeting. This is also the first time when Helen and Carl meet Oyster, who also plays role of a son in their 'family.' Helen's son Patrick is in coma in the hospital, so Oyster takes his place. He is Mona's boyfriend, but it does not stop him from flirting with Helen, who flirts back. When they travel together across the states to destroy all the copies of *Poems and Rhymes around the World*, there are several parallel relationships – employee and employer (Mona and Helen), boyfriend and girlfriend (Mona and Oyster), lovers (Helen and Carl); but also there is an observable incestuous metaphor – Streator's commenting on the attractiveness of Mona ("You don't want to get caught looking anywhere else, but her pubic hair is shaved. From straight on, her thighs are two perfect parentheses with her shaved V between them."⁷⁴), the struggle between the father and a boyfriend ("Her boyfriend would be this hippie asshole, trying o pick a fight with me, her dad"⁷⁵) and the incestuous mother-son relationship between Helen and Oyster ("Oyster sees

⁷² Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 156.

⁷³ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 101.

⁷⁴ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 98.

⁷⁵ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 102.

Helen, still watching him in the rearview mirror, and he winks at her and tweaks his nipple. For whatever reason, Oedipus Rex comes to mind.”⁷⁶). However, this relationship never gets sexually fulfilled. Mona with Oyster later leave, followed by their pseudo-parents, who want to make sure their so-called children will do no wrong.

Going back to Nash and Streator, another similarity between them can be observed in their attitude to homosexuality. As it has been said, there is a possibility Nash is homosexual, but this is more a concern of Streator than a fact (Nash never admitted any homosexual post death intercourse). But as the story develops, Helen dies with her son and thanks to a spell. Her mind moves into a body of Sarge, a police officer, who is investigating the sudden deaths of models that are caused by Nash, who learned the culling song. While Helen’s body died, she stays in the body of the officer, in a male body, and their relationship continues – so Streator is a homosexual, having a sexual relationship with another man. When Helen first transferred her mind, she commented on that by “This is amazing. Being with you like this, you’re giving me an erection. (...) I’ve always wanted a penis.”⁷⁷ As it has become a typical feature for Palahniuk’s novels, the protagonist’s life is controlled by the others; in this case, Carl is the passive observer of how Helen influences his life – she is the one who possesses the grimoire and knows the spells, she is also the one who becomes a male and for that Streator ends up in a homosexual relationship.

During their last confrontation when Streator successfully tracked down Nash, who with the knowledge of the lullaby was killing models to have intercourse with them, it shows up that Nash is actually an underestimated character, slightly mirroring Carl Streator. Most importantly, Nash admits the similarity the same way he admits his sexual deviation. To him, there is no difference between them– they both had coitus with a dead person. “You can’t kill me, (...) You and me, we are exactly alike.”⁷⁸ Streator admits the

⁷⁶ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 112.

⁷⁷ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 242.

⁷⁸ Palahniuk, *Lullaby*, 235.

postmortem sexual intercourse, but he argues that he and Gina were married. This is the point, when Nash can no longer follow or compete with Streator. Despite all the similarities, they are different in their perception of family. Nash is eventually killed by Streator. The protagonist is bound to the family, even just to a so-called concept, and that is why he stays in his relationship with Helen, why he or Helen never used the lullaby on Mona or Oyster.

It was demonstrated that both characters express transgressive sexual behavior, both are necrophiliacs, which is possibly the biggest similarity between them. While Nash is rather a simpler character in comparison to Carl, he is also more open to his deviation. Nash's unattractiveness, job and the lack of social bonds are reflected in his deviation; to have coitus with a corpse is possibly his only chance to have sexual intercourse with an attractive woman. On the other hand, Carl struggles with his experience, unable to admit that in this aspect, there is no difference between these two. The biggest difference is Carl's family perception. Though he enjoyed the intercourse, because it was with his wife, he is clearly suffering from guilt; he has not had sex since his wife died. At the same time, he gladly accepts his new family; but his original family is gone and by the post mortem intercourse, the family concept has been deviated for good. Not only he feels attracted to his new 'daughter' Mona, and the attraction is one the most obvious reflections of his frustrations. Also his submissive personality makes him unable to leave his new 'wife' Helen, despite it means he is going to end up in a homosexual relationship. Also, Streator is not willing to leave his new family, which means he stays with Helen, even though it means to be in a relationship with a man.

5 CHOKE

5.1 An Overview of *Choke*

The 2001 novel's plot is probably one of the most minimalistic concerning the storyline. *Choke*'s protagonist is Victor Mancini, a drop out doctor, a sex addict and a tour guide in a colonial theme park, which reconstructs the life in the 18th century. He works there together with his friend Denny, who is unable to fit in the numerous rules system of the workplace and often ends up being humiliated at the pillory. Victor has another unofficial occupation; he pretends to be choking on food in restaurants, so someone has to save him. By such an act, he gains a financial contribution from his saviors, who are turned into instant heroes and who feel bonded to Victor. He uses the money to pay for his mother's hospital bills, which happens to be 3000 dollars a month. His mother is present throughout the whole story, and the narrator offers a lot of flashbacks, where he reveals how his mother was often in jail and every time she was released she kidnapped him from his foster parents. Her health condition is getting worse and he has to find a solution other than the stomach tube, which is too expensive. The alternative solution is being offered by Doctor Paige Marshall, who wants him to have sexual intercourse together and the embryo could be used for the stem cells treatment. Victor also attends a support group for sexual addicts only to have intercourse with fellow patients. For Victor, those meetings also serve the purpose of finding out new sexual techniques, inspired by the deviations of other addicts. His mother's condition is getting worse and she does not recognize him due to the dementia, so he pretends to be her former lawyers, otherwise she does not communicate with him. When he asks Denny to pretend he is Victor, so he could see her reaction, she gives him a diary written in Italian, Paige is able to translate it and reveals that Victor was conceived from foreskin cells of Jesus Christ. Initially, Victor denies any religious influence in his life, but at the moment he starts to find a new way to live his life and admit that he fulfills the role of the new savior, everything goes wrong. His mother dies, revealing that he is not her biologic son, as she had stolen him, when he was an infant. Paige is not a doctor, but a

patient of the same hospital as Victor's mother, believing she came from the future. Completely disillusioned, he recognizes that Denny, who found a way to give up on his masturbation addiction, no longer needs Victor's attention. Paige turns out to be a perfect counterpart for Victor, they are both equally dysfunctional members of society – Victor, realizing that he does not know his biological mother and that Ida was a harmful element of his life; Paige escaping from the hospital realizes and admits she was just disillusioned by her mental issue.

5.2 Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of Victor Mancini's Personality in *Choke*

Sex in *Choke* is, without a doubt, provided with more space than in any other Palahniuk's novel. Not only protagonist Victor is a sexual addict, but also his best friend Denny suffers from addiction to masturbation, Victor's colleagues have intercourse together and even his mother allowed her patients to enjoy sexual adventures with any historical character of their choice through hypnosis.

Victor classifies himself among the others, as he calls them sexaholics, and with the aspect of support groups, Palahniuk exposes all kinds of sexual deviations. In Victor's support group, there are people, who injured themselves during sex by various items; there are those who suffer from zoophilia, pedophiles, voyeurs and the list goes on. From his description, he does not differ from them and he does not make any judgments. Victor attends the program, which has twelve steps, but as he claims, he stagnates in the fourth step and he definitely does not try to recover. These meetings are just an occasion to have more sex, because those victims are all here for the same reason. Also his best friend Denny who had to masturbate fifteen times a day participated in those meetings, but unlike Victor, Denny found a way out of his addiction. Although we can often observe how one character reflects another in Palahniuk's novels, concerning usually the protagonist and another character close to him (it happens also in *Fight Club* or *Lullaby*), Denny and Victor do

not have so much in common. Even though they are both addicted to a different kind of sexual stimuli, Denny becomes independent of Victor, who, on the other hand, desperately needs the attention of the others.

The sexual pattern in Victor's behavior is difficult to be classified. The character develops, he often changes his mind and sometimes reader can predict his emotional development better than he can. For example, when he claims he does not want to have intercourse with Paige, because it would let to the development of the cure for his mother. The real reason, how he later admits, is that he is emotionally involved with Paige and she is the only person who can help him out of his addiction and promiscuity. When Victor introduces the sexual deviations, he admits his promiscuity, he claims his detachment and he expresses his satisfaction with the short-term manner of his pleasures.

“It's not that I don't love these women. I love them just as much as you'd love a magazine centerfold, a fuck video, an adult website, and for sure, for a sexaholic, that can be buckets of love.”⁷⁹

It is equally important to understand his intentions and to take into consideration that he reckons himself a patient, a victim of his addiction. He compares various addictions with the same result – the person is always addicted to something else than what classifies his addiction. “Sex addicts are really addicted to the endorphins, not the sex.”⁸⁰ By this claim, he is aware that his addiction actually displays something else, a deep dysfunction reflected by Victor's addiction.

With such a point of view, the reader necessarily has to come up with a question – What is Victor really addicted to and what is the cause of his addiction? Further explanation can be provided when Victor goes back to his first time when he had intercourse with a stranger. The opportunity to have sex with a stranger, so with someone he has no emotional bond with, turned out to

⁷⁹ Chuck Palahniuk, *Choke* (London: Vintage, 2003), 17.

⁸⁰ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 19.

be a way to fight his personal problems – or to stop thinking about them. “These are people who don’t want an orgasm as much as they just want to forget.”⁸¹ With frequent flashbacks to his childhood, the answer is closely tied to his mother. She was put into a mental hospital, she refuses to eat and she is slowly dying. Unable to recognize her son, Victor pretends to be someone else, in hope for a closure. He does not know his father, and as a child, he did not spend much time with his mother either. He comments on his promiscuous encounters with women: “Just for these minutes, I don’t feel lonely.”⁸² On one hand, he realizes that sex can help him forget, on the other hand, he is also aware of the fact that sex is just a short term solution. Promiscuous sex does not provide him with any emotional experience, so at the end, he feels lonely – and tries to suppress the loneliness with more sex. As a result, he created two parallel vicious circles – his addiction to sex and choking.

As Mancini recalls his short and rather rare meetings with his mother during childhood, she was rather teaching him conspiratorial theories than expressing any affection to him. When he started to choke in a restaurant and was saved by her, he finally got the feeling that everyone cares about him, this was the first time he felt loved and his mother hugged him in order to save his life. It was the first time he realized that when he is in danger, people pay attention and care: “you had to risk your life to get love. You had to get right to the edge of death to ever be saved.”⁸³

This is the defining moment of his life. He realized that people get true attention of others when they are in danger or they struggle with an important issue. Although he claims he enjoys the promiscuity, he often asks women if they like him, during the intercourse, looking for any expression of affection. The reason for that is that they are likely to express love when they are enjoying physical pleasure. Also, he started to choke in restaurants on purpose, so someone has to come and save him. According to him, the effect multiplies – he gets money from people, who saved him, because he turned them into

⁸¹ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 257.

⁸² Palahniuk, *Choke*, 20.

⁸³ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 3.

heroes. And with the money, he can pay for his mother's medical care. Besides that, he can replicate the feeling he had as a child, loved, needed and being taken care of. It is a counter-service, a mutual help both sides need – he feels the urge to feel needed as he later admits to Denny, who no longer needs Victor to take care of him.

The world of caricatures is also what connects this story world to other Palahniuk's books. Firstly, let's focus on Victor's job. He works in Colonial Dunsboro, a theme park where the visitors can observe the life in 1730s in America. Victor, Denny and other employees play the roles of the inhabitants of the village and every time they do anything up-to-date that could not have happened in 18th century, they are punished. Denny is a frequent victim, being placed in the pillory and mocked, for his constant incompetence to fit in – and to pretend at the same time. To Victor, there is no difference between his life and his job – he pretends at work, he pretends in the restaurants. Secondly, everyone in the park is looking for some sort of an escape – by humming a pop-song, doing drugs or having sex together in the working hours. The protagonist comments on the punishment of Denny by: "He means bondage. Sadism. Role playing and public humiliation."⁸⁴ The same principle is applied in Victor's sex life. Sex as an escape from loneliness, from his emotionally detached mother, from his own emotions and last but not least, from the identification of himself – while other characters from other books struggle with being labeled, Victor seeks for one, he seeks to be labeled as sexaholic, because of a lack of any information from his past). Victor has been deprived of his identity by his mother, who refuses to share any piece of information about his past. In this case, there is an obvious parallel with *Survivor*, where Tender Branson shares his name with other sons, so he is deprived of his identity as well.

He can see himself, again, as one of the others from Colonial Dunsboro. All the people do their ridiculous jobs: "This whole crowd of losers and nutcases who hide out here because they can't make it in the real world, in real

⁸⁴ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 30.

jobs.”⁸⁵ This is another unifying pattern shared in many of Palahniuk’s novels. His characters are servants and waiters, they simply work for other people but they do it on purpose, with their own escape methods – in this case, sex and drugs. Via sex, Victor escapes emotions, loneliness and his mother as well. Otherwise, he is stuck in life and at work (where is the same year every day, so no progress is possible). He is a permanent sex addict, he never moved from the fourth phase of his treatment (and when Denny finds a way, it makes Victor’s world fall apart) and also, he does not want his mother to get better because her illness makes her need Victor for the first time in her life.

Ida Mancini, as it is revealed at the end of the book, is not Victor’s biological mother, but she stole him as an infant. This could be an explanation for her detached behavior that he suffers from. He accuses her of his own failure in life, his sexual addiction and inability to fit in society. He suffers from Oedipus complex, frequently commenting on his unusual bond with his mother. During his childhood, she was trying to turn him into a hero who can change a world that is boring and sad, according to her. It was Victor who got tired from their fugitive way of life and at the end, he called police. But later as an adult, he decides to turn other people into heroes, by allowing them to save his life. While he obviously misses a parental figure in his life, by this act, he receives adoptive parents – those people will always feel obliged to take care of him, they will be sending money and ask him, whether he is doing well, so he basically creates a family on his own.⁸⁶ Ida not only prevented him from loving her, she also prevented him from creating an emotional attachment with any of his foster parents – she manipulated him into denial of any emotional bond to them and she also made sure he would never stay with one family for too long. “And just in case the police or anybody asks you later on, I’m going to tell you all the dirty, filthy things this so called foster mother did to you every time she could get you alone”⁸⁷ - instead of trying to improve her relationship with her son, she gave instructions to Victor and he accused his

⁸⁵ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 31.

⁸⁶ See Palahniuk, *Choke*, 80.

⁸⁷ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 66.

foster parents of child molestation. Her instructions caused not only that Victor was being moved from family to family and it deprived him of any relationships. In addition to that, a lack of emotional attachment and mother's love made him look for the affection elsewhere – for example in restaurants. It also strengthened the urge to feel needed in the lives of the other and for the exact same reason he refuses an offer to have intercourse with Paige, who offers him to get his mother the stomach tube for an exchange. The truth is he is not willing to contribute to his mother's recovery. As his whole life was controlled by this woman, he feels that this is the only chance to make her need him – and make her stuck in her situation as well as he is stuck in his life.

This mother and son relationship is being labeled as a marriage and a lifetime relationship by Victor. Despite it carries an idea of incest, as a proper example of Oedipus complex, but it is never sexually fulfilled. It is mirrored in his own sex life – as he is detached from his love interests emotionally, he still tries to make women feel love for him by asking them about their feelings when they are the most vulnerable. And the same is done with his mother by keeping her in need of him. This also prevents him from intercourse with Paige, who wants to use their future embryo for a neural transplant, which can help to rebuilt human brain cells.⁸⁸ Although Victor admits he is sexually attracted to her, he refuses for the above mentioned reasons.

Victor's personality changes with Paige. Later, the refusal of having sexual intercourse stems from the fact he likes her. With the revelation that Paige is a patient who pretends to be a doctor, who suffers from a mental disorder and persuades Victor that he is a descendant of Jesus, there comes the fact that she is a dysfunctional individual just like Victor. She believes she is from future and when she is proven wrong, she joins Victor, who was also disillusioned Ida was his mother.

To conclude the chapter, *Choke's* protagonist is a sexual addict and the novel contains a numerous descriptions of Mancini's intercourses. He pretends to be raping someone, participates in anal sex, which leaves him injured and

⁸⁸ See Palahniuk, *Choke*, 123.

humiliated, so there is a lot of transgressive sexual practices. But the novel is much more complex. As the character develops his attitude to sex changes and at the end he is finally able to find a romantic, although equally dysfunctional, partner. The extent to which his sexual life is tied to his upbringing is shown in the final part, where he no longer deals with his addiction because his mother died; and it means a fresh start for Victor who survived his choking. “‘Widower’ isn’t the right world, but it’s the first word that comes to mind.”⁸⁹ Again, transgressive sex in Victor’s case turned out to be a reflection of his personality – his unhealthy, detached relationship with his mother, which he compares to a dysfunctional marriage, made him try to find a way of escape. He chose sex, transgressive and promiscuous, which allowed him to treat his counterparts with as little emotion as possible. On the other hand, he uses the vulnerability of the female sex addicts and wants them to express affection to him – again, because of his emotionless mother.

⁸⁹ Palahniuk, *Choke*, 270.

6 FIGHT CLUB

6.1 An Overview of *Fight Club*

Palahniuk's magnum opus from 1996 is narrated by an unnamed narrator who started to attend group therapies for patients with various terminal illnesses or types of cancer. Although he does not suffer from any of these, the narrator suffers from insomnia, and the fact he knows there are people next to whom his own problems seem marginal, helps him sleep. During these therapies, he meets Marla Singer, who attends the same groups as him for more or less the same reason and he once again feels sleep deprived. Marla is another pretender and the narrator cannot feel the same relief knowing there is an intruder in his habits. Also, he started to feel physically attracted to her.

When he manages to fall asleep, he wakes up at different places, at different airports. Being a recall campaign coordinator, his job requires constant travelling, and once he comes back home, his apartment is damaged by an explosion. His only contact is Tyler Durden, a soap maker he met at the beach earlier. Tyler is willing to accommodate the narrator in his house, but he asks him to punch Tyler as hard as he can. After this experience, they establish a fight club, a place where the members fight each other, where there are strict rules and where the social differences are being wiped out – there is no social stratification of the individual fighters, so anyone can fight anyone. The demanded effect is a release of everyday frustrations. By the time fight club expands, Tyler becomes sexually involved with Marla. The narrator is jealous of Tyler and acts cold and detached to her. Anyway, the relationship between Marla and Tyler is violent and he asks the narrator not to talk about him with Marla.

Tyler is not only a soap maker, he also works in the theater and as a waiter, where he inserts pornographic pictures into children movies or urinates into food that is being served, as a form of his personal revolution. When the narrator joins him, and other fight clubs are being established throughout the country, Tyler comes up with the Project Mayhem, which is supposed to cause

chaos and destruction in order to reestablish the civilization. The narrator becomes less and less involved in the Project and after a while of Tyler's absence, he decides to find him again to get the answers what the directions the Project is going to be. When he acts more and more like Tyler and talks like him, it is revealed that there is no Tyler – Tyler is only his hallucination, an alter ego or another part of his personality, who is awoken every time the narrator falls asleep. He created Tyler from his suppressed needs and a frustration of his unsuccessful career and lifestyle.

When his attempts to cancel the Project fail, there is only one solution left – by killing himself, he can kill Tyler. After the narrator shoots himself, he ends up in the hospital, possibly an asylum, where he realizes that although Tyler is dead, the idea of the fight club and the Project Mayhem survives. The end of the novel is open; it is unclear whether the narrator ended up in a hospital or an asylum, if he is conscious or in coma. And in spite of the fact he managed to kill Tyler, he failed to cancel the Project – and with the Project, the idea of Tyler as the leader, survives as well.

6.2 Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of the Narrator's Personality in *Fight Club*

The key triplet of characters in the 1996 novel is the unnamed narrator, Marla and Tyler. The common suppression of the protagonist identity, which happens almost in every Palahniuk's novel (like *Choke* or *Survivor*), is here represented not only by the deprivation of a concrete name in the narrator's case, but it also explicitly demonstrates that his character is defined by his way of life. As a social satire criticising consumerism, which can be another approach to genre of the novel, the narrator works in a company, where his personality does not matter; he does not have any social bonds, because his job does not provide any space for that. His constant travelling, sleep deprivation and attachment to IKEA furniture made him feel empty – and he is capable to fill up the empty space during the group therapies, with people who suffer from a real cause. The narrator's interaction with people suffering from cancer is a form of his

own purification and he comments on the group therapies in this way: “Every evening, I died, and every evening, I was born. Resurrected.”⁹⁰ Not only those support groups treat him like he was a part of a community and he feels he belongs somewhere, but the groups actually provide him with a human touch, because a part of the therapy is hugging and crying.

In addition to the relief he is being provided with by the support groups, he meets Marla Singer during the sessions. Marla is the central female character in the novel, besides the dying members of the support groups, the most importantly, Chloe. Chloe suffers from brain parasites and she knows she is going to die soon. But instead of being scared of death, she struggles with the incompetence to have sexual intercourse before she dies. She even asks the narrator to fulfil her last wish: although she is aware that her illness changed her physical appearance. However, Chloe owns various types of stimuli – from pornographic movies, lubricants and sex toys that could help a potential sexual counterpart to forget that he is actually having sex with a dying woman. Chloe eventually dies without her dying wish being ever fulfilled and her physical appearance prevents the narrator from thinking about her as if she was a potential lover: “Normal times, I’d be sporting an erection. Our Chloe, however, is a skeleton dipped in yellow wax.”⁹¹

Another character that should be mentioned is the character of Big Bob. He was diagnosed with testicular cancer that was caused by his addiction on anabolic steroids. Those helped him to reach the top as a body builder, and later, he had his testicles removed. The hormonal treatment has caused an anatomical anomaly – Bob has women’s breast. Now Bob stands somewhere in between of men and women - formerly masculine and muscular, he has become sensitive and caring, more feminine. Even though he is a minor character, he has a special position in the narrator’s eyes – Bob was the first person he had a close physical contact with, he was able to lie on his breasts and cry; Bob was the one who brought the relief. He is basically a merger of a man and a woman – a human being with falus and breasts. Both Bob and Chloe

⁹⁰ Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club* (London: Vintage, 2006), 22.

⁹¹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 20.

are deprived from any other form of physical closeness due to their appearance and illness; they are not capable or attractive enough to be anyone's potential lovers. While Chloe desperately wants to have sex for one more time, Bob is more of a mother figure, holding unique status because of his positive influence on the protagonist.

Let us move on to the central relationship between Marla and the narrator. When they first met, he despised her, because she was an intruder into his habits; knowing there is another cheater, who pretends to be dying. She deprives him of his feeling of relief and he hates her for that. But she needs the support groups for the same reason as he does, it gives her the feeling she is alive.⁹² Correspondingly, Marla attends the group therapies for the same reason Ida Mancini rebelled against society, which eventually sent her to jail. Both females are irritated by the boredom and stereotypes of life. Besides this, Marla's sexual history is full of partners who demanded various sexual practices, that could be called transgressive – a cross-dressing man, who liked wearing her clothes or another, who used a device for penis enlargement. She even dated a man who persuaded her to pretend coitus with a blown-up doll.⁹³ She is an eccentric female character compared to the insecure narrator, who is lacking any human contact other than a hug by a fellow member of a particular support group. She is also the reason why Tyler is brought to life. In spite of the narrator's initial claims, he says later in the novel: "I know why Tyler had occurred. Tyler loved Marla. From the first night I met her, Tyler or some part of me had needed a way to be with Marla."⁹⁴ When Marla invites him to watch her committing suicide, she ends up having sex with Tyler – and this becomes the key moment of their relationship.

Their first sex is crucial for several reasons, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Firstly, the narrator is sexually attracted to her, he dreams about having sex with her the night she had intercourse with Tyler. He is logically jealous but it is more reflected in his relationship with Marla, whom

⁹² See Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 38.

⁹³ See Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 183.

⁹⁴ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 198.

he rather tries to avoid. The narrator willingly does not discuss her with Tyler, who, on the other hand, does not have a problem to describe his night with Marla: “After Tyler and Marla had sex about ten times, Tyler says, Marla said she wanted to get pregnant. Marla said she wanted to have Tyler’s abortion.”⁹⁵ The nature of Tyler-Marla relationship is destructive, he saved her when she tried to kill herself, but there are no genuine emotions other than a shared will to have sex. ““Tyler says: “Don’t call this love.””⁹⁶

Before it is revealed that Tyler is just another personality of the narrator, despite there are hints that comes with this revelation even before the narrator is explicitly told by Tyler, there are other hints that Marla can be fictional as well. Marla stands between them, sometimes she talks more like Tyler, but sometimes, she shows emotional attachment to the narrator/Tyler. She is unable to recognize them; all the time, she thinks it is Tyler she is having sex with; she thinks Tyler is the narrator. Tyler does not physically exist, so, logically, he never appears in the same room with her and the narrator. The narrator, who is unaware of the fact that Tyler is just a fantasy, starts thinking about this fact and he notices that the only time Marla and Tyler share the room is when they have intercourse: “I’m starting to wonder if Tyler and Marla are the same person. Except for their humping, every night in Marla’s room.”⁹⁷

Despite one of the popular interpretations that Marla is also a projection of the narrator’s psyche, just like Tyler, it is rather improbable. Firstly, when the narrator shoots himself in order to kill Tyler, Marla keeps sending him letters to the hospital afterwards, so she survives. Secondly, despite there is certain similarity between them, concerning their interest and associations with sex – Tyler works in the theatre, where he inserts pornographic pictures into fairytales for children, Marla also associates sex as a disillusion of youth naivety: “You know, the condom is the glass slipper of our generation. You slip it on when you meet a stranger. You dance all night, then you throw it

⁹⁵ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 59.

⁹⁶ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 62.

⁹⁷ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 65.

away.”⁹⁸ But if Marla was just another part of his personality, it could have meant that anything, from Bob to Project Mayhem could be happening only in the head of the narrator. And this would also mean that the narrator actually never had sex. But, the truth is that he discovered Marla’s and Tyler’s affair when he found a condom in the toilet. The physical proof of a protected sex and Marla’s survival, rather suggests that she is an actual person, a love interest of the protagonist. “Whenever Tyler was having sex with Marla, I was asleep.”⁹⁹ The quote suggest something else than Marla’s non-existence— it does not mean there was no intercourse between them at all, but rather that he does not feel that they shared bed. Because he created a perfect version of himself he was supposed to follow (once again a character obeys someone else, another repetitive pattern of Palahniuk’s works), he feels detached and jealous. For the narrator, Tyler is a real competitor, a different person, and for that reason, Marla and the narrator never had sexual intercourse, while Marla and Tyler did.

In the moment of epiphany, the narrator realizes that he is Tyler, he calls Marla and he only thing he asks about is if they have ever had sexual intercourse. Despite the fact that sex is not a major theme in this novel, in comparison of other Palahniuk’s novels, like *Choke*, it plays a major role in the climax of the story. By the confirmation of the sexual act between them, the narrator finally realizes that it was him who slept with Marla and who treated her violently. The reflection of his personality can be seen on this particular relationship. Not only is Marla a victim of emotional abuse caused by the protagonist’s split personality, she is also physically abused. The major theme of the novel is violence and how it can help the members survive their everyday struggles. Tyler, narrator’s friend, mentor and guide, serves the role of the narrator’s emotional purge. He helped the narrator to get rid of the burden of the material world and get his priorities straight; but it was also an alibi for being violent, even for a murder, and this is reflected mostly on the only character that connects him with the reality, Marla. His affection hurts; he

⁹⁸ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 66.

⁹⁹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 174.

leaves the chemical scar on her hand, when he kisses it. But even after the epiphany, he cannot get his life back, when he falls asleep, he becomes Tyler again, so the only solution is an attempt to commit a suicide.

“That old saying, about how you always kill the things you love, well, it works both ways.”¹⁰⁰ This is not only applicable to the relationship of the narrator and Tyler, but also to his relationship with Marla. Marla has become a victim of physical abuse, and she is once again, after her bizarre encounters and a series of humiliating sexual experiences, a victim of unhealthy relationship. The climax of the transgression appears, when she talks to the narrator with a noticeable black eye, which is the evidence of the narrator being violent with her. She says to the narrator: “Just because you and your little disciples like getting beat up, you touch me ever again, and you’re dead.”¹⁰¹ So, even though sex is not the most important theme, it is, once again, a reflection of the character’s personality. Not only he established the fight club, when he can release the daily life frustrations, he also hits his girlfriend, which is possibly the most significant expression of transgressive relationship. But once again, she cannot distinguish between the narrator and Tyler and she willingly accepts the violence in the relationship. She does not leave him when he shoots himself.

Although Palahniuk is more a storyteller, who likes to incorporate interesting stories he has been told, some critics sees his personal influence going even further. In the essay “Hiding homoeroticism in plain view: the Fight Club DVD as digital closet” written by Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, the authors suggest that Fight Club movie reflects Palahniuk’s sexuality. According to them, the hidden homosexual agenda between the narrator of the novel and his alter ego Tyler is shown multiple times, for example:

“Tyler holding a gun in Jack’s (Jack is the movie version of the unnamed narrator) mouth. When Jack wonders why he cannot rid himself of Tyler,

¹⁰⁰ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 184.

¹⁰¹ Palahniuk, *Fight Club*, 195.

Tyler claims he was created from Jack by Jack to satisfy Jack's unmet needs"¹⁰²;

Despite the fact that Brookey and Westerfelhaus were clearly talking about the movie, the scene originates from the novel. From this point of view, the gun clearly represents falus. But this analysis is not very probable. Like in the case of the interpretation that Marla is not real; the popularity of the book caused a variety of over-thinking attitudes to the novel. Despite the fact that even Jesse Kavadlo in his essay "The Fiction of Self-Destruction" talks about the narrator finding love object in Tyler¹⁰³, Tyler represents rather a perfect, masculine ideal for the weak members of the club than a homoerotic fantasy; the narrator loves him because Tyler is all the narrator is not, but there is no evidence he is also a sexual interest. In addition to this, their struggle is about Marla, Tyler has to die, because he is a destructive love rival. "After Jack discovers that Tyler is a projection of his own psyche, he no longer sees Marla as a threat"¹⁰⁴ - the authors of the article do not think the narrator is jealous of Tyler but of Marla. But Marla was an intruder into his way of living before she met Tyler, his love and hate relationship stems from the fact she attends the support groups with the same reason as he does and she is a reminder of his own lies. This brings us back to the key scene when the narrator discovers condoms in the toilet; if it was a homoerotic experience, Marla would have to be another alter ego of the narrator, just like Tyler, which has already been taken as rather improbable interpretation. At the end, the narrator expresses his feeling to Marla, not Tyler and he kills Tyler, not Marla. Despite the fact the theory is rather improbable, it is another point of view that expressive transgressive sex among the central triplet.

¹⁰² Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, "Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The Fight Club DVD as Digital Closet," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19:1 (2002): 37, accessed March 22, 2017, doi: 10.1080/07393180216555.

¹⁰³ See Jose Kavadlo, "The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist," in *You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I Am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, ed. Read Mercer Schuchardt (Dallas: BenBella, 2008), 19.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, "Hiding Homoeroticism in Plain View: The Fight Club DVD as Digital Closet," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19:1 (2002): 37, accessed March 22, 2017, doi: 10.1080/07393180216555.

Sexual transgression once again reflects the nature of the character. The narrator physically fights not only other men, and fighting them he fights his problems and frustrations as well, but his violent nature is reflected in his violent relationship to Marla. His obedient nature, so typical for Palahniuk's characters, is reflected through the alter ego this time. The narrator, unable to face his frustrations on his own, creates not only a perfect version of himself but at the same time a representation that he can fight. In addition to this, any other theory, probable or not, inclines to the conclusion, that the narrator reflects his frustration via transgressive sex.

7 TRANSGRESSION IN THE SELECTED NOVELS

In the last chapter, not only the comparison of the selected characters will be provided, but also additional information and premises that led to the hypothesis that Palahniuk has created a character type. The aim of the chapter is to describe the nature of the character type, what the characters have in common, but also to sum up how their personality flaws are reflected via transgressive sex. And last but not least, other forms of transgression as a part of the character type will be demonstrated.

7.1 Transgression as a Part of the Character Type

In the first chapter of this thesis, there is an emphasis on defining what is actually being transgressed in each analyzed novel. In Palahniuk's case, the principle is reversed – it is hard to find something that is not transgressive. As it resulted from the analyses, his characters practically do not express any standard attitudes – Palahniuk transgresses religion by creating a ready-made messiah or a sex-addicted modern form of Jesus-atheist. His idea of family is posthumous coitus with one's wife or sexual attraction to the idea of one's own daughter. Victor Mancini tries to divorce his own mother by having sexual intercourse with other women. And sex? Basically any deviation is allowed, unless it is an act made of love. Palahniuk's characters are broken, their lives are controlled by other things and other people. And their way out is mostly their own destruction – they usually have to die.

“Imagine what it is like to have your eyes rubbed raw with broken glass. This is what reading Chuck Palahniuk is like.”¹⁰⁵ Jesse Kavadlo, a professor of English at Maryville University of St. Louis in his essay “The Fiction of Self-Destruction” mentions that the problem is not in the story-world. In other words, the world the characters are living in is all right;

¹⁰⁵ Jose Kavadlo, “The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist,” in *You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I Am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, ed. Read Mercer Schuchardt (Dallas: BenBella, 2008), 13.

hopeless as it can be, it is eventually recreated and becomes hopeful, as a new, fresh start for the people involved.¹⁰⁶

It would be a mistake to call Palahniuk a social satirist in the first place. The basic premise of transgressive fiction is that the author never expresses criticism in his books. In *Lullaby*, Streator tries to stop Nash from killing models to have post mortem intercourse only to realize he has done the same thing. The narrator in *Fight Club* creates an opposite self, Tyler, who he is a product, a copy of the narrator's frustration with his own way of life. The narrator is not fighting Tyler, but himself.

It does not mean that the scarred characters can blame their fate only on themselves. Mancini suffers from his mother's incapability to love him, Streator is a necrophiliac by accident, Branson is a victim of the cult he was raised in and the narrator in *Fight Club* is simply incapable to fight his frustration and needs Tyler's guidance. All the members of Branson's cult are dead, Mancini's mother is dying and they are still unable to start living their lives.

These similarities bring the idea that there are some shared patterns concerning Palahniuk's characters. Besides being middle-age white males, all selected characters either have frustrating occupations that usually do not require any special education or cannot provide any space for personal growth: Branson works as a servant, Mancini works as a tour guide in Colonial Dunsboro. Streator is a journalist, but his opinion does not matter and he can only follow orders; when he kills his boss Duncan, Duncan is quickly replaced by another boss, who gives orders. The narrator in *Fight Club* eventually joins Tyler and works as a waiter; despite being a recall campaign coordinator, which is not a typical manual job, he is frustrated by its routine and hopelessness. Carl Streator is not a manual worker either; but his job brings back bad memories; when he is supposed to write about sudden infant death syndrome, which caused death of his own infant daughter. There is one shared

¹⁰⁶ See Kavadlo, "The Fiction of Self-Destruction," 14.

pattern to be observed in all cases – all of them are frustrated by their occupations and lives, dissatisfied and unhappy.

Their job usually means obedience and submissive attitude, which is mostly the result of their upbringing. Mancini's mother was detached and emotionless, which is not only reflected in his sexual addiction and the practices, but also in his 'second job,' which is to choke on food in restaurants. Tyler expresses a hateful attitude to his father as well, saying he is the person he would like to fight eventually (although this attitude is not shared by the narrator). In case of Branson, there is the best explanation for his job and attitude to his own life – his parents were detached and he was trained to serve others. Streater does not mention his upbringing, but the concept of a family is transgressed here as well – his family died and there is a lot of sexual tension in the new concept of a family he created. All these factors affiliated with the family led to character's choice of job later in their lives or their submissive nature. But all of them willingly chose their careers, which are a great part of their self-destructive nature.

Palahniuk also does not provide any relief concerning religion. The transgression of religion is apparent mostly in *Choke* and *Survivor*. In the first mentioned, Mancini tries not to act like Christ's descendant, although he cannot prevent himself from believing it eventually. He believes he has to keep saving the others, which only leads to his mother's death and the epiphany - not only is he not Jesus' son but also Ida is not even his biological mother. In *Survivor*, Branson is not only a 'product' of a deadly cult, which is transgressive itself, because *The Bible* forbids suicide. At first, he feels the messiah complex when he is empowered to advise people to kill themselves; later, he is turned into a television messiah, another product made for a profit of his agent. In *Lullaby*, Streater expresses his acceptance of his own version of messiah complex by saying: "Sure, everybody wants to play God, but for me it's a full-time job."¹⁰⁷ He, Helen and Nash have the power to decide, who will live and who will die, which brings the idea they possess God-like powers. But

¹⁰⁷ Chuck Palahniuk, *Lullaby* (London: Vintage, 2003), 119.

when the grimoire is found and given to Mona and Oyster, it is them who can perform small-natured miracles. And last but not least, Tyler in *Fight Club* also represents a perfect, God-like figure that has a large amount of followers and the idea of the fight club can be interpreted as a violent cult.

7.2 Transgressive Sex in the Selected Novels

Sex and relationships are another aspect of characters' lives that is being transgressed. Even though sometimes it is not equally obvious in every novel that has been discussed, sex reflects perfectly the hamartia of each character. It is transgressive sex that serves as mirror and reveals the true nature of a particular character. Not just that sex has transgressive nature corresponding with the basic Bataille's definition (it is not purposed for a child's conception, often deviated and treated as a standard behavior and appellative in the violation) but Palahniuk also expresses the variety of deviations that reflect other aspects of characters' lives.

Tender Branson from *Survivor* is a virgin who was taught to associate sex with pain, which was the way the cult ensured its members would be obedient servants. By this technique, the members were willingly detached from other people; they did not consider themselves to be in other relationship than master-servant. When Branson meets Fertility (who chose her name according to her job as a surrogate mother, but she is unable to conceive a child) he is disgusted by her job – because she is willing to go through the pain for money. Not just Branson's life is hugely influenced by sex, but also hers. Sex means death in many aspects – when Branson has his first intercourse, he is supposed to die on a same day. When sterile Fertility gets pregnant, she wants abortion immediately. When Adam Branson dies, he is buried under porn magazines and sex toys. Tender is a product of a suicidal cult and he frequently associates sex with death; his personality was deviated too deeply by his church.

Sex and death are also paralleled in *Lullaby*. But this time, it is the female character who dies. Despite the same theme, death, it is now treated

differently, with Nash who is dealing with so many dead women that he developed necrophiliac tendencies – but possibly for his unattractive appearance which prevents him from having a regular relationship with live woman. With his job and a newly gained ability to kill, he kills only models – the lullaby gives him a power to have any woman of his choice.

Since transgressive fiction is not supposed to treat the deviations as immoral, the moment Carl Streater tries to judge and stop Nash, it is revealed he also had post mortem intercourse, so in this aspect, they did the same thing. Actually, while there are only signs Nash might be a homosexual, at the end, it is Streater, who has a homosexual relationship – and it does not bring him pleasure, it is just another way his submissive character is expressed.

Another parallel Palahniuk brings together is sex and family. In *Lullaby*, not only is the concept of a married sex violated when the protagonist has sex with his dead wife, it is violated even further when he accepts that Helen, Mona and Oyster are his new family. Despite he has sex with Helen, who represents mother and wife, she later becomes a man and they continue their relationship as a homosexual couple. Moreover, he feels the attraction to his newly gained daughter Mona and enjoys observing her naked body. Helen does the same thing. She explicitly flirts with Oyster, a replacement for her son, Patrick.

Sex and family are treated slightly differently in *Choke*, where Victor Mancini's sexual addiction is a form of rebellion against his mother, whom he perceives as a burden and feels a marital bond to her. He thinks about his mother frequently during intercourse and tries to escape the damage she caused. Sex is a mean of escape - from his mother and his problems. Tatyana Shumsky in her essay "Tracking Conversion: A Structural Analysis of Survivor and Choke" calls his sexual addiction, choking in restaurants and his job as a "cycle of escapism,"¹⁰⁸ which always leads back to Victor's mother. Kavadlo proposes there is a similar approach to a mother-like figure in *Fight Club*,

¹⁰⁸ Tatyana Shumsky, "Tracking Conversion: A Structural Analysis of *Survivor* and *Choke*," in *Sacred and Immoral: On the Writings of Chuck Palahniuk*, ed. Jeffrey A. Sartain (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 44.

where the mother is represented by Big Bob, whose female breasts provide the narrator with comfort and escape from problems at first, but later he feels choked by them.¹⁰⁹

Another important parallel is the connection of sex and religion. In *Choke*, Mancini decides to pretend he is raping a girl, as a role play, because he denies the idea of being a son of Jesus by doing the exact opposite. From his point of view, promiscuity and sex addiction are something the descendant of Jesus would never do. Sex and religion appear in *Survivor* as well, when Tender Branson is willing to marry a random woman, chosen by his agent, and have sex with her. Although this would be a case of marital sex, the conception of the child would not be done by Tender, whose body is possibly sterile due to the heavy usage of steroids, but someone hired by the agent. In *Lullaby* it is Nash who abuses the God-like power to have coitus and also, by a spell, Helen transfers her mind into Serge's body and this intervention causes Carl ending up in homosexual relationship.

But the most importantly, it is the nature of the characters what is reflected in their sexual practices. In *Fight Club* the narrator's/Tyler's violent behavior is reflected in his violent relationship with Marla, when she appears at the end with the bruise on her eye. In *Lullaby*, Carl Streater works in the newspapers, writing articles on sudden infant death syndrome and tries to stop Nash from killing women for sex, while he has the experience with the same deviation. *Survivor*'s protagonist Tender Branson's cult upbringing is mostly reflected in his lack of relationship, as well as his virginity, and the connection to death causes that his only sexual experience ends with him committing a suicide. And in *Choke*, a lack of mother's attention and feelings turn Victor Mancini into a sex addict.

In conclusion, there is a character type created by Palahniuk, and there is also a variety of transgression. Palahniuk's protagonists are obedient, submissive, usually a working class members whose life is controlled by

¹⁰⁹ See Jose Kavadlo, "The Fiction of Self-Destruction: Chuck Palahniuk, Closet Moralist," in *You Do Not Talk About Fight Club: I Am Jack's Completely Unauthorized Essay Collection*, ed. Read Mercer Schuchardt (Dallas: BenBella, 2008), 19-20.

someone else. Their dysfunctional lives and flaws usually stem from their upbringing, and despite the fact that sex is not always a major theme and it has the same effect in all selected novel – it reflects their dysfunctional lives. Because they are unable to have genuine relationships with anyone, their sexual lives have transgressive manner, including a variety of sexual deviations.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the first chapter was to outline transgressive fiction as a genre. This part was not intended to avoid the problematic aspects of the genre, but to discuss them instead, and in some cases, to find a proper solution how to treat them. Although this chapter of the thesis proved that the differences of opinion among scholars and critics still exist, there appear to be several facts that can be said about transgressive fiction. Firstly, the genre is intended to violate various concepts, from religion to sex, though the reception of the novels included in the genre varies according to the depth of transgression. Secondly, the attitude of the authors should be unconventional and it on these terms means taking transgressive behavior as standard. And last but not least, the appeal on readers seems to be crucial and it often leads to simplification of the core idea of the genre – as an effort to be controversial. The aim was to present transgressive literature as it is, with all the flaws in the theoretical framework; as it was demonstrated, it is a complex genre, existing for several centuries and there are still discussions about the concept, in many cases, without reaching a general consensus.

The importance to define transgressive literature stems from the fact that transgressive sex is a crucial term of this thesis. If the basic idea of the genre is to violate, there is no difference in transgressive sex. The concept of sexual transgression is closely connected to the human nature. According to Bataille, whose book *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* was a crucial source of this work, the potential is limitless. Human urges can and often do violate the standard idea of sex. It is because of a lack of corresponding sources and a lack of consensus of what kind of sexual activity can be called transgressive, the starting point was that transgressive sex is the one, which is not supposed to result in conception of a child. But for the purpose of transgressive sex in transgressive fiction, the umbrella conditions of the genre must be kept, so the author is not supposed to judge the sexual activity of his characters, no matter how deviated they are. Also, the crucial point is to reach the appeal of the novels, so in many cases, the novelists choose to include sexual deviations.

The theoretical framework settled in the first chapter is completed with information about Chuck Palahniuk – firstly, his life, because it is often reflected in his novels as well, but it is important not to over-combine the autobiographical features, as some scholars do. Palahniuk is more of a storyteller than an author of autobiographical novels. Secondly, his work was presented and last but not least, his involvement in transgressive fiction. Coupled with the analyses of the selected novels, the conclusion of this thesis is that Chuck Palahniuk is the author of transgressive fiction. Not only sex is being transgressed in his novels, but also religion, family and relationships. The basic ideas of the genres can be successfully applied on all of the selected novels, as well as the idea of transgressive sex presented by Bataille. Furthermore, Palahniuk's characters often practice various sexual deviations.

The aim of this thesis was not only to explain Palahniuk's writing in the context of transgressive fiction, but the main focus was on the characters' sex lives, as it was successfully proven as one of the key aspects of their lives. With this in mind, transgressive sex does not speak for itself. It was necessary to analyze all the characters and various factors that led to their dysfunctional lives – because the flaws in their lives and their frustrations, all providing the explanation for their transgressive sexual practices. Sex serves as mirror, reflecting their personalities, among other aspects, like religion, which is often being transgressed as well, or their upbringing, a lack of emotional bonds or other flaws in their personalities.

Above all, the analyses of the selected works are crucial and should provide the compelling evidence for the explanation of transgressive sex in them. By analyzing *Survivor*, *Choke*, *Lullaby* and *Fight Club* characters, with the focus on their individual personality flaws and frustrations, there is a possibility to find many shared traits among the characters, which are summed up in the last chapter. Agreeing with Kavadlo, sex is a part of the self-destructive nature of the characters, who are somehow dysfunctional members of society. With all the important aspects of their lives considered, it seems reasonable to assume that sex serves the purpose of the reflection of their characters. The personality flaw typical for a particular character is reflected in his sexual life. The narrator in *Fight Club* fights his own demons, not only with

other men, but also with his girlfriend Marla, who is a victim of a physical violence. Victor Mancini in *Choke* seeks for promiscuous sex to compensate the lack of his mother's attention and to fulfill the urge of being needed. *Survivor's* Tender Branson is incapable of sexual intercourse because of the practices of his church and Carl Streater in *Lullaby* cannot judge necrophiliac Nash, because he also had sexual intercourse with his dead wife.

In light of the results of the analyses, the hypothesis that Palahniuk has created a character type, a representative of a dysfunctional member of a society, who reflects his frustration via sex, has been sufficiently proven.

RESUMÉ

Cílem této práce bylo analyzovat transgresivní sex ve vybraných románech Chucka Palahniuka. Hypotéza byla, že transgresivní sex však slouží pouze jako reflexe povah vybraných postav a že odráží to, kým skutečnou jsou a čemu čelily v minulosti. Zároveň se práce snaží dokázat, že Palahniuk vytvořil typ postavy, která se v jeho dílech opakuje.

Nejprve bylo nutné analyzovat transgresivní literaturu, jelikož základní premisa byla, že transgresivní sex reflektuje emocionální deformaci postav. Jak bylo prokázáno, transgresivní literatura není jednoduchý koncept a existuje zde jen velmi málo aspektů, v nichž se akademici, zabývající se tímto druhem fikce, shodnou. Ačkoliv byl žánr definován v 90. letech, hlavně za přispění Michaela Silverblatta a jeho článku „Shock Appeal: Who Are These Writers, and Why Do They Want to Hurt Us? The New Fiction of Transgression,” další studie odhalily hlavně mezery v konceptu pojetí žánru. O transgresivní fikci lze s určitostí tvrdit, že její existence je datována staletí před Silverblattovým článkem a její hlavním myšlenkou je pojetí deviace jako standardu. V praxi to znamená, že způsobů a oblastí, které lze přetvořit v deviantní, je mnoho, od náboženství, přes sexualitu až po koncept rodiny. Dalším důležitým faktorem tohoto žánru je, aby měl na čtenáře emoční dopad – proto bývá často transgresivní fikce označována a zjednodušována jako snaha o kontroverzi. Autoři, jejichž díla spadají do tohoto žánru, totiž často volí spíše extrémní prostředky k vyjádření transgrese, jako jsou sexuální deviace či náboženské kultury v případě transgrese náboženství. Tímto přístupem zvyšují emoční dopad svých děl, samotná kontroverze je ovšem pouze jedním z prvků tohoto žánru, který však nemůže být sám o sobě považován za hlavní určující faktor.

Dále bylo nutné, aby se v práci objevila i definice transgresivního sexu. I zde teoretické vyčlenění naráží na problematiku faktických nedostatků v definicích. Pro potřeby práce byla klíčová monografie Georgese Batailla *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, který ve své monografii z roku 1962 přistupuje k sexu jako prostředku, skrze který se dá realizovat neomezený potenciál lidských tužeb a potřeb. Tyto mohou vyústit v sexuální potřeby, které se neshodují se standardem přijatým společností a, v mnoha případech, se může

stát sexuální deviací. Protože je obtížné stanovit, kde končí standardní chování a začíná deviantní chování, Bataille určuje výchozí bod v sexuálním chování, jehož účelem není zplodit dítě. Avšak, vyskytuje-li se transgresivní sex jako součást transgresivní fikce, musí být zachována svrchovanost celého žánru, tudíž autor nesmí nijak morálně soudit sexuální aktivitu svých postav a měl by mít také za cíl touto transgresí dosáhnout emočního dopadu na čtenáře.

Druhá kapitola této diplomové práce má za cíl představit Chucka Palahniuka – jeho život, z nějž často ve svých dílech čerpá, ale také jeho díla a, to nejdůležitější, jeho zařazení do žánru transgresivní fikce. Palahniuk otevřeně přiznává, že je autorem transgresivní literatury, dokonce je sám editorem sbírky povídek *Burnt Tongues: An Anthology of Transgressive Stories*. Mimoto prezentuje svůj vlastní vhled na tento žánr s tím, že jeho knihy mají čtenáře nejen šokovat, ale měly by mu i ublížit, čímž prohlubuje emoční dopad svých děl.

K analýzám byly zvoleny čtyři romány Chucka Palahniuka – *Survivor* (1999, *Program pro přeživší*), *Lullaby* (2002, *Ukolébavka*), *Choke* (2001, *Zalknutí*) a *Fight Club* (1996, *Klub rváčů*). Díla nejsou řazena chronologicky, protože bylo účelné, aby byl prvním analyzovaným románem *Program pro přeživší*, jehož hlavní postava má téměř nulové zkušenosti se sexem a aby vývoj postupně gradoval k tématu závislosti na sexu (*Zalknutí*) a sexuálního násilí v neznámějším autorově románu *Klub rváčů*.

První analyzovaný román, *Program pro přeživší*, se zabývá hlavně rozbořem osobnosti hlavní postavy, Tendera Bransona, který se narodil a byl vychován v sebevražedném kultu. Jako druhorozený syn je nucen opustit komunitu, která jej vychovala jako služebníka a vedla jej k odporu k sexu, který měl mít za následek jeho podřízené chování a nezájem o budování vztahů. Všechny děti, kromě prvorozených synů, byly v kultu nuceny sledovat každý porod v komunitě a tímto prostředkem si postupně vypěstovaly nezájem či odpor k sexuální aktivitě. Tender se chová podřízeně a není schopen vnímat sex jinak, než transgresivně – často si jej spojuje se smrtí. Ani ve vnějším světě nemá možnost přijít do styku s jakoukoliv emocí či standardem; je obklopen falší, pornem a předstíráním. Jeho submisivní povaha mu rovněž zabraňuje rozhodovat o svém milostném životě, je tedy připraven poslouchat i v tomto

ohledu: když mu jeho agent - poté co se z Tendera stane celebrita, vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že se stává posledním přeživším sebevražedného kultu - sdělí, že jej ožení s ženou, kterou mu vybral, nebrání se. Dokonce i k jeho prvnímu sexu dochází z vůle jiné osoby – byl to jeho bratr Adam, který si přál, aby se Tender sexem oprostil od církevních dogmat. Avšak jeho první styk se stává fiaskem, není schopen se osvobodit. Navíc jeho partnerka Fertility otěhotní a Tender končí na palubě letadla, které unesl, protože smrt pro něj znamená skutečné osvobození. Sex se tedy znovu snoubí se smrtí, zatímco on namlouvá svůj životní příběh na pásku černé skříňky, v den jeho prvního sexuálního styku je mu souzeno umřít.

Pro analýzu druhého románu jsou klíčové dvě postavy – protagonista Carl Streator, který pracuje jako novinář píšící o syndromu náhlého úmrtí nemluvnat, a vedlejší postava, zdravotník John Nash. Ačkoliv zde Carl, který je rovněž vypravěčem, neposkytuje příliš informací o Nashovi, poukazuje se, že není příliš atraktivním mužem. Postupně odhaluje jeho zálibu v sexistických poznámkách na adresu mrtvých žen a dochází k odhalení, že Nash je nekrofil. Jeho zaměstnání, kde se setkává s velkým množstvím mrtvých těl, jeho spíše odpudivý vzhled a chování se v této sexuální deviaci odráží – nekrofilní styk mu umožňuje vybírat si těla krásných žen, takových, u kterých by v běžném životě neměl šanci. To se potvrzuje i poté, co se Nash naučí znění smrtící ukolébavky, jejíž odřikání způsobuje smrt svého příjemce – vybírá si jen modelky, s nimiž může po smrti mít sexuální styk.

U druhé postavy, protagonisty Streatora, je transgrese v sexu komplexnější. Ačkoliv Nashovo chování neschvaluje, sám také provozoval posmrtný sex s vlastní ženou, když si, dle svých slov, jednoho rána nevšiml, že leží v posteli mrtvá. Tuto zkušenost si nese jako stigma, které mu nedovolilo mít sex po dalších dvacet let, ale také přiznává, že to byla nejlepší zkušenost jeho života. Emoční rozpolcenost se projevuje při první příležitosti, když získává náhradní rodinu – on, realitní makléřka Helen, její asistentka Mona a její přítel Ústřice, se vydávají na cestu, která má za cíl zničit všechny kopie smrtící říkanky. Carl rychle přijímá ostatní jako svou rodinu, a ačkoliv Mona je v této rodině na pozici dcery, Streator o ní sexuálně fantazíruje, čímž se, dle svých slov, dopouští incestu.

Ve vyvrcholení příběhu, závěrečné konfrontaci Nashe a Streatora, Nash umírá, ale z hlediska transgrese s ní vychází jako vítěz. Ačkoliv on sám vykazuje deviantní chování skrze nekrofilii a je tedy částečnou reflexí Streatora, protagonista ve svém sexuálním životě zachází mnohem dále – v jeho případě se dá hovořit nejen o nekrofilii, ale také incestu a homosexualitě. Ačkoliv u Nashe je pouze možnost, že je bisexuální, Streator končí v homosexuálním vztahu s Helen, která pomocí kouzla přesunula své vědomí do těla stárnoucího policejního seržanta. Toto finální rozhodnutí setrvat v homosexuálním vztahu je projevem submisivního chování, ale také neschopnosti opustit svou novou rodinu.

Ve třetím analyzovaném románu, *Zalknutí*, je protagonistou Victor Mancini. Ve dne pracuje jako průvodce v zábavním parku, který má ilustrovat život v Americe 18. století, večer předstírá, že se dusí v restauracích. Jeho strategií je, že jej pokaždé přijde někdo zachránit a jeho zachránce se poté bude cítit k Victorovi vázán. Tito zachránci mu poté posílají peníze, kterými Victor platí léčebné výlohy své matky Idy. V tomto románu poskytuje Palahniuk sexu nejvíce prostoru; nejen Victor je závislý na sexu, provozující celou škálu jeho transgresivních variant s velkým množstvím partnerek, ale doslova každý v jeho okolí má co k dočinění se sexem. Jeho nejlepší přítel je závislý na masturbaci, jeho matka je bývalá sexuální terapeutka, jeho přítelkyně Paige, která nejdříve předstírá, že je doktorka v psychiatrické léčebně, je však pouze pacientkou, požaduje od Victora sexuální styk, aby mohla jejich společně stvořené embryo použít k léčbě jeho matky kmenovými buňkami. Sex je zde opět, jako v ostatních případech, pouze špičkou ledovce – za častým střídáním partnerek je ve Victorově případě jeho nefunkční vztah s matkou, ke které se cítí připoután a od které tímto se snaží odpoutat. Sex má v tomto případě stejný význam, jako dušení se v restauracích – i za to může chladné chování jeho matky, která jej jako dítě zachránila od udušení se v restauraci. Tímto způsobem si Victor hledá novou rodinu a lidi, kteří jej potřebují více, než on je. Tuto možnost mu poskytuje i promiskuitní sex, při kterém se může ke svým partnerkám chovat se stejným odstupem, jako jeho matka k němu, avšak on od nich vyžaduje projevy náklonnosti, kterých se mu od jeho matky nedostává. Transgresivní sex tedy dokonale reflektuje jejich vztah a je zcela způsoben

jeho neemocionální matkou. Když Ida Mancini na konci románu umírá a odhaluje, že není jeho biologická matka, Victor už nadále nepociťuje potřebu promiskuitního sexu a dá průchod emocím ve svém vztahu k Paige.

Posledním analyzovaným románem je *Klub rváčů*, ve kterém si bezejmenný vypravěč nevědomky vytváří své, na první pohled dokonalé, alter ego Tylera Durdena. Předtím ale chodí na skupinové terapie pro pacienty s vážným onemocněním, protože trpí insomnií a vědomí bezvýznamnosti vlastních problémů mu pomáhá spát. Na skupinových terapiích potkává Marlu Singerovou, která v nich, stejně jako on, vidí jen způsob, jak uniknout svým vlastním problémům. Vypravěč je však hlavně obětí svých frustrací a konzumního způsobu života, se kterým se rozhoduje bojovat násilím s pomocí Tylera, nového přítele, který mu poskytuje azyl, když vypravěčův byt vyhoří. Spolu zakládají i klub rváčů, kde kdokoliv může přijít, a pomocí rvačky s někým jiným, bojovat s vlastními problémy.

Problémy nastanou, když Tyler začne mít poměr s Marlou. Tylerova násilná povaha se odráží i v jejich vztahu, který je rovněž násilný a vygraduje tím, že Marla konfrontuje vypravěče s monoklem pod okem. Když se v momentě rozuzlení vypravěč dozvídá, že Tyler neexistuje a je to on sám, kdo bije svou přítelkyni, ztrácí nad Tylerem kontrolu, nedokáže jej potlačit a pokaždé, když usne, Tyler se objeví. Marla však mezi nimi nerozlišuje a je to tudíž vypravěč, kdo ji bije. Ten se rozhodne Tylera zabít vlastní sebevraždou – Tyler umírá, avšak vypravěč přežívá.

Ačkoliv je v ostatních případech využito hlavně primárních analýz, postava alter ega provokuje některé akademiky ke spekulacím. Objevily se interpretace, že ani Marla není skutečná, či že klíčový transgresivní sex se odehrává mezi vypravěčem a Tylerem, kteří k sobě cítí homosexuální náklonnost. Tyto však byly v práci zpochybněny. Zajímavým aspektem ale je, že ačkoliv Tyler a vypravěč jsou tatáž osoba, vypravěč vnímá Tylera jako skutečného, tudíž podle něj nikdy nedošlo k sexuálnímu styku mezi Marlou a vypravěčem, jen Marlou a Tylerem. Ten je v textu demonstrován, když vypravěč nachází fyzický důkaz o jeho existenci – prezervativ v toaletě.

Sexuální transgrese, ke které v tomto případě dochází, tkví tedy hlavně v násilí. Vypravěč/Tyler se chová násilně ke své partnerce, která se stává jeho

obětí. Opět zde dochází k reflexi, která koresponduje s povahou postavy – násilný boj proti vlastním frustracím se odráží i v násilném transgresivním sexu.

Poslední kapitola má za cíl nejen porovnat analyzované postavy a zjistit, jak jsou jejich povahy reflektovány v jejich sexuálním životě, ale rovněž má za cíl zaměřit se na jejich vzájemné podobnosti, protože jedním z předpokladů této práce je, že Palahniuk vytvořil typ postavy, která je objevuje ve všech vybraných románech. Všechny jeho postavy jsou frustrované, nespokojené a nešťastné. U všech se také objevuje trauma z minulosti (*Ukolébavka*), ať už ve výchově (*Program pro přeživší* a *Zalknutí*) či ve formě frustrace z vlastního stylu života (*Klub rváčů* a *Ukolébavka*). Všichni muži jsou osamělí, bez sociálních vazeb a všichni své frustrace řeší netradičním způsobem. Ve vybraných románech se rovněž nacházejí paralely sexu a náboženství či sexu se smrtí. A jak bylo ukázáno, ve všech případech povaha transgresivního sexu koresponduje s povahou postav, která se v ní odráží.

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ANOTACE

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Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

Název práce: “Jsem Jackovo zlomené srdce” – Transgresivní sex jako reflexe povahy postav v dílech Chucka Palahniuka: *Program pro přeživší, Ukolébavka, Zalknutí a Klub rváčů*

Vedoucí Práce: Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová, Ph.D.

Počet znaků: 166,626

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Abstrakt:

Tato práce si klade za cíl analyzovat postavy z vybraných románů Chucka Palahniuka a zároveň také prozkoumat, jak jejich transgresivní sex koresponduje s jejich osobnostmi. První kapitola představuje transgresivní fikci jako žánr, ale rovněž poukazuje na problematické aspekty a snaží se vysvětlit základní problematiku. Součástí úvodní kapitoly je nejen diskuze o žánru jako takovém, ale také diskuze o transgresivním sexu. Druhá kapitola představuje Chucka Palahniuka – jeho život, dílo i jeho začlenění jako autora transgresivní fikce. Následující kapitoly se zabývají hlavně analýzami vybraných děl, s ohledem na transgresivní sex, který zde reflektuje povahy vybraných postav. Poslední kapitola nejen shrnuje a porovnává podobnosti a rozdíly mezi postavami, ale také prezentuje typ postavy, který Palahniuk vytvořil, a rovněž zahrnuje další formy transgrese, které se ve vybraných románech objevují.

Klíčová slova: transgresivní fikce, transgresivní sex, Chuck Palahniuk, Program pro přeživší, Ukolébavka, Zalknutí, Klub rváčů, typ postavy, Tender Branson, Carl Streater, John Nash, Victor Mancini

ANNOTATION

Author: Marika Nováková

Department: Department of English and American Studies

Title of the Thesis: 'I am Jack's broken heart'- Transgressive Sex as a Reflection of Characters' Personality in Chuck Palahniuk's *Survivor*, *Lullaby*, *Choke* and *Fight Club*

Supervisor: Mgr. Vladimíra Fonfárová, Ph.D.

Number of Characters: 166, 626

Number of Pages: 85

Number of Appendices: 0

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Abstract:

This diploma thesis' aim is to analyze the characters of the selected novels of Chuck Palahniuk and to find how transgressive sex corresponds with their personalities. The first chapter introduces transgressive fiction as a genre, but it also presents its problematic aspect and tries to explain the basic issues. Not only the genre, but also transgressive sex is being discussed within the introductory chapter. In the second chapter, there is an introduction of Chuck Palahniuk – his life, work and his involvement in transgressive fiction. The following chapters deal with the analyses of the selected novels, with the focus on transgressive sex, which reflects characters' personalities. The last chapter does not only summarize, compare and contrast the characters, but also presents a particular character type created by Palahniuk and involves other forms of transgression appearing in the selected novels.

Key words: transgressive fiction, transgressive sex, Chuck Palahniuk, *Survivor*, *Lullaby*, *Choke*, *Fight Club*, character type, Tender Branson, Carl Streater, John Nash, Victor Mancini