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Tyler Durden, Trickster.

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A Thesis in the Field of English
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

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Abstract

Paul Radin's Winnebago Trickster Cycle is the template for the trickster character. Through his actions and values (if he has any), one comes to know the eponymous character's defining traits. Coupled with an understanding of liminality as defined by both Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, this thesis utilizes both the base characteristics of the trickster figure as well as an analytical framework of the trickster provided by William J. Hynes and William G. Doty to define Tyler Durden from Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* as a trickster. Support for his dubbing as trickster comes in the form of character studies on Loki, Mary Poppins, and Peter Pan wherein they too are given the same treatment by other authors and are similarly categorized as tricksters.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Kyle Yeager is a graduate of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in Economics. After working various jobs in Treasury and Finance throughout New York City and Nashville, TN, he decided to put down his calculator and pick up a pen. Chuck Palahniuk is mostly at fault for this change, though Ray Bradbury is not entirely blameless either.

Dedication

To my father (Rayger), mother (Ca), Keira (KMY/KYR), Christian (LTY), and Diederik (Deej), for all of your enduring support, unparalleled love, and fighting spirits.

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Chapter I.

“People are always asking, did I know about Tyler Durden”: An Introduction to Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*

The first rule to writing this thesis is to shy away from overused *Fight Club* tropes and create a unique perspective on the material underserved in academic circles. Chuck Palahniuk’s debut novel, *Fight Club*, and its cinematic adaptation of the same name by director David Fincher, with the screenplay written by Jim Uhls, both have gained notoriety since their respective debuts. Palahniuk has, as of this writing, published 18 novels, a “remixed” version of his 1999 novel *Invisible Monsters*, two coloring books, two graphic novel sequels to *Fight Club*, two non-fiction works, and many works of short fiction; the film adaptation of his novel *Choke* was released in 2008 to positive reviews. *Fight Club* punched Palahniuk’s ticket and kickstarted a prolific career that has attained him widespread fame and infamy due to the content of his works.

The characters of *Fight Club* themselves are widely known as well. The key player is Tyler Durden, portrayed by Brad Pitt in the film, who is the alternate personality of the Narrator. The Narrator, played by Edward Norton, is unaware of Tyler Durden’s true nature, believing him to be a friend, roommate, and co-creator of fight club; a separate entity from himself entirely. The “pair” start fight club, an outlet for men to rage against the machine, reclaim their masculinity, and regain hope in their lives. It is only when fight club becomes Project Mayhem, an anarchistic vehicle that Tyler Durden uses to drive society to the brink of destruction, that the Narrator discovers they share the same body which Tyler Durden takes over when he falls asleep. The Narrator then works

to undermine Tyler Durden and save his love interest, Marla Singer, who is portrayed by Helena Bonham Carter in Fincher's film.

The goal of this thesis is to establish the trickster nature of the Narrator and Tyler Durden. Henceforth, the two will be referred to as one character, interchangeably, since they are the same person¹. To determine the trickster nature of this character, the concept of liminality, which this thesis will argue is a key component and building block of the trickster, will first be explored. Then, an analytical framework will be described which will build out each chapter of this thesis. Afterward, the unique contribution of this character to the trickster universe will be discussed. Finally, the conclusion will speak to the potential of Tyler Durden in society today.

This thesis will not engage with *Fight Club* scholars or their arguments, as this is a trickster analysis and not necessarily a critique of the novel or film directly. For works of that nature, readers should turn to "Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: 'Fight Club', Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence" by Henry A. Giroux, which is widely regarded as one of the best analyses on *Fight Club*. For those wishing to engage with the rampant violence within the work, Kevin Alexander Boon (2003) is a great start; for masculinity and violence specifically, see Suzanne Clark (2001) or Lynn M. Ta (2006). The broader topic of masculinity is at the forefront of Terry Lee (2002), Asbjørn Grønstad (2003), Krister Friday (2003), Kevin Alexander Boon (2005), Caroline Ruddell (2007), and Andrew Slade (2011); conversely, look to William Irwin (2013) for fragility. For terrorism and rebellion, see Ruth Quiney (2013) and Justin Garrison (2012), respectively.

¹ Chapter IV will discuss this issue in great detail as a key contributor to their trickster nature.

Chapter II.

Liminality and the trickster

Arnold van Gennep's *Les rites of passage*, or *The Rites of Passage*, explored the passage of time in a person's life and the accompanying rites which dictated how they move from one stage to another. These ceremonies, which are held at each phase of life, are crucial not only for the development of the individual but for society as a whole as they hold these rites sacred to their respective identities. Gennep's work is replete with detailed accounts on specific rites which are homogenous between heterogenous cultures, supporting that these rites are a universal concept spanning the world across all types of rituals. Within these ceremonies are three distinct stages, which Gennep calls the "*rites of separation, transition rites, and rites of incorporation*" (11). Within each of these rites, Gennep dubs "the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *post-liminal rites*," (21) respectively.

The liminal rites, those pertaining to the middle stage or the transitory period, focus on the in-betweens. When describing the rites surrounding travel, which can be taken literally in moving from one place to another or figuratively, as in progressing from one rite to another, Gennep writes that "[w]hoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds" (18). While in motion between stages, the liminal character exists in this interstitial space that is without definition. While Arnold van Gennep does not reference the trickster character in his work specifically, the trickster

exists in this transitory space; the trickster is a liminal character who is situated between the rites of separation and rites of incorporation.

Liminality is further developed in Victor Turner's work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* by applying Arnold van Gennep's aforementioned lens. Turner expounds upon Gennep's transition rites, noting that "[d]uring the intervening 'liminal' period, the characteristics of the liminal subject (the 'passenger') are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (94). Since these passengers are in transit between periods, Turner continues that these "[l]iminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95), and they are "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness...and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (95). Accentuating the concept of existing in those disparate spaces, Turner states that "[l]iminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low" (97). It is through this transitional stage that "the passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of statuslessness" (97). Liminality is where "the opposites, as it were, constitute one another and are mutually indispensable" (97). Victor Turner, like Gennep, does not mention the trickster within his work; however, the two concur that liminality is a key stage in the development of the individual and society to move from one state of being to another.

The eponymous character in Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*² exhibits liminality throughout the tale as a focal point of his trickster nature. The Trickster³ of the Winnebago Trickster Cycle in Radin's work is introduced as "primarily an inchoate being of undetermined proportions, a figure foreshadowing the shape of man" (xxiv). As he is yet unformed, Trickster is therefore in a liminal position in his development and is therefore a liminal character. Trickster is found to be constantly wandering his world, stopping only for short respites in different towns or places before moving on again. The liminal character is one who is in constant motion, oscillating between physical states, locations, personalities, and relationships and Trickster embodies this concept as will be evidenced throughout this thesis. The liminal status of the trickster is a foundational characteristic, though there are others that will be explored in great detail which are evidenced within Radin and others.

William J. Hynes and William G. Doty's anthology *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Context, and Criticisms* contains 13 chapters dedicated to the trickster and his cultural contributions, as well as analyses of specific characters through the lens of the trickster. The third chapter, in particular, titled "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide," provides a framework by which to judge any given character's trickster nature through six characteristics⁴. They write that "at the heart of this cluster of manifest trickster traits is (1) the fundamentally ambiguous and anomalous personality of the trickster" ("Guide" 34). Hynes and Doty argue, first and foremost, that

² Though this thesis will regard and reference Trickster as Radin's character, potentially inferring it to be his intellectual property, it is understood that Trickster belongs to the Winnebago peoples and Radin only published their tale; he did not create the character.

³ When referencing Radin's character specifically, the capitalized "Trickster" will be used to differentiate him from any other trickster characters or trickster traits and characteristics, specifically.

⁴ The articles by Székely and Valentova, both of which will be introduced and heavily utilized later in this thesis, each applied this analytical framework by Hynes and Doty as the basis of their arguments.

to be considered a trickster character, they must be undefinable and deviating from the norm. It is essential that this character exhibits qualities that are fluid and contradictory in nature to be considered a trickster. Hynes and Doty are therefore defining a trickster by defining his⁵ liminality.

The Hynes and Doty article will guide this thesis to establish Tyler Durden's trickster nature through their six characteristics, where each will be given its own chapter. These chapters will feature the Winnebago Trickster, Tyler Durden from the novel, film, and screenplay, as well as other characters that have received their own character studies which determine their liminality and trickster nature. The first characteristic, as listed above, is the trickster's "ambiguous and anomalous" ("Guide" 34) nature, and, "[f]ollowing from this are such other features as (2) deceiver/trick-player, (3) shape-shifter, (4) situation-invertor, (5) messenger/imitator of the gods, and (6) sacred/lewd bricoleur" ("Guide" 34).

William J. Hynes' article "Inconclusive Conclusions: Trickster – Metaplayers and Revealers," which serves as the concluding chapter of his and Doty's anthology, caveats that "it is not necessary for the term "trickster" to have a set number of characteristics in all existing belief systems for the term to have meaning. As long as a number of shared characteristics are found in a large number of instances, it is possible to speak, albeit carefully, of "a trickster figure"" (Conclusions 211). While Hynes argues that a character need not emulate each of the trickster characteristics which he and Doty laid out in their

⁵ Traditionally, trickster characters are viewed as male or having male genitalia. Despite relying on mostly male incarnations of the trickster character within this thesis, Mary Poppins's role as a trickster character is also explored extensively. For further analysis on female trickster figures, see Katherine Kiefer-Newman's dissertation, titled *Agents of Change: A Multiplicity of Female Tricksters in Two Decades (1990s and early 2000s to 2010) of Postmodern American Movies*.

“Guide,” that a few would suffice if they adhere to the universality of the trickster motif, the aim of this thesis is different. The goal of this work is to evidence how Tyler Durden is a paradigm of the trickster figure due to his liminality and his embodiment of each and every one of these characteristics⁶.

⁶ As it is likely that other “trickster scholars” (if such a term exists, i.e. not Hynes and Doty), would define their own characteristics of a trickster character (and potentially deviate from Hynes and Doty), this statement is asserting that this thesis will follow the Hynes and Doty framework specifically and address each of their characteristics.

Chapter III.

“I know this because Tyler knows this”: The trickster as an anomalous and ambiguous character

The basis of this thesis, originally, was not to determine if Tyler Durden was a trickster character, but rather to work through his actions within Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and determine whether or not he could be considered a hero. Many of Tyler's traits and the acts he commits through the narrative could easily be dismissed as heroic and readily accepted as villainous. The paper's goal would not necessarily be rooted in establishing him as a hero in the traditional sense, rather as a modern-day hero viewed through a 21st-century lens. The Sisyphean task would be to create the spin, discover the twist, convince an audience that Tyler Durden's motives were pure, that the ends justified the means, and that he should be treated as a “good,” rather than a “bad,” guy. That discovery phase, as it were, led to the analysis of the character's duality, of the split between the Narrator and his foil, Tyler Durden. At the forefront of this process was Erica McCrystal's article “Hyde the Hero: Changing the Role of the Modern-Day Monster.”

Erica McCrystal analyzes the role of Mr. Hyde within Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, understanding that he is clearly defined as a villain therein, and reexamines the character in a contemporary view⁷. This split personality character has gone through many iterations and reproductions since the novella's initial publication in 1886, which McCrystal details within her work. She

⁷ McCrystal wrote the article in the winter of 2018.

argues that the Marvel superhero The Incredible Hulk would be the modern-day representation of this split personality character of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde⁸. McCrystal notes that the original comic series by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby “demonstrates an attempt to negotiate monstrosity with heroics, which often proves to be difficult and divisive, while urging readers to rethink traditional notions of heroism” (240). She also discusses the different medium in which Mr. Hyde is a necessary evil where he fights for the good guys against an even more terrible threat than he:

Hyde shows the readers and audiences that a monstrous individual is not necessarily a monster and that sometimes the only way to defeat real monsters is through monstrosity. Mr. Hyde can be embraced by society as a heroic figure who can quell external threats to mankind because his outlier status equips him with powers and strength that the common man lacks. In this way, the modern-day Hyde is transformed from a monstrous social reject to a saviour vital to society. (McCrystal 247)

If the Hyde persona can adapt to the times and become the hero of the story, fighting with the heroes rather than against them, would it then be possible for Tyler Durden to do the same?

McCrystal pursues the idea that Stevenson’s “novella grapples with the psychological capacity for an individual to unleash repressed monstrosity” (235). Hyde is unable to repress his monstrosity and commits heinous, wanton acts of violence against innocent people and is recognized as the villain of the original story. Using McCrystal’s lens, if Tyler Durden was able to contain his capacity for the villainous, would he then be

⁸ The similarities between the two are readily recognizable, with the former personalities both diminutive doctors whereas the latter are gigantic goliaths.

considered a hero? When Tyler Durden does unleash his violence, hatred, and any manifested monstrosity in the text and film, is he then considered a villain? As there is evidence of both, how can Tyler Durden's overall character be evaluated as either hero and/or villain, or does he require a new classification? McCrystal highlights that certain authors of modern Hyde adaptations "put pressure on simplified reductions of good and evil; they encourage readers and audiences to rethink what makes one a hero or a monster, and they ultimately argue for monstrosity to be a requisite of a modern-day hero" (235). If McCrystal is correct in her assertion that modern characters can fall outside the scope of the traditional definitions of hero and villain, then monstrous characters like Mr. Hyde and Tyler Durden could potentially be heroic in today's world. McCrystal's lens widened the scope for hero-villain relationships to be viewed through a grayscale rather than the traditional dichotomous black and white.

McCrystal's argument for the acceptance of the monstrous and a blurring of the line between hero and villain was central to the formulation of this thesis. Mr. Hyde's modern-day portrayal has been that of the hero, or at least not the most villainous character within his narratives⁹, as evidenced within McCrystal's work. There is a rationale behind why this change has occurred in recent years: audiences clamor for a clear delineation in the classic hero and villain relationship, whereby these characters exhibit qualities befitting their status within a narrative. Sophie H. Janicke and Arthur A. Raney explore the Affective Disposition Theory ("ADT") in their article "Modeling the Antihero Narrative Enjoyment Process." ADT "contends that a positive disposition

⁹ Hulk may have destroyed Johannesburg in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* while under Scarlet Witch's spell, though he was instrumental in conquering Thanos in *Avengers: Endgame*; he likely killed people in the battle in the former, though he brought back half the population of all life in the latter. Hulk was a monster, though there was a bigger, "badder" villain in Thanos that could only be conquered through Hulk's help.

toward a protagonist is a prerequisite for enjoyment” (Janicke 540). This formulation, based on personal and moral biases, leads the audience to believe that “heroes are morally upright and, therefore, loved. Villains are morally bankrupt and, thus, despised” (533). Through their study, however, Janicke and Raney found that antiheroes, rather than the traditional hero-villain classification, break the ADT formula in that:

Antiheroes are indeed often ‘ambivalent,’ embodying obvious flaws and weaknesses, acting selfish, and disregarding various social conventions. At the same time, these characters are admirable in some ways, often working – though usually unconventionally – toward some greater good. Viewers may see such flawed-but-well-intending characters as more similar to themselves. (Janicke 535)

Through a relaxing of their moral compass through “moral disengagement” (Janicke 535), the viewer can grant leniency on the antihero’s actions to enjoy the content.

A similar argument is made by Daniel M. Shafer and Arthur A. Raney in their article “Exploring How We Enjoy Antihero Narratives.” The authors contend that “if viewers aim to enjoy antihero narratives, they must find ways to like the protagonists, despite their sins” (Shafer 1037). This is accomplished through a separation of the “antihero’s morally questionable actions from their¹⁰ feelings toward him” (1034). Shafer and Raney note that “[r]epeated exposure to stories from the same genre teaches us how narratives, scenes, and settings are constructed, how fictional causes are related to fictional effects” (1031), which allows for a degree of acceptance of these non-heroic traits by the gradual erosion of traditional views on the narrative structure, that of the hero-villain relationship, through both moral disengagement and moral justification over

¹⁰ “Their” is referring to the viewing audience.

time. These arguments support the rationale behind Mr. Hyde's interpretation today, supporting McCrystal's argument, of how an audience can come to support a character that breaks traditional dichotomous molds. This contemporary change in the relationship between these opposing forces thus led to the analysis of Tyler Durden as a trickster character.

As discussed in Chapter II, the Hynes and Doty article "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide" provides a rubric of the characteristics that typical trickster characters embody. The first of these traits, the "anomalous and ambiguous personality of the trickster" ("Guide" 34) outlines how a trickster character "is not fully delimited by one side or the other of a binary distinction, nor by both sides at once, nor by a series of oppositions...anomalous, a-nomos, without normativity, the trickster appears on the edge or just beyond existing borders" (34). Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, a comprehensive ethnography on the cultural universal of the mythologies of the world which utilizes Genep's *Rites of Passage* as a framework for each of the heroes' journeys, continues this thread noting that, "in him¹¹ are contained and from him proceed the contradictions, good and evil, death and life, pain and pleasure, boons and deprivation" (Campbell 123). This nonconforming nature, this ability of the trickster to transcend any boundary, and to exist within and beyond any territory is a key feature of the trickster: it is the trickster's liminality.

Exploring Peter Pan's qualifications as a trickster character, Eva Valentova expounds on this dual nature of the trickster. Within her article, "The Betwixt-and-

¹¹ Campbell is specifically referring to the trickster-god Edshu in this passage, though this applies to all trickster characters.

Between: Peter Pan as a Trickster Figure,” she writes that tricksters “never stick to one side of a dichotomy, such as good/evil, man/woman, or human/animal...they want to find out what makes the boundary, exploring both sides and blurring the boundary in the process” (736). She continues, stating that “the black and white world of good and evil is nothing for the betwixt-and-between¹² tricksters, for they move in both these spheres, making the world gray” (736). Attributing this to Peter Pan specifically, Valentova establishes his liminality by situating him between “two historically contradictory religions – Christianity, represented by St. Peter, and Paganism, symbolized by the Greek god Pan” (737).

The description of Hynes and Doty’s first trickster characteristic by the authors themselves and contributions by Campbell and Valentova above each stress the concept that there is no demarcation between good and evil for the trickster character as he is known to blur the line between these dichotomous analogies. Tyler Durden need not be called a hero or villain when he can be a trickster. Tyler’s liminality and therefore trickster nature will be examined throughout this thesis as a whole, especially since these attributes are key to defining the trickster and contribute to each of the subsequent characteristics.

Liminality is rampant throughout both the novel and film versions of *Fight Club*. The Narrator and Tyler Durden’s liminality will be discussed specifically, though it is

¹² Valentova utilizes this term in the title of her work, though it is borrowed from J.M. Barrie’s *The Little White Bird*, where Solomon Caw (a crow) dubs Peter Pan as a “Betwixt-and-Between” (Barrie, *Little* 115) character (reference taken from Valentova on page 738 of her work). Although it is unclear if Victor Turner knew this term from Barrie or not (Barrie’s work was originally published in 1902 and Turner’s novel debuted in 1969), the latter, as mentioned, employs it in his definition of liminality. Whether coincidental or not, this supports Peter Pan and tricksters in general as liminal characters. Further, this concept is reminiscent of McCrystal’s discussion on the blurring of black and white, creating a gray space for these liminal characters.

through the liminal places in which they encounter one another that will be examined first; these transitory places where Tyler Durden and the Narrator first “meet”¹³ one another. Within both versions of the text, the Narrator of *Fight Club* believes that he is an insomniac¹⁴. He continuously is drifting between dream-like states, not knowing if he is fully awake or dreaming. His job as a recall coordinator has him traveling across the country to investigate automobile accidents to determine liability and any potential costs associated with a recall due to manufacturer defects. On one of his many business trips, in the film version, he awakens from a mid-flight nap to find Tyler Durden sitting next to him. The scene has the two sitting next to each other and they engage in light banter, beginning with small-talk regarding the fact that they have the same briefcase. This interaction is liminal for two reasons. The first is that the Narrator is, in fact, dreaming. He does not realize that he is imagining Tyler Durden and is speaking to him in a dream. The position between awake and asleep, or rather believing himself to be awake whilst asleep, dictates this to be an in-between state, a liminal space.

The second liminal aspect of their meeting is their physical position on an airplane mid-flight. Airplanes themselves can readily be seen as both liminal characters and places¹⁵. Typically, a passenger boards an airplane to either go to or return from somewhere that is not their home. They then travel between these states, suspended at 10,000 feet. The plane touches down in either the passenger’s original point of origin or their destination, or a layover before the continuation of their travels. The plane is

¹³ As Tyler Durden and the Narrator are the same person, they cannot actually “meet,” though this is the best way to state that this is the perceived first time when they encounter one another.

¹⁴ This is addressed in Chapter VIII, that he’s not actually an insomniac, but rather Tyler takes over when the Narrator falls asleep which results in the Narrator’s exhaustion from a complete lack of sleep.

¹⁵ This concept applies to any major mode of transportation, theoretically, though since an airplane is used in the film, this is the only one to be discussed here.

constantly transitioning between its own rites of separation and incorporation, which involve many safety and operational rules and regulations, with the majority of them existing while situated within the transitional stage. The passengers on these airplanes are therefore in a liminal space while traveling. It is fitting, then, for the Narrator and Tyler Durden to “meet” on an airplane while in a physical manifestation of the liminal place. This meeting fits the “ambiguous” (“Guide” 34) nature of the trickster since it is not initially clear to either the audience or the Narrator himself that he is meeting Tyler Durden in a dream, and not while awake. The liminality here is therefore amplified, in an *Inception*-like way¹⁶, as he is within a dream on a plane, both liminal places.

Chuck Palahniuk’s introduction of Tyler Durden to the Narrator within the novel also occurs within a complex liminal space. In general, the novel and film have slight deviations throughout their respective narratives, though these introductions take place in quite different spaces. While the film firmly establishes their introduction in a double liminal space, the novel actually places them within a triple liminal space. The Narrator says that, “[h]ow I met Tyler was I went to a nude beach. This was the very end of summer, and I was asleep” (Palahniuk 32). The first liminal space, as already established above within the film version’s introduction, is that they met within the Narrator’s dream. The second is the time depicted: it is at summer’s end. The changing of the season, the transition from the oppressive August heat into blustery days of Autumn, places the characters and all those around them within a broader liminal space. The third aspect of

¹⁶ Christopher Nolan’s 2010 film, *Inception*, deals with dreams within dreams and suggests that one can enter these dreams and manipulate the dreamer’s perspective; here, it emphasizes the duality of liminality in this interaction.

liminality in this interaction is that the Narrator was on a nude beach when he met Tyler, which needs further unpacking.

Similar to an airplane, a beach is forever moving through its own rites of passage. Like the plane arriving and departing from a known to an unknown place, from the perspective of a first-time traveler, a beach is constantly transitioning between low and high tides. From either perspective, qualifying its liminal position, the beach is either separating itself from its low/high tide to transition to the other before the acme/nadir of the next tide cycle. Meeting on a beach is therefore telling of this character's nature, that he himself is liminal, and therefore adheres to Hynes and Doty's first trickster characteristic; meeting on a nude beach further qualifies this space and the characters as liminal.

A nude beach shares the function of the tide with its patrons in a way that a regular beach cannot. As the tide eternally ebbs and flows, so too does the attire of the nude beach's patrons. A regular beach may see all forms of beachwear and undress, from risqué thongs and speedos to people swimming in t-shirts and rash guards. A nude beach, however, and theoretically, has all of its patrons naked. Each patron would come to the beach clothed, strip down to relax or swim *al fresco*, then put their clothing back on and reemerge into the world. Tanned or burnt, salty or sandy, relaxed from a nap or exhausted from swimming, the person that entered that nude beach is not the same one that left it, physically or mentally. Clearly, a beach in and of itself is a place of transition, though a nude beach even more so. A nude beach, by definition from a Western perspective, is "anomalous" ("Guide" 34) in that it is the absolute deviation from what one considers the norm. This interpretation of their meeting in a dream, as the seasons are changing, on the

nude beach allows it to be an “ambiguous” (“Guide” 34) place where they meet. The trickster himself is these things and the space in which he finds himself is liminal.

The introduction of Tyler Durden to the Narrator may diverge between the narratives, though each aid in establishing characters’ liminality. Despite the medium, the pair meet in liminal spaces, and in each narrative, the pair decide to live in a liminal location. Within the explanation of their first characteristic, Hynes and Doty state that “the trickster seems to dwell in no single place but to be in continual transit through all realms marginal and liminal” (“Guide” 35). A key ingredient in liminality is that this character exists on the threshold of the known and unknown; a character who is at the same time self-defining while being unordered, an oxymoron.

Within this paradoxical ideal exists the house on Paper Street where the two take up residence. This house shares its natures with its residents, emphasizing their trickster nature. The Narrator notes that “Tyler’s rented house on Paper Street is a living thing wet on the inside from so many people sweating and breathing. So many people are moving inside, the house moves” (Palahniuk 133). This movement denotes that the house itself is not transfixed or sturdy, without consistency or a solid frame, and can therefore be considered liminal. Furthermore, a “paper street” in civil engineering terms describes a theoretical and as yet unbuilt or undeveloped location. Therefore, their home, this house on Paper Street, cements itself as a liminal space.

The Paper Street House¹⁷ is as counter-balanced as the Narrator and Tyler Durden. Its description in the novel could come from a high-end real estate brochure, which underscores the refined, classy, and expensive components meant for the rich and

¹⁷ Since this location is treated as a liminal space and critical to establishing the character’s liminality, The Paper Street House will be considered a proper noun and capitalized as such throughout this thesis.

wealthy homeowner. The Paper Street House has extravagant amenities spanning “three stories and a basement...[i]t has pantries and screened sleeping porches and stained-glass windows on the stairway landing. There are bay windows with window seats in the parlor. The baseboard moldings are carved and varnished and eighteen inches high” (Palahniuk 57). Further, their home has “a closet with seven-foot rollers for rolling up damask tablecloths so they never have to be creased. There’s a cedar-lined, refrigerated fur closet. The tile in the bathroom is painted with little flowers nicer than most everybody’s wedding china” (57). It is a regal place, designed for the upper crust elite to wine and dine their equally snooty friends and colleagues.

Interwoven amongst the depictions above, Palahniuk reveals the darker side of the house. While it may have a beautiful, ornate bathroom, “there’s a used condom in the toilet” (Palahniuk 57). The Paper Street House may appear, on the surface, to be luxurious, and yet “[t]here’s no lock on the front door from when the police or whoever kicked in the door” (57). It has fallen into such disrepair that, when it rains, it “trickles down through the house, and everything wooden swells and shrinks...everywhere there are rusted nails to step on or snap your elbow on,” (57) so much so that they “don’t dare turn on the lights” (57) or presumably walk barefoot. This is not a house to be lived in; it is “the perfect house for dealing drugs” (58). There is a dual meaning in *The Paper Street House*, that something refined can become shabby, classy can turn decrepit, and that anything can become so devalued to be considered cheap. The Paper Street House is a liminal place, reflecting the nature of its residents and their trickster nature, as this place too exists in the Genep’s transition stage.

The use of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner's concept of liminality and Hynes and Doty's "ambiguous and anomalous" trickster characteristic has placed Tyler Durden in the trickster conversation. His introduction in the novel and film, and where he lives in both, further reflects these traits.

Chapter IV.

“If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person”: The trickster as a shape-shifter

The trickster is a liminal character, one that is living between the stages of separation and reincorporation, within Arnold van Gennep’s transitional stage. This transitory nature of the trickster can be viewed as fluid, as water, as easily flowing between the known and the unknown, the established and the unstable. If he can manipulate his state of being, he is a “shape-shifter” (“Guide” 36) as per Hynes and Doty. The pair writes that, “as shape-shifter, the trickster can alter his shape or bodily appearance in order to facilitate deception” (36) and that he is a “master of metamorphosis” (37). Lewis Hyde in *Trickster Makes This World* notes that the trickster is “polytropic, changing his skin or shifting his shape as the situation requires” (Hyde 62). The character analyses that follow will illustrate this shape-shifting trait in various ways to highlight the Narrator/Tyler Durden’s trickster nature.

The use of shape-shifting in character studies

The Erica McCrystal article “Hyde the Hero: Changing the Role of the Modern-Day Monster” offered an initial view on how Tyler Durden could be treated under the analytical lens of Robert Louis Stevenson’s work as a different type of hero character. At the surface, Stevenson’s work is centered on the shape-shifting nature of Dr. Jekyll into Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll remarks that he “had but to drink the cup, to doff at once the body of the professor, and to assume, like a thick cloak, that of Edward Hyde” (Stevenson 72). Martin Danahay, however, writes in his work “Dr. Jekyll’s Two Bodies” that this

comment is “underscoring the ease with which he could switch bodies” (Danahay 31). Shape-shifting came naturally to Jekyll once he created the potion that granted him the freedom to become someone else in both body and spirit. The body was not his own nor was the personality that controlled that body. Danahay notes that, “[i]n order to encompass the fall from gentleman to working-class man Dr. Jekyll had to change not just consciousness, but bodies as well. It is for this reason that Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* is a tale about two bodies and not just two identities” (37). This concept of shape-shifting which incorporates mental and physical changes will be especially relevant in *Fight Club* and will be examined through various character studies, entrenching it within the trickster character itself and the trickster motif as a whole.

To emphasize the traditional trickster’s shape-shifting abilities within the Hynes and Doty framework, and before Tyler Durden’s trickster nature is examined within this view, the perspective will shift from the Victorian anti-hero¹⁸ to the Winnebago Trickster. Radin’s Trickster is often found manipulating his state of being to suit his needs as they arise. As winter approached, Radin’s Trickster found himself without food or shelter. In a surprising turn¹⁹, Trickster had taken on companions in his journey, acquiring friends in “a little fox” (Radin 21), “a jay,” and (21) “a *hetcgeniga*”²⁰ (22). Rather than eat them

¹⁸ Hyde was utilized to emphasize that non-traditional trickster characters can fit into the Hynes and Doty mold of shape-shifting as well as other characteristics from their “Guide.”

¹⁹ It is surprising as almost every character Trickster meets on his journey is either slaughtered for food, becomes a lifelong enemy, or is used to suits his needs when they are useful to him and they are discarded after their purpose is fulfilled. As described in what follows, these ‘friends’ do not seem to suit any purpose other than to illustrate that Trickster had more than one mouth to feed and others to shelter. He established a burden of responsibility, which appears to be anomalous to his character in general. Whereas the Winnebago Trickster Cycle has seen Trickster fix an otherwise unsolvable problem on his own in the past, these characters create a problem that forces him to exhibit his shape-shifting abilities. As is his nature, however, this scene acts almost as a reversal of a *Deus ex machina* where an unlikely problem is created for Trickster to flex his transformative abilities.

²⁰ Note #51 within Radin’s work states that the “English equivalent is not clear, possibly a nit” for the Winnebago word of *hetcgeniga* (Radin 56)

and use their pelts as shelter as he had been wont to do heretofore, Trickster decides that he will instead transform himself into a woman to seduce a neighboring chief's son.

Trickster "took an elk's liver and made a vulva from it. Then he took some elk's kidneys and made breasts from them. Finally, he put on a woman's dress...[he] stood there transformed into a very pretty woman indeed" (22-23). Due to 'her' beauty, "the chief's son liked her very much" (23) and they wed. Trickster's shape-shifting prowess was such that:

Not long after Trickster became pregnant. The chief's son was very happy about the fact that he was to become a father. Not long after that Trickster gave birth to a boy. Then again he became pregnant and gave birth to another boy. Finally for the third time he became pregnant and gave birth to a third boy. (Radin 23)

From this example, Radin's Trickster introduces his ability to both outwardly and inwardly change his appearance to deceive the villagers. This act was not merely a glamour, where he convinces the villagers that he is a woman by a simple spell or charm with a façade; he physically changes his appearance as well as his internal biology. He is regarded as a beautiful woman to these people and is so skilled in his shape-shifting abilities that he was able to produce three children, which engrossed him and his group within the village, awarding them food and shelter. Trickster is finally found out after "she dropped something very rotten"²¹ (24) and was forced to flee from the village for safety. One cannot necessarily assume that Trickster or any characters within the Winnebago Trickster Cycle adhere to the laws of man, so to say that Trickster remained within the village for at least three pregnancies spanning roughly nine months apiece

²¹ This, presumably, was the very old and very used elk's liver which was converted into the vulva for Trickster's womanhood.

would be risky; however, Trickster's transformation of his body to provide for himself and his so-called friends provided to be fruitful for a considerable amount of time.

Trickster's inward change is almost as powerful as the physical one, as he was able to convince this village that he was a woman beyond appearances alone. It would be one thing to momentarily shape-shift into another state for some end goal, though to impersonate a woman for this period is equally as impressive. Trickster had to play the role of wife and mother as well as heir to the chief's throne as a pseudo-chieftess for the duration of his stay in the village. The myth does not detail the responsibilities required of a woman or, in essence, a princess in that time in that village, though one can imagine that Trickster performed them dutifully else he would have been discovered before his eventual exodus.

To further stress the ubiquity of shape-shifting within the trickster motif, the Norse god Loki's transformative attributes will be examined. The duality of shape-shifting, the outward (physical) and inward (mental) transformations, is prevalent within both the traditional and modern-day tales of Loki. Helena Bassil-Morozow's article "Loki then and now: the trickster against civilization" utilizes these sources, both the *Prose Edda*, which is "Scandinavia's best-known work of literature and the most extensive source for Norse mythology" (Byock ix)²², and Tom Hiddleston's portrayal of the character within the Marvel Cinematic Universe, or "the MCU" to do so. The traditional Loki from the *Prose Edda* is referred to as the "Slander of the Gods, the Source of

²² Jesse Byock translated the version of the *Prose Edda* utilized in this thesis and this citation is taken from the Introductory chapter of the work.

Deceit, and the Disgrace of All Gods and Men” (Sturluson 38)²³. Loki is further known for “the kind of wisdom known as cunning, and is treacherous in all matters” (39). With this depiction in mind, Bassil-Morozow calls upon “The Death of Baldr and Hermod’s Ride to Hel” to reinforce Loki’s trickster nature through his shape-shifting abilities²⁴.

There are three instances of Loki’s shape-shifting abilities within this tale from the *Prose Edda*. This story is based on the Norse god named Baldr, who was “Odin’s second son” (Sturluson 33) that “was the best, and all praise[d] him” (33). One day, he dreamt that great harm was to befall him. To prevent this from happening, the goddess Frigg received oaths from all manner of beings that they would not hurt Baldr in any way. As Baldr was henceforth invulnerable, the Æsir²⁵ entertained themselves by attacking him, believing this to be without consequence. This angered Loki, that “Baldr was uninjured” (65). The cunning and deceitful Loki then changed “himself into the likeness of a woman” (65) and approached Frigg to divine a way to kill Baldr. Frigg, convinced of Loki’s shape-shifting ability, noted that the only material from which she had not secured an oath was mistletoe, as “it seemed too young to demand its oath” (66). Loki then “got hold of the mistletoe” (66) and approached Hod, who did not shoot at Baldr since he was blind and unable to aim at him. Hod, through Loki’s guiding hand, “shot at Baldr. The shot went right through Baldr, who fell to the ground dead” (66).

²³ Byock supports that “[i]t has long been assumed that the learned and quarrelsome Icelandic chieftain Snorri Sturluson is the author of the *Edda*” (Byock xii) within the Introduction to the *Prose Edda*, so when referencing the Norse myth, Sturluson will be credited within the citation.

²⁴ This tale from the *Prose Edda* could support Loki’s claim to be a trickster by examining it under the lens of other trickster characteristics aside from shape-shifting and thus be included within other chapters within this thesis; this concept of one tale exhibiting a character’s embodiment of multiple trickster characteristics will be explored in Chapter IX.

²⁵ The general name for the assembled gods of Norse mythology.

The other gods were devastated at the death of Baldr and grieved for some time. They decided to send the god Hermod to retrieve Baldr from Hel, where the latter responded that “[i]f all things in the world, alive or dead, weep for him, then he will be allowed to return to the Æsir. If anyone speaks against him or refuses to cry, then he will remain with Hel²⁶” (Sturluson 68). In response, “the Æsir sent messengers throughout the world, asking that Baldr be wept out of Hel” (68) and all did, except one. There was a giantess who “said her name was Thokk” (68) who told the messengers that “[a]live or dead the old man’s [Odin’s] son gave me no joy. Let Hel hold what she has” (69) and thus Baldr remained in Hel. It is said, though, that “[p]eople believe that the giantess was Loki...the one who did the most harm to the Æsir” (69). Loki, transformed into a woman, caused the death of Baldr and then, by shape-shifting into a giantess, forced him to remain in the underworld.

The last instance of Loki’s shape-shifting trickster nature within this tale comes in response to the Æsir’s vengeance. The gods understood Loki to be at the forefront of this sorrow, so they pursued him to exact their revenge. Loki was found to be hiding in a house in the mountains, where, “[d]uring the day he often changed himself into a salmon and hid in a place called Franang’s Falls” (Sturluson 69). The Æsir pursued him there, and trying to escape, Loki jumped into the river and shape-shifted into a salmon. He swam away, initially eluding capture, up until “Thor waded into the middle of the river...reached out and succeeded in grabbing him, but still the salmon slipped through

²⁶ Hel is both the name of Loki’s daughter and the underworld where she resides.

his hands. Thor finally got a firm hold on it near its tail” (70)²⁷ and Loki was captured and paid the price for his actions through gruesome torture²⁸.

Loki, like Radin’s Trickster, temporarily benefitted from his trickster’s nature as a shape-shifter. He succeeded in killing Baldr through his transformation into a woman, prevented his reincarnation by shifting into a giantess, and initially escaped from the Æsir by morphing into a salmon. Loki’s modern-day adaptation in the MCU is heavily reliant upon his mythological tradition, which maintains his trickster and therefore his shape-shifting nature. Loki exhibits this trickster characteristic in the second Thor-centered MCU film, *Thor: The Dark World*, where Bassil-Morozow notes that “Loki demonstrates to his brother (played by Chris Hemsworth) the range of shapeshifting he can achieve, including the guise of Captain America” (90). As Captain America is the de facto leader of the Avengers, or the heroic group of superheroes to which Thor belongs, this could pose a major threat to the other heroes or even humanity if Loki were to take on that form and instruct (or command) them to do anything villainous or un-heroic. Loki playfully flexes the range of his shape-shifting ability with his brother Thor, turning him “into Sif”²⁹ (a female warrior and childhood friend of Thor)³⁰ for a moment” (90); not only is Loki able to distort and change his own shape, but he can push this shape-shifting power onto others³¹.

²⁷ The tale goes on to say that, due to how Thor handled the salmon-Loki, “salmon are narrow towards the rear” (Sturluson 70). This idea of the trickster providing the current shape of something is echoed in Radin’s Trickster tale replicated in Chapter VI about his anus and again in Chapter IX about his penis.

²⁸ This scene could be read through the lens utilized in Chapter VI, whereby Loki becomes a trickster-tricked as he is duped by the use of his shape-shifting ability here.

²⁹ Bassil-Morozow calls Sif a “childhood friend” as this is her representation within the MCU. However, the *Prose Edda* says that Thor met “the prophetess called Sibyl, whom we call Sif, and he married her. No one knows Sif’s ancestors. She was the loveliest of women, with hair like gold” (Sturluson 6).

³⁰ This parenthetical note is taken directly from Bassil-Morozow.

³¹ Loki’s power of manipulating the physical state of others through his shift-shifting trickster characteristic has not been exhibited elsewhere, as far as this author has found.

The last instance of Loki's power that will be exhibited here is one of a personality shift rather than a physical one. Bassil-Morozow notes that "his less magical and more human powers of disguise include the ability to play a good son and a victim, and to change sides, which he successfully does several times in *Thor*" (90). Hiddleston's Loki is a deceptive, manipulative, shape-shifting trickster whose true nature is always questionable at best, yet the audience continually cheers for him to be a "good guy" and a good brother to Chris Hemsworth's Thor character. Loki's representation within the MCU has consistently been represented as a protagonist who eventually turns into the antagonist; he starts off as a supporting hero-character before the inevitable shift into the villain-character. Either he is truly conflicted, unable to pick a side, or he is a master shape-shifter where he can shift his personality in such a convincing way that the audience and other characters are unable to see his true nature; he may be so adept at this trickster characteristic that he is able to hide his true intentions even from himself. This inward change, similar to the ability exhibited by the Winnebago Trickster in the previous example where he transformed into a woman for a prolonged period of time, is reflected in their more human, non-divine trickster counterparts analyzed throughout this thesis.

Not all examples of shape-shifting work in the same way, though, as there are limits on what certain characters can do based on the nature of their writing and stories. Éva Székely's approach to Mary Poppins and her shape-shifting ability is one such character³². Her article, "Aspects of Liminality and the Figure of the Trickster in P.L. Traverse's *Mary Poppins* Novels" argues in favor of Poppins' trickster nature, strictly

³² The forthcoming treatment of Tyler Durden as a shape-shifter will be similarly analyzed.

following Hynes and Doty's framework characteristic-by-characteristic. Székely stresses that her protagonist is a human female, unlike the supernatural characters aforementioned, though "Mary Poppins is able to modify the dimensions of her body to fit in a variety of spaces" (102) to justify her adherence to this trickster trait. This is the only section in Székely's work that does not provide textual evidence from by P.L. Travers, the author of the Mary Poppins works, to support her claim; however, Székely justifies the inclusion of this characteristic in that "while she³³ is never seen to change into any kind of animal, she claims kinship with talking polar bears, lions, snakes, and giants turtles. Moreover, she speaks the language of all the animals" (102). Székely notes that, due to the ambiguous and anomalous nature of the trickster, that this characteristic too is open for interpretation; that not every description of every characteristic needs to be followed to the letter. With this concept in mind, the ability of human beings to shape-shift is explorable and therefore applicable to Tyler Durden.

Each of these various forms that both the Winnebago Trickster and Loki assume through their shape-shifting capabilities have their own names and identities, disassociated from their original persona. Further, the trickster can manipulate not only his outward appearance but his inward personality as well. Shifting perspective back onto *Fight Club*, Tyler Durden and the Narrator's shape-shifting abilities will now be analyzed through both Hynes and Doty's "Guide" as well as the evidence provided by other trickster characters above.

³³ She, as in Mary Poppins.

The use of shape-shifting in *Fight Club* through names and identities

The first element of Tyler Durden's shape-shifting ability is illustrated by Eva Valentova in that "tricksters do not limit themselves to a single identity...they are free to assume any identity they fancy at the moment or find useful" (Valentova 736). Since identity is crucial to the plot of *Fight Club*, this aspect of the trickster will be considered first. Then, like both Radin's Trickster and Loki, Tyler's outward appearance and inward demeanor and personality will be analyzed.

The Narrator of *Fight Club*, portrayed by Edward Norton in the film, is nameless³⁴. While everyone has a name, it would be more appropriate to state that both the reader and viewing audience alike do not know this character's given birth name. Attempting to establish a naming convention for this character so his actions can be viewed as separate and distinct from those of Tyler Durden, authors of *Fight Club*-related works each have taken it upon themselves to ascribe a name to the Narrator. Therefore, these authors have unknowingly attributed to the trickster nature of this character through shifting his name, and therefore his identity, throughout their analyses, reviews, and critiques. Many authors have credited the Narrator as "Jack," based on the third-person references Edward Norton makes throughout the film version, such as "I Am Jack's Complete Lack Of Surprise" (Fincher 1:16:08-1:16:12)³⁵ or "I Am Jack's Inflamed Sense Of Rejection" (Fincher 1:35:26-1:35:28)³⁶. This naming convention is derived from the

³⁴ This nameless protagonist, the unreliable narrator of the novel, who is portrayed by Edward Norton in the David Fincher-directed film, will be stylized, and referred to, as "the Narrator" throughout this thesis. This author will not apply any of the many names which other authors, Chuck Palahniuk himself included, use to prevent confusion. The multitude of names applied to this character that be discussed within this section will further serve his recognition as a trickster character.

³⁵ Jim Uhls wrote the *Fight Club* film screenplay in 1998; the movie was then released in 1999 with David Fincher at the helm as director.

³⁶ Adding to the complexity of names, similar to the novel where "Joe" is the first-person speaker referring to his ailments, the screenplay has the character "JACK" reciting these lines either verbally or internally

moldy magazines that are littered, literally, throughout The Paper Street House which contain “articles where organs in the human body talk about themselves in the first person” (Palahniuk 58). The novel, however, has these same articles written from the perspective of “Joe” as in “I am Joe’s Prostate” (58) or “I am Joe’s Raging Bile Duct” (59)³⁷; this then represents the first change in the naming convention³⁸ for the Narrator. The next name change for the Narrator comes from Chuck Palahniuk himself³⁹.

Chuck Palahniuk decided to leave his “protagonist”⁴⁰ nameless in his novel. Upon discovering that Marla Singer and all those around him know him as Tyler Durden, the Narrator reveals his true identity to her. His real name, though, is still hidden from the reader:

I take out my wallet and show Marla my driver’s license with my real name. Not

Tyler Durden. “But everyone knows you’re Tyler Durden,” Marla says. Everyone

such as “I Am Joe’s Complete Lack Of Surprise” and “I Am Joe’s Broken Heart.” However, the film has these changed to “Jack” as will be discussed.

³⁷ Hence the use of “Joe” in Uhls’ screenplay, though he still titles the Narrator as “Jack.”

³⁸ Despite extensive research, the legal rationale behind the change from “Joe” in the novel to “Jack” in the film is unknown. Allegedly, the *Readers’ Digest* articles sampled within the *Fight Club* novel are taken from J.T. Ratcliffe’s novel titled *I Am Joe’s Body*, which was then reproduced in the magazine. There was a legal dispute that denied David Fincher from referencing “Joe” since both sources did not want to be associated with *Fight Club*’s content, hence the switch of naming convention to “Jack;” further, *Readers’ Digest* itself was not referenced in the film, but rather is only cited as “Reader’s Digest” (Uhls 1998, quotation marks from the original source) within the screenplay. The film production ran into the same issues with the representations of Starbucks and Blockbuster Video, so while those names are also omitted from the film, it is clearly visible what Fincher is trying to portray when they do appear on-screen.

³⁹ Chuck Palahniuk is the only one who would theoretically know the Narrator’s true name, though if he chose to dub him “Joe,” then this would be the second name he has assigned to this character based on the upcoming paragraph’s content.

⁴⁰ Protagonist, in quotes here, needs exploring for at least four reasons: (1) Should the Narrator be the protagonist or does that designation go to Tyler? (2) Would the pair be the combined protagonist while society, the government, media and news outlets, the overwhelming consumerist culture, or any of the external forces placed upon them be considered their separate or collective antagonist(s)? (3) Does there need to be an established protagonist/antagonist relationship between the two personae, and, if so, would dubbing either as “protagonist” then become problematic? (4) This is a thesis that aims to define Tyler Durden as a trickster character, so this character could be all of these specifications and none as is fitting of a trickster in general, who does not adhere to normalized dichotomous classifications as explained in Chapter III.

but me. Nobody at work calls me Tyler Durden. My boss calls me by my real name. My parents know who I really am. “So why,” Marla asks, “are you Tyler Durden to some people but not to everybody.” (Palahniuk 172)

Marla Singer does not know the Narrator as “Joe,” or “Jack,” or by his true name; she only knew him as Tyler Durden until this revelation. However, in a February 2014 interview with *Hustler Magazine*, Chuck Palahniuk states that “because 20th Century-Fox created the convention of calling the protagonist Jack, I’m calling him Cornelius” (*Hustler* 46). Palahniuk refuses to comply with the established norm and decides upon a different name, adding yet another identity to this character by choosing one from the Jim Uhls-written screenplay which was uttered by Marla prior to her discovering that the Narrator was not born with the name of Tyler Durden.

The Narrator of *Fight Club* has many jobs in both the novel and film. Coupled with the jobs that Tyler Durden has⁴¹, the Narrator is a waiter, a movie projectionist, a recall campaign coordinator, and a soap vendor. He also would attend a different support group every night of the week. It is unclear which name he gives to the people with whom he works and interacts. What is confirmed, though, is that the Narrator notes twice that he would “never give [his] real name at support groups” (Palahniuk 19, 23). He was able to get away with these multiple identities at these group meetings, stating that “anyone who might’ve noticed me in two years has either died or recovered and never came back” (39). Since his jobs serviced quite different industries, any differences in naming and identity would likely go unnoticed by both the people for and with whom he worked and interacted. Marla, though, was a common thread within the support group

⁴¹ Being the same person, any job that the Narrator believes Tyler Durden has would then be a job he himself actually has.

system. The Narrator remarked that “Marla’s lie reflected my lie, and all I can see are lies” (23) while she continued to attend the support groups where she would therefore be able to see through his name game. By splitting up the meetings to avoid seeing each other, they would cease to reflect their lies on each other and get the therapy they needed; and most importantly, the Narrator could continue with his lie unscathed, assuming a different identity at each of these groups without worrying about getting caught. For two years, he attended countless support groups and went to work at these various companies, all the while employing different names and identities with which he fooled all those around him.

The Narrator and Marla Singer, upon agreeing to the terms of their support group arrangement, exchanged numbers in case of a meeting swap. Marla, realizing that the Narrator only wrote down his number and not his name, says to him that “[i]t doesn’t have your name on it. Who are you? Cornelius? Any of the stupid names you give at group” (Uhls 1998)? At this point, Marla is in the middle of the street and decently far away from the Narrator, so, as stated in the screenplay, “Jack starts to yell, but the traffic noise is too loud. Marla just shakes her head at him, turns, and keeps moving away. A bus moves into view and stops, obscuring her” (Uhls) and the screenplay (and film) transition into another scene. Since Marla never heard his real name, Tyler Durden later tells the Narrator that:

Marla doesn't know the difference between you and me. You gave her a fake name the night you met. You never gave your real name at a support group, you inauthentic shit. Since I saved her life, Marla thinks your name is Tyler Durden. (Palahniuk 168)

Over the course of the narrative, in both the film and novel, Marla Singer comes to know the Narrator as “Tyler Durden” since she has no reason not to believe that that is his one, true identity. She abandons the name “Cornelius” in favor of “Tyler” though it appears that this name struck a chord with Chuck Palahniuk. That is, up until the sequel to *Fight Club* titled *Fight Club 2: The Tranquility Gambit*. Although this work will not be explored within this thesis⁴², it is important to note that Palahniuk dubbed the Narrator therein as “Sebastian⁴³.” As if the multitude of names presented thus far were not enough of a compelling argument for the shape-shifting nature of the Narrator’s identity, the closed captioning for the film uses the name “Rupert” when referring to the Narrator⁴⁴.

There are countless names and therefore countless identities with presumably rich and complex backstories that the Narrator may have created throughout this life. Up until this point, Marla Singer had seen only the one physical person, the combination of Tyler Durden and the Narrator sharing the same body. While they may differ in their actions and general affect, she had accepted these conflicting personalities as one under the name of Tyler Durden; she then learns that they are truly separate identities. Marla saw one person and then saw another⁴⁵. The Narrator is effectively a different person within each

⁴² *Fight Club 3: The Masterpiece Gambit* will not be used in this thesis either. Both the sequel and third installment in the Fight Club universe were written by Chuck Palahniuk and were issued first as serial comic books then compiled in graphic novel form. The sequel was released in 10 issues from May 2, 2015 until March 30, 2016 and was issued as a graphic novel on May 18, 2016. The third work was issued in 12 installments beginning on January 30, 2019 and was compiled as a graphic novel on April 14, 2020. While we live in the Amazon Prime age where these works are readily available for next-day shipping, they fall out of scope for the purposes of this thesis. Further study would warrant the inclusion of these works to understand their role in the trickster motif at large.

⁴³ The following text is taken from the first cell from the first issue of the story which states “Look at him. He calls himself **Sebastian** these days” (Tranquility 9) [emphasis within the comic]. This is the only reference taken from this source in this thesis.

⁴⁴ As seen in the “X-Ray” function provided by Amazon Prime Video while watching the film; the source of this information is cited from here: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0137523/trivia>.

⁴⁵ Marla Singer’s last words in the novel before the Narrator shoots himself in the face to rid himself and the world of Tyler Durden were her refuting the Narrator when he says “Marla likes Tyler” (Palahniuk

support group which he attends, with a different name and a different disease, even a different person to Marla with whom he had a very complicated relationship, making a strong case for him to be considered a shape-shifter through his identity alone. Marla was not the only one, though, to be confused by the Narrator's name and identity. To highlight his trickster nature as a shape-shifter beyond this plurality of names and identities, the physical attributes of the character will be analyzed.

The use of shape-shifting in *Fight Club* through physical changes

Tyler Durden and the Narrator are the same person and yet they are quite different. While they inhabit the same physical body, their conduct and personality are starkly contrasted, further leading to the idea that this character is a shape-shifter beyond the horde of names and identities employed by the Narrator as previously mentioned. The first time that both the Narrator and the audience discover that these are not separate characters is in a bar in Seattle. During his travels around the country, the Narrator meets many men who look and act the same as he does: these "beat-up guys" (Palahniuk 156) buy him beers and they have an instant connection. While believing this is due to their shared membership in fight club, and thus their similar outlook on life and belief in the "Word of Tyler"⁴⁶, the Narrator rolls with the punches and enjoys the camaraderie; at least, at first. These men, despite the city and despite the situation, all inexplicably refer to him as "sir" and yet they always, inexplicably deny knowing the name "Tyler Durden." These men from cities outside of the Narrator's home turf, these fight club

205), to which she responds, "[n]o, I like you...I know the difference" (205). Over time, Marla Singer understands the differences between the persona despite them sharing the same physical body.

⁴⁶ A concept to be further developed within Chapter VII through the trickster's, and therefore Tyler Durden's, role as a psychopomp.

members from satellite fight clubs all across the country, know to say that they “never heard of him, sir” (157) when the Narrator asks about Tyler Durden. One bartender in Seattle, though, apparently did not get the memo and calls the Narrator “Tyler Durden.”

The bartender in Seattle is very clearly a member of fight club, battered and bruised, described in the screenplay in that “the BARTENDER wears a NECK BRACE and has a black eye” (Uhls 1998)⁴⁷. The following is the interaction between the Narrator, who believes he has never before been in this bar or met this man, and the bartender, who clearly knows something the Narrator does not within the film:

BARTENDER. Welcome back, Sir. How have you been? JACK. Do you know me? BARTENDER. Is this a test, Sir? JACK. No, this is not a test.

BARTENDER. You were in here last Thursday. JACK. Thursday?

BARTENDER. You were standing exactly where you are now, asking how good security is. It’s tight as a drum, Sir. JACK. Who do you think I am?

BARTENDER. Are you sure this isn’t a test? JACK. No, this is not a test.

BARTENDER You’re Mr. Durden. You’re the one who gave me this. (Fincher 1:50:33-1:51:14)⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The novel and the film portray the interaction between this bartender and the Narrator very similarly, though the gut-punch that is received upon hearing that he and Tyler Durden are one and the same is viscerally portrayed through the film and thus reproduced here as evidence of their shape-shifting rather than using the screenplay or novel’s text.

⁴⁸ While the screenplay and novel both contain this scene, the language employed within the film is cited directly here since it conveys the best message and argument for this section; it is only slightly altered in the final cut of the film versus the other two textual sources. This will be a consistently inconsistent trend throughout this thesis, as there are minor variations between the three sources of *Fight Club* and the most appropriate wording will be chosen as it best fits. The naming for these characters, however, is taken from the Uhls screenplay. Based on the previous subsection within this chapter, “Jack” is used as that is the Narrator’s temporary name within the film, though any number of names could have been employed to convey this character’s lines.

The Narrator is then shown the kiss scar on the wounded bartender's hand that he had inexplicably given to this stranger; the scar from the lye burn that both the Narrator and Tyler Durden share, which they also give to each member of Project Mayhem⁴⁹. Understandably confused at being called his friend's name rather than his own, the Narrator races back to his hotel room in Seattle to call Marla Singer. After some prodding, when asking her if they had ever had sex⁵⁰, Marla responds, "[o]h, you mean, you want to know if I think it was "making love" or just two animals going at it" (Uhls 1998)? The Narrator, dumbfounded, says "[s]o we *did* make love" (Uhls) to which Marla follows up with "[y]ou fuck me, then snub me. You love me, you hate me, you show me your sensitive side, then you turn into a total asshole" (Uhls)! Finally, the Narrator breaks down and directly asks Marla his name, to which she responds, "Tyler Durden" (Uhls). Marla Singer and the bartender both call the Narrator "Tyler" rather than his own name. The novel continues the conversation with Marla Singer further clarifying that "[y]our name is Tyler Butt-Wipe-for-Brains Durden. You live at 5123 NE Paper Street which is currently teeming with your little disciples shaving their heads and burning their skin off with lye" (Palahniuk 160), reinforcing the kiss scar.

Since the Narrator spoke to Marla Singer about their relationship, Tyler Durden was forced to confront him about their unique situation. Previously, the Narrator swore three times to never discuss his relationship with Tyler Durden with anyone. Tyler himself said that "[i]f you ever mention me to her, you'll never see me again" (Palahniuk

⁴⁹ This scar is worn like a badge of honor by each Project Mayhem member, a gift from the great Tyler Durden upon their initiation. While this scene is not explored within this thesis, its close reading could theoretically be included within Chapter VII as a gift from the "divine" Tyler Durden in his role as a psychopomp; it would be cited from Chapter 9 of the *Fight Club* novel.

⁵⁰ Which, in the Narrator's mind, is impossible as she is sleeping with his friend Tyler Durden and not him.

72) to which the Narrator agrees thrice. Forcing his hand after the Narrator's conversation with Marla Singer, Tyler Durden admits to the Narrator that they "use the same body, but at different times" (164). Tyler Durden points out to the Narrator that, now, "there isn't a me and a you, anymore" (164). The Narrator believed that he was always in control, though Tyler Durden took over his, or their, body when he needed to accomplish his goals.

The film version of *Fight Club* utilizes flashbacks to reproduce events throughout the movie to visualize the shape-shifting aspect of this trickster character. Whereas the viewing audience had believed Tyler Durden had performed certain actions, either by actually seeing Brad Pitt perform them or by having Edward Norton witness them as a third-party or not initially knowing that they happened at all, David Fincher utilized these "flashbacks" to reshoot these same scenes with Norton replacing Pitt in the Tyler Durden persona⁵¹. As such, explaining their actual relationship, Tyler Durden says to the Narrator that "[s]ometimes *I* control it and you imagine watching me" (Uhls 1998). To illustrate this shape-shifting trait, the screenplay writes "INT. BAR BASEMENT – NIGHT (JACK'S MEMORY) Jack stands near the back of the crowd as Tyler stands in the middle of the light. TYLER The first rule of fight club is -- JUMP CUT – SAME SHOT – (ALTERED FLASHBACK) -- it's JACK in the light, talking, behaving like TYLER," (Uhls) with Norton, or "Jack," continuing the sentence without a break that "you don't talk about fight club" (Uhls). "Jack," or Edward Norton, replaces Tyler Durden, or Brad

⁵¹ While it is not the argument of this thesis that Fincher specifically utilized these flashbacks to highlight the shape-shifting trickster characteristic of Tyler Durden explicitly, the recreation of these scenes to show the changeover from Pitt to Norton serves the same purpose.

Pitt, in a scene previously shown in the film where the audience viewed Tyler Durden, not “Jack,” in control of this scene and, most importantly, of fight club.

One benefit of the film is that different actors are able to replicate the scenes for the viewer’s clarification of the changeover and therefore the shape-shifting nature of Tyler Durden. The Palahniuk text does not explicitly do this, but rather allows the reader to rethink those scenes with the Narrator in mind, not Tyler Durden. Elizabeth Kinder and Patricia Pender advocate in their article “‘A Copy of a Copy of a Copy’: Framing the Double in *Fight Club*,” that “*Fight Club* is not just a novel that rewards rereading; for readers attuned to the narrative frame, it demands it” (Kinder 544). Upon a reread, these scenes where the reader was led to believe that Tyler Durden was in control or that he and the Narrator were interacting with one another take on a different meaning and illustrate the shape-shifting nature of the character. Prior to Tyler Durden’s revelation, the Narrator had believed that he and Tyler were separate entities, entirely different people. He met Tyler Durden⁵² and therefore he is not Tyler; how could he be? However, within both versions of the narrative, the Narrator now knows that he is not in absolute control over his own body as he shares it with another. This character is written to be, and portrayed as, a human male, not a supernatural or mythological character; being human innately prevents his physical appearance from altered like his counterparts in Trickster and Loki. His internal aspects, his personality, demeanor, capacity for empathy, and thoughts and intentions, though, all drastically change between the two personas.

Tyler Durden disappears from the Narrator’s life after the big reveal that they share the same body. The Narrator then searches far and wide to discover his

⁵² Either on the airplane or the nude beach, depending on the source, as discussed in Chapter II.

counterpart's plans to try and foil them. Throughout this country-wide search, the Narrator encounters many men who are extremely similar to himself and the wounded bartender in many ways. He sees "guys with stitches around the rim of an eye socket where a good slam packed their face meat against its sharp edge...with sideways noses...beat-up guys" (Palahniuk 156), all of whom recognize him and call him "Sir," as mentioned. However, the wounded bartender, due to either a concussion sustained from his fights or sheer ineptitude calls the Narrator "Tyler Durden" instead of whatever everyone else calls him⁵³.

How is it that everyone, literally all of the other characters within the narrative, know not to call him Tyler Durden sometimes, and yet they know him as Tyler Durden in others? One particular scene from the film is able to convey the noticeable shift in the attitude of the members of Project Mayhem when interacting with the Narrator and Tyler Durden. Project Mayhem was the elite group of men who were "going to save the world" (Palahniuk 125). Its mission statement was to "break up civilization [to] make something better out of the world" (125). The goal was "the complete and right-away destruction of civilization" (125). These men were bound for life once they joined the ranks of Project Mayhem, forsaking their names, friends, family and lived in The Paper Street House full-time. For the scene in question, these acolytes were assembled in The Paper Street House, chanting the "Word of Tyler" when the Narrator walks him. Angel Face⁵⁴ immediately

⁵³ Ostensibly, no character within either narrative would refer to the Narrator as either "Joe" or "Jack," since these are only the internalized names from the magazines. The supporting cast, Tyler Durden included, must have some other way to call the Narrator's attention or refer to him in the third person, though this is never stated; yet another identity shape-shifting attribute of this character.

⁵⁴ Thinking back on how Project Mayhem began, the Narrator notes that "a young guy with an angel's face came to his first fight club, and I tagged him for a fight. That's the rule. If it's your first night in fight club, you have to fight. I knew that so I tagged him because the insomnia was on again, and I was in a mood to destroy something beautiful" (Palahniuk 122). The Narrator "wanted to breathe smoke," (124) so he "held the face of mister angel like a baby or a football in the crook of [his] arm and bashed him with [his]

stands up from his seat and says, “let me get that for you” (Fincher 1:31:37) and grabs some beer from the Narrator, clearly believing him to be Tyler Durden. The group is watching the news, waiting for the segment covering the building that they had just defaced for their most recent Project Mayhem homework assignment. Seeing what they had done, the Narrator understandably admonishes them, saying “holy shit...what the fuck did you guys do” (Fincher 1:32:23-34) when the rest of the assembly is cheering in celebration of their actions. Once the group appreciated that the Narrator is not joking and is visibly upset, Robert Paulson simply responds, “Sir, the first rule of Project Mayhem is you do not ask questions, Sir” (1:32:43-1:32:47). Within an instant, the members of Project Mayhem instantly realize that this is not their fearless leader, the one who had just led them on this expedition; they are still in their mission garb, bespeckled with paint, having only just returned from this mission.

When the Narrator first entered the room, the members of Project Mayhem had all looked upon him with the most abject veneration, honored that he would grace them with his presence. Their perspective shifted immediately once they realized who was in control and relied on the “Word of Tyler” to deflect the situation and criticism. Once the Narrator is told by Tyler Durden that they share the same body, there is a flashback sequence where the Uhls screenplay is written that “JACK (“TYLER”) (TO ANGEL FACE)” (Uhls 1998), screams the words “you are not job, or how much money you have in the bank (Fincher 1:54:11-1:54:15)⁵⁵. Up until this revelation, the Narrator had not

knuckles, bashed him until his teeth broke through his lips” (124); he remembers that “Tyler told me later that he’d never seen me destroy something so completely. That night, Tyler knew he had to take fight club up a notch or shut it down” (123). After such a remarkable annihilation, this man, Angel Face (portrayed by Jared Leto in the film), still joined Project Mayhem.

⁵⁵ The film replaced Pitt with Norton in this scene to highlight the screenplay’s direction of “JACK (“TYLER”) from this scene, so the interplay between the two is highlighted for double-effect of this shape-shifting scene.

even remembered committing the act until he saw it on the news in The Paper Street House⁵⁶. This malleability with which the shape-shifter was able to switch between persona is typified in the Robert Louis Stevenson passage when Dr. Jekyll revels in capacity for shape-shifting:

I was the first that could plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lending and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. But for me, in my impenetrable mantle, the safety was complete. Think of it – I did not even exist! Let me but escape into my laboratory door, give me but a second or two to mix and swallow the draught that I had always standing ready; and whatever he had done, Edward Hyde would pass away like the stain of breath upon a mirror; and there in his stead, quietly at home, trimming the midnight lamp in his study, a man would could afford to laugh at suspicion, would be Henry Jekyll. (Stevenson 73)

The Narrator and Tyler Durden are almost at this point where they can shift as easily as Jekyll and Hyde, though unfortunately for the Narrator, this is not intentional on his part. Tyler Durden takes control once the Narrator is asleep and, the Narrator worries, the more exhausted he becomes, that he would inevitably “go to bed earlier. That next night, Tyler would be in charge a little longer. Every night that I go to bed earlier and earlier, Tyler will be in charge longer and longer” (Palahniuk 174). This fear is echoed in Dr. Jekyll when he realizes that he too was “slowly losing hold of [his] original and better self, and becoming slowly incorporated with [his] second and worse” (Stevenson 77).

⁵⁶ Instead of the news broadcast, the novel has the Narrator read about the defacement in the newspaper, though he presumably led this same operation too.

The shape-shifting may not be consensual in either case, though it occurs nonetheless and contributes to the trickster nature of Tyler Durden⁵⁷.

The Narrator and Tyler Durden, in their capacity as a trickster character, are shape-shifters. The naming convention, the flexibility in their identity, alone satisfies Hynes and Doty's description of this characteristic. The way in which they carry themselves and have others readily identify who they are in the moment is the second way in which this character is a trickster shape-shifter. The swagger, the peacock strut, the confidence, style, pizzazz, and bravado exhibited by Tyler Durden conveys when he is in control. It is when the Narrator opens up and becomes meek, timid, self-conscious, an "average Joe,"⁵⁸ that the others recognize him for who he is in that moment. The Narrator evolves over the narrative, taking on more of Tyler's personality and persona, though the other characters notice this shift in the character as readily as the audience can tell the difference between Brad Pitt and Edward Norton⁵⁹.

⁵⁷ It is not the goal to state that Dr. Jekyll and/or Mr. Hyde is a trickster simply because he can shape-shift. That would require a similar analysis to this one to deduce whether or not this dual-character could be considered a trickster by following Hynes and Doty's "Guide" framework.

⁵⁸ The pun is intended here on the play between this stereotypically average person and the naming convention employed by Palahniuk in the novel.

⁵⁹ Kinder and Pender call attention to this dramatic shift, noting that during the "'reveal' scene, Pitt's Tyler is tanned and healthy in appearance in contrast to Norton's pale and emaciated narrator" (Kinder 551). While it is not possible for the Narrator, as a human male, to flip between appearing tan and healthy-looking to his emaciated state while Tyler Durden is in control, which would require an instant shift, though this clearly illustrates the pair's relationship in both the film and within the Narrator's mind.

Chapter V.

“I want you to hit me as hard as you can”: The trickster as a situation-invertor

The trickster can manipulate any situation to benefit him. Hynes and Doty write that, “[a]s situation-invertor, the trickster exhibits typically the ability to overturn any person, place, or belief, no matter how prestigious. There is no “too much” for this figure” (“Guide” 37). He is self-serving and will do absolutely anything he feels like, no matter the consequences. There are no boundaries which he will not cross and no sacred rite he will not blaspheme. Hynes and Doty extend this idea in that “[p]rofaning or inverting social beliefs brings into sharp relief just how much a society values these beliefs” (37). It is through the trickster’s actions of breaking these taboos that shed light on what a society holds dear to them. He can act as the mirror to a culture, reflecting its values on the other characters with whom he interacts, which he will then shatter by not falling in line or acting accordingly.

Paul Radin’s Trickster narrative reveals what the Winnebago culture holds dear by emphasizing which situations the titular character inverts. Radin describes a scene where Trickster⁶⁰ decides that he is tired of playing the role of father and husband and departs from his family and village. Trickster states that he “will go around the earth and visit people for I am tired of staying here” (Radin 25). The capacity for responsibility and duty are lost on Trickster; he refuses to adhere to societal norms or tribal custom. Radin, in part three of his novel titled “The Nature and the Meaning of the Myth,” comments that “[i]n these words we have his protest against domestication and society with all its

⁶⁰ This same scene will be utilized again later in Chapter IX, though for a different purpose.

obligations. Doubtless this also voices the protests of all Winnebago against the same things” (140). He is noting that, at some point in the creation of these myths, the Winnebago people included a rebellious tone for their Trickster. Furthermore, as this myth was passed down through oral tradition which in and of itself is not protected against modification and omission, it can be presumed that this antiestablishment trickster theme remained intact⁶¹. This lends itself to the idea that, while the Winnebago themselves may not break their own rules, Trickster, and trickster characters generally, provide the outlet by which the people can act out their rebellious nature while keeping their own hands clean. Radin goes on to state that “[w]e have here, in short, an outlet for voicing a protest against the many, often onerous, obligations connected with the Winnebago social order and their religion and ritual” (152).

Eva Valentova too notes that “[t]ricksters make the world they live in more like themselves. Or rather, they *reveal* [author’s emphasis] the world to be, like themselves, ambiguous, polyvalent, changeable, and unpredictable” (737). Bassil-Morozow furthers this sentiment, in that “[m]ythological and folkloric narratives portray the trickster as a figure challenging the civilizing forces of society and attempting to destabilize or renew the system” (84). Rather than treating Tyler Durden simply as an anarchist, a terrorist, or even the embodiment of toxic masculinity and hyperviolence⁶², these traits may simply be an extension of his trickster nature instead. Bassil-Morozow continues that “[w]e need stories about tricksters because they make us aware of the dangers of extremes: cultural

⁶¹ The argument can be made that, at any point within the enduring history of the Winnebago Trickster Cycle, the designated storyteller or keeper of the tale would be able to incorporate this myth on their own, citing that this is and has always been included. There is no way to tell, though, if that is true or not; since it is included in Radin’s narrative, it will be regarded as true to the story.

⁶² As mentioned in the introductory chapter, these aspects will not be discussed in this thesis; rather, see Chapter I or the References section for further readings on these topics.

stalemate on the one hand, and constant change on the other” (85). Without the trickster character to illuminate the world for what it is in his capacity as a “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37), the status quo will forever be accepted as right and true and will continue on, unchallenged.

Peter Pan is one such character who embodies the Hynes and Doty outline for this trickster characteristic of situation inversion. The character is written to be innocent of many of the Winnebago Trickster’s lewd and illicit behaviors. Similarly, he is spared many of those characteristics with which he shares his partial namesake, the Greek god Pan⁶³, in that he “has not inherited Pan’s libido” (Valentova 741). Yet he is not devoid of the characteristics that make him a trickster character, just the inappropriate components as Valentova argues “he is a child and a hero of children’s literature” (741). He can therefore embody the trickster character without adhering to every single trait laid out by Hynes and Doty or those exhibited by Radin’s Trickster, an act of situation inversion all its own. That said, however, he does manipulate Wendy into coming to Neverland with him by using her wants and desires against her; rather than stealing her away and forcibly flying her to Neverland against her will, “[i]nstead, he tries to seduce her into going with him: he promises to teach her to fly and to show her mermaids. He uses cleverness instead of violence to achieve what he wants” (745). Peter Pan takes a situation that initially did not benefit him, where she remained in London instead of traveling with him to Neverland and inverted it by promising Wendy her heart’s desire.

⁶³ Peter Pan receives his name from the Greek god Pan, as mentioned, as well as St. Peter from Catholicism. Valentova writes that “[t]he most important trickster feature that Peter Pan shares with St. Peter is his function of psychopomp” (741) which will be further developed in Chapter VII.

Éva Székely takes a similar approach as Valentova in applying the traditional trickster motif to Mary Poppins. Székely, like Valentova, qualifies that “Mary Poppins is a modern, feminine variant of the ancient mythical figure of the trickster. Though she does not violate gastronomic, scatological or sexual taboos, which any traditional male trickster would definitely do, she does share the basic six characteristics of tricksters⁶⁴” (100). Stated in this matter-of-fact fashion, Székely is unapologetic that her trickster character does not adhere to all the characteristics laid out by Hynes and Doty, similar to Valentova’s remarks regarding Peter Pan and his namesakes.

Describing how Mary Poppins serves as a “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37), Székely notes that “this trickster nanny functions as a social safety valve for the children, as well. She always gives them the opportunity to let off steam” (102)⁶⁵. These actions of situation inversion “encourage the children to act foolishly: laugh freely, stand on their heads, and dance to their own tunes” (102). In a similar fashion, Hynes and Thomas J. Steele, S. J.’s article “Saint Peter: Apostle Transfigured into Trickster”⁶⁶ is a trickster analysis on the Catholic figure of St. Peter. Their study utilizes tales that exist “within the unofficial realms of popular Christianity” (Steele 159) rather than the traditional Bible stories. These inane stories of a typically stoic character, one who serves “as an exemplar of the *imitatio Christi*,” (159) are centered on St. Peter as a trickster figure who acts as “a social steam valve that can vent the pent-up emotions and suppressed feelings resulting from the constrictions of any system of belief and behavior” (170). Akin to Mary Poppins’ allowance of her wards’ playtime rather than the rigidity of her station as a

⁶⁴ These characteristics are from Hynes and Doty’s “Guide.”

⁶⁵ This “safety valve” (102) Székely describes is reminiscent of when Trickster breaks the cultural taboos which the Winnebago will not.

⁶⁶ This article can be found in Chapter 10 of the Hynes and Doty *Mythical Trickster Figures* anthology.

nanny for which she was hired, the trickster allows for a character to break free from the shackles of society through the use of situation inversion.

One of Mary Poppin's primary duties as a nanny to the Banks children is to raise them to be prim and proper. However, acting both as a "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37) and the "social steam valve" (Steele 170), Mary Poppins also allows the children to be children. Székely describes a scene where the children were attempting to act as mature adults, so Mary Poppins instead activates her situation inversion ability and skill as a trickster to have the children burst out in laughter and truly enjoy themselves rather than be something they are not, so much so that they literally float on air⁶⁷. Mary Poppins performs her duties as required of her position, "delivering praises and punishments whenever she feels they are needed and/or appropriate" (Székely 102), though she understands her role is open for interpretation to best suit her, and her charges', needs best.

Through Peter Pan's and Mary Poppins' actions in their respective character studies, it is evident that the trickster can do whatever they want, whenever they want, even and/or especially when it breaks from tradition or custom in their role as a "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37). Furthermore, these tricksters are playful and childlike, portraying almost a sense of innocence in their actions, which breaks away from the traditional trickster motif which often finds those tricksters being violent or destructive through their utilization of this characteristic, which is similar to how Tyler Durden embraces this trickster trait.

⁶⁷ The scene in question, as cited by Székely, is from "Chapter Three: Laughing Gas" from *Mary Poppins* by P.L. Travers.

The first instance of Tyler Durden's role as a "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37) discussed here will pertain to fight club itself and the rules which govern this top-secret organization. Tyler Durden created the rules for his fight club, although, as a trickster, he also took advantage of a loophole within them⁶⁸. One of the most popular lines from *Fight Club* is the first rule of fight club. Ironically, this rule is one that should be regarded as a well-kept secret rather than a widely recited mantra. "The first rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club" (Palahniuk 48) and, to reinforce this concept, "the second rule about fight club is you don't talk about fight club" (48). These rules are at the heart of their covert operation. The next four rules, which are more logistical, procedural, and functional in nature, are that there are "only two guys to a fight. One fight at a time. They fight without shirts or shoes. The fights go on as long as they have to" (49). The seventh and final rule of fight club, though, is "if this is your fight night at fight club, you have to fight" (50). This, in and of itself, is Tyler Durden playing "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37). If he believes and maintains the first two rules, then Tyler does not want the word to get out to the public about their exclusive club. Yet, by establishing the last rule, that any newcomer at fight club is welcomed into the fold and gets to fight on their first night, he breaks the first two rules outright. In theory, if all members of fight club followed the first two rules, there would never be new members and the last rule would be pointless. Tyler Durden here subverts his own rules, the laws that govern fight club, in his role as a trickster character.

Tyler Durden is often found turning the table on unfavorable situations to extort some benefit from them, similar to breaking his own rules. This characteristic is

⁶⁸ Tyler Durden also created this loophole, of course, though his exploitation of it will be the focus of this discussion.

embedded within both the film and novel versions of the narrative, where Tyler Durden works as a film projectionist for the union. Whereas the film version is able to break the fourth wall, where the Narrator speaks directly to the audience to visually show what this role entails, the novel provides this job's description in detail. The Narrator tells the reader that, "[n]ewer theaters, they splice all the reels together into one five-foot reel" (Palahniuk 26) for one cohesive film, whereas older theaters require a projectionist to manually operate two separate projectors containing the sequential reels of film so that "the audience never sees the break when one reel starts and one reel ran out" (27). As Tyler Durden works in an older theater, he is required to do the "changeover"⁶⁹ (28) of the projectors so the audience is unaware that any change had occurred, and the movie goes on. In his capacity as a trickster and playing the role of "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37), Tyler Durden would often splice a single "frame of a lunging red penis or a yawning wet vagina close-up" (Palahniuk 30) during these changeovers into non-pornographic, family-friendly films.

A movie patron would not want to see a film when Tyler Durden is manning the projectors. For these moviegoers, they may be taking their children to see a G-rated cartoon, like one where "the dog and cat are left behind by a traveling family and must find their way home" (Palahniuk 30) and "just after the dog and cat, who have human voices and talk to each other...there's the flash of an erection" (30). This family may be

⁶⁹ The film version has Edward Norton narrate that a "changeover," separate from this scene though similar in nature, happens when he finally discovers that he and Tyler Durden are the same person. He blacks out, as his mind is not able to handle the news of this revelation after the Narrator broke his promise by speaking to Marla Singer about Tyler, and a changeover occurs which allows Tyler Durden to take control. The Narrator then wakes up in a panic to discover that Tyler has made phone calls as a part of his contingency plan now that he has been discovered. Originally, Chapter IV would have been titled "Changeover" as a result of that scene, emulating an instance of shape-shifting, though to prevent confusion with the usage of the term here, it has since been renamed.

watching as “a Grand Canyon vagina with an echo, four stories tall and twitching with blood pressure as Cinderella danced with her Prince Charming” (31) just appears on-screen. There is a reasonable expectation of what the parents are subjecting their kids to see, though Tyler Durden, the “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37), splices these frames of graphic pornography into these films, which last for only “one-sixtieth of a second” (30). The most disturbing aspect of this inversion, the Narrator notes, is that “[n]obody complained. People ate and drank, but the evening wasn’t the same. People feel sick or start to cry and don’t know why. Only a hummingbird could have caught Tyler at work” (31).

One of the integral aspects of this trickster characteristic is that it challenges the status quo by breaking a central taboo. In this case, Tyler Durden is challenging and perverting the moviegoing experience through his role as a film projectionist. The United States has the Motion Picture Association (“MPA”) provide a rating system that allows parents to readily know if a film’s content is acceptable for their children. This scale ranges from a G-rating, where the content has “nothing that would offend parents for viewing by children”⁷⁰ to an NC-17 rating, where the film is “clearly adult...children are not admitted”⁷¹. This system, to an extent in today’s society, is relatively infallible; parents oftentimes trust this rating almost explicitly. Knowing this to be true, Tyler Durden thereafter “spliced a penis into everything” (Palahniuk 31), negating any rating provided by the MPA and immediately graduating it to an NC-17 film, inverting the entire entertainment experience and a cultural staple. Hynes and Doty write that, in his

⁷⁰ “Film Ratings: Informing Parents since 1968.” *Motion Picture Association*, <https://www.motionpictures.org/film-ratings/>. Accessed 19 September 2020.

⁷¹ Ibid.

role as a “situation-invertor...the trickster often turns a place of safety into a place of danger and back again” (“Guide” 37).

The splicing of grotesque pornographic images into the films is also self-reflective of the *Fight Club* film itself. David Fincher utilizes this process within the film multiple times to quickly blur Tyler Durden into scenes prior to his introduction on the airplane⁷². He is effectively creating his own changeover to imprint Tyler into the film before he should be there, hinting that Tyler Durden, and his relationship with the Narrator, exists within the latter’s mind; these flashes happen so quickly, though, that they are easily missed and require re-watching to find them all⁷³. Furthermore, the last scene of the film is a gigantic penis, hovering mid-screen for only a split second prior to the credits. This further emphasizes the role Tyler Durden plays as a “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37), one that is more aligned with his traditional counterparts rather than the more innocent Peter Pan and Mary Poppins.

While Tyler Durden’s role as a film projectionist is important in establishing his trickster nature through situation inversion, it is also utilized as a vehicle by which he can invert the traditional workplace environment and corporate structure. Due to his adept skill at inverting established practices to suit his needs, Tyler Durden and the Narrator are able to expand the scope of fight club and its role in the society they wish to build. As mentioned, newer movie theaters do not need a person to manually flip the reels of film since they could be contained on one continuous reel. Since the role of the projectionist was being outmoded, Tyler Durden was about to be fired from the union. Hynes and

⁷² As mentioned in Chapter II, the introduction of Tyler Durden to the Narrator within the film version of *Fight Club* takes place on an airplane whereas the novel is on a nude beach.

⁷³ Reminiscent of Kinder and Pender’s call to re-read the novel.

Doty note that “[w]hat prevails is toppled, what is bottom becomes top, what is outside turns inside, what is inside turns outside” (“Guide” 37) when a trickster acts as a “situation-invertor” (37). Tyler Durden acts accordingly when he is brought into the office of the “president of the projectionist union”⁷⁴ (Palahniuk 114). This trickster told the president that “[a]s long as the union kept sending a paycheck, he’d keep his mouth shut” (113) regarding the scenes of “[s]odomy. Fellatio. Cunnilingus. Bondage” (113) which he had included within the films he tended since those tainted “[m]ovies had gone back to the distributor...had gone back out in re-release” (113) nationwide. The president of the union did not take this threat well.

This man, the president of the projectionist union, whose “body was bigger and stronger than he would ever really need” (Palahniuk 115) punched Tyler in the face so hard that it “knocked Tyler out of his chair, and Tyler sat against the wall, laughing” (114). Tyler did not fight back; he simply told him that “[y]ou have too much to lose. I have nothing” (114). Tyler Durden remarked that he himself is “trash and shit and crazy to you and this whole fucking world...you don’t care where I live or how I feel, or what I eat or how I feed my kids or how I pay the doctor if I get sick, and yes I am stupid and bored and weak, but I am still your responsibility” (115). The president proceeded to kick Tyler in the ribs, knowing that Tyler’s words were true and there was nothing he could do. Tyler inverted the movie-going experience and then inverted the concept of a job entirely. After the president beat the crap out of him, literally getting his kicks in, Tyler

⁷⁴ This man is referred to as “mister chapter president of the local chapter of the national united projectionist and independent theater operators union,” (Palahniuk 112) “mister chapter president” (113), and “the president of the united union of united projection operators independent and united theaters united” (113), so his simplified title from page 114 is used instead of these ridiculous ones which further invert this man’s station as the head of this union.

received “early retirement, with pension” (113) from the union. Thereafter, “Tyler was free to start a fight club every night of the week...there was always money coming in” (117). Rather than working a job for pay, performing a task for money, Tyler Durden would continue to receive his paycheck for free, for actually not working, through his inversion of the traditional employer-employee relationship.

After Tyler Durden intentionally lost this fight, he decided that the members of fight club should go out and do the same. While it is unclear if he could have won this bruising battle with Mr. President if he had tried, he actively decided to lose it. This inversion begs the question: why does someone fight? Through either a verbal conflict or physically attacking another person, the purpose of a fight is typically to win an argument or to enforce one’s will or beliefs upon another. The entire concept of a fight is predicated on winning that fight, emerging victorious, and overcoming another. Tyler Durden has other plans, however, since he instructs his followers that, “[b]y this time next week, each guy on the Assault Committee⁷⁵ has to pick a fight where he won’t come out a hero. And not in fight club” (Palahniuk 119). The Narrator recounts that “[y]ou aren’t alive anywhere like you’re alive at fight club” (51); he says that “[a]fter you’ve been to fight club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex” (50). This feeling of elation, of bliss, is only achieved through fighting at fight club, as per Tyler Durden’s words; there’s just no experience in the world quite like it. Instead of hoarding this sensation for themselves, Tyler Durden wants his men to pick a fight where they will lose and provide that feeling for others, to “let him

⁷⁵ The Assault Committee is a subcommittee of Project Mayhem, which itself is an offshoot of fight club which requires a separate initiation process and serves as Tyler’s special “army,” for lack of a better term.

experience winning for the first time in his life” (120). Tyler Durden’s goal is to “remind these guys what kind of power they still have” (120).

Tyler Durden understands that “a man on the street will do anything not to fight” (Palahniuk 119) and herein lies the doubling down of the situation inversion. Not only is Tyler Durden instructing his men to start a fight which they will purposefully lose, but he is also breaking a cultural taboo. Joe Sixpack⁷⁶ is someone who will do anything in their power to prevent themselves from getting in a fight in the first place. For a non-fight club member to win a fight against these guys, now seasoned veterans at fighting, would pose a serious challenge. Tyler Durden warns them that, “[i]f you win, you screwed up” (120), further emphasizing that he wants the entire basis of starting this fight to be inverted, thus allowing the underdog to come out on top in order to regain the power that has been stripped of and from them.

The first time that the Narrator and Tyler Durden fight each other, it was a reserved and awkward melee. The Narrator states that he “had never hit anybody” (Palahniuk 52) before that fight, which echoes the accepted belief that most people would do whatever they could to avoid one. The film version of *Fight Club* specifically takes this idea a step further and inverts it completely through Tyler’s homework assignment of picking and losing a fight with a stranger. There is a montage of random fight club members trying, and failing at first, to fight random people on the street. One “space monkey⁷⁷” is shown washing a car and intentionally spraying innocent bystanders

⁷⁶ A typical or ordinary American male and another play on the use of the name “Joe.”

⁷⁷ “Space monkey” is a derogatory term employed by the Narrator for the members of Project Mayhem, in that they “do the little job [they’re] trained to do” (Palahniuk 12). The Narrator references them as such throughout the novel and film. The screenplay introduces these characters upon Ricky’s initiation into Project Mayhem, when Tyler refers to him as “[a] monkey, ready to be shot up into space, ready to sacrifice himself for Project Mayhem” (Uhls 1998) with the screenplay then defining a new character, in that “[a]nd, so, all those with shaved heads will henceforth be termed “SPACE MONKEYS” (Uhls).

walking by with a hose. This man, clearly trying to provoke someone to fight him, gets his wish when a priest passes him. This holy man at first struggles with his fight-or-flight response, though is quickly seen striking back against the space monkey. Not only does the priest fight that day, but he is next shown fighting in fight club itself as a member. While priests do not necessarily swear oaths of nonviolence or pacifism, it is uncommon for a man of the cloth to be portrayed in such a manner. David Fincher allows for Tyler's message and trickster nature to be taken a step further than that of the novel where even the most unexpected characters fall prey to Tyler Durden's will. This further emphasized that Tyler Durden can and will subvert any expectation by inverting whatever situation in which he finds himself.

The Narrator and Tyler Durden were waiters at the Pressman Hotel in both the film and novel, in addition to their role as a film projectionist. As servers, they mercilessly mar the food they give to the hotel's restaurant patrons. The Board of Health rates every restaurant based on their respective levels of sanitation and cleanliness in a given city or jurisdiction, similar to the role the MPA plays with rating movies, as discussed earlier in this chapter. New York City, for example, has the Department of Health which grades each restaurant from A to C based on the number of sanitary violations that they commit. It is commonplace for a potential restaurant patron to shy away from a C-grade, whereby that restaurant (or food truck) has "28 or more points for sanitary violations"⁷⁸ versus an A-grade which has "0 to 13 points"⁷⁹ on the same scale. Similar to the guidance provided by the MPA, when choosing a restaurant, a potential

⁷⁸ "Frequently Asked Questions." *NYC Health*, <https://a816-health.nyc.gov/ABCEatsRestaurants/#!/faq>. Accessed 19 September 2020.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*.

customer relies on the reasonable expectation that they will be receiving edible, clean, untainted food if they see an A-grade in the window. These “situation-invertors” (“Guide” 37), though, break this taboo by undermining the authority of this governmental organization and the expectation of their rating system in both the restaurant at the hotel as well as those which employ fellow fight club members.

Marla Singer and the Narrator experience this aspect of situation inversion in both the film and novel versions of *Fight Club* when they decide to eat out at a diner which the audience and the characters themselves can assume is a decent enough establishment with a passing grade on its Health Department rating⁸⁰. The narrative allows for another inverted situation when Marla orders the soup and the waiter, clearly a member of fight club based on his bruised face in the film, says “[m]ay I advise against the lady, here, eating the clam chowder” (Palahniuk 172)⁸¹; the waiter also refers to the Narrator as “Sir.” Tyler was “a service industry terrorist. Guerrilla waiter. Minimum-wage despoiler” (84). Tyler the trickster inverts yet another situation where the reasonable expectation of clean food is bypassed, another taboo is broken. These acts, though, lead to how the Narrator quits his job at the hotel similar to Tyler Durden’s termination from the projectionist union.

⁸⁰ Otherwise, why would they go there in the first place; the only potential justification would be that it was cheap enough for them to afford a meal there though even then, one could assume that this diner would be shut down if it were found to be too unclean.

⁸¹ Chuck Palahniuk, in the Afterword of the novel, wrote that, “[y]ears later, in London, a young man pulled me aside before a book event. He was a waiter at a five-star restaurant – one of only two five-star restaurants in the city – and he loved how I’d depicted waiters spoiling food. Long before they’d read my book, he and the other servers had messed with the food they served celebrities. When I asked him to name one celebrity, he shook his head. No, he couldn’t risk telling. When I refused to sign his book, he waved me closer and whispered: “Margaret Thatcher has eaten my cum.” He held up one hand, his fingers spread, and said: “At least five times...”” (Afterword 215). These situation-inversion references can be funny, until they’re true.

The Narrator followed in Tyler Durden's footsteps when he approached the manager of the Pressman Hotel. The Narrator told the hotel manager that he "wanted the hotel to send me a check every week equivalent to my average week's pay plus tips" (Palahniuk 114). If they gave in to his demands, he "wouldn't come to work anymore, and...wouldn't go to the newspapers or the public health people with a confused, tearful confession" (114) regarding the horrible, unspeakable things that he did to people's food; how he had "been peeing into soup, farting on crème brûlées, sneezing on braised endive" (114). These disgusting acts had been going on for the majority of the narrative, with the Narrator commenting earlier that "the tomato soup must still be hot because the crooked thing Tyler tucks back in his pants is boiled pink as a jumbo prawn" (85). Rather than getting thrashed for his threats like Tyler Durden did by the president of the projectionist union, the Narrator inverts even that situation and takes it upon himself to kick his own butt. The Narrator begins by repeatedly punching himself in the face, noting that "[i]t just looks good, all the blood" (116) and then tosses himself "back against the wall to make a terrible noise and break the painting that hangs there"⁸² (116). He continues to pound himself, bleeding across the room, eventually dragging his bloody face on top of the manager, with "the filth sticking to the blood on both of us, and right then at our most excellent moment, the security guards decide to walk in" (117)⁸³. Unable to explain himself out of the situation, the manager accepts his loss and agrees to pay the Narrator his normal wages without the expectation of work.

⁸² The novel notes that, "for no reason at all, I remember the night Tyler and I had our first fight. *I want you to hit me as hard as you can*" (Palahniuk 116); this is due to the fact that their first fight would have occurred exactly in this same way, with the Narrator fighting himself and imagining that someone is fighting back.

⁸³ This scene of situation inversion is replicated in the film almost exactly as cited here, with the one exception being a change in venue. The solo fight occurs in the office of the Narrator's manager at the recall company rather than at the hotel.

The Narrator, mirroring Tyler Durden's actions (which, of course, are his own), inverts the situation so that he now receives normal pay for these jobs without ever having to work again. The trickster character, and therefore the Narrator and Tyler Durden, break cultural taboos through their situation inversion: they prey upon the faith which the public has placed within established institutions and exploit this belief system. The trickster as a "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37) goes beyond the individual acts he commits and moves into the global way he destabilizes the system.

Chuck Palahniuk, in an interview published in *BlackBook*⁸⁴, spoke to what his characters do in revolt against the system in which they find themselves. Palahniuk said that, "the idea of kind of making a game out of these things and playing them in a different way, not just accepting the game that you're given by the culture but inventing your own" (*BlackBook*) was the impetus for the fight clubs and the way his characters are able to survive in their respective societies. This also highlights how the Narrator and Tyler Durden are adept "situation-invertor(s)" ("Guide" 37). The situations described in this section from *Fight Club* as well as the other studies all show that the trickster will do anything in their power to get what they want. Sometimes, the aim of the trickster is to explore, and/or break, the boundaries of the system. Tyler Durden, specifically, is profaning the rules and established norms that his society uses to govern, and its citizens have accepted. He is disrupting two separate yet similar organizations, the MPA and the theoretical Board of Health, which reflect society's customs and values at large. This concept can be taken beyond just the interpersonal interactions which the trickster

⁸⁴ *Blackbook* defines itself as "an influential global arts & culture authority and brand" which has an online presence as well as "a print magazine...an insider guide, an art gallery...a women's empowerment platform, book publisher, and a content, design, and marketing services provide / agency." This excerpt was taken from their website at blackbookmag.com/about/.

inverts; this is bigger than flashing pornography to unsuspecting theater goers, picking fights with people who have done nothing to deserve it, or violating someone's meal. He may just be the sole conspirator, the only actor, the trickster and the "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37) who rebels against society and breaks their taboos since the common man is unable to do so in order to enlighten the masses on what is right and wrong, what should and should not be done. The trickster, though, may just be playing tricks for what he considers to be fun, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter VI.

“Those birthday candles...they’re the kind that never go out”: The trickster as a trick-player

Hynes and Doty write that, “[a]s his name explicitly states, the trickster is a consummate and continuous trick-player and deceiver...the trickster acts as the *prima causa* of disruptions and disorders, misfortunes and improprieties” (“Guide” 35). The trickster often employs these abilities to get what he wants, though not always successfully. Paul Radin describes Trickster as one “who dupes others and who is always himself duped” (Radin xxiii). Hynes and Doty further extend this concept in that “a trick can gather such momentum as to exceed any control exercised by its originator and may even turn back upon the head of the trickster, so the trick-player is also trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35). The trickster can sometimes fall prey to his own trickery, losing control of a situation that he himself initiated. The trickster’s deceptive nature often bears fruit for him, though his reward may turn out to be poisonous⁸⁵. Despite the inevitable outcome, the trickery employed by the trickster can oftentimes be humorous as well.

The epic hero Odysseus from Homer’s the *Odyssey* is one such “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35) character. This Greek myth is centered on Odysseus’s arduous travels home to his family in Ithaca after his exploits in the Trojan War wherein the titular character oftentimes finds himself in quite perilous circumstances. One such instance, and where he acts as both a trickster and a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35), occurs when Odysseus his

⁸⁵ The trickster’s trickery that backfires on him is more than a mere cause-and-effect relationship. It is because the actor is a trickster character that the situation would ever happen in the first place and he is therefore the only one that would yield this outcome.

crewmates find themselves in “the land of the high and mighty Cyclops” (Homer 214). Odysseus and his men decide to engage with the Cyclops to divine whether they were “violent, savage, lawless? or friendly to strangers, god-fearing men” (217)? Upon reaching the cave of Polyphemus, a great and terrifying Cyclops, they find him and his ilk to be of the former disposition. Polyphemus mercilessly murders and eats two of Odysseus’ crewmen and traps them inside the cave with a mighty, immovable boulder. Polyphemus eats another two of Odysseus’ friends for breakfast the next morning before setting out to tend his sheep for the day, locking the men inside the cave. Upon his return that night with his flock in tow, Polyphemus once again feasts on another two of the crew. Knowing that this cycle will continue until there is no one left, Odysseus plots their escape.

Odysseus was known far and wide in the ancient Greek world by his name and exploits. He was welcomed with open arms by all strangers, as was the custom passed down by the gods, except for the Cyclopes. To best this brute, Odysseus decides to give two gifts to the Polyphemus: the first is the wine they had brought with them and the second is a name. While the Cyclops was quaffing the delicious draught, Odysseus tells him that he is “Nobody – that’s my name. Nobody – so my mother and father call me, all my friends” (Homer 223). The Cyclops overdrinks and, before passing out, regurgitates the wine and dismembered, fallen crewmates. Seizing their opportunity, Odysseus and his men go to work with their escape plan, converting the “Cyclops’ great club” (221) into a massive stake which they then stab into the Cyclops’ one eye while he lay drunk. Polyphemus “wrenched the spike from his eye and out it came with a red geyser of blood – he flung it aside with frantic hands, and mad with pain he bellowed out for help from

his neighbor Cyclops” (224). His brethren questioned who was doing this to him, and Polyphemus replied that “*Nobody*, friends...Nobody’s killing me now” (224). By providing this false name, Odysseus portrays his first act as a trickster and “trick-player” (“Guide” 35) within this scene.

The other Cyclopes disregard Polyphemus’ call for help and went back to sleep, since, apparently, “no one” was attacking him. Polyphemus removes the massive boulder and stood guard by the door until dawn “hoping to catch a comrade stealing out with sheep” (Homer 224). Odysseus questioned, “how could I find escape from death for my crew, myself as well. My wits kept weaving, weaving cunning schemes – life at stake, monstrous death staring us in the face” (224). Seeing how Polyphemus tended to his flock the day before, Odysseus decides to use Polyphemus’ sheep against him. By strapping himself and his men under the Cyclops’ flock, Polyphemus, now blinded, felt only wool slip between his fingers as the sheep departed from the cave instead of human flesh. Through these actions, exemplifying Odysseus’ trickery, they escaped Polyphemus and begun their escape from that wretched place to their ship with relatively minimal casualties.

Michael Simpson’s article “‘Odyssey 9’: Symmetry and Paradox in *Outis*” discusses the complexity and “irony of the pun, *Outis/mêtis*” (Simpson 24)⁸⁶. Simpson writes that, “if the name the hero gives himself is descriptive of his situation in the cave, it also deceives the other Cyclopes and so prevents his otherwise certain death. The paradox is that Odysseus, in articulating his condition by means of a verbal symbol,

⁸⁶ *Outis* is the Greek term for “nobody” or “no one,” which is the name Odysseus gives to Polyphemus. *Metis* is a reference to the Titan Metis who was an embodiment of cunning; see footnote 88 for more on this character.

delivers himself from it” (24). Odysseus’ usage of this pun, though, is negated upon their arrival at his ship. Yes, they took a hit and lost men, yet they reached safety and were once again bound home. However, against the will of his men, Odysseus proclaims “Cyclops – if any man on the face of the earth should ask you who blinded you, shamed you so – say Odysseus, raider of cities, he gouged out your eye, Laertes’ son who makes his home in Ithaca” (Homer 227). Now knowing his true name, Polyphemus invokes the wrath of his father Poseidon, the god of the seas, who then curses Odysseus and his men. *The Odyssey* translator Robert Fagles notes that in this scene, “[d]eceit is indispensable if he and his crew are to escape, but though he is master of all the arts of deceit, this particular subterfuge is one his whole nature rebels against” (Fagles 32)⁸⁷. Through the use of his cunning, or his *metis*⁸⁸, by employing the name “Nobody,” or *outis*, Odysseus was illustrating his trickery, his deceitful trickster characteristic. However, as is the nature of the trickster character, he himself becomes “duped” (Radin xxiii), a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35), by telling the Cyclops his true name⁸⁹.

The tricky trickster characteristic shown through this chapter from *The Odyssey* evidences well that the trickster can exhibit great deceit, though he may also fall prey to his own trickery. It signifies that the trickster can be an actual trickster figure, a character who tricks and deceives, as his name implies. Since, as Radin writes in the Prefatory Note

⁸⁷ This excerpt is taken from the Introduction to the Fagles translation of the *Odyssey* and therefore is attributed to the translator rather than to Homer.

⁸⁸ See Hesiod’s *Homeric Hymns* for the description of the Titan Metis, who was born from Tethys and Oceanus (Hesiod 334) and was the “wisest among gods and mortal men” (886). Further, Apollodorus’s work, *The Library*, describes the plot to overthrow the Titan Cronus, where “Zeus...took Metis...to help him, and she gave Cronus a drug to swallow, which forced him to disgorge...the children whom he had swallowed” (Apollodorus 1.2.1). Odysseus and Metis, through their cunning and trickery, both provide a brute with a draught that forces them to vomit up their respective companions.

⁸⁹ Odysseus’ use of different names and identities (further emphasized in Book XIII of the *Odyssey* titled “Ithaca at Last”) to highlight his trickster nature could be given similar treatment to that of the Narrator in Chapter IV of this thesis, though it falls out of scope of this particular document.

to his work that “[l]aughter, humour and irony permeate everything the Trickster does,” (xxiv) it also shows how these tricks allow for levity. *The Odyssey*, the Winnebago Trickster Cycle, and *Fight Club* are all generally serious in tone and often deal with death and destruction⁹⁰. The tricks that the trickster play then allow for a modicum of hilarity, a break from the darker tones of the narratives. *The Odyssey* provided this sentiment with the Cyclops’ exclamation that no one had blinded him, implying that he had done it to himself; this scene, though, occurs just after Odysseus’ friends were just savagely murdered and eaten by Polyphemus. This concept of the trickster providing a twisted dark humor will be addressed in Radin and then *Fight Club*, while each also showing that the trickster invariably will have his tricks played back on him.

Paul Radin recounts a tale where Trickster acts as a “trick-player and deceiver” (“Guide” 35) to a group of small ducks. Trickster encounters these ducklings in his travels and offers to sing songs for their merriment and dancing pleasure. The tricky Trickster tells them, though, “[w]hen I sing, when I have people dance for me, the dancers must, from the very beginning, never open their eyes” (Radin 15). So Trickster sings his songs and the young ducks dance with their eyes closed until one of them hears an odd sound. The little duck opens his eyes and, “[t]o its surprise, Trickster was wringing the necks of his fellow ducks” (15)! Trickster deceived the ducks to dance blindly while he slowly killed each of them for his meal, displaying his prowess as a

⁹⁰ The tales from Norse mythology centered on Loki are also quite dark in tone, however, these works noted are in a stark contrast when compared to the tales of Peter Pan and Mary Poppins, both of which are quite playful and more relaxed than these.

trickster, literally⁹¹. This act of deception, though, leads to another, making him a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35).

Trickster prepared his meal of the young ducks, cleaning and then skewering them on stakes next to a fire to cook. Exhausted from all of his trickery, Trickster decided to sleep while his meal cooked, assuming that “[b]y the time I awake they will unquestionably be thoroughly done” (Radin 16). To sleep soundly and without worry, Trickster tells his anus that it “must keep watch for me while I go to sleep. If you notice any people, drive them off” (16). Upon awakening to find that all of his food was gone, eaten by foxes while he was asleep, Trickster decided to punish his anus. His anus, however, had done all that it could to drive away those “covetous fellows” (17) when it had “expelled gas in rapid succession” (17) as both a pseudo-alarm clock for Trickster as well as warning shots to the thieves. As punishment for losing his food, Trickster “took a burning piece of wood and burnt the mouth of his anus. He was, of course, burning himself” (17-18). After this scene, Trickster continued on his way and found what he believed to be the remnants of an animal, so he “picked up a piece of fat and ate it. It had a delicious taste” (18). After eating all he could find of this mystery meat, “much to his surprise, he discovered that it was a part of himself, part of his own intestines, that he was eating” (18).

Trickster played the part of a “trick-player and deceiver” (“Guide” 35) by convincing the ducks to dance with their eyes closed to kill them silently for a meal. He became a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35) in the subsequent scene, though, in three ways.

⁹¹ This example could also be categorized under the “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 34) trickster trait in Chapter V; Chapter IX describes the transferability of these characteristics to other sections within this work.

The first is that he entrusted his anus to a task which it could never accomplish, losing his meal in the process. Secondly, Trickster is unaware of his own body⁹² and therefore severely burned himself without the knowledge that his anus was a part of himself. Lastly, this trick was further busted when Trickster unknowingly engaged in autocannibalism; that is a serious trick to play on oneself. This is also an inane example of both the trickster's ability to trick and manipulate others as well as the one who becomes the butt of their own joke. These same "trick-player" ("Guide" 35) and "trickster-tricked" (35) characteristics will be seen in the upcoming examples of Tyler Durden and *Fight Club*.

Fight Club's Project Mayhem was itself a tricky organization. Its mission statement was "to save the world" (Palahniuk 125). As discussed in Chapter V, it was Project Mayhem desire to "force humanity to go dormant or into remission long enough for the Earth to recover" (125). This was eco-terrorism at its finest, attempting save the planet by killing off the virus that was the human race; quite the trick to play, bringing about death and destruction on a global scale. This enterprise begets scholars and critics alike to treat the narrative⁹³ as one replete with violence and anarchy, which holds true under this particular lens. Project Mayhem itself, though, is broken down into smaller subcommittees, like the "Mischievous" (12) and "Arson" (119) each of which serves a particular function for Tyler Durden. One of these committees gave its members the

⁹² This is a common theme throughout the Winnebago Trickster Cycle, akin to when Trickster's right arm brutally cut up his left arm over a dispute when dressing a buffalo (Radin 8), in that Trickster is not yet aware of himself or his own makeup.

⁹³ Both the novel and the film, though the film version does not detail how far Project Mayhem, and therefore Tyler Durden, plans to go with his plans; the novel has a much darker tone when it comes to this organization's actions, the death of its members, and murder.

⁹⁴ The "Mischievous Committee of Project Mayhem" (Palahniuk 12) is referenced early on (page 12 is actually the second page of the particular version of the novel utilized within this thesis) though it is more formally introduced on page 119 along with the other committees of Arson, Assault, and Misinformation.

homework assignment of “drilling bank machines and pay telephones and then screwing lube fittings into the drilled holes and using a grease gun to pump the bank machines and pay telephones full of axle grease or vanilla pudding” (133); the purpose of this prank is unknown⁹⁵ though it seems it was done just to sow chaos, a trick played by a trickster.

Project Mayhem, and its assorted subcommittees, act as the physical manifestations of Tyler Durden’s trickery and deceptive nature. As such, one prank allows for a bit of dark humor, where “thousands of...bumper stickers just appeared on cars one morning” (Palahniuk 144) with the slogans of “I Drive Better When I’m Drunk,” and “Make Mine Veal;” “Drunk Drivers Against Mothers” and “Recycle All the Animals” (144)⁹⁶. These ironic and offensive slogans are at one time absurd in tone while also being cruel in their nature. They are highly polarizing statements, either someone will think they are funny, or they will not: this is the trickster’s way. Chuck Palahniuk, speaking with Arifa Akbar from the British newspaper *The Independent*, explains that “making them laugh is a way of breaking the tension. You are confronting people to the point where they are about to remove themselves but then you make them laugh and they remain, and then you confront them again...you keep rewarding and punishing them” (*Independent*). Tyler Durden the “trick-player” (“Guide” 35) finds the line that people ought not to cross and shatters it so he can see their reactions, which in this case, is more likely than not an uncomfortable, awkward laugh where the reader is unsure of how to respond⁹⁷.

⁹⁵ The committee is also unknown, as the Narrator knows to not ask questions about Project Mayhem. Due to the actions described in Chapter V, one could assume that the Narrator and Tyler Durden are fully funded and therefore do not necessarily need the money or coins that they could steal from these machines, thus making this act a trick for the trick’s sake.

⁹⁶ Each of these ‘slogans’ are taken from page 144 of the novel.

⁹⁷ After all, the trickster can be both a “breaker of taboos” (“Guide” 40) and a “trick-player” (35) as will be described in Chapter IX.

Tyler Durden gave another homework assignment to the members of the Mischief Committee which closely resembled the bumper stickers trick. Under the trickster's guidance, the space monkeys⁹⁸ printed out "airline pocket cards that show passengers fighting each other for oxygen masks while their jetliner flames down toward the rocks at a thousand miles an hour" (Palahniuk 145). Instead of the passive airline passengers subserviently following the instructions on the original placard, the film depicts these cards with the passengers screaming and going wild at the thought of their impending doom. This is a triple trick by an accomplished trickster. First, it plays a trick on the airlines who, more likely than not, do not know that their cards have been replaced. Second, it plays a trick on the passengers themselves, who, more likely than not, would only ever read these emergency cards in a non-emergency event when they were bored and either freak out or laugh at the sight of these cards. Third, if the plane was actually in trouble, more likely than not, the passengers would not race to look at these original placards for instruction and follow them to the letter⁹⁹; by replacing realistic elements into the parody that was previously contained in these cards, of placid passengers doing as their told as their plane is crash landing into land or sea, the trick is made clear. This same kind of humor is mirrored in the initiation ritual into Project Mayhem.

Tricky Tyler Durden requires the pledges that wish to join his Project Mayhem fraternity to engage in a very specific initiation ritual. To prove their mettle and exhibit the fortitude required of all Project Mayhem members, these plebes must wait on The Paper Street House's porch "without foods or shelter or encouragement for three days"

⁹⁸ General members of Project Mayhem.

⁹⁹ This is yet another example of the bleeding of one characteristic into another, whereby this could be Tyler Durden breaking the cultural taboo of the TSA and the airline companies, that they are to be trusted explicitly and he rebels against them, and fit squarely within Chapter V. More on this in Chapter IX.

(Palahniuk 129) before they are granted entrance into both Project Mayhem and their new home. For these three days, though, Tyler Durden tells the Narrator that “[i]f the applicant is young, we tell him he’s too young. If he’s fat, he’s too fat. If he’s old, he’s too old. Thin, he’s too thin. White, he’s too white. Black, he’s too black” (128-129). These men have their resolve tested while being constantly reminded that they are not enough, that they are inadequate and will not be accepted. These men have turned to fight club, to Tyler Durden, and now to Project Mayhem because they feel that society has forgotten about them. They are the downtrodden, ridiculed masses that already feel that they are not enough and are inadequate to live in the world today.

The trick that Tyler Durden is playing on these men can be viewed as indoctrination into his cult, strengthening their negative views of their prior lives only to give them praise in a positive light within Project Mayhem. The trick is that these men could leave the porch at any time, yet they withstood the barrage of insults, abuse, and, most importantly, tricks from the current members of Project Mayhem. The Narrator and Tyler Durden enjoy yelling at these prospective members of Project Mayhem in the film, hitting them with brooms and kicking their belongings off the porch. With the early initiates of Project Mayhem, they were tormented solely by the Narrator and Tyler Durden through their separate persona. This must have been extremely confusing for these potential new members. The screenplay notes “EXT. PORCH – NIGHT ... JACK ARE YOU STUPID?! I TOLD YOU TO GET OUT OF HERE! YOU’RE NEVER GETTING INSIDE THIS HOUSE!¹⁰⁰ EXT. PORCH – MORNING ... TYLER I’m sorry about the misunderstanding” (Uhls 1998). These first applicants likely knew of the

¹⁰⁰ This segment is fully capitalized within the screenplay to emphasize that “Jack” is screaming at Ricky, the imminent first member of Project Mayhem.

dichotomy of these characters, though it is amusing that the “two” are so contradictory in speech and manner from one night to the next morning. Upon his initiation, Ricky, who is portrayed by Eion Bailey in the film, is then seen screaming at Angel Face, a new initiate played by Jared Leto, that “you, you’re too fucking...blonde” (Fincher 1:30:19-1:30:25)! These tricks employed by Tyler the trickster allow for a few fun scenes where the Narrator and Tyler Durden get to be silly for a bit amongst the more violent scenes of the film. All the while, though, Tyler Durden is reminding these men how the external world viewed them before their stepping into fight club or stepping onto his porch at The Paper Street House. This tricky trickster is forcing them to sit outside for three days, to remain in the world that has beaten them down, before they can make their way into The Paper Street House, their new sanctuary.

Though oftentimes successful in his trickery, the trickster is confronted with the inevitable backfire whereby the trick player falls victim to his own trick as detailed by Hynes and Doty, referenced by Radin throughout Trickster’s exploits, and as evidenced by Odysseus in his interaction with Polyphemus. For *Fight Club*, however, most of Tyler Durden’s exploits, and trickery, seems to be relatively consequence free; at least, for him. This thesis will touch upon the collateral damage from Project Mayhem later, though Tyler Durden remains relatively unscathed throughout the narrative. Tyler Durden only becomes a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35) in the final scene of both the novel and film, albeit in different ways.

The film and novel each conclude with the Narrator shooting himself in the face to rid himself and the world of Tyler Durden. The film shows the Narrator place the gun in his mouth on the top floor of an office building and pull the trigger. The camera

switches focus by zooming in on the resulting smoke coming out of Tyler Durden's (Pitt's) mouth, which then pans around the actor to show that Tyler Durden's skull has been blown out and, as he drops to the floor, he instantly vanishes. Tyler Durden is gone, and the Narrator is bleeding profusely from his face for a bit before miraculously recovering¹⁰¹. A few space monkeys enter the room with Marla Singer, with one whispering that he "can't believe he's standing," referring to the Narrator/Tyler Durden to which the other space monkey replies "he's one tough motherfucker" (Fincher 2:15:13-2:15:17)¹⁰². The Narrator, now recovered from the bullet to the head, holds Marla's hand and says to her that "you met me at a very strange time in my life" (2:15:52-2:15:56) and the credits roll¹⁰³. Tyler Durden overstepped, threatened Marla Singer, and destroyed the surrounding buildings which held all of the credit card companies to destabilize society through erasing credit history¹⁰⁴. He succeeded as these buildings collapse due to the soap-based bombs that the space monkeys planted in them all, though at the cost of his own 'life.' Thus, since Tyler Durden is gone in the film, he becomes a "trickster-tricked" ("Guide" 35).

The novel does not contain as simple of an ending. Rather than popping right back up, getting in the last line and have a nice, loving moment with Marla Singer at the

¹⁰¹ He did, after all, shoot himself in the face, though how he is relatively fine is unknown and not discussed in the film. The consequence of this self-inflicted gunshot wound to the face is treated much differently in the novel.

¹⁰² This is an instance where the space monkeys do not know which persona is in control, so the character is given the reverence he deserves.

¹⁰³ Just before a phallic symbol is presented for a split-second.

¹⁰⁴ The novel describes the destruction of the buildings is an attempt to destroy the museum sitting underneath, stating that "the Parker-Morris Building...all one hundred and ninety-one floors, will slam down on the national museum which is Tyler's real target" (Palahniuk 14) erasing actual history rather than resetting everyone's credit to create chaos. The novel was written in 1996, with presumably little access to the internet and digital preservation of the art and artifacts within the museum, these items would theoretically be lost to time, to Tyler the trickster.

end, the Narrator awakens in a mental institution after he shoots himself¹⁰⁵. He notes that, when he shot himself, “[t]he bullet out of Tyler’s gun, it tore out my other cheek to give me a jagged smile from ear to ear. Yeah, just like an angry Halloween pumpkin. Japanese demon. Dragon of Avarice” (Palahniuk 207). While Tyler Durden does not make a reappearance in the final few pages, it is unclear if he is gone for good. Whereas the film ends on a hopeful note, the last words of the novel are from an orderly (or an angel, as the Narrator is unsure of his whereabouts, believing that he may be in heaven) whispering that “[w]e look forward to getting you back” (208). Tyler Durden therefore becomes a “trickster-tricked” (“Guide” 35) if nothing else than he must remain in the dark, outside the light, for the time being; he may be biding his time until his eventual return, or he may be gone for good.

It is important to note, though, that sitting in the asylum and being locked away from the world and Marla Singer, the Narrator and Tyler Durden both fell prey to their own trickery. The trickster character plays games with those around him, sometimes for amusement, sometimes for more diabolical or devious purposes. Radin’s Trickster and Tyler Durden both break these restrictions without question because they can and because it is their function to do so; it is essential to their nature. What if we, too, were to follow in their footsteps? Would that lead to cultural change for the better, or simply result in jail-time, fines, and community service? The next section treats the trickster as one that is sent from the heavens to provide mankind with the gifts and message of the gods.

¹⁰⁵ By shooting himself in the face, the Narrator blacks out and a new chapter in the novel begins where he wakes up and “[e]verything in heaven is white on white” (Palahniuk 206), unsure whether he is in heaven or an insane asylum.

Chapter VII.

“What will you have wish you’d done before you died”: The trickster as a psychopomp

The trickster, as described by Hynes and Doty, is first and foremost an “ambiguous and anomalous” (“Guide” 34) character. This concept accentuates that he blurs the line between good and evil, light and dark, that he is liminal and in-between. This fifth characteristic of the trickster describes that, as he comes from “uncertain or impure birth, the trickster can be both a messenger and an imitator of the gods. Admixing both divine and human traits, he can slip back and forth across the border between the sacred and the profane with ease” (39-40). As the trickster transcends these boundaries, he is considered to be a psychopomp, or “a mediator who crosses and resets the lines between life and death” (40). While he travels between these two realms, the lands of the living and the dead in his capacity as a psychopomp, he oftentimes brings gifts to humanity, stolen from the gods. These gifts then serve to both benefit and transform humanity.

Many of the trickster characters explored throughout this thesis also act as psychopomps in their respective stories. For instance, Helena Bassil-Morozow reads that “Loki’s psychopomp connection includes his daughter, Hel, who presides over the realm over the dead” (88); similar to Greek mythology where the god Hades is synonymous with the underworld, Hel shares her name with her domain. Additionally, Eva Valentova also treats Peter Pan as a psychopomp, as she considers “Neverland being something of an Otherworld” (Valentova 751) or as the underworld. Peter Pan can travel across these borders with ease, as he not only escorts his companions to Neverland, but he also “brings Wendy and her brothers back home to the world of the living” (742) when they

are done with their adventures. The idea of Neverland as the land of the dead in Peter Pan's universe is predicated on the concept that the "lost boys," Peter Pan's friends in Neverland, are not lost, but, in fact, are actually dead. The phrasing of 'he lost his father' or 'she lost a child' could be similarly used here to imply that the boys are dead and have traveled to the Underworld, under the alias of "Neverland" in J. M. Barrie's¹⁰⁶ works. While the Narrator from *Fight Club* is a real-life human male, the case can be made that Tyler Durden is his divine counterpart and a psychopomp.

The Narrator and his compatriots can be viewed as belonging to the religion, or the cult, of Tyler. His every utterance can be treated as "Word of Tyler"¹⁰⁷, with the Narrator remarking, "[w]here would Jesus be if no one had written the gospels" (Palahniuk 15)? This ideates that everything Tyler says and does is considered sacrosanct, needing to be preserved and remembered both for cultural and historical significance as well as for his worshippers. Tyler is treated as a god and his word divine, revered as if he receives instruction from a higher power.

Throughout both the novel and film, many members of both fight club and Project Mayhem repeat the rules laid out by Tyler as if they are golden, unbreakable laws that require adherence above all else. The Narrator hears the space monkeys – the members of Project Mayhem – repeating Tyler Durden's mantras throughout the novel, like "[y]ou are not a beautiful and unique snowflake" (Palahniuk 134), or "[y]ou're not your job. You're not your family, and you're not who you tell yourself" (143). Further, when a

¹⁰⁶ James Matthew Barrie is the author of the Peter Pan novels and plays.

¹⁰⁷ A term I, Kyle Yeager, am creating for this section, to be reminiscent of the Word of God in Catholicism, reinforcing the idea of Tyler Durden bringing the divine to humanity in his role as a psychopomp.

Project Mayhem member named Robert Paulson is killed¹⁰⁸ during a raid, they chanted “[h]is name is Robert Paulson” (178) in this mindless, zombie-like state becoming Tyler’s drones, repeating his words and feeling them to their core. Robert Paulson, or “Bob” who was portrayed by Michael Lee Aday who is more commonly known as “Meat Loaf” in the film, was close to the Narrator and quickly rose the ranks of fight club, ultimately joining Tyler Durden’s inner circle within Project Mayhem. On the day he died, out of respect, “[i]n every fight club...the chapter leader walks around in the darkness outside the crowd of men who stare at each other across the empty center of every fight club basement, and this voice yells: “His name is Robert Paulson”...and the crowd” (178) repeats these words back to him. They then chant his age, that he was a member of both fight club and Project Mayhem, and in this way, he is remembered. The Narrator even hears this chorus in a bar across the country spoken by fight club members of the kitchen staff when he appears in the bar to speak with the wounded bartender, further highlighting the spread of the “Tyler Durden dogma” (141). At other points within both the novel and film, it is clearly visible how Tyler Durden’s words and actions carry much weight with his followers, as the text asks the reader to “[p]icture this happening in a hundred cities, in a half-dozen languages” (179); this firmly establishes Tyler Durden as a messenger of the gods to his parishioners, fitting well within this trickster characteristic from Hynes and Doty’s guide.

The psychopomp character seamlessly transitions between the living world and the underworld, or the afterlife. Within the scope of *Fight Club*, one can read the physical fight clubs belonging to, or as a part of, the underworld. Oftentimes, the term

¹⁰⁸ This character and his death will be discussed further in Chapter VIII.

‘underworld’ is a reference to the world of crime, where drugs, guns, and sex are trafficked illegally and found readily; fight clubs then could be situated within this underbelly of society. It is an elusive event, “because except for five hours from two until seven on Sunday morning, fight club doesn’t exist” (Palahniuk 52); at least, in the beginning. To enter this exclusive club, a prospective fight club member needs to know or come in contact with Tyler Durden, similar to Wendy’s reliance on Peter Pan to get to Neverland¹⁰⁹. The trickster here acts as the intermediary between the outside world and fight club, the living world and the underworld. Furthermore, the initial fight clubs were found “in the basement of a bar” (50), highlighting the transition between the inside and outside worlds, the upstairs where everyone else exists and the downstairs where fight club gathers. Arnold van Gennep writes that the transition rite, moving from one state to the next, “is intended to show that at the moment in question the individual does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world...and he is therefore isolated and maintained in an intermediate position, held between heaven and earth” (Gennep 186). To enter fight club through Tyler Durden, either as a regular or newbie, “is to unite oneself with a new world” (20). This descent into the fight club basement can be viewed as a katabasis, or a trip to the underworld, similar to Odysseus traveling to “The Kingdom of the Dead” in Book Eleven of the *Odyssey* which Tyler Durden facilitates in his role as a psychopomp trickster character.

Hynes and Doty include in their description of the psychopomp trickster that he is “often associated with conducting individuals to restored life” (“Guide” 40), or in other words, revitalize someone on the brink of death. The root of the *Fight Club* narrative is

¹⁰⁹ As discussed in Chapter V, due to the seventh rule of fight club, the clubs expand and ultimately newcomers may not know Tyler Durden the man, though they would absolutely know the legend.

founded in the Narrator's inability to sleep, which guides him to the support groups where he meets Marla Singer and then "befriends," or rather develops, Tyler Durden; without the insomnia, none of this happens. However, the lack of sleep can be reimagined as not only a clever plot device but rather as another aspect of the trickster as a psychopomp. The Narrator remarks that "[t]hree weeks without sleep, and everything becomes an out-of-body experience" (Palahniuk 19) and that "[e]verything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can't touch anything and nothing can touch you" (21). He is the walking dead, a zombie without the ability to feel or be felt. What is the difference between this lifeless form and actually being dead, according to the Narrator's own words? The beginning of the *Fight Club* narrative is consumed with language based on suicidal inclinations, where the Narrator internalizes thoughts like "your life comes down to nothing, and not even nothing, oblivion" (17). The man is dead inside until Tyler Durden revives him, until Tyler Durden the psychopomp restores his life to one worth living; the same can be said for the other members of fight club¹¹⁰.

The Narrator notes that "[w]ho guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world...who I am in fight club is not someone my boss knows" (Palahniuk 49) and

¹¹⁰ This statement should be taken with a grain of salt. Yes, this is a true statement within this context and within the narrative in general, though, for a character like Robert Paulson, of course, it is not since he was murdered while carrying out the will of Tyler Durden and in service to Project Mayhem. Further, the space monkeys are seen fertilizing the gardens at The Paper Street House with the fallen members of Project Mayhem and the deceased from the other subcommittees. While this is generally a behind-the-scenes act, the Narrator notices "the little spot of gold in the dirt is a molar with a gold filling...next to it surface two more molars with silver amalgam fillings...it's a jawbone" (Palahniuk 136). It is never explicitly stated how many lives were lost because of Tyler Durden and his directives, though one can assume there were many. Robert Paulson is really the only one that the audience sees die the film; however, in addition to Bob, the readers of the novel know that the Narrator's boss was killed by Tyler Durden as was Patrick Madden, "the mayor's special envoy on recycling" (Palahniuk 198). The other members who do manage to survive, though, are saved from the shell of their former lives through Tyler Durden.

that “[w]hat happens at fight club doesn’t happen in words” (51) as it is almost like an out-of-body experience. Participating in fight club rejuvenated a host of men who were without purpose, without feeling. The Narrator existed in a pseudo-fugue state, wandering in the darkness until Tyler Durden, the psychopomp trickster, brought him into the light. Helena Bassil-Morozow writes that “[t]he role of the psychopomp emphasizes the trickster’s transcendent qualities, among which is the ability to transgress the frontier between consciousness and the unconscious” (88). This is highly relatable to *Fight Club* since the Narrator and Tyler Durden share a body, though have different personalities, consciences, and consciousnesses. Consciousness, here, can be viewed as what is alive and out in the real world whereas the unconscious is held in the dark recesses of the character’s mind. Restated, the living world would represent the light and the underworld, the world of fight club, would be the dark. The Narrator’s drab, boring, meaningless existence was a dark time in his life¹¹¹, until Tyler came and brought light into it. This concept is well represented in another movie franchise, the *Eastrail 177 Trilogy*, written and directed by M. Night Shyamalan.

The 2016 film *Split* was the second film in M. Night Shyamalan’s *Eastrail 177 Trilogy* which is centered on a character that has multiple personality disorder. This character, portrayed by James McAvoy, is named Kevin Wendell Crumb and he and his 24 separate and distinct personalities serve as the central villain in *Split*, the second film in the franchise, as well as one of the villains in the final installment titled *Glass*. When one personality would take over the body to act and speak, that character was said to take over the “light”; to be in the light of day rather than in the darkness of the shared

¹¹¹ As is echoed in the final words of the film.

unconscious mind with the other personalities. One of the personalities says that, “every one of us has to wait in a chair, and Barry¹¹², he decides who stands in the light” (*Split* 2017)¹¹³. Unlike this character, the Narrator of *Fight Club* is not aware that his personality has ‘split;’ he believes himself to be separate and distinct from Tyler Durden. Upon the discovery that he and Tyler Durden are the same, the Narrator frets that “I could imagine myself becoming one of Marla’s stories. *I dated a guy once who was a split personality*” (Palahniuk 183). The goal of this thesis is to establish Tyler Durden as a trickster character, not to diagnose the Narrator and Tyler Durden in any psychological capacity. Therefore, there is no argument to made, at least within the confines of this essay, that the Narrator suffers from either multiple personality disorder or dissociative identity disorder¹¹⁴. The only reflection of this concept is exemplified in the Narrator’s distress at the thought of how he will be remembered by Marla Singer. This thesis argues that the characters are the two sides of a coin, their own twisted yin and yang, where their trickster nature, not a psychological disorder, is the cause for their differentiation. The description from Shyamalan’s works is utilized to convey how consciousness can play a part in the role of the psychopomp.

The final aspect of the trickster as a psychopomp to be explored is how “the trickster’s position midway between the gods and humans allows him to function as a

¹¹² One of the other personalities who, presumably, has an authoritative capacity over the others while in Crumb’s hive mind.

¹¹³ There are specific years that can be referenced to see the natural progression of *Fight Club*’s publication history: the original Chuck Palahniuk novel was published in 1996, the Jim Uhls screenplay was written in 1998, and the David Fincher film was released in 1999. M. Night Shyamalan said in an interview that he “had written the character a while ago...had written out a few scenes of it...had dialogue written out” (McKittrick), so I am merely sourcing the release date of the film, despite the years it likely took to write, direct, and then produce the film, since this author has not found a specific publication date for the screenplay.

¹¹⁴ A modern term for multiple personality disorder.

cultural transformer” (“Guide” 40). Fight club becomes a national phenomenon within the novel and film and without. Chuck Palahniuk himself writes in the Afterword, that, “seven books later, men still ask where to find the fight club in their area. And women still ask if there’s a club where they can fight one another” (Palahniuk 217). What better way of highlighting the cultural transformation that occurred because of Tyler Durden’s actions within *Fight Club* than to show that Chuck Palahniuk, years later, is still being asked where a real-life fight club is located so people could go and fight¹¹⁵. Within the novel, fight club is happening every night in what appears to be in every major city in the country; the film has the Narrator flying from city to city searching for Tyler Durden and in this montage, the audience sees people fighting each other everywhere. Tyler Durden’s message, the “Word of Tyler,” spreads as gospel across the country and holds transformative powers. This is his gift to humanity, as is his nature since “[t]he trickster quite regularly brings gifts essential to human culture, usually by breaking a central taboo established in the divine order” (“Guide” 40); and what better gift to give humanity than that of a safe space for men and women to beat each other up. The trickster as a messenger of the gods provides humanity with gifts, as he can traverse the borders between worlds, though the trickster himself can also create his own inventions that can similarly benefit humankind.

¹¹⁵ Of course, Palahniuk would not be allowed to tell them, even if they did exist, due to the first and second rules of fight club.

Chapter VIII.

“The Paper Street Soap Company”: The trickster as a bricoleur

The ingenuity of the trickster knows no bounds. He is a useful and innovative character, able to utilize his surroundings to best suit his needs in any circumstance in which he finds himself. Hynes and Doty name the trickster a “bricoleur or a tinker or fix-it person, noted for his ingenuity in transforming anything at hand in order to form a creative solution...these items can be put to whatever inventive purpose is necessary” (“Guide” 42). The trickster himself can transform himself as needed, as illustrated in Chapter IV, and can gift the divine to humanity, as illustrated in Chapter VII, though the specific trickster characteristic highlights his outward transformative powers. As a bricoleur, the trickster creates things that benefit himself and, either intentionally or accidentally, those around him.

Eva Székely utilizes the “creative solution” (“Guide” 42) aspect of the bricoleur in order to describe Mary Poppins’ role as a “magnificent storyteller, who can see the imaginative and curative possibilities in a random event on the street...or an uninteresting object on the mantelpiece” (Székely 103). Rather than creating something physical, Mary Poppins utilizes her creativity to best help the Banks children. Similarly, Eva Valentova utilizes a passage from the Peter Pan tale titled *The Little White Bird* by J.M. Barrie as an example of his status as a bricoleur trickster. This scene has Peter Pan creating a reed to play music to the animals surrounding him, which, in Valentova’s words, “shows how supremely skillful Peter is at imitation, another important skill from the trickster’s repertoire. Moreover, Peter’s pipe-playing shows his boundless creativity” (Valentova

740). These instances show that a physical creation, as well as a creative one, can serve this Hynes and Doty characteristic, and *Fight Club* has both in spades.

The Narrator's creation of Tyler Durden to serve his needs is quite the flexing of his powers as a bricoleur. He himself, though, desperately needed Tyler and would not have been able to accomplish what Tyler did, so it is Tyler Durden's trickster abilities and capacity to create that will be the basis of this section. The first creation to be examined is the fight clubs themselves that Tyler Durden builds from scratch. The functional use of fight club is made clear throughout this thesis, from the cathartic release on behalf of the Narrator, allowing him to fight his demons, to the reclamation of its members' will to live through the invigoration of their fighting spirit¹¹⁶. This creative solution allows its members to break free of the mundanity of everyday life and gives purpose and meaning for these men where there was little to none prior to their admittance into fight club. Tyler Durden's creativity did not begin and end with fight club, though; his trickster nature breaks through into his innovative mind, beginning with his proclivity for making soap.

Tyler Durden has a plethora of knowledge on many diverse topics. Tyler himself would deflect this compliment, attributing his cleverness to the Narrator's lack of sleep, having that time instead to expand his horizons. Tyler Durden explains to the Narrator that "it's not insomnia. As soon as you fall asleep, I take over and go to work or fight club or whatever. You're lucky I didn't get a job as a snake handler" (Palahniuk 167). The film continues this sentiment, with Tyler saying to the Narrator that "you have night jobs because you can't sleep...or you stay up and make soap" (Fincher 1:54:17-1:54:22).

¹¹⁶ Chapter VII spoke to this concept, where Tyler Durden, the trickster psychopomp, restores life to the fight club members.

The time otherwise spent sleeping allowed Tyler Durden to develop his plans for fight club, for Project Mayhem, presumably for future plans which were cut short when the Narrator shot him, and many of these aims were centered around soap. While soap making is not a trickster attribute in its own right, the way in which he creates his soap and its various uses are aligned with Tyler's trickster nature and bricoleur status.

Tyler Durden is a professional soap maker. He introduces himself to the Narrator as such in the film. The novel and film are replete with detailed instructions on how to make soap curated by Tyler himself. A relatively commonplace and innocuous thing, soap; Tyler Durden's soap, though, is that of legend and cause enough for him to be considered a trickster on its own. Chapter 8 of the novel outlines the entire soap making process, in a similar fashion to Tyler Durden laying out the rules of fight club, so that the reader could essentially create soap themselves. Tyler, the bricoleur, instructs the Narrator, and eventually the members of Project Mayhem, on how to make his signature soap. Tyler, the trickster, instructs those same men on the power of soap and the non-traditional things they can do with certain ingredients. Tyler Durden's capacity as both bricoleur and trickster has him taking the unremarkable and makes it remarkable when he tells the Narrator that "you can skim the glycerin off" (Palahniuk 72) the top of the tallow, instead of mixing it back in within in the soap, and "mix [it] with nitric acid to make nitroglycerin" (72). Tyler Durden says, "[y]ou can mix the nitroglycerin with sodium nitrate and sawdust to make dynamite" (73). If dynamite is not your cup of tea, Tyler Durden tells the Narrator to take the "nitroglycerin with more nitric acid and paraffin and make gelatin explosives" (73). Paraffin is a finicky ingredient, though,

typically does not work well for the Narrator¹¹⁷, so instead “mix...nitro with cotton and add Epsom salts as a sulfate” (12) to get a different and yet more effective use of soap-as-explosive for this trickster-as-bricoleur. The soap and its potential uses are true examples of the “creative solutions” (“Guide” 42) of a bricoleur, a trickster figure who is able to transform existing ingredients and repurposes them for new and interesting uses to aid them in their adventures. Hynes and Doty further qualify the two types of a bricoleur, since, in his transformative capacity, the trickster “can find the lewd in the sacred and the sacred in the lewd” (42) evoking the terms of “sacred bricoleur” (42) and “lewd bricoleur” (42).

Tyler Durden initially teaches the Narrator how to make soap in the textbook kind of way, where soap is made by slowly rendering fat with a few extra steps like adding scent or color. The lewd bricoleur, though, is not one for tradition and craves to muck up this process. Tyler decides to source his fat, not from animals or any synthetic materials, but from human beings; he sourced the “liposuctioned fat sucked out of the richest thighs in America” (Palahniuk 150) for his soap. Tyler Durden has his space monkeys from Project Mayhem travel to the “medical waste dump” (150) to grab “[t]he richest, creamiest fat in the world, the fat of the land” (150) as the base for their soap whereupon they will take this human excess “back to Paper Street and render and mix with lye and rosemary and sell back to the very people who paid to have it sucked out. At twenty bucks a bar, these are the only folks who can afford it” (150). Apparently, there are no

¹¹⁷ The Parker-Morris Building, where the Narrator and Tyler Durden find themselves at the end of the novel for their whole “murder-suicide thing” (Palahniuk 13), does not blow up since, as the Narrator notes with “[t]he barrel of the gun tucked in my surviving cheek, I say, Tyler, you mixed the nitro with paraffin, didn’t you. Paraffin never works” (205).

FDA regulations or health board to test the cleanliness of the soap¹¹⁸, considering “Nordstrom’s called and left an order for two hundred bars of Tyler’s brown sugar facial soap...people are saying it’s the best soap ever” (87). Tyler’s soap became all the rage, with “The Paper Street Soap Company” (87) actually becoming “backlogged on filling orders” (177)¹¹⁹. Unfortunately for these potential customers, they did not know that product was made by a lewd bricoleur¹²⁰.

Tyler Durden, the lewd bricoleur, takes the grotesque, the unwanted, the unclean, and repurposes it; the soap he is molding and pushing back into society is a symbol for the members of both fight club and Project Mayhem. Tyler Durden’s followers chant the mantra: “You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake...you are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile” (Palahniuk 134). As stated by Victor Turner, “the neophyte in liminality¹²¹ must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate...they have to be shown that in themselves they are clay or dust, mere matter, whose form is impressed upon them by society” (103); they were the dirty Starbucks cups thrown out into the trash can of society and Tyler Durden remade them, remolded them in his vision. The garden at The Paper Street House is yet another example of Tyler’s status as a bricoleur trickster, in both the sacred and lewd categories.

¹¹⁸ Another example of Tyler Durden, the trickster, the “situation-inventor” (“Guide” 37), the breaker of taboos, subverting the establishment to get his way, as illustrated in Chapter VII.

¹¹⁹ The Narrator states “God help us when the holidays came around” (Palahniuk 177), further emphasizing that Tyler’s soap became a hit and was in high demand. Tyler Durden can only hope that his customers surgically shed a few pounds before Christmas so he can get their new, fit bodies clean with his soap; an odd take on self-cleansing though an effective use of his talents as a lewd bricoleur.

¹²⁰ Tyler Durden’s job as the movie projectionist from Chapter V also could be read as a bricoleur as he is creating new scenes in the movies, and a lewd one since they are pornographic. The same can be said through his role as a waiter in that he is creating new dishes for the restaurant patrons, and a lewd one as he is doing nasty things to their food.

¹²¹ The neophytes, here, are symbolized by the recruits and members of both fight club and Project Mayhem.

The trickster inventor can be described as sacred, lewd, and all places in between as this is a part of the trickster mythos, allowing for this aspect of the character to also be both “ambiguous and anomalous” (“Guide” 34). A footnote previously mentioned that the members of Project Mayhem were burying the bodies of their fallen comrades in the garden. The Narrator notes that he had to “push the one, two, three molars into the dirt and hair and shit and bone and blood where Marla won’t see” (Palahniuk 136), further evidencing the multitude of bodies buried therein. Supplying the garden with this human fertilizer, “[t]he plants are growing faster than the space monkeys can cut them back” (135). Rather than purchasing the essential ingredients to grow fertile crops, the lewd bricoleur does not let this prime plant food go to waste. Presumably, the members of Project Mayhem were then consuming these crops as one of, if not their primary, sources of sustenance, effectively creating a desecrated sense of the circle of life for the followers of Tyler. The use of the garden at The Paper Street House plays a role in the sacred nature of the bricoleur as well. Ecclesiastes 3 from the Old Testament of the Bible states that there is “a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted...all are from the dust, and to dust all return” (Eccl. 3.2, 20).

This hallowed ideology is reminiscent of the death of Robert Paulson in both versions of *Fight Club*. As mentioned in Chapter VII, when Robert Paulson is killed during a Project Mayhem homework assignment towards the end of the narrative, he is brought back to The Paper Street House by his comrades. Upon entering Project Mayhem, all men relinquish their rights and names, however, through death, one can reclaim his name and identity. The Project Mayhem members believe that “[o]nly in death will we have our own names since only in death are we no longer part of the effort.

In death we become heroes” (Palahniuk 178). This sentiment is echoed earlier in the novel when Tyler Durden recounts how, [i]n ancient history...human sacrifices were made on a hill above a river...after hundreds of people were sacrificed and burned, Tyler says, a thick white discharge crept from the altar, downhill to the river” (76). After years of burning bodies on the pyre, rain would fall which “seeped through the wood ashes to become a solution of lye, and the lye combined with the melted fat of the sacrifices” (76). These ancient people “found that their clothes got cleaner if they washed at that spot” (77) in the river where this mixture trickled downstream. This is how Tyler Durden justifies that “the first soap was made of heroes” (78). These ordinary men in fight club and Project Mayhem are remade as heroes in their sacrifice to Tyler Durden, the sacred bricoleur. They then return to dust, as the Bible lesson describes, and again are transformed into food for their comrades, this time through Tyler Durden, the lewd bricoleur.

Assessing what to do with Robert Paulson and hide the evidence, the film has Angel Face¹²² propose to the group that they should “bury him...take him to the garden and bury him” (Fincher 1:46:36-1:46:40). The Paper Street House’s garden, therefore, becomes a symbol of life and death, of the “sacred and lewd bricoleur” (“Guide” 42), and of the “anomalous and ambiguous” (34) trickster¹²³.

¹²² The blonde member of Project Mayhem, portrayed by Jared Leto, who the Narrator utterly destroys in a fight in both the novel and film

¹²³ The argument could be made that the garden of The Paper Street House is itself a liminal space, constantly decomposing the fallen bodies of fight club and Project Mayhem like Bob, sustaining the lives of the creatures in its soil, and creating new life in the vegetables, herbs, and plants.

Chapter IX.

Bleed-Through: The application of the six trickster characteristics to one story

The previous six chapters of this thesis were each dedicated to unpacking one of the trickster characteristics established within Hynes and Doty's article "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide." This methodology provided ample space to prove Tyler Durden's status as a trickster through primary and secondary sources supporting the characteristic of that chapter. What this approach may be lacking, though, is how one story can fit the mold of many, or all, the characteristics. This chapter will be dedicated to that meld. Utilizing a tale from Paul Radin's *Winnebago Trickster Cycle*, this chapter will prove how every Hynes and Doty characteristic can be applied to one story. The same process will then be followed with *Fight Club* to prove the bleed-through of trickster characteristics.

One episode included in Paul Radin's *Winnebago Trickster Cycle* recounts the interaction between a chipmunk and Trickster. Occurring just after a scene where Trickster was prevented from exacting his revenge on a mink, he went out into the world and continued to wander. From afar, a chipmunk ridiculed Trickster on how he carried his penis and the way it was looked. Already in an aggravated state, Trickster became irate, arranging and rearranging his penis and testicles until they were made to appear 'normal' by today's standards¹²⁴. Seeing that the chipmunk was the creature mocking him, Trickster says to his penis, "you may go after him for he has been annoying you for

¹²⁴ Footnote #91 from Radin's work, states that "[w]e have here the first intimation that the penis and scrotum are now to be given their normal position and the penis to receive its normal size" (Radin 59) as opposed to the freeform state in which the organs had been haplessly organized within their carrying box previously.

a long time” (Radin 39). Trickster unraveled his epically long penis to chase the chipmunk into a “hollow tree” (39), yet he could not reach him. Trickster was persistent though, “[s]o he unwound more and more of his penis and probed still deeper, yet all to no avail. Finally, he took what still remained, emptying the entire box, and probed and probed but still he could not reach the end of the hole” (39). Failing to reach his quarry, Trickster recalled his penis and, “[m]uch to his horror, only a small piece of it was left” (39).

Aghast that his penis had been reduced to such a paltry state, Trickster “kicked the log to pieces. There he found the chipmunk and flattened him out” (Radin 39). Why, if Trickster’s endgame was to kill the chipmunk, did he allow his penis to attack instead of using his whole body, or even just his legs which he ultimately uses? What could his penis have done if it had reached the chipmunk? His actions contradictory, his intention unclear, therefore fulfilling Hynes and Doty’s first characteristic of the “ambiguous and anomalous” (“Guide” 34) nature of this event. The second characteristics, that of the “deceiver/trick-player,” (34) states that “a trick can gather such momentum as to exceed any control exercised by its originator and may even turn back upon the head of the trickster, so the trick-player is also trickster-tricked” (35). The use of his penis could have been Trickster’s attempt at a trick, though one could only speculate what he intended with the chipmunk had he caught him, though his failure lost him a considerable length of his penis. The third aspect, that of the “shape-shifter” (36), can be viewed as the penis acting more like a snake than a penis, or as literally taking the form of a snake-like creature. The penis’ ability to be sent off into the tree, with its own agency, could also fulfill this trickster trait. Furthermore, the penis had its actual form changed as a result of

this incident, accentuating the shape-shifting aspect of this tale and of the trickster who is emotionally fazed, yes, though no lasting physical harm has befallen him as a result of the chipmunk's actions.

Trickster comes to terms with the new size and shape of his penis quickly and decides to act, thus fulfilling the three remaining trickster characteristics from Hynes and Doty. The Winnebago Trickster Cycle states that "it would not have been good had our penis remained like that and the chipmunk was created for the precise purpose of performing this particular act" (Radin 40); there is something divine, or something pertaining to a higher power, in the intervention and invention¹²⁵ of the chipmunk for the betterment of mankind. This gift from the gods fulfills the trickster's capacity as "a messenger and an imitator of the gods" ("Guide" 39). Trickster then takes the chewed-up remnants of his penis from the chipmunk and decides to "make objects out of the pieces for human beings to use" (Radin 39). This unfortunate situation for Trickster becomes a gift to humanity in two specific ways. The first is that Trickster, due to this incident, provides human males with their genitalia as they appear today¹²⁶¹²⁷. The second is that, as bricoleur, Trickster converts the remnants of what was once his penis into "lily-of-the-lake...artichokes...ground-beans...[and] rice" (39) for human consumption¹²⁸. Viewed in a sacred way, these are gifts that sustain humanity; viewed in a lewd way, humanity

¹²⁵ Radin notes that "the special creation of an animal to perform a particular act is not an old Winnebago concept" (Radin 59, note #92), though he does not provide context for this concept and it is kept within the tale, nonetheless.

¹²⁶ As described in Chapter VI, where Trickster punishes his anus, he is similarly responsible for the reason why "the anus of human beings has its present shape" (Radin 18).

¹²⁷ This could support either his status as a bricoleur or messenger of the gods, or both, as is the purpose of this chapter.

¹²⁸ Trickster is found effectively eating himself throughout the tale, where he eats some of these plants which initially grew out of his penis as well as eating his own burned intestines, which is referenced in Chapter VI and in the footnote above.

forever will be consuming Trickster's penis when choosing these vegetables for their meals. Finally, Trickster's capacity to provide humanity with gifts due to his suffering accentuates his ability as a "situation-invertor" ("Guide" 37), or one who can "turn a bad situation into a good one" (37). As outlined here, one incident in Radin's Winnebago Trickster Cycle is examinable under the purview of each of Hynes and Doty's six characteristics for the trickster.

Fight Club will now be given this same treatment, where a single scene is analyzed by each of the trickster characteristics. Project Mayhem doled out Tyler Durden-approved homework assignments to its members to be completed, with no questions asked. As was his duty, the Narrator was instructed to "bring Tyler twelve driver's licenses. This would prove we each made twelve human sacrifices" (Palahniuk 151). One such sacrifice was to be Raymond K. Hessel, a convenience store clerk. Rather than simply grabbing this young man's license and running, the Narrator asked, "[w]hat does Raymond Hessel want to be when he grows up" (153)? This twenty-three-year-old community college dropout with a gun to his head cried out that he had wanted to become a "veterinarian" (154), though that meant "too much school" (154) and he was not willing to sacrifice the time or money for it. The Narrator provided an alternative for him, saying "[y]ou could be in school working your ass off, Raymond Hessel, or you could be dead. You choose" (154). The Narrator kept his driver's license, as per Tyler Durden's instructions, and tells Raymond that "I'd rather kill you than see you working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television" (155). This reality check for Mr. Raymond K. Hessel provides insight into the shared trickster nature of both

the Narrator and Tyler Durden and will therefore be examined through the six characteristics of the trickster from Hynes and Doty's "Guide."

The incident described above has far-reaching implications for the Narrator's, and therefore Tyler Durden's, trickster eligibility. The homework assignment referenced calls for "twelve human sacrifices" (Palahniuk 151) which, if taken literally, means the Narrator was tasked with the murder of twelve people. Why, then, would the Narrator rebel against Tyler Durden's orders and spare Raymond K. Hessel's life? Or, is it possible that the space monkeys were allowed to simply retrieve the licenses rather than "sacrifice" these presumably innocent people? Prior to this homework assignment, Tyler Durden told the members of Project Mayhem that, "in two weeks, you should each of you have a gun about this size to bring to meeting. Better you should pay for it with cash...next meeting, you'll all trade guns and report the gun you brought as stolen" (121). He then instructed them to not "get any bullets...and just so you don't worry about it, yes, you're going to have to kill someone" (125). The "ambiguous and anomalous" ("Guide" 34) nature of the trickster allows for Tyler's motives to be extremely unclear: why buy a gun without bullets? Is Tyler providing the bullets? Furthermore, how can someone kill another person using a gun without bullets? Does he expect his followers to bludgeon people to death with the barrel of the gun? Moreover, what is Tyler's motivation here? One of the goals of fight club is to provide the oppressed and downtrodden with a sense of purpose in their lives; if this particular homework assignment is to murder these same men that they were trying to save through fight club, would that not be counter-intuitive? What's the point of it all, then? However, if by sparing their lives, impressing upon these potential sacrifices the value of a life, of their

lives specifically, are they then not accomplishing the same goal of providing purpose for these men? This homework assignment and how the Narrator carries it out are entrenched within the first characteristic, that of an “ambiguous and anomalous” (“Guide” 34) nature.

The film version of *Fight Club* treats this scene differently than the novel. Rather than acting alone, the Narrator envisions himself watching Tyler Durden perform this assessment of Raymond K. Hessel’s life. Viewed as an out-of-body experience, the Narrator ‘watches’ in horror as Tyler Durden pokes and prods Raymond K. Hessel’s head with the gun before sending him on his way with his own homework assignment, becoming a veterinarian. Temporarily losing faith in their mission, the Narrator is ‘handed’ the gun Tyler Durden was using and he notices that it was empty the entire time, highlighting the “deceiver/trick-player” (“Guide” 34) aspect of their trickster nature and granted a bit of insight into the “ambiguous and anomalous” (34) structure of this assignment¹²⁹.

The Narrator’s personality and demeanor change dramatically throughout both the film and novel versions of *Fight Club*. The novel’s version of these events has him acting on his own, with a gun to a man’s head. It would be difficult to imagine the Narrator acting in such a way at the beginning of the novel without the influence of Tyler Durden. That alone may serve as an essential piece of his “shape-shifting” (“Guide” 36) nature, though that could be considered character development. Therefore, utilizing the scene in the film, which is conducted with both the Narrator and Tyler Durden present, the

¹²⁹ Only this one ‘sacrifice’ is described in the novel and shown in the film. While this instance called for an empty chamber, the other sacrifices and/or the other members of Project Mayhem may have had bullets. This is unclear, though it does provide a partial answer to the questions posited earlier.

“shape-shifting” (36) is portrayed literally and serves as a more appropriate illustration of this trickster characteristic¹³⁰; however, this can be taken a step further. It has been evidenced above how Loki was able to transform his brother Thor into Sif by pushing his ability onto another. This event too exhibits the transformation of another through the trickster’s shape-shifting abilities. The Narrator is forcing an absolute change upon Raymond K. Hessel whereby this convenience store clerk must become a veterinarian. To become a veterinarian would require the theoretical reapplication to community college¹³¹, achieving a grade point average that would grant him admission into a four-year institution, graduation from said college or university, and acceptance into a veterinary program which itself would then take an additional four years. This lengthy process would change this man in insurmountable ways, mentally, physically, and spiritually; if he does not acquiesce, the alleged alternative is death, which would similarly represent a shift in his appearance and outlook with a bullet to the head. Tyler Durden threatens that he will continually check-in on Mr. Hessel and if he is not on track to become a vet, he will be killed.

The event above is initiated, at face value, as a simple mugging of a guy at a bus stop¹³². The “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37) that is the Narrator, the fastidious believer

¹³⁰ Raymond K. Hessel is portrayed by South Korean actor Joon Kim in the film version of *Fight Club* as per IMDb, or the Internet Movie Database. The novel, though, introduces him as “Raymond Hessel, Caucasian, aged twenty-three with no distinguishing marks” (Palahniuk 152). There could be any number of reasons why David Fincher, or the head of casting, would have an Asian-American actor instead of a Caucasian one (casting issues, talent pool, etc.) so there is no need for a “shape-shifting” discussion on the switch of ethnicity between the film and novel, though it is interesting and worth noting.

¹³¹ The contents of Hessel’s wallet were “a library card...a video movie rental card...a social security card...fourteen dollars cash...an expired community college student card” (Palahniuk 153).

¹³² From the perspective of the Narrator in the novel, “I parked tonight, and I waited around the block for Raymond Hessel to finish his shift at the all-night Korner Mart, and around midnight he was waiting for a night owl bus when I finally walked up and said, hello” (Palahniuk 151-2). The film has the Narrator and Tyler Durden throw Raymond Hessel out of the same shop during his shift and hold this interaction in the back of the store rather than at the bus stop.

in the “Word of Tyler,” internalizes that “no, this wasn’t about money. Not everything is about money” (Palahniuk 152). Rather than a standard snatch-and-grab job, the Narrator wanted to resuscitate this young man, to breathe life into someone living a meaningless, pointless life. This was a violent act, as Raymond K. Hessel was held at gunpoint and forced to relive his sad, mediocre life, believing that he was about to confront death; instead, this was a resurrection. This highlights how the Narrator plays the role of a “situation-invertor” (“Guide” 37) as well as the “psychopomp” (39), where a mugging that could have ended with the taking of life instead of giving this man cause to truly live his life anew¹³³. The chapter ends with the Narrator thinking “Raymond K. K. Hessel,¹³⁴ your dinner is going to taste better than any meal you’ve ever eaten, and tomorrow will be the most beautiful day of your entire life” (Palahniuk 155). Through the teachings and practices of Tyler, which have served as the “messenger of the gods” (“Guide” 34) characteristic, the Narrator, as a sacred bricoleur, is creating the greatest gift possible for Hessel: the gift of a second chance at life.

The stories from Radin and *Fight Club* both illustrate the bleed-through of the trickster characteristics examined throughout this thesis. Either of these scenes could stand on their own merit within any section of this thesis, adhering to any of the characteristics alone or altogether. The trickster is a character that thrives in the middle ground, in a liminal space, creating tension between opposing forces; he is always in

¹³³ If all the members of Project Mayhem were carrying out this same task, of retrieving the drivers’ licenses, each of them may have been just killing random people as sacrifices. The Narrator, here, may be inverting the instructions as well as breathing life into these young men, revitalizing them.

¹³⁴ Hessel, in his panic and belief that his life was ending, stuttered and stammered through his responses, so this is a running gag in the chapter where the Narrator adds multiple “Ks” to his name, as evidenced by the Narrator prompting him, saying “Raymond K. K. K. K. K. K. Hessel, I was talking to you” (Palahniuk 152). This occurs in both the film and novel. This is also reminiscent of the play with the name of the president of the projectionist union’s title.

conflict. He calls attention to the structure and makes haste to confound it in any way possible. This bleed-through is just one more example of the trickster's tricky nature. There is one unique characteristic of Tyler Durden that does not fall within Hynes and Doty's framework, though, which will be the basis of the next chapter.

Chapter X.

“Don’t call this love”: Tyler Durden’s contribution to trickster culture through his capacity to love

The trickster motif and its characteristics have been applied to Loki, Mary Poppins, and Peter Pan as evidenced throughout this thesis. Tyler Durden has not been previously been given this trickster treatment, though, marking this thesis as the first of its kind. The previous chapters were written to firmly place Tyler Durden within the trickster conversation, proving how he clearly fulfills Hynes and Doty’s requirements of being considered a trickster character. Furthermore, this thesis has demonstrated the similarities between Tyler Durden’s actions and abilities and those of the Winnebago Trickster from Paul Radin and the three trickster characters named above. This chapter of the thesis will look to further entrench Tyler Durden within trickster culture by evidencing what he uniquely brings to the table. As this is a trait specific to Tyler Durden rather than the others, who are in similar positions being non-traditional trickster characters, the supporting evidence previously utilized within this thesis would therefore not be pertinent for this argument. Therefore, it is prudent to only compare Radin’s Trickster to Tyler Durden and this new concept within the world of the trickster, that of Tyler Durden’s capacity to love¹³⁵.

¹³⁵ If, say, Valentova tried to argue that Peter Pan is a trickster because he can live in different worlds, or Székely argued that Mary Poppins was a trickster based on her unique ability to deal with children effectively, neither would compare their characters to Tyler Durden in any capacity, since they would be making arguments too specific to their own characters. As such, only the ‘pure’ Winnebago Trickster should serve as the basis of a trickster character for any of these theoretical examples; the Winnebago Trickster Cycle also strongly informed Hynes and Doty analysis, so Tyler Durden will only be compared to Radin’s Trickster.

Chuck Palahniuk himself writes in the Afterword of *Fight Club* that “[r]eally, what I was writing was just *The Great Gatsby*, updated a little...it was a classic, ancient romance but updated to compete with the espresso machine and ESPN” (Palahniuk 215-216); Palahniuk further notes that among all the reviews of the novel, “[n]o one called it a romance” (216). As referenced in the introductory chapter of this thesis, many critics of the novel and film focus on the themes of the hypermasculinity, violence, consumerism, and the like whereas very few discuss the love between Tyler Durden/the Narrator and Marla Singer¹³⁶. Suzanne del Gizzo’s article “The American Dream Unhinged: Romance and Reality in “The Great Gatsby” and “Fight Club”” accepts Palahniuk’s challenge and takes a deep dive into understanding his choice of *The Great Gatsby* above all other literary comparisons.

Suzanne del Gizzo’s article does a fantastic job aligning these two stories and characters therein, fully expanding upon Palahniuk’s commentary in the Afterword to *Fight Club*. She notes that “[r]eading the books side by side puts them into focus as novels about the development of commodity culture in America and its devastating impact on individuals in a way that reading them separately does not” (Gizzo 70). *Fight Club* fans and scholars understand how both Palahniuk and Fincher highlight the backdrop of a consumerist culture, and its people’s unhealthy obsession with branding, marketing, and superficiality, throughout the narrative. The argument can then be made that the distress placed upon the main characters of both F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and *Fight Club* can almost be a scapegoat, then, for their respective actions.

¹³⁶ For these types of articles, see Jeremy De Chavez’s “The Political Subject Is a Lover Not a Fighter: Reading Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* as a Love Story” or Jose Antonio Aparicio’s ““Your Heart Is My Piñata”: Chuck Palahniuk’s Unconventional Love Stories.”

Placing this concept within the overall theme of this thesis, Radin questions if the Winnebago Trickster Cycle is “a *speculum mentis* wherein is depicted man’s struggle with himself and with a world into which he had been thrust without his volition and consent” (Radin xxiv)? Gizzo states that “[t]he men in *Fight Club*, who have inherited this artificial, denatured world...are rushing to destroy it; they want to see the project through to its logical end, so that the earth and society can recover and begin to reestablish the real” (Gizzo 92). While Gizzo does not speak directly to Radin or the trickster specifically, the two are getting to the same point; Jay Gatsby and Tyler Durden/the Narrator are caught in the wheel of society and desire to break free from their current position to make a difference for themselves and, eventually, their loved ones. What if this sentiment is read as the search for love in a world that had forsaken these characters and shown them no real love in return? Gizzo does not believe that there is any real love between the main characters in either novel, writing that, “in *Fight Club*, Marla is used for sex by Tyler, and while the Narrator develops a camaraderie with her based on their relationship to Tyler, it is hardly a love affair or a “classic, ancient romance”¹³⁷” (Gizzo 82).

Gizzo continues that Daisy¹³⁸ “is, for Gatsby, less a person than an idealized object that will complete and validate his crafted identity” (Gizzo 82). The relationship between Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan has garnered much attention in the academic world over the many years since the novel’s publication in 1925, so there is not much

¹³⁷ Palahniuk’s own words from the Afterword, already cited above.

¹³⁸ Daisy Buchanan is the love interest of Jay Gatsby in *The Great Gatsby* and, one can argue, the impetus for all that he does throughout the novel.

new to be written within this thesis, especially since it falls out of scope¹³⁹. However, whereas Gizzo does not see the romantic connections between the Narrator and Marla Singer, or Gatsby and Buchanan evidently, this aspect of love in *Fight Club* will be explored here. The goal of this work is to read the Narrator/Tyler Durden as a trickster character, which has been successfully evidenced in the previous chapters. Therefore, if the character has the capacity to love and exhibit care for others more than himself, or at all for that matter, then this too should be considered a trickster characteristic; a trait not exhibited in Radin's Winnebago Trickster Cycle.

The Winnebago Trickster does not display any signs of affection nor does he have the capacity for empathy based on his interactions with strangers and 'friends'¹⁴⁰ alike. He is clearly unable to love any woman or man and it appears that the care he shows for his children is self-serving rather than at worst a feeling of duty or at best an emotion resembling love. He is driven by the basest of instincts and when exerting emotional energy it is through anger, rage, or sexual desire rather than love itself. As evidenced in Chapter V, Trickster flees from the village where he bore three boys for the chief's son when they discover him to be Trickster, rather than a woman. However, what could be read as a sad scene, for a 'mother' to leave behind her sons, a 'wife' to depart from husband, and for anyone to never be able to see their entire family ever again, Trickster shows no remorse whatsoever. Trickster simply leaves when it is no longer convenient for him. He exclaims "[i]t is about time that I went back to the woman to whom I am

¹³⁹ Further, although it too falls out of scope, Jay Gatsby, or James Gatz as is his birth name, could be read as a shape-shifting trickster through his incredible transformation in the novel through his pursuit of Daisy Buchanan.

¹⁴⁰ There would have to be a seriously compelling argument to state that Trickster ever had a true friend, even those with whom he spent time in the chief's village. This includes the polecat from tale 44 (beginning on Radin 46) since Trickster expressly did not trust the gift that polecat had given to him.

really married...when he got there he found, much to his surprise, that the boy that had been born to him was indeed quite grown up” (Radin 24).

Trickster is returning to what appears to be, what one could consider, his ‘home’ village where his established ‘family’ of a wife and son already live. Had he gone there in the first place, he could have prevented the prior village from the shame and horror of his time there, but instead he only travels to this village after his expulsion from the other. After a time, “when he saw that his child was able to take care of himself, he said, ‘Well, it is about time for me to start travelling again’” (24-25)¹⁴¹. The time has come again when he grew bored and decided to venture off on his own. This family clearly meant nothing to him emotionally, but rather served their purpose and when they no longer suited him, he left. Trickster clearly does not care for either of the families that he established in these villages¹⁴². This draws strong parallels to the father of the Narrator in *Fight Club*, who is similarly disinterested, and therefore shows no love to or for, his family.

There are no references made within *Fight Club* that are endearing towards any father figure. The reader learns that “Tyler never knew his father” (Palahniuk 49), which could be interpreted in a few ways. This could be a reference to a lack of bonding, or that Tyler Durden had no real relationship, with his father; he knew him in the sense that he knew that he had a father, as one does, and that he knew his name, yet he never knew him personally or on a deeper level. There was no love given by father to son and, therefore, Tyler Durden does not feel like he knew the man at all. Tyler Durden, being the Narrator,

¹⁴¹ This passage, or tale, was also referenced in Chapter VI, though that usage was in order to highlight the trickster’s nature of breaking customs and highlighting his role as a protester against the norm.

¹⁴² There could be many more families that he’s created along the way, not only just these two.

could also be seen as dramatizing the relationship to put words to a feeling that the Narrator cannot express internally or externally. One way of expressing these feelings was when the Narrator “asked Tyler what he’d been fighting. Tyler said, his father” (53). The Narrator remarked earlier that “I knew my dad for about six years, but I don’t remember anything. My dad, he starts a new family in a new town about every six years. This isn’t so much like a family as it’s like he sets up a franchise” (50). Mirroring Trickster’s nature, this father would remain just long enough to establish roots and then disappear; wander on until he found a new place to lay his cap and start again where it was convenient or suited some other personal, selfish reason.

The thesis of this work is that Tyler Durden is a trickster character, not that his father was one. The fact that the father established many families across the world is not an explanation or justification for Tyler’s trickster nature. However, as the expression goes, it’s not like he licked it off the grass. Due to his father’s inability to love, the Narrator initially felt the same as he had no one to teach him how to love others or how to have faith and trust in relationships. The Narrator hates his father for what he’s done to him, yet he still seeks his approval: he tells Tyler that “[m]y father never went to college so it was really important I go to college. After college, I called him long distance and said, now what? My dad didn’t know. When I got a job and turned twenty-five, long distance, I said, now what? My dad didn’t know, so he said, get married.” (Palahniuk 50-51)¹⁴³. He continually checks in on his father to win favor from him, from a man who

¹⁴³ The qualifier that the father is a “long distance” call away is utilized twice in this small passage. It is interesting to note that, through his job as a recall coordinator, the Narrator is constantly traveling to the four corners of the country to conduct inspections. It is then clear that while he calls his father on the phone, he could readily visit his father instead; how could it be that in all of his travels, he is not within driving distance of this man? Prior to the events of the novel and film, the Narrator had no intention to do that since he had no capacity for love, which Marla Singer will change as evidenced in the following.

wanted nothing to do with him and gave him no sound advice his entire life. Once the Narrator and Tyler Durden created fight club and began to truly live life, the Narrator noticed that “[m]aybe we didn’t need a father to complete ourselves” (54). However, the Narrator did need something to complete himself, it just was not his father.

What if the Narrator created Tyler Durden to further distance himself from his father so he could learn how to love? His role as a recall campaign coordinator reduced the value of a human life to ones and zeroes. This job was absolutely dehumanizing, and yet, for someone unable to love, it was perfect. The Narrator would “take the population of vehicles in the field (*A*) and multiply it by the probable rate of failure (*B*), then multiply the result by the average cost of an out-of-court settlement (*C*)” (Palahniuk 30) to determine whether the car will be recalled or not. This is a mathematical equation, something purely quantitative and without any feeling or emotional component to it; there are no other variables considered, no (*D*) integer where the driver and passengers’ lives are concerned. The question is not, should this car be recalled because it is killing people but rather, is it cost effective to do so? After years of experience, and innumerable lives lost, it is no wonder this man had a psychotic break. Further, if he had “daddy issues” and was already unable to feel love for others, this job only reinforced those negative emotions by distancing himself even further from humanity.

The film version has Edward Norton explain his work and this formula to his seat buddy on one of his many flights. After hearing his speech, this woman appears shell-shocked at both the Narrator’s excitement with which he delivers his job description as well as this horrible methodology. This stranger asks the Narrator: “[w]hich...car company do you work for” (Uhls 1998) to which he replies, “[a] major one” (Uhls),

highlighting that this is a nationwide issue with many defective cars on the road. The Narrator was a depressed insomniac, trolling cancer support groups to feel literally anything, potentially due to this soul-crushing career. The man that he had become, the one semi-raised by his mostly-absent father, had no capacity for love. He had spent his professional years weighing the cost of human lives through simple arithmetic against the bottom line of his company's financial statements. He was a morbid creature, believing that "[o]n a long enough time line, the survival rate for everyone will drop to zero" (Palahniuk 17); while not wrong, this was quite a bleak outlook on life. It is through the support groups that he finds a woman, Marla Singer, and finally has the reason and need to change. This may very well have been love at first sight for the Narrator, as he says that "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" (198).

The Narrator finally comes to terms with the situation he is in. Ultimately, he discovers that "if Tyler loves Marla. I love Marla" (Palahniuk 199). The Narrator initially questioned if "another woman is really the answer I need" (51), and the answer is a resounding yes¹⁴⁴. While the novel is bookended by the idea of "that old saying, about how you always kill the thing you love, well, it works both ways" (13, 184), the Narrator is cognizant that the events of the narrative changed him in such a way that he can now love someone. He can finally experience and express emotion; he is able to feel in ways he had never felt before. The Narrator tells Marla that "I think I like you" (197) to which she replies, "not love" (197)? Punctuating the fact that this may be the first instance of a

¹⁴⁴ The full quote is in response to the father telling the Narrator to get married, and the latter remarks that he is "a thirty-year-old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need" (Palahniuk 51) after discussions on how they were raised by their mothers and the resulting product is that he is still a child as an adult.

positive emotion that he has ever experienced, the Narrator relies with a comic retort, relieving the tension he must be feeling, by stating, “this is a cheesy enough moment...don’t push it” (197). Marla’s penultimate words in the novel directed at the Narrator are that “it’s not love or anything...but I think I like you, too” (205) with her knowing that she is speaking to the Narrator and not Tyler Durden. He then makes the ultimate self-sacrifice for this woman by literally shooting himself in the face.

There is no evidence to support the Winnebago Trickster would ever act in such a way that the Narrator does in *Fight Club*. Trickster had plenty of opportunities throughout his journeys to settle down with his family or express love for his wives or children, yet nowhere does he do that. The Narrator/Tyler Durden share so many similarities with Trickster and trickster characters, as evidenced throughout this thesis, and yet they dramatically differ in this instance. *Fight Club* may not have been written as a novel about a trickster character, though this thesis evidences how the Narrator/Tyler Durden is unequivocally a trickster. However, in his own words, Chuck Palahniuk wrote *Fight Club* to be a novel where a boy goes through great lengths to be with the woman he loves as a modern-day complement and compliment to *The Great Gatsby*, and this thesis chapter brings those two together. The Narrator/Tyler Durden is a trickster, though he differs from the traditional figure through his capacity to love.

Chapter XI.

“We look forward to getting you back”: Closing remarks and the future of Tyler Durden

The Narrator/Tyler Durden satisfied each of the characteristics laid out by Hynes and Doty in their “Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide.” Their actions very closely mirrored those of the Winnebago Trickster as well as those exhibited by Loki, Peter Pan, and Mary Poppins as mentioned. Furthermore, he brought to the table something Trickster could not, which is his capacity to love. Therefore, Tyler Durden is a trickster.

Only in death do members of Project Mayhem regain their names. Only through sacrifice do they serve their ultimate purpose. They must die for Tyler Durden to see them as anything but pawns in his elaborate chess game to bring about the destruction of society. But what about the Narrator? Does he reclaim his name through Tyler Durden’s death? Was Tyler the sacrificial lamb who, like the chipmunk, only existed to be destroyed? Whose only purpose in life was to grant meaning to something otherwise deformed and unable to function properly without their unique assistance? Redemption comes for the members of Project Mayhem through death, their lives being elevated to a higher plane of existence through Tyler’s aid. Does the Narrator receive this same treatment? The novel and film both have ambiguous and ominous endings, since the fate of both Tyler Durden and the Narrator is unknown. The Narrator wishes to be with Marla Singer within both narratives, though the last line in the novel is delivered from an orderly, a member of fight club and probably Project Mayhem, telling the Narrator that “[w]e look forward to getting you back” (Palahniuk 208). This concept would warrant

further study with the inclusion of both graphic novel sequels to the original *Fight Club* novel.

For the Narrator and Tyler Durden's future, this author, too, would echo the orderly's comment in that we look forward to seeing him again in the spotlight. In this contemporary moment, in the winter of 2021, the most rampant and pervasive media is that of the superhero genre. Lance Strate writes on the importance of medium for viewer retention when it comes to heroes in his article "Heroes, Fame and the Media." While he does not focus on the trickster or *Fight Club* specifically, he writes that "the electronic hero is characterized by the image," (Strate 51) or the physical embodiment of the character, played by an actor or actress. There is minimal descriptive language on Tyler Durden's physical appearance within the novel *Fight Club*. Two such instances are on his physique, where the Narrator notes that he held "Tyler's feet while he does two hundred sit-ups" (Palahniuk 65) during a conversation they had. The second is that, in the final scene, the Narrator notes that "Tyler's standing there, perfectly handsome and an angel in his everything-blond way" (202). His impeccable, Adonis-like physique and his Brad Pitt face are not at the forefront of the novel, whereas this is a major focal point of the film.

Brad Pitt landing the role of Tyler Durden was pivotal for the success of the film as well as the cult-status of the character. Giving such a well-known Hollywood superstar's face to the little-known, print version of Tyler Durden, audiences may be persuaded to view this content rather than read the novel simply due to their prior association with Pitt's work. Strate notes that "the concept of the hero becomes dependent on the way in which the culture disseminates information, on the means by

which information is disseminated. In other words heroes become famous through the dominant medium of communication of their culture” (Strate 48).

Since film has more widespread appeal than novels today¹⁴⁵, Durden has become well-known through Pitt’s portrayal, with the role being categorized as one of the best characters ever to be on the big screen. *Empire Magazine*’s “The 100 Greatest Movie Characters”¹⁴⁶ placed him eighth on their list and he similarly ranked forty-third out of one hundred on *Ranker*’s article “The Best Movie Characters of All Time,”¹⁴⁷ just to name a few¹⁴⁸. While it is mostly a combination of personal opinion and conjecture about films exceeding popularity over novels, one example would be to compare the highest grossing film to the best-selling novel of 2019. *Avengers: Endgame* grossed \$2.8 billion in the box office¹⁴⁹ while *Where The Crawdads Sing* sold roughly 4.5 million copies (Alter). To equate these examples in their own relative terms, if a movie ticket costs \$20, then roughly 140 million people saw the film, or 135.5 million people more than who read the novel; if the paperback version of the novel sells for \$10, then *Where The Crawdads Sing* gained \$45 million in revenue, or \$2.7 billion less than *Avengers: Endgame*. Disney films alone grossed over \$10 billion¹⁵⁰ (which includes *Avengers:*

¹⁴⁵ Today, here, is a relative term (for one, because the day I am writing this is not the ‘today’ that you’re reading this), as Strate wrote his article in 1985, Palahniuk wrote the novel in 1996, the film was released in 1999, and this thesis was written over the course of a year from 2020-2021. However, as each of these individual pieces can be read ‘today,’ I will use this term; further, until some new medium comes along, it appears that film and television will be the prevailing winner for some time.

¹⁴⁶ “The Greatest 100 Movie Characters.” *Empire Online*. 22 Jan. 2020, <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/100-greatest-movie-characters/>.

¹⁴⁷ “The Best Movie Characters of All Time.” *Ranker*, 22 Jan. 2020, <https://www.ranker.com/crowdranked-list/best-movie-characters-of-all-time>.

¹⁴⁸ These rankings, amongst others, could be a combination of Pitt himself, his portrayal of the character and of his physique within the film, the source material from Palahniuk, and Fincher’s direction in the film.

¹⁴⁹ “Avengers: Endgame.” *BoxOfficeMojo*, 22 Jan. 2020, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt4154796/>.

¹⁵⁰ “Disney Crushes Own Global Box Office Record With Historic \$10 Billion.” *Variety*, 22 Jan. 2020, <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/disney-box-office-record-10-billion-frozen-2-lion-king-avengers-endgame-1203428859/>.

Endgame) in 2019, effectively reaching 500 million people worldwide and, while these examples are the extremes, it is evident that film has surpassed novels as the dominant form of entertainment in contemporary society. Therefore, the manifestation of Tyler Durden from the words of Chuck Palahniuk's novel and into film is paramount to the widespread exposure of both.

Brad Pitt's portrayal of Tyler Durden in the 1999 film still has cultural relevance and significance today. To evidence this claim, an example from the popular television show *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* will highlight both Tyler Durden and *Fight Club*'s pervasive fame. Rob McElhenney, the creator, and a main cast member of the show goes through many radical physical transformations for his show's plot. The seventh season of *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* finds his character, "Mac," gaining about 60 pounds as a gag so the other characters can make fat jokes. In a similar fashion, McElhenney then sheds the weight for season thirteen and gets into objectively phenomenal shape, all for the benefit of the joke. He spoke to *Vulture* on the concept of working out, stating that "every time I turned on a movie or a TV show, a man was taking his shirt off and he was always insanely ripped...and I don't mean like Marvel superhero characters – insurance salesmen, marketing executives, and chicken delivery people" (*Variety*).

Since this is the current climate of pop culture, McElhenney thought it "would be funny to explore on our show, where a character did all of that work and everyone is actively unimpressed" (*Variety*). To pull off this joke, and to get to the peak of physical perfection, he hired a special trainer. In an interview with Conan O'Brien, McElhenney said that "I wanted to look like Channing Tatum in *Magic Mike*, so I went and I found

the trainer. I sat down with him and I said, ‘Okay, look, I need to get into really good shape for this show, and I have an ideal male body that I want to go for’ and he (the trainer) goes ‘don’t tell me what it is.’ I said ‘Why?’ and he goes ‘every dude for the last 20 years that wants to get into shape comes in and says the same thing...I have the ideal male body that I’m trying to achieve and I already know what it is’ and I said ‘Oh really, what is it?’ ‘He goes Brad Pitt, *Fight Club*’...and I was ‘like goddamn it you’re right’” Conan assented, stating: “I think that’s the one we all have in mind.” McElhenney continued that the trainer then told him that “I just wanna temper your expectation, you are not gonna look like Brad Pitt in *Fight Club* no matter what we do, because I can get your body close enough, the problem is from the neck up you’re not Brad Pitt” (*Conan*)¹⁵¹.

The *Always Sunny* reference is but one example of how, twenty plus years later, Tyler Durden and *Fight Club* still hold cultural significance despite a mediocre box-office performance, which is typically the standard by which to judge popularity and success today. However, as the film can is often considered a “cult” film, it is interesting to think back to the ADT discussion. Shafer writes that:

Repeated exposure to stories from the same genre teaches us how narratives, scenes, and settings are constructed, how fictional causes are related to fictional effects, how themes and archetypes are recycles, among other things. Through repeated viewing of antihero stories, viewers can learn that plot pattern and develop corresponding cognitive structures that are activated when such stories are later viewed. (Shafer 1031)

¹⁵¹ Punctuation and syntax added to give structure to the commentary, which was delivered in essentially one run-on sentence in the interview.

The film may not have been a success in 1999 due to the unique nature of its content. However, after the last twenty some years of certain content trying to mimic, in a way, this narrative and its characters¹⁵², it could theoretically see its return in a contemporary capacity. As Loki has resurfaced in the *Thor* and *Avengers* movies, and Mr. Hyde as The Hulk, in the MCU, two characters explored within this thesis, there is potential for a revival of *Fight Club*. Additionally, with Chuck Palahniuk's works continuing to grace best sellers' lists, his notoriety and fame are becoming increasingly more widespread with audiences who had previously only known him from *Fight Club*. With Marvel and Disney effectively printing money through these franchises, it would be an interesting spin on this classic character to be granted a position on the silver screen once again, which could explore his trickster nature and reaffirm his status as a cultural icon.

¹⁵² Some of which are referenced in the Afterword of the novel, like a ride Palahniuk himself rode and was instructed by a cowboy who stated that "[t]he first rule of the Haunted Tunnel Tour is you don't talk about the Haunted Tunnel Tour" (Palahniuk 210), or "[b]efore *Saturday Night Live* featured 'Fight-Like-A-Girl Club'" (211) or "[b]efore the University of Pennsylvania hosted conferences where academics dissected *Fight Club* with everything from Freud to Soft Sculpture to Interpretative Dance..." (212). There are countless other imitations of Palahniuk's concept that have been pervasive in various media throughout the years.

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