

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMED BOUDIAF
FACULTY OF LETTERS AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



***“To Buy or Not to Be” The Rejection of a
Postmodern World in Chuck Palahniuk’s
Fight Club (1996)***

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in Literature**

Candidate
Miss. Khaoula BENDIB

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my supervisor, **Dr. Mohammed SENOUSI** for his patience and guidance. Without his deep critical insight, this work would have never been achieved. I am thankful for all the hours he spent reading my humble work, and for all the efforts he put into helping me to exceed all the expectations, including those of mine.

A special salute to the jury members for spending their precious time in reading and analyzing my work.

Lastly, I would thank my family, and my beloved mother in specific, who has believed in me and did everything to pave a great and delightful intellectual journey for me. Special thanks go to those who provided support, trust, and most importantly, faith in me.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the lost generation.

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to highlight and explore the impact of the consumerism on white men in the American society, as well as the use of violence as a rejection towards a commodified masculinity in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996). Besides, it sheds light on the identity issue experienced by American white men, which is a direct result to the consumerist culture imposed in the American society. This research examines how this novel depicts a consumerist nation, that is meaningless at core, and its psychological impact on white men and their role in such societies. Moreover, it discusses how Palahniuk represents both, redemption and terrorism through violence that is committed by these men. This endeavor, thus, investigates how influencing is consumerism on the psychological level of the individuals, and especially white men as they seek their own salvation through violence. It also draws attention towards the interpretation of this violence as a rejection since it is uncommon for individuals to use for a cause. To this end, this dissertation is divided into two chapters; the first one provides a socio-historical context and theoretical background about consumerism in America during the twenty first century. Also, it sheds light on the psychoanalytical approach and its main theories, which are used in the present study. Furthermore, it provides a theoretical background on satire in the American writings. This offers a better understanding of the issues tackled in the second chapter. This latter, in its turn, analyses the impact of consumerism on the American white man in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, and how masculinity is 'commodified', which results in an identity crisis. In addition, it focuses on violence and how it is portrayed in the novel. We conclude that in a consumerist society, identity represents what is owned; which affects, not only the economic field, but the psychology of its population. For this latter is being 'commodified' at heart, which results in the male manifestation against consumerism. Furthermore, *Fight Club* is about embracing passion and nothingness, for all the members are people who run from their anxiety of their life, which is imposed by society. Thus, the *Fight Club* is considered as a therapeutic club since it represents a space that allows the expression of repressed anger and a way to deal with fear, where members seize chances and risk their lives in embracing to be passionate within the club, which they cannot make in real life.

Key words: Masculinity, commodification, identity, violence, self-recognition.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Today, consumerism has affected global society in various ways. It highlights the satisfaction we have within ourselves requiring constant attention and empowerment through regular consumption. However, it is argued that, consumerism has marked an impact on the psychology of the individual; increasing an unsatisfying false self and society's spiritual connection with the nature¹. Thus, the concept of consumerism threatens to destroy the beneficial connection between nature and human spirit; that is to impede the natural gender course in the society. It indeed has affected the individuals of the American contemporary society on various levels. Remarkably, it has changed the core meaning of white men masculinity; the manifest destiny of masculinity with its hard-boiled, tough image of manliness has been disturbed, and its blocked reflexivity has been harshly unsettled.² Moreover, the shift from an industrial to an information economy; that is to say, from the production of goods to the production of knowledge, has offered men, at least, fewer and fewer meaningful occupations³.

Consequently, the male body has been transformed from an agent of production to a receptacle for consumption. For the male working force is not defined by the image of the tightly hewn worker using his body and labour to create the necessities for everyday life, instead, it is now modelled on the image of the young, computer-whiz yuppie who defines his life and goals around hot start-up e-commerce companies, day trading, and other get-rich-before-I'm-twenty-one schemes, as well as the conspicuous consumption of expensive products.⁴ Hence, the new millennium offers white, heterosexual men nothing less than a life in which ennui and domestication 'define' their everyday existence.

¹ Emerald D Neal, *Consumerism, Nature, and the Human Spirit* (New York: Pinguin Books, 2004), p. 24.

² Bhabha Homi, *Are You a Man or a Mouse?*, p. 59.

³ Faludi Susan, *Stuffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, (New York: Morrow, 1999).

⁴ Giroux A Henry, *Private Satisfaction and Public Disorders: Fight Club, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence*, *A Journal of Composition*, Vol. 21, No.1, (Winter 2001), p. 20.

Eventually, this new definition of masculinity results in the commodification of the American white man, who finds himself a slave to his own commodities, since his core existence relates to the quality of goods and products he purchases in the matter of the natural self-identification in his society.

Many postmodern authors tackled the individual's numerous struggles with late consumerist culture in literature to establish identity in a de-centred world; where a cultural ethic emerged that disassociated men from aggression in an attempt to create an 'appropriate' masculinity in America during the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

To be a man is to be the problem⁵, this is, as Susan Faludi has pointed out. Hence, the way men are perceived and the way men perceive themselves is not the same as before due to feminism, racial reform, and other popular and important movements of the period.

Chuck Palahniuk, as an anti-consumerism orientated author, depicted violence as a rejection toward that phenomenon in his work *Fight Club* (1996). Palahniuk sheds light on the male manifestation against consumerism, which has been massacring masculinity; so that it goes with what serves the modern slavery regardless of the biological nature of today's individual.

Therefore, *Fight Club* is regarded as a satiric work, which depicts the 'uncivilized' reaction from the male individual as the 'wakening' of the genuine masculinity from within; in other words, it focuses on violence as a disguise which hides the psychological struggle of the protagonist in the middle of the cultural swamp; that is to highlight how society is corrupted by consumerism.

Many authors are known for their literary works on modern society issues, especially consumerism, but remarkably, few are those who dealt with it on a psychological level. As an anti-consumerist writer, Chuck Palahniuk portrayed the exhausted spirits from modern slavery, and highlighted a disaffected masculinity in his novel *Fight Club* (1996).

⁵ Faludi Susan, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of The American Male* (New York, William Morrow, 1999).

Chuck Palahniuk was born in Pasco, Washington on February 21, 1962. Most of his childhood was spent living in a mobile home in Burbank, Washington. During his twenties, Palahniuk studied at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism graduating in 1986. After graduation, Palahniuk moved to Portland, Oregon where he entered the workforce as a journalist working for local newspapers. However, he abandoned journalism. He returned only after establishing himself as an accomplished novelist. During his years of struggle, Palahniuk also volunteered at a shelter and hospice where he grew very close to a patient who passed away. He did not continue volunteering after the death of his patient friend. He began writing fiction in his thirties while attending writer's workshops, hosted by Tom Spanbauer, who inspired Palahniuk's minimalistic writing style. His initial works were rejected publication mostly because of the amount of disturbing content. However, Palahniuk managed to get one of his short stories published in a compilation in 1995. The story later became an inspiration and evolved into Palahniuk's most famous novel, *Fight Club*. While the short story had a difficult time finding a publisher, its conversion into a novel experienced the opposite. *Fight club* was accepted and published in 1996. For his exceptional writing in *Fight club*, Palahniuk was presented the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award as well as the Oregon Book Award for Best Novel in 1997.

In *Fight Club*, the narrator is a bored, aimless office worker whose life has become a 'copy of a copy'. He works as a recall campaign coordinator and participates in the consumer-driven goals of his culture. He lives in a nice condominium apartment in which he spends his time wondering about what kind of lamps and chairs will 'define him' as a person.

Because of this meaningless cycle, he develops insomnia and decides to visit a doctor. This latter advises him to see some support groups so that he realises the real pain people are facing. Consequently, he expresses his emotions through crying in one of these support groups whose slogan is 'Remaining Men Together' and finally he gets to sleep that night.

Days after he loses this joy because of a woman, her name is Marla Singer, who attended the same groups he attends, which made it impossible for him to fake his sickness, i.e. no more sleep back to point zero. The narrator decides to go on a vacation where he meets Tyler Durden, a charismatic man who makes soap for a living. Tyler gives him his phone number. After returning home, the narrator finds that his condominium has blown up in a mysterious explosion. He calls Tyler, who meets him at a bar. Tyler tells the narrator that he can move in with him, but he has to do him a favour; he asks the narrator to hit him as hard as he can, so they engage in a messy fight which is the cornerstone of the Fight Club. Gradually, this creation attracts more men who are desperate in this empty society, especially those who want to manifest their masculinity. They manifest their rejection against the consumerist society with help of those who believe in the same cause; starting by the foundation of Fight club, which gathers different men, who seek to prove the existence of their masculinity, to provide them with such opportunity only by fighting against each other. Gradually, under Tyler's lead, this foundation spreads to numerous areas where each one has its own Fight club, leading to the final stage, where there is an army of men who violently rebel against the society.

Eventually, they are assigned many homework that lead to the final stage of this chain, which is Project Mayhem. In this novel, this project is considered as the psychological wakening of the protagonist and the readers as well, who find themselves questioning the accuracy of the narrator.

This dissertation will therefore examine how this novel depicted a consumerist nation, that is meaningless at core, and its psychological impact on white men and their role in such societies. Moreover, it will discuss how Palahniuk represents the battle of life in search of freedom.

This pushes us to think how influencing is consumerism on the psychological level of the individuals, and especially white men as they seek their own salvation through violence. It

also draws attention towards the interpretation of this violence as a rejection since it is uncommon for individuals to use for a cause.

Undoubtedly, this induces us to go deep in the novel to explore how modern slavery is depicted, and to portray the psychological struggle of the anti-consumerist individual. It also provokes us to shed light on that fine line that stands between the revolution for salvation and terrorism.

The purpose is to explore the psychology of buying in a society where buying is ‘being’, and one’s identity is only what society ‘labels’ them. Moreover, this research paper aims to show how violence is not an action, but a reaction in seeking freedom, which is about real manhood in this novel.

Uncommonly, Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* approaches men at core, and how they manifest real manhood. This dissertation seeks to answer the following questions: how is masculinity seen through a consumerist lens? And how is violence portrayed in the novel?

With the growth of American economic and cultural influence, particularly in the latter half of the century, the American culture, consumption, and lifestyle, were increasingly adopted on the worldwide level, highlighting the fact that the American corporations, consumer goods, cultural forms, and styles exerted an increasing influence over people’s lives and corporate brands, commodities, and services associated with the likes of Ford, Coca-Cola, Disney, McDonalds, Nike, MTV, Microsoft, Starbucks, and numerous other commercial enterprises became cultural universals, immediately recognizable features of the consumer landscapes of a growing number of people around the world.⁶ At this point, one might question the difference between ‘consumption’ and ‘consumerism’, or even use them interchangeably. In fact, one leads to another; that is to say, consumption is considered as a necessary aspect of

⁶Princen Thomas, “Ecological Economics,” Volume 31, Issue 3, *Elsevier*, 1999, pp. 347-363; p. 351.

human existence and a practice that has constituted a prominent part of social life in all societies throughout human history.⁷

Where things are made, and services are located is only a subject to change, since it is a world-wide treat, it only depends on generating needs, wishes, desires, and fantasies in order to satisfy the consumer. It is here the turning point, which the natural process of life takes another course; resulting in a way of life that is perpetually preoccupied with the pursuit, possession, rapid displacement, and replacement of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of things one might not need, that is Consumerism. It is a way of living that revolves around the wanting of things, the longing for things, the purchasing of things, a way of life in which having, desiring, and wishing for more and more things have become significant preoccupations for late modern subjects whose identities are increasingly bound up with what and how they consume.⁸

In literature, many authors portrayed consumerist societies in their postmodern writings. During the Jazz Age⁹, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* novel was published in 1925. In his novel, he describes the decline of genuineness and authenticity in America due to the impact of consumerism, the lands were once full of life but now they turned into ash. It has been consumed by consumerism. The world is not about people; consumerism is about the material things, not genuine human relationships.¹⁰ Thus, Fitzgerald's novel is considered as a warning to America about the path it is taking. He uses the characters to portray the impact of consumerism on Americans; "I married him because I thought he was a gentleman...I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe"¹¹, complains Myrtle about her husband George after their marriage, because he lied to her about his financial

⁷Princen Thomas, "Ecological Economics," Volume 31, Issue 3, *Elsevier*, 1999, pp. 347-363; p. 351.

⁸Ibid, p. 353.

⁹Jazz Age: a period in the 1920s and 1930s, in which jazz music gained nationwide popularity in the United States, it was intertwined with the developing cultures of young people.

¹⁰Pumphrey Kimberly, *God Bless America, Land of The Consumer: Fitzgerald's Critique of The American Dream*, (Bridgewater State University, 2011), p. 116.

¹¹Fitzgerald F Scott, *The Great Gatsby*, p. 34.

status to impress her, which made this whole marriage is not based on finances instead of love. Fitzgerald sheds light on the fact that the more individuals focus on money and possessions, the more they lose themselves in the process, and become lifeless eventually.

In Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985), consumerism is considered as pillar of life; that is to shed light on how the postmodern consumer is addicted to the idea of purchasing products in order for him to live. 'Consume or Die'¹², states DeLillo during an interview in the describing the American mentality, which is reflected in his novel. He also depicts the importance of purchasing products for consumerists through the characters in the novel, who try to avoid death through shopping.

Another literary work that focuses on another angle of consumerism is *American Psycho* (1991) for Bret Easton Ellis. This novel illustrates the mechanisms of domination of the capitalist system in the 1980s,¹³ where luxury is all what it takes for someone to be noticed in the society; by wearing well-known expensive brand name clothing, Bateman, as the protagonist, noticeably experiences pleasure of being noticed and loved, which leads him to give disproportionate importance to clothing. Along with the body, the whole process is considered as a means for exercising his luxury. Consequently, everything seems to be, in an extent, a commodity in the novel.¹⁴ As a subject, Bateman identifies himself with things, that is to say, commodities, and this relation provides him much pleasure. Having said that, one may keep in mind that Bateman seems to see everything as a commodity, including other human beings (especially women) and, by this vision, he feels that all that can be managed, and thus satisfaction can be dominated as well.¹⁵ However, it is argued that the process of exploitation between the subject and the object, i.e. the consumer and the product, works in

¹²DeLillo Don. DePietro Thomas, *Conversations with Don DeLillo* (Univ: Press of Mississippi, January 1, 2005).

¹³Colby Georgina. Bret Easton Ellis: *Underwriting The Contemporary* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 66.

¹⁴Jefferson de Moura Saraiva, *Painful Lust: Status and Consumerism in American Psycho* (Master Thesis) (Londrina State University, 2018), p. 116-117.

¹⁵Murphet Julian, *Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho: A Reader's Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 81.

the opposite way. As Bateman satisfies his desires and lust, he is enslaved by them as well; that is to say that the consumer's needs and desires are satisfied by the product, however, this satisfaction reproduces the needs and desires, locking the subject in an endless cycle of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is what Murphet calls 'reification', which means

The transformation of relationships between human beings into relationships between things. Reification is both what is behind the urban alienation Patrick experiences, and his only method for curing it. The infinity of things through which he can identify himself opens up the 'existential chasm' in Bateman; he closes it briefly in the gesture of purchase.¹⁶

Additionally, in *American Psycho* the emphasis is put on the fact that luxury places the characters in a vicious circle where they find pleasure in objects and feel hungry for more of the same objects. By the very end of the novel, Bateman reads a sign in a bar: "THIS IS NOT AN EXIT¹⁷"; these words can be perfectly applied to the image of the characters who are trapped in their lust in the novel.

In Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996), consumerism is shown as a colonizer that cannot be touched; it only exists in the minds of the individuals, and what does a colonizer do? It conquers the lands then slowly spreads all over the country, not only that, but it tortures the nation physically and spiritually, breaking any sort of hope for freedom. Likewise, consumerism does to a nation, it destroys all glimpses of inner satisfaction and implants the lust for consumption. "I loved my condo. I loved every stick of furniture. That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinet were me. The plants were me. The television was me."¹⁸ The protagonist in the novel expresses his sadness after the loss of his condominium, showing to what extent he is attached to his possessions, which is the impact of living in a consumerist society, where individuals are

¹⁶Murphet Julian, *Bret Easton Ellis's American Psycho: A Reader's Guide*, (New York: Continuum, 2002), p. 37.

¹⁷Ellis Bret Easton, *American Psycho*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 399.

¹⁸Palahniuk Chuck, *Fight Club*, p. 110.

what they possess. “all I do is want and need things.”¹⁹ Palahniuk portrays the lust for consuming more through his unnamed narrator who identifies himself as a product of a consumer society. As the unnamed narrator in this novel claims that his commodities are him, the difference between him and his commodities disappears; as life equals a career which in turn provides a paycheck that one spends on commodities, thus, commodities represent his life: “it took my whole life to build this stuff.”²⁰ Since his life is commodified, it can be said that he has been life sentenced; for his whole life depends on what he possess, which is tough for this cycle to be broken. As the narrator meets Tyler Durden, an artist that works in the domain of soap, he immediately states “Tyler is capable and free, and I am not,”²¹ he realises that he is a prisoner of his commodities, i.e. commodified, only in comparison to Tyler whom commodification is difficult due to the temporary nature of work. On the other hand, Tyler, as an anti-consumerist, describes how society is corrupted by consumerism, and how this latter brainwashed the nation so that all what they worship is their commodities, in this regard he states “... people chasing cars and clothes they don’t need. Generations have been working in jobs they hate, just so they can buy what they don’t really need.”²²

To conclude, consumerism has left such a remarkable impact on the postmodern society; not only on the economical level, but also on the social, cultural, and notably, on the psychological layers of the individual. Moreover, this impact has been manifested through literary works, for each using the different aspects and genres in literature to serve the purpose as mentioned above.

The selected novel is studied with the help of the **Psychoanalytical Criticism**, and **Existentialism**, taking into consideration the most accurate theories of the selected approaches. The **Psychoanalytical Criticism** is applied as the frame of this study. We shall

¹⁹*Fight Club*, p. 146.

²⁰*Ibid*, p. 44.

²¹*Ibid*, p. 174.

²²*Ibid*, p. 114.

study the psychological effect of consumerism on the American white man. That is to say, the impact that is left on masculinity which eventually, became deformed. Consequently, this led to a manifestation of an identity crisis. Moreover, we shall apply Michael Hogg's **Uncertainty-Identity** theory to understand the social identity process that motivates people to seek identification among their societies. To support the previous theory, we shall utilise Fromm's **Mechanisms of Escape** theory which focuses on the strategies that are used to escape uncertainty in modern societies. Furthermore, this paper uses **Terror Management** theory to investigate how people behave on a daily basis in the absence of mortality awareness, as well the root cause of such behaviours.

Palahniuk's novel manifests an existential crisis in search of identity, which is the main concern of existentialism since it deals with the longing to one's true self, i.e. real manhood in this novel. To highlight this, we shall look into **Jean-Paul Sartre** theory of one's true self. According to him, "*man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards.*"²³ *Fight club* is regarded as an existential work, for the protagonist struggles with self-division, not knowing whether to just remain a slave with white collars, whose masculinity has been commodified, or to manifest what real manhood is.²⁴

This inquiry is composed of two chapters; **chapter one** provides a socio-historical background about consumerism in America during the twenty first century. Also, it sheds light on the psychoanalytical approach and its main theories, which are used in the present study. Furthermore, it provides a theoretical background on satire in the American writings.

Chapter two uses the psychoanalytical approach to examine the impact of consumerism on the American white man in Palahniuk's *Fight Club*, and how masculinity is 'commodified', which leads to an identity crisis. In addition, it focuses on violence and how it is portrayed in the novel.

²³ Sartre Jean-Paul, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 28.

²⁴ Palahniuk Chuck, *Fight Club*, p. 114.

CHAPTER ONE: Socio-Historical Context and Theoretical Background ‘*To Be a Man Is to Be the Problem*’: Masculinity through a Consumerist Lens

‘Man’, ‘Masculinity’, and ‘Consumerism’²⁵, as we seek to form the link among the previous concepts, one can notably highlight the psychological atmosphere that contains all what is related with them; that is to explore the nature of the process through which one concept affect the other. Naturally, if someone says ‘man’, ‘masculinity’ is automatically reflected to our brains, for being a man is possessing masculinity. However, this fact has changed in the modern consumerist society, for the position of the American white man is different from before²⁶. This change marked an impact on his psychology, and led to an internal conflict.

Thus, a socio-historical background is provided on consumerism, especially in America, to shed light on the cornerstones of this idea. In addition, we shall dig in the psychological aspects of the individual to cover the process, through which consumerism affects the psychology of the protagonist in *Fight Club*. To do so, we shall look into the psychoanalytical criticism, and its main theories. Finally, we shall explore satire as a genre in literature, and how it serves the present study.

1.1. Consumerism in the American Twenty-First Century

Although the consumer culture did not emerge in the western society until after World War Two, a glimpse of cultural values that are related to consumption has faced a historical rise, which goes back to the early modern era. Since the 1990s, the historiography of consumption has emphasized that a specific culture of consumption was the driving force in the process of industrialization in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It has also been argued

²⁵Consumerism: the idea that increasing the consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's wellbeing and happiness depend fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions.

²⁶Allan J. Kimmel, “European Advances in Consumer Research,” *The Association For Consumer Research, (JACR)*, Volume 4, (1999), pp. 243-251; p. 249.

that earlier forms of consumer culture can be traced further back to the second half of the sixteenth century or even to the Renaissance.²⁷

Since the act of buying and using goods in a meaningful way have existed from the beginning of civilization, historians of consumption commonly assume that a proper culture of consumption have developed only in modern societies as a long-term and progressive process. For consumer culture represents a crucial cultural feature in the development of the modern Western world. Its historical emergence could also be interpreted as the result of a specific social configuration, in which the relationship between the symbolic world and material resources started to be mediated through the market, and to assume a central role in sociocultural reproduction, in the fulfilment of personal needs and the use of material objects.²⁸

The main features of consumer culture have been labelled as the growth of materialistic attitude, the tendency to form sort of competition over purchasing goods, as well as the meaningful increase of the value of these goods as a way to express identity and social belongings. The evolution of modern world is accompanied with forms of consumer culture, for the formation of modern societies was accompanied by the emergence of both new cultural models, through which people interacted with commodities, and new ways of generating collective identities and social distinction thanks to the consumption of goods.²⁹

This first wave of consumerism is considered short-lived, for it takes place in an economy mired in speculation and risky borrowing. Though a lot less in gross terms than the burden of debt in the United States in late 2008, which Sydney economist Steve Keen has describes as “the biggest load of unsuccessful gambling in history,” the debt of the 1920s is seen very large. In both eras, borrowed money has bought unprecedented quantities of material goods on time payment and (these days) credit cards. Later, a war economy followed, so it was

²⁷Magaudda Paolo, *Consumer Culture*, (Padua: University of Padua, 2015), p. 1.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid, p. 2.

almost twenty years before mass consumption resumed any role in economic life, or in the way the economy was conceived.³⁰

Consumerism not only impacts the nation on the economic level, but on the psychological as well; for it affected the way people perceive each other. With this phenomenon, the value of the individual is related to what he possesses, hence, the culture of luxury penetrated the original concept of consumption. The social links among individuals and their absence do not make any remarkable difference, for these bonds and links are replaced by objects.

1.2. Psychoanalytical Approach as a Gate in Literature

The early twentieth century has marked the beginning of the modern psychology, and along the process, the psychological analysis of literary texts, i.e. psychoanalytical criticism has evolved. It is considered as a method of critique with the help of theories, which are claimed by noted sociologists, including Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, and above all Sigmund Freud. This latter was the first one who used this method of therapy for neuroses, later this method has expanded due to developments and practices in the history of civilizations including mythology, religion, literature and other arts. In the process of explaining literature, psychoanalysis has been used, and in this process, literature has been used as a source for psychoanalytic conceptions. We noticed that literary criticism has used psychoanalysis theory to interpret literature, and literature has also attempted to exploit and use psychoanalysis for creative purposes. Psychological criticism deals with the work of literature primarily as an expression, in fictional form, of the state of mind and the structure of personality of individual author.³¹ Thus, the idea of psychoanalysis revolves round the concept that peoples' actions are determined by their pre-stored ideas of the recurrent events.

³⁰Higgs Kerry, "A Brief History of Consumer Culture," *The MIT Press Reader* 2014. <https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/a-brief-history-of-consumer-culture/>. Accessed on: 10.05.2021.

³¹Mahroof Hossain, *Psychoanalytic Theory Used in English Literature: A Descriptive Study*, (Bangladesh: Z.H. Sikder University of Science & Technology, 2017), p. 41.

1.2.1. Psychoanalysis as a Therapy

Before digging into the psychoanalytical approach, we shall explore psychoanalysis as a therapy since it is considered as the cornerstone of the psychoanalytical criticism in literature. This therapy is considered as the narrativization³² of an individual's life, through which importance is given to the significance between the unconscious and the thought process.³³ Psychoanalysis has been seen as a form of therapy which aims to cure mental disorders 'by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the minds'. Psychoanalysis examines the articulation of our most private anxieties and meanings to culture and gives us a perspective on them as cultural formations.³⁴ Psychoanalytic approaches to literature may not always be rich enough, may tend to be reductive. However, on the level of theory, psychoanalysis is of great importance. Psychoanalysis emphasises on motives, it focuses on hidden or disguised motives which helps to clarify literature on two levels, the level of writing itself and the level of character action within the text.³⁵ It sheds light on the subject and tries to explain what are the relationship of meaning and identity are to the psychic and cultural forces. Psychoanalysis has a great importance in contemporary understandings of reading, meaning and the relation of literature to culture.

The modern theory that is used in literature has two meanings; the first one is concerned with mentally disordered people, which makes it seen as a method of treatment. The second one is regarded as theories on the human mind and its complexities.

³²Narrativization is the imposition of a narrative-like elements on real experiences; it is a presentation or interpretation in terms of a story or narrative.

³³Mahroof Hossain, *Psychoanalytic Theory Used in English Literature: A Descriptive Study*, (Z.H. Sikder University of Science & Technology, 2017), p. 41.

³⁴Ibid, p. 42.

³⁵Ibid, p. 41.

1.2.2. Conceptual Theories

Sartrean philosophy of existentialism is constructed by the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Based on how it is named, it deals with the understanding of the human existence rather than the world as such; he puts emphasis on what it means to be a human. In this regard, the main feature of his philosophy is the radical freedom, which characterises the human condition as well. Sartre sets up his own picture of the individual human being by first getting rid of its grounding in a stable ego. As he later puts it in *Existentialism is a Humanism*, to be human is characterised by an existence that precedes its essence. As such, existence is problematic, and it is towards the development of a full existentialist theory of what it is to be human that Sartre's work logically evolves.³⁶ In his analysis, Sartre explains that an individual contains two negating powers within, which eventually leads to an existential crisis, resulting in lack of self-identity, i.e. creating freedom. "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does."³⁷ Sartre believes that human beings live in constant anguish for freedom, for once the individual becomes self-aware, he has to make choices that define the very 'essence'; since Sartre's theory of existentialism states that "existence precedes essence" which means that only by existing and acting a certain way that gives meaning to life. According to him, there is not a certain way to act and there is not any God to give purpose, thus, defining oneself is a responsibility that falls on the shoulder of the individual. Consequently, this lack of pre-defined purpose along with the absurdity of life provides numerous choices, which eventually leads the individual to the anguish of freedom.³⁸ With no restrictions, each individual has the choice to take actions and become who he wants to be and lead the life he wants to live. According to Sartre, each choice we make defines us,

³⁶Onof J Christian, "Jean Paul Sartre: Existentialism," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2021. <https://iep.utm.edu/sartre-ex/#SH2d>, Accessed on: 29.04.2021

³⁷Catalano Joseph, "*A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

³⁸Mittal Tarun, "To Be is to Be: Jean Paul Sartre on Existentialism and Freedom," *Your Story*, 2017. https://yourstory.com/2017/06/jean-paul-sartre-philosophy-existentialism-freedom?utm_pageloadtype=scroll, Accessed on: 29.04.2021

while at the same time revealing to us what we think a human being should be. Thus, this incredible burden of responsibility that the free man has to bear is what relegates him to constant anguish.³⁹

Jean-Paul Sartre considers money as the one factor that restricts a person's freedom; the need of money, he reasoned, is the excuse people give themselves when they shut down the idea of exploring unconventional life choices. Society's acquaintance of money pushes Sartre to blame capitalism for this phenomenon; for he considered capitalism as a machine that traps people in an endless cycle of working jobs they hate so they can buy things they do not need. This necessity of material things, he argued, did not exist in reality but rather was a man-made construct that led people to deny their freedom and consider living in other ways as foolhardy.⁴⁰

In conclusion, Sartre's understanding of existentialism is based what is to be a human, which in his view, falls under motivation for action that can be found in the nature of consciousness; representing the utter desire for being. As for freedom, he claims that it is the individual's right to exercise his freedom, only in a way that he preserves his own existence. This latter, for Sartre, it is represented through the original choice of the individual on how he seeks to manifest his position.

For a better understanding of the core motives behind the process of self identification, Michael Hogg has developed uncertainty-identity theory. It is argued that feelings of uncertainty in relation to who one is and what one should believe, motivate people to engage in behaviours that reduce uncertainty. Secondly, he states that the processes of categorising oneself, together with other people as members of a group, serve to reduce self-uncertainty and provide a validated social identity. The experience of having a stronger social identity

³⁹Mittal Tarun, "To Be is to Be: Jean Paul Sartre on Existentialism and Freedom," *Your Story*, 2017. https://yourstory.com/2017/06/jean-paul-sartre-philosophy-existentialism-freedom?utm_pageloadtype=scroll, Accessed on: 29.04.2021.

⁴⁰Ibid.

reduces uncertainty by enhancing self-esteem and provides a framework for understanding how one should think and behave.⁴¹ Uncertainty-identity theory focuses on how feelings of uncertainty in relation to the self can be the driving force for people to identify with social groups in order to manage, protect and reinforce their previously uncertain sense of self. This theory rests on the assumption that feelings of uncertainty concerning attitudes, values, beliefs and feelings are uncomfortable. Hence, people will do their best to manage, avoid or significantly reduce these uncertainties.⁴² Hogg acknowledges that some situations of uncertainty can be challenging yet enjoyable; for some people seek such situations to test their boundaries, while there are situations that are both pleasurable and uncertain, Hogg is making a broader existential argument. Uncertainty matters when feelings of uncertainty undermine our sense of self. He states that if people do not have the resources to deal with existential uncertainty they will tend to experience anxiety and uncertainty in relation to who they are and how they should behave. These issues are particularly salient during times of crisis such as unemployment or divorce:

We are particularly motivated to reduce uncertainty if, in a particular context, we feel uncertain about things that reflect on or are relevant to self, or if we are uncertain about self; about our identity, who we are, how we relate to others, and how we are socially located. Ultimately, people like to know who they are and how to behave and what to think, and who others are and how they might behave and what they might think⁴³

Certain experiences in life can be experienced as threatening, overwhelming and uncontrollable if individuals are unable to develop a strong sense of self-identity, which in turn helps to shield them from existential uncertainty.

Many individuals, if not all of them, tend to escape this uncertainty through numerous strategies, thus, Fromm focuses on two main ones that are used in modern societies. The first one is Authoritarianism which is the first escape route, this involves submitting to a

⁴¹Hogg Michael .A , “A Social Identity Theory of Leadership,”*Personality and Social Psychology Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2001, pp. 184-200; p. 190.

⁴²Hardie Bick James, *Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence*, p. 1037.

⁴³Hogg Michael .A., *Uncertainty-identity Theory*, p. 73.

charismatic leader and is the mechanism of escape that captured the psychological attractions of fascism.⁴⁴

Automaton conformity is the second main escape route and involves uncritically conforming to group norms and behaviour. This route specifically refers to the compulsive conformity which is common in modern democracies. Both mechanisms of escape provide a sense of security and stability and help to alleviate feelings of uncertainty, anxiety and isolation. The main focus of Fromm is authoritarianism, since it is the escape route that captures most of Fromm's attention in *Escape from Freedom*. Both of these escape routes resonate with themes addressed in the uncertainty-identity literature.⁴⁵

In sum, Fromm utilizes Mechanism of Escape to discuss the process that is followed by individuals to escape uncertainty in modern societies, namely, uncertainty of identity where individuals cannot endure their uselessness, especially their inability to draw meaning for their existence.

On the unconscious levels, individuals tend to struggle in search of meaning to their existence in the absence of mortality awareness; for this absence directly affects how their minds function, thus, their behaviour is automatically impacted. Influenced by the work of Ernest Becker, Terror Management theory investigates the actions of individuals in the light of mortality unawareness; taking an interdisciplinary approach to examine what motivates people to 'act the way they do'⁴⁶ Becker argues that the root cause of human activity stems from the unconscious strategies people use to deny or symbolically transcend death. In *The Denial of Death* (1977) and *Escape from Evil* (1975) he directly addresses the often devastating implications that arise from our awareness of our 'individuality within finitude'⁴⁷ As far as we are aware, human beings are the only creatures who have to cope with the

⁴⁴Fromm E, *Escape from Freedom*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969)

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Becker E, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, (New York: The Free Press, 1971), p. vii.

⁴⁷Becker E, *The Denial of Death*, (New York: The Free Press, 1977), p. 26.

knowledge that they live in a body that will eventually die. This is the existential predicament that humans have to struggle with and his work specifically addresses how people protect themselves from the terror of their 'inevitable death'⁴⁸ The core proposition of terror management theory is that people need to live in a world of meaning and believe they are valued contributors to their shared cultural world view.

Terror management theory is influenced by the work of Becker, but it is interesting to note that Becker himself was influenced by Fromm. Although Becker came to be critical of Fromm's optimism concerning human potential, he was a 'great admirer' of Fromm and shared Fromm's concern with themes of existential isolation and anxiety.⁴⁹ Both theorists devoted their work to understanding unconscious factors that influence our beliefs, values, thoughts and behaviour. In relation to terror management theory, Hogg acknowledges how their research shows mortality salience to 'increase affiliation and belongingness needs' together with 'group and world view protective behaviours'⁵⁰. Nevertheless, whilst recognising the importance of terror management research he also claims that existential anxiety is a 'messy variable'⁵¹:

It certainly involves anxiety about death, but also a significant degree of uncertainty about one's own death and, perhaps most importantly, about what there is after death, the afterlife. Not surprisingly, mortality salience has been shown to increase people's desire for certainty⁵²

Terror management theory has shown that the unconscious processes to impact on everyday thoughts and behaviour of individuals in spite of their unawareness. This theory contributes to a better understanding of how individuals behave in the presence, as well as the absence of certain factors, which play a crucial role on how individuals perceive themselves in their societies.

⁴⁸Liechty D, "A Conversation with Ernest Becker," *The Ernest Becker Reader*, (Seattle: The Ernest Becker Foundation in association with The University of Washington Press, 2005), p.p. 219-229.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Hogg, Michael. A, *Uncertainty-identity Theory*, p. 109.

⁵¹Hardie Bick James, *Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence*, p. 1045.

⁵²Hogg, Michael. A, *Uncertainty-identity Theory*, p. 109.

In sum, psychoanalysis is one of the modern theories that are used in English literature. It is regarded as a theory of personality organization and the dynamics of personality that guides psychoanalysis. Thus, it has been used in literature by the academic field of literary criticism. The psychoanalysis has been one of the most controversial and for many readers the least appreciated among the critical approaches, in spite of that, it has been regarded as a rewarding approach in the application of interpretative analysis, which has become one of the mechanisms to find out the hidden meaning of a literary text, as well as the writer's personality which plays the role of a factor in writing a book. The main goal of psychoanalysis is to project the link between behaviour and unconscious.

1.3. Satire in The American Literature

Satire is very known when it comes to pop culture which the majority of us are familiar with; although we might not be aware of it, but satire can be part of culture, entertainment, and literature as well. It is created for the sake of manifesting crucial topics in societies, sometimes in a humorous way, while in other works, it can be dark to an extent in order to reflect the seriousness of the topic.

Satire is both, a genre and a literary device that holds human nature up to criticism and scorn. It is often political in focus but does not have to be. In literature, writers use irony, humour, and exaggeration to create successful satire⁵³.

The word satire derives from the Latin word 'satur,' which means 'well-fed,' and was used in the phrase "lanx satura," meaning "a dish full of many kinds of fruit." Though these words seem far removed from the definition of satire, they were used by ancient Roman critics and writers to refer to what we know as satire today, including what is commonly

⁵³MasterClass Staff, "What Is Satire? How to Use Satire in Literature, Pop Culture, and Politics—Plus Tips on Using Satire in Writing," *MasterClass*, 2020.
<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing#what-are-the-origins-of-satire>, Accessed on: 30.04.2021

considered the literary origin of satire: Aristophanes's Old Comedy. The word "satire" made its way into the English language in the sixteenth century.⁵⁴

1.3.1. Satire in Literature

In literature, satire is considered as a type of social commentary; where writers tend to use exaggeration, irony, and other devices to mock a particular leader, an institution, or to question a social situation to make a change. Many contemporary authors have been using satire to comment on everything that is related to capitalism like Brett Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*, in which exaggeration is used to shed light on consumerism and its impact on the social status. Moving to the issue of race in Paul Beatty's *The Sellout*, which features a young black male protagonist in Southern California who ends up before the Supreme Court for trying to reinstate slavery. Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* is considered as a satiric genre which tackles the issue of a contemporary society that suffers from consumption, and the 'deformed' masculinity that is portrayed through the unnamed narrator. In this novel, Palahniuk satirises the commodified masculinity of the American white man, who worships his possessions to end up with the fact of being owned by them.

1.3.2. Types of Satire in Literature

Satire serves as a powerful tool in contemporary literature. There are two main types of satire, each serving a different role; for they have different levels of harshness, since some of them seek to simply poke some innocent fun, while others view their subjects as evils that must be stopped.

The first one is Horatian satire, named after the Roman satirist Horace. It is the most gentle and sympathetic towards the subject; it is comic and offers light social commentary, which is meant to poke fun at a person or situation in an entertaining way. It deals with issues

⁵⁴MasterClass Staff, "What Is Satire? How to Use Satire in Literature, Pop Culture, and Politics—Plus Tips on Using Satire in Writing," *MasterClass*, 2020. <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing#what-are-the-origins-of-satire>, Accessed on: 30.04.2021

that are seen as follies rather than evil. The satirist's verse, Horace implies, should reflect this attitude: it should be easy and unpretentious, sharp when necessary, but flexible enough to vary from grave to gay. In short, the character of the satirist as projected by Horace is that of an urbane man of the world, concerned about folly, which he sees everywhere, but moved to laughter rather than rage.⁵⁵

The second type of satire is Juvenalian, which is dark rather than comedic, for it is meant to speak truth to power; Juvenalian satirists don't just see their subject's actions as wrong or silly, but as evil. Their style, then, contains less traditional humor and more sarcasm and strong irony,⁵⁶ where the writer's objection and call for change is clearly seen. Juvenal, more than a century later, conceives the satirist's role differently. His most characteristic posture is that of the upright man who looks with horror on the corruptions of his time, his heart consumed with anger and frustration. Why does he write satire? Because tragedy and epic are irrelevant to his age. Viciousness and corruption so dominate Roman life that, for someone who is honest, it is difficult not to write satire.⁵⁷

To satirise a literary work means to use some specific techniques, in order to create a satirical piece. These techniques are the following:

Irony, which is a critical tool in satire because it highlights the distance between the way people talk about a situation and the reality of the situation. For example, the use of words that say the opposite of what it is meant. Secondly, there is Hyperbole; for over-exaggerating one feature or characteristic of the satirical target can draw the readers' attention to what is meant to be conveyed. There is also Allegory, which is a story that can be read in two ways; with a literal meaning on the surface, and a hidden meaning underneath that comments on a

⁵⁵Elliot C Robert, "Satire," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998.

<https://www.britannica.com/art/satire/additional-info/history>, Accessed on: 01.05.2021

⁵⁶MasterClass Staff, "What Is Satire? How to Use Satire in Literature, Pop Culture, and Politics—Plus Tips on Using Satire in Writing," *MasterClass*, 2020.

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-satire-how-to-use-satire-in-literature-pop-culture-and-politics-plus-tips-on-using-satire-in-writing#what-are-the-origins-of-satire>, Accessed on: 01.05.2021

⁵⁷Ibid.

political or social situation. Furthermore, there is Parody, which mimics a familiar style or concept, usually by placing it in a new context or giving it a ridiculous subject. While parody can sometimes be used to develop satire, there is a key difference between the two. Whereas satire aims to inspire action or change, parody is used primarily for comedic effect.

CHAPTER TWO: *'I don't Want to Die Without any Scars':*

Violence as a Rejection of a Deformed Masculinity

As for an individual who struggles with his own identity in a society that imposes a certain lifestyle, one has to take action in order for him to show the disastrous impact that is marked, not only on the economic level, but on the psychology of individuals who are directly linked to this phenomena. In the current study, the issue is targeted from a psychoanalytical perspective, for consumerism has affected the core identity and masculinity of the American white men.

Thus, this chapter investigates the issue of identity and its importance for one's psychological stability by digging in the psychological aspects of the individual to cover the process, through which consumerism affects the psychology of the protagonist in *Fight Club*. Furthermore, it explores the existential crisis of the protagonist as part of the process to shape his own presence. To do so, we shall discuss the theory of the Double in order to explain how the protagonist manifests against the commodification of his masculinity. Finally, this chapter sheds light on the trajectory that is taken by the protagonist to reject the commodification of masculinity in his society.

2.1. Symbolism of Fight Club

Palahniuk's novel explores the ideas of passion, as the narrator engages his passion the very first moment he joins Fight Club. This latter is not only a strange club where men fight against one another other, it is metaphor for the need to engage with that need for struggle. The Fight Club represents someone's need to be a warrior in life and to resist the goal of society to enslave them and make them tame. The drastic mental shift is noted after participating in Fight Club, the narrator comes to the life changing realization that he wants to incorporate his desire to live in new perspective. Fight Club gives an excitement for the narrator to live his life where in here he finds a cause that is worth living. He does not want to

play safe with his life anymore. Thus, he commits to a path where he is willing to die for, accepting all sorts of risks.

Fight club is not football on television. You aren't watching a bunch of men you don't know half way around the world beating on each other live by satellite with a two-minute delay, commercials pitching beer every ten minutes, and a pause now for station identification. After you've been to fight club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex. Fight club gets to be your reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair cut short and cutting your nails. The gym you go to are crowded with guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says.⁵⁸

In his thesis, Agus claims that *Fight Club* is about embracing passion, by submitting to that primitive and innate urge for violence. The way of understanding primitive experiment of violence in *Fight Club* is as hyper-masculine reaction to modernity's repression and denial of the natural instincts of anger and the physical will to dominate. It is also seen as a revival of a contest in which the men can test themselves authentically rather than vicariously. Instead, it tries to cultivate physical prowess and self confidence outside the constructs of society, such as the demanding ethos familiar in gym, where people in modern don't trust themselves to make decisions about how to live. They spend lots of time in the self-help section looking for those how-to books that tell them how to live their lives correctly.⁵⁹

You aren't alive anywhere you like you're alive at fight club. When it's you and one other guy under that one light in the middle of all those watching. Fight club isn't about winning or losing fights. Fight club isn't about words. You see guy come to fight club for the first time, and his ass is a loaf of white bread. You see this same guy here six months later, and he looks carved out of wood. This guy trust himself to handle anything. There's grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn't about looking good. There's a hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved.⁶⁰

⁵⁸*Fight Club*, p. 50.

⁵⁹Agus Salim, *Existentialism in Chuck Palahniuk's Novel Fight Club*, (thesis) (University of Sumatera Utara Medan, 2016), p. 59.

⁶⁰*Fight Club*, p. 51.

The Fight Club is about the narrator being passionate in seeking the meaning of his life, where people in that club are deeply engaged with the concrete lives of their own circumstances. All men beat one another to form a commitment to action, a willingness to embrace great passion, and a cultivation of risk and danger. The narrator's excitement over Fight Club encapsulates his equally felt disappointment with the mundane real world.⁶¹ In his job and personal life, the narrator moves in almost zombie-like state, he feels little sense of accomplishment or connection with his fellow human beings. Consequently, this club makes him feel alive because it tests him in a way the real world does not. He also feels like he is part of a community, which is something larger than himself. While there is no ultimate goal to Fight Club, it gives these men a sense of purpose and control over their lives. The association of the club with a church strengthens Tyler's god-like desire and position, its effects on the men who attend the meetings, and a proof to his successful missionary work.

For its members, Fight Club is about embracing nothingness, explains Agus. For all the members are people who run from their anxiety of their life, a life that is imposed by society. "Nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered."⁶² When one is not defined by any essence, either within himself or one given by the world, he is free to direct himself in any number of ways that are open to him by the situation where he finds his true self. Moreover, Fight club is about becoming who they truly are without any border and rules given by society. Fight Club is not about what you do, it is more about how you do it since it is up to someone to figure out what path, out of all the ones possible for. After someone chooses that path, he pursues it with passion and engagement, with a fire of lived intensity.⁶³

Most of guys are at fight club because of something they're too scared to fight. After few fights, you're afraid a lot less.⁶⁴

⁶¹Agus Salim, *Existentialism in Chuck Palahniuk's Novel Fight Club*, (thesis) (University of Sumatera Utara Medan, 2016), p. 60.

⁶²*Fight Club*, p. 54.

⁶³Agus Salim, *Existentialism in Chuck Palahniuk's Novel Fight Club*, (thesis) (University of Sumatera Utara Medan, 2016), p. 60.

⁶⁴*Fight Club*, p. 54.

On a psychological level, Fight Club is considered as a therapeutic club since it represents a space that allows the expression of repressed anger and a way to deal with fear. Members there seize chances and risk their lives in embracing to be passionate within the club, which they cannot make in real life. All men in Fight Club know that the world is bigger than they are, and they cannot have it under control, which is why Fight Club is a cause for them to be living passionately. Since Fight Club gained a lot of members, Tyler creates his ideology into a larger movement, Project Mayhem, which is a project where it is intended to beat down the consumerist-society by spreading out anarchy.

What Tyler says about being the crap and the slaves of history, that's how I felt. I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I'd never have. Burn the Amazon rain forests. Pump chlorofluorocarbons straight up to gobble the ozone. Open the dump valves supertankers and uncap offshore oil wells. I wanted to kill all the fish I couldn't afford to eat, and smother the French beaches I'd never see. I wanted the whole world hit the bottom.⁶⁵

This was the goal of project mayhem, Tyler said, the complete and right-away destruction of civilization. We wanted to blast the world free of history.⁶⁶

Project Mayhem will break up civilization so we can make something better out of the world.⁶⁷

It is shown how Tyler pushes the narrator's spirit to be more passionate about himself in accomplishing the idea of Project Mayhem. He takes the narrator along the process of picturing how passionate he is to destroy all the bigger things than himself, reaching out the things he never does, and committing himself to let the the world to feel the chaos he has always been struggling with. The narrator wants the world to be free from any essence that is already given before. Thus, the emerging goals of Project Mayhem are in particular Tyler's aim of eliminating all signs and memories of the past. In order for this to happen, however, the old structures of the world should be thrown away, sacrificed, purified, and cleaned. That

⁶⁵*Fight Club*, p. 123.

⁶⁶*Ibid*, p. 124.

⁶⁷*Ibid*, p. 125.

is to be revived from ash after being exorcized from all the hunting ghosts of the consumerist society, which eventually leads to redemption.

2.2. Commodified Masculinity

Home was a condominium on the fifteenth floor of a high-rise, a sort of filing cabinet for widows and young professionals. The marketing brochure promised a foot of concrete floor, ceiling, and wall between me and any adjacent stereo or turned-up television.⁶⁸

The narrator lives in a condominium, which is considered an expensive luxury home compared to normal apartments. Not only does he have a condominium, it is also filled with expensive furniture. As he says when describing the kinds of furniture that decorates his home “... my clever Njuranda coffee tables in the shape of a lime green and an orange yang that fit together to make a circle.”⁶⁹ This is just his coffee table, as he refers to proudly. For him, the kind of furniture he buys creates an identity for him, which he dies for; since buying the newest and fresh editions of furniture from the catalogue brings him satisfaction within, as well as an escape from his job.

“It was me that blew up.”⁷⁰ As a reflection of an inner damage, the unnamed narrator in *Fight Club*, cries out his suffering after the mysterious explosion in his condominium, which, for the narrator, represents him as an individual in life, and portrays his own existence. This remarkable value that is given to such commodities raises some questions about the link between the individual and his concrete possessions, and how can such possessions cause this great harm on the psychology of the individual.

⁶⁸*Fight Club*, p. 35.

⁶⁹*Ibid*, p. 35.

⁷⁰*Ibid*, p. 111.

2.2.1. Creation of a Disabled Masculinity

In the novel, it is shown that the narrator takes his buying power very proudly, for he feels that he is part of the upper middle class through these products. Not only that, but purchasing gives sense to his existence. This creates a false identity of the narrator, as if he is separated from the working class, as if he is part of the ruling class of the bourgeoisie; a luxury that the upper class bourgeoisie has is the consumptive lifestyle, which has become viral in the narrator's mind.

He feels the need to buy his way out of life. Thus he describes, "You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got that sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug."⁷¹ It is as if the purpose of living is to buy products in order to make yourself complete. In the novel, the narrator fills his life with consuming these products, especially furniture in order to fulfil the hollow part. Thus, create a sense of completion in his life. This completion is only felt for a 'couple of years' as the narrator says; as they have passed, he must start to buy other new furniture to fill this sense of satisfaction again.⁷²

According to Hogg in his uncertainty-identity theory, such actions are considered as means of self engagement in the society; that is to say that the utter objective for someone who is uncertain of who he is, and what role he has in his society, is reaching a self identification, which in this novel, only occurs through commodities.⁷³ He also states that by behaving this way, individuals are more likely to experience less pressure, for they reduce their uncertainty and gain more validation among society. This validation enhances their self-esteem and provides a sense of security.

⁷¹*Fight Club*, p. 38.

⁷²Ali Muhammad, Pratiwi Andhika, Herwandar Ria, *Middle Class Rebellion through the Main Characters in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club*, (University of Al-Azhar Indonesia, 2018), p. 220.

⁷³Hardie Bick James, *Escaping the Self: Identity, Group Identification and Violence*, p. 1037.

And I wasn't the only slave to my nesting instinct. The people I know who used to sit in the bathroom with pornography, now they sit in the bathroom with their IKEA furniture catalogue.⁷⁴

A nesting instinct is a natural urge that emerges when an individual is preparing to have a child. This nesting instinct is usually seen amongst women who are pregnant. It is the instinct to clean, organize and have control over the environment that is prepared for the unborn baby. However, the narrator is not expecting any pregnancy; thus, his masculinity is manipulated in the middle of this obsession. He does not even have a spouse. Hence, this urge to consume is misinterpreted by him as a nesting instinct, and it becomes an escape, and a reason to have this consumptive lifestyle. To his desperation, he even relates his behaviour to pornography; for the satisfaction and addiction people get when they purchase are similar to the ones viewers of pornography enjoy.

The narrator starts attending with different support groups, where people share their struggles with their diseases as well as their feelings, to form a real connection, or to reanimate his own emotions. For Hogg, this is considered as a strategy that a person, who is uncertain of his own identity, commits in order for him to be identified. However, this identification is related to the grouping system, through which a person reinforces a self-confidence; for this person feels that he eventually fits perfectly with others.

In spite of faking his struggle, the narrator finally gets to have a real connection with one of the participants named Big Bob at a testicular cancer support group. Big Bob used to own a gym, have a barrel chest, and flex his muscles as a body builder, an icon of masculinity. But, due to taking carcinogenic steroids, he had to have his testicles removed, and testosterone treatments have since caused his body to produce increased estrogen as a counterbalance, giving him large breasts. Hence, Bob cries because he feels emasculated and feminised. The narrator cries, too, finding that the emotional outlet finally allows him to sleep after a long struggle with insomnia. His end of struggle with insomnia portrays the end of the feeling of

⁷⁴*Fight Club*, p. 37.

uncertainty that has been nagging him for a while, for he finally enjoys a high self-esteem, and the sense of empowerment.

For the narrator, the weeping of Bob is a passive act towards real manhood, which is the exact opposite of the psychological objective of the support group that is named 'Remaining Men Together', which is seen as an 'unmanly' retreat from disease and death. Part of the narrator believes that 'real men' are not supposed to hug, cry, or to share, instead, they are expected to fight. Big Bob is considered as the physical manifestation of the narrator's own psychological condition, for the narrator feels feminized by his white-collar job and his consumer lifestyle, only with a group of people this time.

He may not have literally lost his balls, but he still feels unmanned.⁷⁵ As Susan Faludi argues in her book *Stiffed* (1999), "the economic transition from industry to service" or from blue to white collar, along with the shift "from production to consumption" or from building to buying things, "is symbolically a move from the traditional masculine to the traditional feminine." This shift has been "more traumatic for men than we realize"⁷⁶: "Where we once lived in a society in which men in particular participated by being useful in public life, we now are surrounded by a culture that encourages people to play almost no functional public roles, only decorative or consumer ones."⁷⁷ Faludi sheds light on the psychological impact of a consumerist society on real manhood; for it creates a sense of uncertainty with identity.

While performing the duties for his job, the narrator is either stuck in his office or crammed into seats on air-planes, disempowered, or carried passively along, unable to show any manly initiative or expansiveness: "I wanted a way out of my tiny life. Single-serving butter and cramped airline seat role in the world"⁷⁸. Jack's role as consumer is experienced as equally emasculating.

⁷⁵Keeseey Douglas, *Understanding Chuck Palahniuk*, p. 17.

⁷⁶Faludi Susan, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, (New York, Perennial, 1999), p. 38.

⁷⁷Ibid, p. 34-35.

⁷⁸*Fight Club*, p. 173.

It's nothing anymore to have a beautiful stock body [...] those cars that are completely stock cherry, right out of a dealer's showroom in 1955, I always think, what a waste.⁷⁹

In a post-industrial society, manhood has become a commodity itself, for men are expected to go to the gym in order to display a well shaped body. "The gyms you go to are crowded with guys trying to look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an art director says," but "even a soufflé looks pumped"⁸⁰ The narrator criticises the fact that going to the gym to have a sculptured body is something that a feminised man would do, for his core objective is to have those gazes on him. "The ordinary man is no fool," Faludi argues;

he knows he can't be Arnold Schwarzenegger. Nonetheless, the culture reshapes his most basic sense of manhood by telling him as much as it tells the celebrity... That manhood is displayed, not demonstrated....The aspects of this public 'femininity' objectification, passivity, infantilization, pedestal perching, and mirror-gazing, are the very ones that women have in modern times denounced as trivializing and humiliating qualities imposed on them.... No wonder men are in such agony.⁸¹

To some extent, commodification influences the narrator in the novel to the point where he sees himself as an object; for him, he is nothing but a shallow creature, and in order to fill that void within, he has to purchase the latest products to feel himself complete. Not only that, but even the narrator's impression and the way he sees people is commodified as well, this fact is depicted in the way he describes Marla as having "Italian dark leather sofa lips."⁸² This description portrays how 'infected' is the way people see each other in a consumerist society, as they are being evaluated on the scale of products instead of their features. This sheds light on what is considered to be beauty and attraction, i.e. commodities, which have taken over the lives of the individuals.

⁷⁹*Fight Club*, p. 48.

⁸⁰*Ibid*, p. 50.

⁸¹Faludi Susan, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, p. 39.

⁸²*Ibid*, p. 36.

The narrator reaches the conclusion of him being a slave to his addiction when he realises that “the things you used to own, now they own you,”⁸³ since his own existence, for him, is attached to buying things in order to give meaning to his life.

Fight Club focuses on the consumerism culture and how it shapes male identity and ignores how capitalism has dominated and exploited society. In giving the reaction to consumerism, Palahniuk parodies it in the life of the narrator where he confesses that he is the slave of consumerism lifestyle, where the catalogue of IKEA has taken the role of pornography, in which implicitly illustrates the identity crisis of masculinity in his generation.

Advertising and media has a power that amazingly influences to create social standards and norms. The results of these bombarding messages of electronic media experiment are quite surprising, and show the powerful impact on the cultural and social values. The social and personal behaviour and thoughts are under the spell of the uniform patterns developed under the influence of advertising media where, in order to create identity, it requires that people have a general idea for what different products mean and represent. Consumerism has drained the individuality and authenticity of someone where someone’s views of existence, that values forms within society, are based on the acquisition of material goods, such as money or possessions, and social positions.

People do not seek greatness anymore since their desire to be better than others is limited to making more money and gaining more possessions, and not by the achievement of individual greatness. *Fight Club* visualizes how these material goods, and the narrator’s view concerning them, are the only thing he describes about his personality in the beginning of the novel, where he only talks about his fancy material belongings, such as IKEA furniture. This is to emphasize that his identity ultimately only consists of these material goods, which he *owes* his existence to. For him, life is to buy various products that gain social status for him. It is in

⁸³Faludi Susan, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, p. 44.

this way that he attributes the meaning of his life to these household objects. Thus, he is trapped in this consumerism lifestyle and he is aware of this fact; that he himself admits it.

2.2.2. The Power to Change Nothing

You 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). A times B times C equals X. This is what will cost if we don't initiate a recall. If X is greater than the cost of a recall, we recall the cars and no one gets hurt. If X is less than the cost of a recall, then we don't recall.⁸⁴

This formula is used as a baseline to determine whether a car must be recalled or not, most people do not know this, but the narrator does, thus, he becomes a salaried professional since he is the worker who understands this formula among the other workers, who only understand about the act of producing. This fact makes him classify himself among the middle class, especially that his job does not involve a physical work. Although the narrator knows that his job is crucial because it determines the lives of people, still, he cannot do anything about it. The narrator is merely a worker in that company, which is the exact opposite of what he thinks he is, an upper class. If he is truly a part of the upper class bourgeoisie, then he should have the power to change that formula. Not only that, he should be able to change the formula and escape from the guilt that he has.⁸⁵

“What I don't have to say is I know about the leather interiors that cause birth defects. I know about the counterfeit brake linings that looked good enough to pass the purchasing agent, but fail after two thousand miles.”⁸⁶

The narrator can finally see how the bourgeoisie capitalist with their profit point of view, where everything is about money, is destroying society and killing many lives. This creates hatred towards the company he works at, and a hatred of his job as well. From this hatred, he

⁸⁴Faludi Susan, *Stuffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, p. 26.

⁸⁵Ali Muhammad, Pratiwi Andhika, Herwandar Ria, *Middle Class Rebellion through the Main Characters in Chuck Palahniuk's Fight Club*, (University of Al-Azhar Indonesia, 2018), p. 222.

⁸⁶*Fight Club*, p. 76.

starts to question his position as an upper class bourgeoisie, making himself feel stressed out by this position and depressed. This can be seen from the way he sees his life, day by day. What the narrator consciously thinks about can be read, for this novel is in the first person point of view of the narrator.

According to terror management theory, this sense of numbness is expressed as someone loses awareness towards mortality, where his daily behaviour changes on different levels; in a way, his enrolment in support groups from the very beginning is considered as a step to refresh his emotions, or to 'reboot' them again in order for him to feel death like normal people do.

“Every take-off and landing, when the plane banked too much to one side, I prayed for a crash. That moment cures my insomnia with Narcolepsy when we might die helpless and packed human tobacco in the fuselage.”⁸⁷

Every time the narrator goes away on a mission to view a car accident to determine whether a recall is to be initiated, he immediately thinks of death, for the nature of his job is to determine the lives of people, which he does not accept. Alas, he suppresses his hatred and anger because he cannot leave his job, since quitting threatens his buying power.

Eventually, he gets sick and tired from his job; “I hated my life. I was tired and bored with my job and my furniture, and I couldn't see any way to change things.”⁸⁸ He sees no escape from his work that he must do in order for him to preserve the lifestyle that he is addicted to, even the thought to abandon haunts his conscience, for the things that he buys make him even guiltier, since the money is made from other people's suffering. Thus, he sees no solution and cannot decide which side to identify with, or which heart to listen to.

Eventually, he encounters Tyler Durden in a nude beach during his vacation from work. Tyler is a charismatic man who makes soap for a living. Later on, they exchange their phone

⁸⁷*Fight Club*, p. 23.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*

numbers. After returning home, the narrator finds that his condominium has blown up in a suspicious explosion, thus he calls Tyler, who meets him at a bar. After many drinks Tyler tells the narrator that he can move in with him, but he has to hit him as hard as he can as a favour. They engage in a messy fight, which is considered as the turning point of the narrator's life.

Tyler is working-class while the narrator is a white collar; Tyler is hard while the narrator is soft; Tyler is physically powerful and rebellious while the narrator tends toward passive conformity. The unnamed narrator immediately realises this fact as he says,

“I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve. Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not.”⁸⁹

He envies Tyler in spite of belonging to a higher social class, for Tyler is freer to become himself; he does not feel burdened, or chained up by his job. The narrator on the other hand, feels like Tyler is a role model to him, even though his social class is higher. This is considered as one of Fromm's mechanisms of escape, where an utter submission to a charismatic leader is involved. He describes how individuals give up the independence of their individual self and fuse their self with somebody or something to acquire the strength the individual is lacking.⁹⁰ At a point, the narrator does not feel like his social class contributes to his personality. While Tyler, even though he is a lower class worker, is described by the narrator as capable and free, capable of expressing himself freely in his own comfort zone from the separation of society. This is the result of where Tyler lives separately from society, which makes him as capable and free as he wants to be, with the ability to do anything he wants without the burdens of society.

⁸⁹*Fight Club*, p. 131.

⁹⁰FrommE, *Escape from Freedom*,(New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969), p. 103.

The narrator even describes Tyler as forceful and independent, for he is able to enact his will whenever he wants to, without the constraints of society. He knows his ‘genuine’ position in society. Since Tyler knows that society needs the proletariat in order to survive, he becomes forceful, not feeling that his social class is holding him in a cage; unlike the narrator, Tyler does not need the acknowledgement from other people to prove himself.⁹¹ Thus, he represents the certain individual who is aware of his identity, as well as his role and position in the society.

On the other hand, the narrator is trapped and caged in unlike Tyler, who is free to do what he wants; this is the luxury that Tyler gets as a lower class, he is not chained to his job like the narrator, who regardless of what he benefits from the buying power and luxury that he has, it still is just a commodity that is only valuable because society has agreed upon it.

2.2.3. Satirizing the Tragic Reality in Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*

In the selected novel, Palahniuk applies satire to critique the materialism of the American society and popular culture. His unnamed narrator, a self confessed “slave to the nesting instinct,”⁹² parodies the discourse of the culture he is attempting to undermine, listing his purchases and suggesting the “IKEA furniture catalogue” has taken the place of pornography for his generation.⁹³ Ironically, while marketing of these items make them feel as if they are creating their own individuality, in reality, they only entrench conformity, the narrator admitting that he and his peers “all have the same”⁹⁴ distinctive designer items.

Within consumer capitalism we are offered a surfeit of commodities, an abundance of commodity choices, but this image of plenty is illusory. Our desires are mediated by ideas about roles and lifestyles which are themselves constructed by commodities and our “choices” are propelled by these constructs.⁹⁵

⁹¹Ali Muhammad, Pratiwi Andhika , Herwandar Ria , *Middle Class Rebellion through the Main Characters in Chuck Palahniuk’s Fight Club*, (University of Al-Azhar Indonesia, 2018), p. 225.

⁹²*Fight Club*, p. 43.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Young Elizabeth, *The beast in the jungle, the figure in the carpet: Bret Easton Ellis’ s American Psycho*, p. 104.

The narrator's obsession with commodities is considered as a coping mechanism for his sense of absurdity, and the inevitability of death creating a false sense of permanence, security, and resolution: "You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life [...] then for a couple of years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got that sofa issue handled"⁹⁶ while in reality they are no defence against the truth the narrator is beginning to realise; that "Nothing is static" and "Even the Mona Lisa is falling apart."⁹⁷ Objects cannot protect him against his mortality, the fact that "Someday I'd be dead without a scar and there would be a really nice condo [...] until the dust settled."⁹⁸ This discourse of commodification influences the narrator to the point where he sees himself as an object, saying "It's nothing anymore to have a beautiful stock body [...] those cars that are completely stock cherry, right out of a dealer's showroom in 1955, I always think, what a waste."⁹⁹ When he finally understands that "the things you used to own, now they own you"¹⁰⁰ he gives the green light to Tyler to destroy his apartment, as a liberation that allows him continue on the path towards confronting the void by "hitting the bottom."¹⁰¹

Besides to parodying consumerism in *Fight Club*, Palahniuk also advances a postmodern concern with the ubiquity of television and film as a mediating discourse between consciousness and reality. In *Survivor*, Palahniuk's second novel, a character comments:

We all grew up with the same television shows. It's like we all have the same artificial memory implants. We remember almost none of our real childhoods, but we remember everything that happened to sitcom families.¹⁰²

This idea can be detected in *Fight Club* in that characters use fictional mediums to explain reality, such as the references to the films *Psycho* and *Sybil*¹⁰³, or when Tyler saves Marla and

⁹⁶*Fight Club*, p. 44.

⁹⁷*Ibid*, p. 49.

⁹⁸*Ibid*.

⁹⁹*Ibid*.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid*, p. 44.

¹⁰¹*Ibid*, p. 70.

¹⁰²Palahniuk Chuck, *Survivor*, p. 111.

¹⁰³*Fight Club*, p. 173-196.

thus, “according to the ancient Chinese custom we all learned from television,”¹⁰⁴ assumes responsibility for her. *Fight Club* uses the discourses of television and film to explore questions of existential authenticity and artificiality in, but with far less intensity¹⁰⁵; to portray the influence of pop culture over the narrator of *Fight Club*.

Satire has always been considered as a storytelling technique for centuries, for it offers such a fruitful mixture of comedic relief and a social critique at once. Thus, humans tend to enjoy this genre in literature nowadays, since this genre offers both, a good laugh and a dig at the core issues of the society.

2.3. “I Wanted to Destroy Everything Beautiful”

In *Fight Club*, Tyler is himself a service industry “space monkey,” working nights as a cinema projectionist, which is an opportunity for him to splice family films with subliminal shots of pornography. He also works as a waiter in an expensive restaurant, where he laces the soup with urine. However, he is also an entrepreneur: his “luxury” soap, made from human fat and sold at an enormous profit, represents the primary source of funding for Project Mayhem, along with the “corporate sponsorship” obtained by the narrator’s blackmailing of his boss. Tyler’s other jobs; which is done while the narrator is “asleep”, are opportunities for guerilla terrorism, rather than employment necessary for his day to day existence: *he* is the “big tourist,” merely posing as a member of the working class. Thus, the body of the “working man” is an object of desire for the narrator, emblematic member of the demasculinized middle classes. In sum, it is suggested that it is a certain passionate attachment to the patriarchal nation which actually provokes the longing to attack it, in a way to perform the role of its “public enemy number one.”

¹⁰⁴*Fight Club*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁵Wenley Stephen, *Existential Thought in American Psycho and Fight Club* (Master Thesis) (Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), p. 49.

The night the narrator moves in with Tyler, fight club starts. Neither had been in a fight before, "so Tyler said, 'I want you to do me a favor. I want you to hit me as hard as you can.' I didn't want to, but Tyler explained it all, about not wanting to die without any scars, about being tired of watching only professionals fight, and wanting to know more about himself"¹⁰⁶ Tyler asks the narrator to participate, and later, the members arrange the fights. Only one exception exists, in the seventh rule of Fight Club, which states "if this is your first night at Fight Club, you have to fight"¹⁰⁷ and since violence constitutes the only activity that happens in Fight Club, no one fails to consent. The first fight consists of mediated violence. The narrator claims, "Like every guy on his first night in Fight Club, I breathed in and swung my fist in a roundhouse at Tyler's jaw like in every cowboy movie we'd ever seen," to which Tyler countered with a blow "straight on, pow, just like a cartoon boxing glove on a spring on Saturday morning cartoons"¹⁰⁸

Just as the system dehumanizes subjects in reducing them to function, the violence of Fight Club reduces members to instruments of function: "There's nothing personal about who you fight in Fight Club. You fight to fight"¹⁰⁹. In addition, the violent spectacle of Fight Club isolates its participants in that pain, rather than the other participants, is the primary experience, and the participants can only think of the other in terms of thought mediated by images of spectacle. Fight club's equivalence differs from what the narrator seeks at the interactive support groups narrating pain; for Tyler alone manipulates the pain that causes the narrative. Fight Club sets up a contrast with the real world: "Who guys are in Fight Club is not who they are in the real world"¹¹⁰; also, "You aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at Fight Club"¹¹¹. It diminishes the importance of that with which it contrasts - "After a night in

¹⁰⁶ *Fight Club*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 50.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.p. 52-53.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 54.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 49.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

Fight Club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down"¹¹² and "After Fight Club, you're so relaxed, you just cannot care"¹¹³. Although "Fight Club exists only in the hours between when Fight Club starts and when Fight Club ends"¹¹⁴, the narrator's body bears the signs of its violence in the real world: "Two screens into my demo to Microsoft, I taste blood and have to start swallowing. My boss doesn't know the material, but he won't let me run the demo with a black eye and half my face swollen from the stitches inside my cheek,"¹¹⁵ it is at this point where violence lures the narrator and absorbs him, and eventually, is reflected on his social and psychological behavior.

2.4. Identity Crisis: The Doppelganger

If I could wake up in a different place,
at a different time, could I wake up as
a different person?¹¹⁶

In the novel, the narrator expresses how tired he is from his consumerist lifestyle, which is considered as a meaningless cycle. His wish comes after encountering Tyler, who projects what a free individual is. This projection sheds light on what it means to be 'alive' in the eyes of the narrator. For he considers himself a shallow moving body with neither an identity, nor a reason to exist for. Thus, his journey in search of meaning begins as he starts to compare himself to Tyler since he considers him as a model for him.

2.4.1. An Existential Journey in Search of Meaning

The impression that the narrator has about Tyler reflects how empty the life of a white collar is, not to mention the fact of his existence becoming an "out-of-body experience"¹¹⁷ in which "Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy [...] you can't touch anything

¹¹² *Fight Club*, p. 49.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, p. 139.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 49.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 47.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.

and nothing can touch you;”¹¹⁸ he expresses desperately how he is alienated from society because of his work, wherein he loses the tendency to feel anything including himself. In addition to his doctor’s diagnosis about insomnia, where he says “ Insomnia is just a symptom of something larger. Find out what’ s actually wrong”¹¹⁹ this ‘something larger’ is the narrator’s existential crisis, and his successive desire for a meaningful existence. It is also considered as a part of the process of an existential ‘awakening’. In this regard, Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* the following,

one day the ‘why’ arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. [...] Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. [...] What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery. In itself weariness has something sickening about it. Here, I must conclude that it is good. For everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it.¹²⁰

In *Fight Club*, as mentioned before, the narrator is sick and tired of his ‘mechanical life,’ thus, he begins to search for meaning through the natural process of awakening his consciousness. His second attempt to do so is through the interaction with Tyler Durden, who portrays the freedom of masculinity, since his friend Bob mirrors the narrator’ s initial desire for meaning and reason amidst what seems to be the futility of existence when he says “All my life [...] Why I do anything, I don’ t know;”¹²¹ he finds that, by participating in support groups for people with chronic illnesses and pretending that he is one of them, he is able to simulate feelings of anguish in order to be able to sleep. Conveyed in an ironic tone, the narrator’ s despair reveals in nihilism and the absurdity of existence: “It’ s easy to cry when you realize that everyone you love will reject you or die.”¹²² Surrounded by dying people, the

¹¹⁸*Fight Club*, p. 21.

¹¹⁹Wenley Stephen, *Existential Thought in American Psycho and Fight Club* (Master Thesis) (Victoria University of Wellington, 2011), p. 19.

¹²⁰Camus Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 12-13.

¹²¹*Fight Club*, p. 18.

¹²²*Ibid*, p. 17.

narrator attempts to grasp mortality, saying “On a long enough time line, the survival rate for everyone will drop to zero,”¹²³ this echoes the process of awakening that Camus describes as a man admitting “ that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy,”¹²⁴ which in the narrator’s case, the support groups are the utter beginning of the end.

As a coping mechanism with the glimpses of death, the support groups use guided meditation as a way of transcending pain, suffering, and fear, entering a state akin to that which Sartre uses as an example of the individual of bad faith who “realises herself as not being her own body, and [...] contemplates it as though from above as a passive object to which events can happen but which can neither provoke them nor avoid them because all its possibilities are outside of it,”¹²⁵ for the narrator faces a greater existential struggle with support groups, since he does not even use his real name during those sessions, next to the fact of him faking his illness; in other words, his intentions to earn meaning to his existence, i.e. identity, have backfired on him. Through his way to earn a self identification, he only ends up with a sense of belonging through faking his own death.

2.4.2. ‘I Know This Because Tyler Knows This’: Seeking Liberation

The unnamed narrator in *Fight Club* is struggling with the identification of his place in the society. He does not have any firm idea of who he is, and seems to suffer constantly over his own sense of self. Therefore, it is this gap in his psyche that calls forth his double, Tyler Durden, whom he unconsciously creates to fill in the missing pieces of himself. According to previous theories, this process is considered as a mechanism of escape from the uncertainty over his own identity. As the narrator loses everything in his life by the end of the story, including his belongings, his job, and many people who are close to him, he achieves a highly

¹²³*Fight Club*, p. 17.

¹²⁴Camus Albert, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, p. 12.

¹²⁵Sartre Jean Paul, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 79.

problematic sense of self. However, this ambiguous sense of self is not the product of what Freud or Jung consider a proper assimilation of different parts of the psyche into a coherent whole; instead, in this case, the narrator creates a persona that represents everything he always wished he could be, and then he *becomes* that persona.¹²⁶

Moreover, because Tyler and the narrator are in fact the same person from the very beginning, there is not any grammatical indicator that shows whether it is the narrator or Tyler speaking, which makes their discourse appear like one single stream of consciousness. The narrator subtly informs the reader from the very first scene, in which Tyler holds a gun in the narrator's mouth, that he and Tyler are one and the same through the use of repeated phrases such as "I know this because Tyler knows this"¹²⁷ and by oblique indications that Tyler only lives in and through the narration itself: "I tongue the gun barrel into my cheek and say, you want to be a legend, Tyler man, I'll make you a legend. I've been here from the beginning. I remember everything."¹²⁸ This does not only shows that they are the same person, but it highlights the fact that the narrator has absolutely no idea who he is, and that he is trapped in an internal struggle to find this out. The most obvious indication of the narrator's lack of identity is the fact that his name is never given, making him appear identity-less to the reader as well as to himself from the very beginning, he tends to use different names for different support group: "I never give my real name at support groups"¹²⁹. This attitude evolves and is applied more generally as time goes on: "I never give my real name"¹³⁰ which is not only considered as a disguise, but also a sign of absence of genuine identity.

¹²⁶Gamache M Christine, *An Opposing Self: Doppelgangers in Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and Fight Club*, (Master Thesis) (Rhode Island College, 2011), p. 35.

¹²⁷*Fight Club*, p. 12.

¹²⁸*Ibid*, p. 15.

¹²⁹*Ibid*, p. 19.

¹³⁰*Ibid*, p. 23.

All of this changes when the narrator meets Tyler, or creates him, because, as Ruddell explains, the narrator “create[s] a double that he believes to be stronger than him”¹³¹, a persona that is capable of supplying what he finds lacking in himself. For the narrator, then, Tyler ultimately represents the possibility of escaping his superficial obsession with self-definition at a material level: “May I never be complete. May I never be content. May I never be perfect. Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete”¹³² It is this invitation that gives Tyler the power that he increasingly wields over the narrator’s life.

As the Narrator comes to identify unconsciously with his self-created double, he ironically recognizes that he and Tyler have a lot of things in common. Most important from a psychological level, perhaps, is a common resentment of their fathers that seems to have affected who they became as adults; the narrator says that “Tyler never knew his father”¹³³ which is very similar to the relationship the narrator recalls about his own father: “Me, I knew my dad for about six years, but I don’t remember anything”¹³⁴. This notion makes sense that the narrator does not remember anything about his childhood with his father since Tyler does not know his own father, i.e. the same man.

Once the narrator identifies with Tyler, he starts to enjoy the sense of self that faces a change, and he feels that he is becoming a different person in spite of not being able to define who that person is. The narrator and Tyler devise their own support group of sorts, which they call Fight Club, as an outlet to exorcise their own and other men’s personal demons.¹³⁵ While participating in Fight Club, the narrator becomes a completely different person, although this transformation does not yet carry over into other aspects of his life, like his job: “Who I am in

¹³¹Ruddell Caroline, “Virility and Vulnerability, Splitting and Masculinity in Fight Club: A Tale of Contemporary Male Identity Issues”, *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy* 48.3, 2007, p. 495.

¹³²*Fight Club*, p. 46.

¹³³*Ibid*, p. 49.

¹³⁴*Ibid*, p. 50.

¹³⁵Gamache M Christine, *An Opposing Self: Doppelgangers in Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and Fight Club*, (Master Thesis) (Rhode Island College, 2011), p. 39.

fight club is not someone my boss knows”¹³⁶. This is perhaps why the rules of Fight Club, which the narrator devises through Tyler, include a strict rule of secrecy that the narrator follows: “The first rule of fight club is you don’t talk about fight club. I tell Walter I fell. I did this to myself”¹³⁷. The irony here is that the narrator is the one who caused these injuries to himself through engaging in Fight Club willingly, these injuries are considered self-inflicted since Tyler does not really exist in a physical form.

The narrator’s journey, his becoming, begins the moment Fight Club begins. As Nietzsche instructs, the becoming is a journey and a perpetual state of flux and growth; the narrator has thus embarked on his journey, one that will unfold and progress throughout the rest of Fight Club’s narrative.¹³⁸ The narrator begins to subject himself to the things he fears most; disorganization, chaos, and destruction only with Tyler’s driving force behind him,. In their essay *Enjoy Your Fight! – Fight Club as a Symptom of the Network Society*, Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen write about the empowering nature of dealing with and overcoming pain, and the significance of the process by which this empowerment is achieved:

The aim is not to become immune towards pain but to live through it. Being hit and feeling pain is a way to re-conquer life. The practice of Fight Club invokes a life with scars. “I don’t want to die without any scars,” [Tyler] says. Why the body and why scars? The body is that which is not just a “copy of a copy of a copy.” And it is my bod...the scar on the body is lasting. It cannot be changed like clothes... If the experience has disappeared, bodily harm offers an experience of life (and death). Through fighting, fighters feel the finality of life, and life itself.¹³⁹

This is key to the becoming, as the Narrator must face and overcome the things he fears if he is to become, since fear is an obstacle that will stand in the way of reaching the self-confidence, and self-awareness that are vital to the becoming. Surviving and embracing life

¹³⁶*Fight Club*, p. 49.

¹³⁷*Fight Club*, p. 48.

¹³⁸Pate Anthony, *Nietzsche's Übermensch in the Hyperreal Flux*, p. 54.

¹³⁹Diken Bülent, and Carsten Bagge Laustsen, “Enjoy Your Fight! – Fight Club as a Symptom of the Network Society,” *Cultural Values* 6.4, (2002), p.p. 349-367.

lived on the edge , in the middle of disorganization, chaos, and destruction, are the ways to break free from the endlessly repetitive scenarios that the narrator has become trapped in. Fight Club is his chance to experience something real, and something as painful and scary as a brutal beating, but as he survives and comes to embrace the fights, he gets to reconnect with his humanity and identity as well.

The narrator continues to live a dual life, not only the life he shares with his projected double, but also the one he splits between who he is in the “real world” and who he is in Fight Club. It is inevitable, however, that these two worlds eventually begin to *seep* into one another: “If I could wake up in a different place, at a different time, could I wake up as a different person?”¹⁴⁰

Initially, the narrator finds Tyler to be intriguing, wild, and reckless, which is the utter opposite to his own reserved and monotonous lifestyle; but after the narrator begins to identify with Tyler, he actually begins to adopt his ideas, of course, the ones which reflect the narrator’s own *repressed* desires. Therefore, when Tyler confesses to blowing up the narrator’s condo, the narrator is shocked and angered at first but realizes that this act, which he actually did himself, fits both of their philosophies: “At the time, my life just seemed too complete, and maybe we have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves”¹⁴¹ which is echoed by Tyler: “It’s only after you’ve lost everything . . . that you’re free to do anything.”¹⁴²

It is when the narrator gets to experience the destruction of his material possessions and his psychic attachment to them that he feels hopeful and free for the first time in the story. The Fight Club is working as his therapy, because he can sleep and because he, and the other members, are “fighting” the things that had blocked them, “I asked Tyler what he’d been

¹⁴⁰*Fight Club*, p. 33.

¹⁴¹*Ibid*, p. 52.

¹⁴²*Ibid*, p. 70.

fighting. Tyler said, his father. Maybe we didn't need a father to complete ourselves"¹⁴³ What the narrator does not yet realize is that he is freeing himself from the shadow of the father only to make himself vulnerable to a much more dangerous shadow figure, i.e. his double.¹⁴⁴

2.4.3. Liberated or Controlled?

It is remarkable that the liberated the narrator becomes, the stronger Tyler becomes, not to mention how the influence on the narrator changes from giving advice to controlling him. In the early stages of the story, the narrator confesses that he sometimes lets Tyler talk instead of him, not only to keep Fight Club secret, but also because he sees him stronger than him: "At the hospital, Tyler tells them I fell down. Sometimes, Tyler speaks for me. I did this to myself"¹⁴⁵. This quickly changes to Tyler not only speaking for the narrator but through him: "Tyler's words coming out of my mouth. I used to be such a nice person"¹⁴⁶. After a while, the narrator just goes along with anything Tyler wants to do, even though he does not approve of many of Tyler's actions: "Basically, I said the same stuff Tyler said"¹⁴⁷.

Because the narrator lets this escalate for too long without any kind of resistance, a point is reached where Tyler is no longer controllable, and it is obvious that Tyler, and the narrator implicitly, is engaging in activities of which the narrator has no recollection and of which he may not approve.¹⁴⁸ For the narrator is no longer calling the shots and comes to realize that he is now merely an instrument that Tyler is using for his own, and the narrator's, destructive purposes: "This is what Tyler wants me to do. These are Tyler's words coming out of my mouth. I am Tyler's mouth. I am Tyler's hands"¹⁴⁹. Consequently, the narrator makes the same mistake as do many protagonists in doppelgänger stories: he gives his double too much

¹⁴³*Fight Club*, p.p. 53-54.

¹⁴⁴Gamache M Christine, *An Opposing Self: Doppelgängersin Frankenstein, Jekylland Hyde, and Fight Club*, (Master Thesis) (Rhode Island College, 2011), p. 40.

¹⁴⁵*Fight Club*, p. 57.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid*, p. 98.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁸Gamache M Christine, *An Opposing Self: Doppelgängersin Frankenstein, Jekylland Hyde, and Fight Club*, (Master Thesis) (Rhode Island College, 2011), p. 41.

¹⁴⁹*Fight Club*, p. 155.

freedom, leading to a blurring of the sense of self and the double usurping the power of the protagonist.

In her thesis entitled *An Opposing Self*, Christine Gamache clarifies: “For the narrator, this usurpation occurs whenever he is sleeping, whenever, that is, he leaves his mind vulnerable to his unconscious, from which Tyler emerges. The narrator acknowledges the fact that Tyler existed in his mind long before he was aware of him, as “Tyler had been around a long time before [they] met”¹⁵⁰, but interestingly, the narrator contends that “The first time [he] met Tyler, [he] was asleep”¹⁵¹. As evidenced by the narrator’s and Tyler’s opposite work schedules, the narrator not only loses control of his consciousness altogether when Tyler is in control, but he seems to have a completely separate life as Tyler: “Tyler worked part-time as a movie projectionist. Because of his nature, Tyler could only work night jobs. . . . Some people are night people. Some people are day people. I could only work a day job”¹⁵². Although the narrator is living both lives, the details of the life that Tyler lives are still unknown to him: “I don’t know how long Tyler had been working on all these nights I couldn’t sleep.”¹⁵³

Tyler’s absence has an utter effect on the narrator, as he is still not a coherent whole of a personality with this vital part of himself missing: “My wish right now is for me to die. I am nothing in the world compared to Tyler”¹⁵⁴. As Tyler himself boasts, the narrator has no control over what he does while he is asleep: “Every time you fall asleep . . . I run off and do something wild, something crazy, something completely out of my mind”¹⁵⁵. As a result, the narrator is now afraid of sleep, because he is scared that he will one day cease to exist and that he will wake up as his counterpart forever more:

The next night, I’d 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

¹⁵⁰*Fight Club*, p. 32.

¹⁵¹*Ibid*, p. 172.

¹⁵²*Ibid*, p. 25.

¹⁵³*Ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁴*Ibid*, p. 146.

¹⁵⁵*Ibid*, p. 163.

charge longer and longer. 'But you are Tyler' Marla says. No. No, I'm not. . . .
And if I went to bed earlier every night and I slept later every morning, eventually
I'd be gone altogether. I'd just go to sleep and never wake up.¹⁵⁶

The narrator realizes how dangerous this situation is, and eventually confesses his concerns to his love interest, Marla Singer saying that "Tyler Durden is a separate personality I've created, and now he's threatening to take over my real life"¹⁵⁷

The narrator's actions when he is Tyler, of which he is still not completely conscious, come from the repressions of his own psyche, but when they are in Tyler's hands, they are taken to extremes that are extremely dangerous, not only for the narrator himself, but also people in his life and society as a whole. Tyler argues that the narrator has always sought such chaos within himself, but that he would never, of himself, have acted on it: "You're in Ireland the summer after you left college, and maybe this is where you first wanted anarchy."¹⁵⁸ Once the Fight Club is able to provide a sufficient outlet, Tyler creates a new tool for the narrator's repressed anarchic and aggressive desires: "You can build up a tolerance to fighting, and maybe I needed to move on to something bigger. It was that morning, Tyler invented Project Mayhem. Tyler asked what I was really fighting"¹⁵⁹. Project Mayhem, a covert operation of which Tyler makes sure that the narrator has only minimal knowledge, involves many of the men from the now numerous Fight Clubs who have now been stripped of their individuality and have collectively become Tyler's "space monkeys."¹⁶⁰

Project Mayhem is responsible for random acts of violence against corporations and businesses calculated, which is in Tyler's view, considered as adding madness to the mundane world. The little pieces that the narrator finds out about the workings of Project Mayhem really shock and horrify him because he knows that he is the one to blame for them:

¹⁵⁶*Fight Club*, p. 174.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid*, p. 173.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁰Gamache M Christine, *An Opposing Self: Doppelgangers in Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and Fight Club*, (Master Thesis) (Rhode Island College, 2011), p. 42.

“At the moment where he realizes that Project Mayhem is not just a story of revolution, not just an ideal masculine therapeutic space, but rather a physical organization that actually harms people, the Narrator becomes horrified and feels the weight of his personal responsibility”¹⁶¹. In some complex way, Tyler seems to possess the narrator’s best interests at heart, and he tries to remove the obstacles that are holding the narrator back. However, instead of merely providing the push that the narrator needs to sell his belongings, tell off his boss, and quit his job, Tyler, who is a much more impulsive and primal part of the narrator, only knows how to destroy; the knowledge that all of these terrible things are happening because of the double over whom he has lost control weighs heavily on the narrator’s conscience: “The world is going crazy. My boss is dead. My home is gone. My job is gone. And I’m responsible for it all”¹⁶². These feelings remind us of the guilt that Victor Frankenstein feels over the slaying of innocent people performed by his Creature and that Henry Jekyll feels for the acts of Hyde; but the guilt the narrator feels is amplified due to the fact that it is him who is performing these acts.

However, the narrator in *Fight Club*, having lost control over his double, is able to get it back unlike in Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and most doppelgänger narratives. As Tyler himself realizes that he is dependent on the narrator’s unconscious desire for his very existence: “I wouldn’t be here in the first place if you didn’t want me”¹⁶³. The narrator gradually becomes conscious, and remembers what Tyler has thought and done “All the things that Tyler knows are all coming back to me”¹⁶⁴. As he does so, he directs himself to re-assume control over his split self. This can be seen in the last scene of the story, which is also where the story begins, with Tyler holding a gun in the narrator’s mouth. Although Tyler is still there, seemingly in command, the narrator knows that it is actually him who will

¹⁶¹*Fight Club*, p. 59.

¹⁶²*Ibid*, p. 193.

¹⁶³*Ibid*, p. 168.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid*, p. 198.

determine the outcome: “To God, this looks like one man alone, holding a gun in his own mouth, but it’s Tyler holding the gun, and it’s my life”¹⁶⁵. Since the narrator has learned what he can from Tyler and does not need his presence anymore, the scene suddenly changes from Tyler holding a gun in the narrator’s mouth to the narrator holding a gun in his own mouth: “Marla’s coming toward me, just me because Tyler’s gone. Poof. Tyler’s my hallucination, not hers. Fast as a magic trick, Tyler’s disappeared. And now I’m just one man holding a gun in my mouth”¹⁶⁶. When the narrator shoots the gun and merely pierces his cheek with the bullet, it symbolizes the death of his old, divided self: “Of course, when I pulled the trigger, I died. Liar. And Tyler died”¹⁶⁷ And because there is no need for Tyler anymore, the “Tyler” part of the narrator’s psyche is now just a voice in his head.

2.5. The Battle of Life Towards Freedom

After a night in fight club, everything in the real world gets the volume turned down. Nothing can piss you off. Your world is your law, and if other people break that law or question you, even that doesn’t piss you off.¹⁶⁸

The Fight Club is considered as a place where a group of man with the same anxiety and fear just like the narrator gather and fight against one another; this club itself gives a different meaning in living life, for it is their rejection to their stilled life. Due to its existence, the narrator can live authentically without any social expectations can take over him. The formation of Fight Club allows the narrator to react against the meaninglessness of popular culture and society by embracing self-destruction in order to facilitate the creation of authenticity. Before he meets Fight Club his life was vain and trapped into the consumerism culture.

¹⁶⁵*Fight Club*, p. 204.

¹⁶⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷*Ibid*, p. 206.

¹⁶⁸*Ibid*, p. 49.

2.5.1. "I Want to Break Free!"

I didn't want to, but Tyler explained it all, about not wanting to die without any scars, about being tired of watching only professionals fight, and wanting to know more about himself. About self- destruction. At the same time, my life just seemed too complete, and maybe we have to break everything to make something better out of ourselves.¹⁶⁹

Eventually, the narrator reaches the stage where he wants to create a new self-identity after joining Fight Club, he starts to investigate himself in different ways. Being authentic means making a choice. Here, the narrator starts to take a place and role in the world he lives in where he no longer defines himself according to his material belongings. Thus, he believes that in order to move from his sense of rejection, he has to destroy his old daily life to create a better path. Fight club allows the powerless to stimulate their desire to be powerful, it is the harnessing of aggressive and ambitious drives, as necessary to living a passionate life, finding "a vision of life that burns brilliantly" preferable to simply "being a good person". In Fight Club, the narrator is able to do all the things he can't do in real world. His hand might only work for his job and his condominium out there. But, in Fight Club his hands authentically work for his desire. His hands fight for his life.¹⁷⁰ Tyler highlights the fact that in order for someone to achieve something great in their life, they have to feel pain. Tyler is convincing the narrator that chaos is a dominant force in universe. Thus, violence is portrayed as salvation in their society, and the direct trajectory towards freedom.

When Tyler invented project mayhem, Tyler said the goal of project mayhem had nothing to do with other people. Tyler didn't care of other people got hurt or not. The goal was to teach each man in the project that he had the power to control history. We, each of us, can take control over the world.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹*Fight Club*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁰Agus Salim, *Existentialism in Chuck Palahniuk's Novel Fight Club*, (thesis) (University of Sumatera Utara Medan, 2016), p. 48.

¹⁷¹*Fight Club*, p. 122.

Tyler's Project Mayhem is about the quest to achieve individuality and freedom in facing the world. That is to say that he resists the values of the crowd by taking individual responsibility for creating identity, and someone must perpetually put that identity at risk by subjecting it to constant challenge. He spreads out his ideology to be an autonomous person where he gives himself his own rules to live by. Eventually, his will is depicted by the creation of a revolution through Project Mayhem against the consumerist lifestyle.

Ironically, the narrator, along with groups of other men involved with the club, which later *becomes* Project Mayhem, are stripped of their individuality and become one faceless unit with the purpose of changing the world through anarchy and destruction. For the members of this club, as a collective, become as identity-less as the narrator: "The Narrator is careful to illustrate how the men standing in the bar basement in the dim pool of light are identically clothed without shirts and shoes, how they assume the same habits of grooming, with short hair and nails, all mirror-images of each other"¹⁷². The turning point is Bob, the narrator's friend from the support groups. As Bob joins the Fight Club, he is just one of many nameless space monkeys. But once he dies serving Project Mayhem, he becomes Robert Paulson and will forever be remembered for his sacrifice. It is a concept that the narrator fully understands: "Only 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."¹⁷³

2.5.2. Responsibility as The Other Side of Freedom

Existentialism believes that individuals are utterly free and must take personal responsibility. The world is inherently meaningless, but the essential movement of existentialism is to assert that it does not have to stay that way. Thus, someone is still able to take over the responsibility for overseeing meaning in the world. Responsibility is at the heart

¹⁷²Kennett Paul, "Fight Club and the Dangers of Oedipal Obsession," *Stirrings Still: The International Journal of Existential Literature*, 2005, p. 54.

¹⁷³*Fight Club*, p. 178.

of Sartre's philosophy, which asserts that someone is totally free and totally responsible at once.

In *Fight Club*, the narrator decides how to interpret the situation exploring the choice of paths he has, through the selection of a different path from another. He is captivated by modern life and wants to have freedom for himself. Thus, being part of *Fight Club* and *Project Mayhem* brings different perspective for the narrator in seeing his life. However, the quest of his freedom has not stopped yet; for all his desire of freedom creates a confrontation within himself. This is as he realizes that Tyler Durden becomes an obstacle now, and the growing of *Project Mayhem* becomes disturbing as well in the light of how little he acknowledges about. In inescapable freedom, there is an inescapable responsibility; after all what happened from his desire of freedom, the narrator later chooses to take responsibility for everything in order to create who he really is. "The world is going. My boss is dead. My home is gone. My job is gone. And I'm responsible for it all."¹⁷⁴

Tyler's ideology has caused a lot of problem and the narrator feels guilty about it, which leads him to take responsibility. Real responsibility involves things someone cares about in one way or another; his home, his job, and his boss are part of his life that he cares about, and the narrator wants to take responsibility for the loss he causes.

"I have to take care of Tyler Durden,"¹⁷⁵ says the narrator. This sheds light on how he is ready to take responsibility since Tyler Durden has become an obstacle to him. As Tyler starts to take control over the narrator's body, *Project Mayhem* increasingly disturbs society and the narrator personally. This incident leads the narrator towards taking full responsibility for his choice to gain his freedom. Having the constant responsibility to make a choice is part of the human condition, and being free means to always have a choice. This statement stands with the philosophy of Sartre where he contends that people always have a choice, therefore

¹⁷⁴*Fight Club*, p. 193.

¹⁷⁵*Ibid*, p. 197.

are always free. The statement above is his choice of how to interpret the situation around him. Thus, in order to liberate himself, the narrator has to be free from the shadow of Tyler Durden. That is to say that he is responsible to create the true notion of himself.

This is like a total epiphany moment for me.
I am not killing myself. I yell. I'm killing Tyler.
I have to do this. The police helicopter. And I
pull the trigger.¹⁷⁶

On the other hand, the narrator is still searching for freedom, a pursuit in which Tyler has become, not only an obstacle, but a threat to Marla as well, who has developed into a love interest for the narrator. The narrator considers killing himself, but decides not to as he must “save” Marla. Thus, his own life is saved by the desire to save the life of another, which indicates a move towards community and human affection instead of destruction, as a state of psychological chaos. In sum, the narrator takes responsibility for his existential quest by committing the most unexpected action, which is killing himself.

¹⁷⁶*Fight Club*, p. 205.

General Conclusion

Considering what we have gone through, Identity is still considered an issue that is tackled by different approaches, depending on the lenses which are used to penetrate what an identity means, and its core significance within individuals. In a postmodern nation where social, cultural, and economic levels are considered as the essence of an individual's identity, approaching these levels means approaching the cornerstones of the identity. In a consumerist society, identity represented what is owned; which affected, not only the economic field, but the psychology of its population. For this latter has been 'commodified' at heart. This identical genocide, which was the ultimate result of commodification of individuals, and remarkably, the commodification of genuine masculinity of American white men, was largely reflected in the literary work of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996). In this novel, Palahniuk shed light on the male manifestation against consumerism, which had been massacring masculinity; so that it went with what serves the modern slavery regardless of the biological nature of today's individual. Therefore, *Fight Club* is regarded as a satiric work, which depicts the 'uncivilised' within.

In *Fight Club*, the protagonist was a bored, aimless office worker whose life had become a 'copy of a copy'. He worked as a recall campaign coordinator and participated in the consumer-driven goals of his culture. He lived in a nice condominium apartment in which he spent his time wondering about what kind of lamps and chairs would 'define him' as a person. Therefore, this novel focused on the psychological journey of the protagonist where he, and other men with the same struggle, used violence to manifest their true masculinity in a society that is corrupted by consumerism.

The first chapter of the present study provided a socio-historical and theoretical base for the analysis of the selected novel. It offered a synopsis of the socio-cultural background of consumerism as a phenomena in the American twenty first century. Likewise, we shed light

on the psychoanalytical approach as a tool to decode the psychology, as well as the hidden motifs behind the struggle portrayed in the novel. Since *Fight Club* manifested an existential crisis in search of identity, a conceptual background of Sartre's existentialism was provided, next to other psychoanalytical theories as this work discussed the longing to one's true self, i.e. real manhood.

Furthermore, this chapter highlighted the use of satire in the American writings, where it was used as a genre in literature that made it easier for authors along different eras to criticize unpleasant incidents in their societies. In order for them to do so, different types of satire were used depending on the situation itself; that is to highlight how serious the case was. Moreover, choosing what type of satire to apply was related to the objective we want to reach, whether it was about mere comedy or to discuss a main concern, in order to look for solutions.

The second chapter attempted to investigate the issue of identity and its importance for one's psychological stability, and how it could turn into a momentous menace once it was damaged or distorted. By analysing the selected novel, this research provided a new perspective for the creation of a commodified masculinity by consumerism. In his novel, Palahniuk portrayed how new consumerist culture that was based on buying resulted in the creation of a disabled masculinity, where men did not acknowledge their own identity, or their true position in society. This uncertainty of identity led them to the numbness they suffer from daily, which eventually made them unsure of their role as part of society. Palahniuk's novel tackled this critical issue from a psychological perspective, since it dealt with their internal conflict between what they were expected to be and what they really wanted to do in order for them to *be*. Thus, the protagonist, with other characters, tended to show their effort to earn an identity in their society through different trajectories, alas, they ended up with nothing but the struggle and the pain of not being able to change anything from before. In this novel, irony and parody were used as a mechanism to criticize the situation they were dwelling in, where a

strong language was used only to reflect how they were psychologically rejecting their current situation, and their will to change it.

The present chapter explored what Fight Club represented in the novel for both, the protagonist and the members of this club. This latter was not a mere club where men meet to fight against each other, but way more than that. It represented someone's need to be a warrior in life and to resist the goal of society to enslave them and make them tame. This club gave a reason to live for whoever sought one. Furthermore, it was about embracing passion, by submitting to that primitive and innate urge for violence, instead of a society where masculinity was about what men were expected to be, and not about what they naturally were. In addition, this club was about embracing nothingness, for all the members were people who ran from their anxiety of their life, which was imposed by society. It was where they could model their masculinity without borders, since it was not about what they did, but about how they did it. Thus, the Fight Club was considered as a therapeutic club since it represented a space that allowed the expression of repressed anger and a way to deal with fear, where members seized chances and risked their lives in embracing to be passionate within the club, which they could not make in real life.

This chapter introduced the identity crisis that the protagonist suffered from on his way to reach meaning of his life. Thus, he tended to experience an existential crisis as part of the process to shape his own presence, where he was a desperate moving body that wished death at any given moment, for he believed that his own salvation was to get rid of his life.

The protagonist finally got to meet Tyler Durden, who was the total opposite of him, since he represented all the masculine charisma he had ever wanted in his life, not to mention the freedom he had been longing to since ever, so he considered Tyler as a life modal to him to follow. He started tasting the joy of being a real man, where he used his own body to feel his own existence, and picking on Tyler all the features was his way to have a high self-esteem

about himself. Gradually, he came to realize that he and Tyler were similar in a way that he got Tyler to speak for himself from time to time, not to mention his familiarity with places he had never been to. He felt himself being absorbed instead of reborn; for Tyler started taking control over his life without even questioning the situation.

Eventually, he found out that he and Tyler were the same person, where Tyler was his *double* who reflected his deep desires from within. It was at that point where he was aware of how dangerous the situation is since it was no longer about only proving something, but destroying things as a way to prove a true self.

The very start of this realization came after the shift from ‘we do not talk about Fight Club’ as the Fight Club was created, right to ‘we do not ask questions’ as madness took place with Project Mayhem. This latter was the turning point for the protagonist as he lost his friend Bob, who got shot during his mission in this project, and the fact that he, unexpectedly, had no idea about this project. It was seen as if his unconscious desires, which were represented by Tyler, were manipulating him by taking over his mind so that there was no way back.

Thus, the narrator was destined to go through a battle of life, which decided whether to earn freedom or to remain enslaved. As a start, the protagonist took the same trajectories which were taken by his double; for he was aware that he acknowledged whatever Tyler knew since they were the same person. In this regard, it was the narrator versus his unharnessed desires, i.e. Tyler. He was fully aware that no one would ever be able to give him an identity but himself, and it was his own call to make some radical choices in his life, which were irreversible.

His journey for freedom started by his realization of those facts, next to the guilt and the will within him to change the whole situation; it was the core belief of existentialism which highlighted the fact that individuals were utterly free as they took personal responsibility as a

must. It asserted that someone was still able to take over the responsibility in order for him to oversee meaning in the world.

To assure his liberation, the narrator considered killing himself, but decided not to as he must “save” Marla. Thus, his own life was saved by the desire to save the life of another, which portrayed the switch towards community and human affection instead of destruction, as a state of psychological chaos. In sum, the narrator took responsibility for his existential quest by committing the most unexpected action, which was killing himself.

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المخلص

تهدف هاته الدراسة إلى إبراز واستكشاف تأثير النزعة الاستهلاكية على الرجال البيض في المجتمع الأمريكي ، فضلاً عن استخدام العنف كرفض للرجولة السلعية في رواية تشاك بالاهنيوك (نادي القتال) (1996). وعلاوة على ذلك ، فإنها تلقي الضوء على مسألة الهوية التي يعاني منها الرجال البيض الأمريكيون ، وهي نتيجة مباشرة للثقافة الاستهلاكية المفروضة في المجتمع الأمريكي. ويدرس هذا البحث كيف تصور هذه الرواية أمة استهلاكية ، لا معنى لها في جوهرها ، وتأثيرها النفسي على الرجال البيض ودورهم في مثل هذه المجتمعات. وعلاوة على ذلك ، سوف يناقش هذا البحث الكيفية التي يمثل بها بالاهنيوك كلا من الخلاص والإرهاب من خلال العنف الذي يرتكبه هؤلاء الرجال. وبالتالي فإن هذا المسعى يحقق في مدى تأثير النزعة الاستهلاكية على المستوى النفسي للأفراد ولا سيما الرجال البيض الذين يسعون إلى الخلاص من خلال العنف. كما أنها توجه الانتباه إلى تفسير هذا العنف على أنه رفض ، كونه من غير المؤلف استخدامه من طرف الأفراد لقضية ما. وتحقيقاً لهذه الغاية ، تنقسم هذه الأطروحة إلى فصلين ، الأول يوفر سياقاً اجتماعياً تاريخياً وخلفية نظرية عن النزعة الاستهلاكية في أمريكا خلال القرن الحادي والعشرين. كما أنه يلقي الضوء على النهج النفسي والنظريات الرئيسية المستخدمة في هذه الدراسة. وعلاوة على ذلك ، فإنه يوفر خلفية نظرية عن السخرية في الكتابات الأمريكية. وهذا يتيح فهماً أفضل للقضايا التي يتناولها الفصل الثاني. وهذا الأخير بدوره يحلل تأثير الاستهلاكية على الرجل الأبيض الأمريكي في نادي مكافحة بالاهنيوك ، وكيف أصبحت الذكورة "سلعة" و هو الأمر الذي يؤدي إلى أزمة هوية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك هذا الفصل يركز على العنف وكيفية تصويره في الرواية. ونخلص إلى أن الهوية في مجتمع استهلاكي تمثل ما هو مملوك حيث أنها لا تؤثر على المجال الاقتصادي فحسب بل على نفسية سكانها. لأنهم أصبحوا "سلعة" مما يؤدي إلى ظهور الذكور ضد النزعة الاستهلاكية. وعلاوة على ذلك ، فإن نادي القتال يدور حول اعتناق العاطفة والعدم لأن جميع الأعضاء هم أناس يهربون من قلقهم من حياتهم وهو ما يفرضه المجتمع. وبالتالي يعتبر نادي الكفاح ناد علاجياً لأنه يمثل مساحة تسمح بالتعبير عن الغضب القمعي وطريقة للتعامل مع الخوف حيث الأعضاء يجازفون ويجازفون بحياتهم في احتضان ليكون عاطفياً داخل النادي و هو ما لا يمكنهم تحقيقه في الحياة الحقيقية..