

## Chapter 3

### **The Presentation of Self-identification in the Novel**

Many people in the late twentieth century live in the materialistic world where they can easily satisfy their physical needs with available materials. They have so much freedom and too many choices but little or no spiritual guidance due to their loss of religious faith. Such situation has made them confused, aimless and inert. Some people encounter identity crisis and do not know what they really want in life. A number of them, however, do not want to live this way. They attempt to search for their own identity in order to feel their true self-worth as such search can lead one toward self-fulfillment. There are various approaches to self-identification. Most people choose those that are socially acceptable rules, but a few, like the protagonist in **Fight Club**, prefer outrageous identification methods. In this chapter, the narrator's self-identification will be analyzed in three main aspects: his self-identity problems, his identification process, and how both are presented in the novel. The same issues as presented in the film will be the subject of the next chapter.

### **The Protagonist's Basic Problems**

The rather chaotic beginning of the novel is a good introduction to the protagonist's state of mind: confused, restless, and bored with his meaningless life. He is dissatisfied with his life and job. He does not know what to do to make his life meaningful. Such condition stems from three major conflicts: internal, interpersonal, and social conflicts.

## 1. Inner Conflicts

Inner conflicts are often the most critical of the three conflicts as they are directly related to one's mind. Inner conflicts can cause confusion and uncertainties. In **Fight Club**, this kind of conflicts torments the protagonist or the nameless narrator who struggles, first with a mental disorder at the very beginning of the story, and later with his disturbing dark side.

The first sign of the narrator's mental disorder is his insomnia which reduces his liveliness. Being an insomniac, the narrator does not know whether he is asleep or awake. He cannot differentiate reality from fantasy. He lacks interests in life. Insomnia is not only a symptom but also an implication of his intention to retreat into a fantasy world so that he does not have to face the unpleasant reality: a boring job and aimless life. It is in his attempt to find the solutions to his suffering--to cure his insomnia-- that brings him to support groups when he gets to know Tyler, his double.

If we diagnose the psychological symptom of the protagonist literally, we may say the narrator is a schizophrenic. Rickabaugh and Sdorow (2002 : 421) states that there are three kinds of schizophrenia: disorganized, catatonic, and paranoid schizophrenia. People who suffer the disorganized schizophrenia will perform the unusual behaviors such as “[speaking] gibberish, [dressing] outlandishly, [performing] ritualized movements, and [engaging] in obscene behavior.” Those in the second type have the problems with body movement. They might remain in the same position for a long time. The paranoid schizophrenic, suffers “hallucination, delusion, suspiciousness, and argumentativeness,” among other symptoms. Based on Rickabaugh and Sdorow's theory, the narrator can probably fall into the third category. He unconsciously creates Tyler as his imaginary friend and treats Tyler as a real person, hallucinating situations in which he disagrees with Tyler.

The narrator's creation of Tyler indicates the fighting between the consciousness and his unconsciousness. According to Sigmund Freud (quoted in

Rickabaugh and Sdorow (2002 : 421), the former is associated with the ego, the part of the mind that can adapt or change according to the environment one lives in (Appignanesi, 1979 : 157). The latter, where the instinct of wicked desires and unreasonable actions lies, is presided over by the id, which is, in turn, prohibited from acting by the superego. The relationship between the narrator and Tyler dramatizes the interplay of these three elements in human psychology.

Like most people in society, the narrator has long been doing what consciousness dictates in order to be accepted. He is, at least in the beginning, properly dressed and has conformed to social rules. The ego in the narrator's mind plays an important role in regulating his behavior so that he is a good social member.

Meanwhile, his id, which presides over the unconsciousness where the instinct lies, is prohibited from acting by the superego. Naturally, the instinct with its close link with one's feelings includes wicked desires and unreasonable actions. Like other members of the middle class who constitute the majority of the society, the protagonist has a reasonably well-paid job and lives a rather luxurious life. He is, however, contented neither with his life nor this lifestyle which are based on social values that emphasize material rather than spiritual pursuits. The narrator superficially seems happy and satisfied with his possessions, as seen in his obsession with all the splendid furniture. He feels the lack of psychological well-being, the most important key to a happy life.

The protagonist cannot be happy with those materials for too long. In spite of all kinds of expensive commodities, he suffers insomnia and becomes inactive and lifeless due to sleeplessness. He comes to realize that the materials he owns cannot give him happiness. This is the beginning of his search for his true self and what he really wants. To find his identity, he cannot keep the id repressed by the superego, for such control will block a substantial part of his self. Releasing his id helps him discover his real desires he has been hiding.

Troubled by the long control of his consciousness, the narrator wants to free his unconsciousness from social or moral constraints, and to follow his instinct's lead. At this point, it is the id's turn to emerge and run wild, doing outrageous things the narrator has never experienced before. Urged by his death instinct, he invents Fight Club where he and other members can fight against one another without previous quarrels. Their fights must continue until they bleed to death or until one of them wants to stop. At Fight Club, the narrator is able to express his male identity and masculinity, a crucial part of his self which has been lost in contemporary "civilization". With his Fight Club membership, he regains a sense of belonging, and can establish his identity.

When the extensive activities of Fight Club can no longer fulfill his self, the narrator sets up Project Mayhem, through which he and his crew hope to destroy civilization. He conducts terroristic activities. As seen, without the control of the superego, the id, which occupies a large area in human mind, can cause infinite troubles or alienate a person from society.

The narrator is an example of ordinary people with self-contradiction or a double life. His dark side, or his shadow, is represented by Tyler Durden, whose behavior is ruled by the id of the unconscious. This shadow is appropriately attributed with a night job, wild experiences, and anti-social side of life (contrary to the narrator's day job and normal life). Therefore, Tyler appears mostly in the night-time. Tyler is associated with the dark, the night, and/or mystery, and possibly, evil. As Tyler is presented throughout the story as a separate character, he will be discussed in full in the following section.

## 2. Interpersonal Conflicts

Besides conflicts with himself, the narrator also has conflicts with some other characters, especially, Tyler Durden, Marla Singer, and the narrator's boss.

## 2.1 Conflicts with Tyler Durden

The narrator has various relationships with Tyler Durden : Tyler is the narrator's friend and shadow, idol, surrogate father, lover, partner, or even enemy. He appears as the narrator's close friend who guides him to self-expression. In the novel, the narrator's friends are not particularly mentioned. He lives by himself. Before he knows Tyler, he struggles with his identity crisis and attempts to find a way out. Although he joins some support groups as his temporary sanctuaries, the insomnia returns when Marla intrudes the groups. The narrator refuses Tyler's offers of help several times, "Tyler had been around a long time before we met" (32). We can see that at first the narrator hesitates to admit his dark side.

After realizing that he cannot handle all the problems by himself, the narrator accepts Tyler's help. This occurs after his condominium has been exploded. At this point, he feels that his commodities cannot give him real happiness. He begs Tyler for help:

Oh, Tyler, please rescue me.

Deliver me from Swedish furniture.

Deliver me from clever art.

May I never be complete.

May I never be content.

May I never be perfect.

Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and complete. (46)

This implies that Tyler is always with the narrator like the shadow in his mind, but he has not let him emerge. When Tyler does emerge, the narrator's life changes immensely. He experiences so many incidents he never has before. Yet, the narrator is

not fully aware until the end of the story that Tyler is his own dark side. He does not even know that all the mischief Tyler has done is what he himself wants to do. Tyler always pushes the narrator to wild activities to express his true self. Sometimes Tyler even speaks for him. Palahniuk intentionally makes everyone even the narrator understand that Tyler is another character because this creates a dramatic surprise to reveal at the end that Tyler is the same person as the narrator.

Apart from being a friend and a shadow, Tyler is the narrator's idol, as well as surrogate father and mentor. Tyler represents his ideal. He is everything the narrator wishes to be. Totally opposite to the narrator, Tyler rebels against social constraints and dares to run wild whereas the narrator accepts them and acts as a good social member. This is why the narrator adores him. In fact, the narrator seems to regard Tyler as his surrogate father. Since the narrator has never been acquainted with his real father who should be his role model and give him good advice, he substitutes Tyler for father a man needs.

As the narrator's mentor, Tyler gives the narrator some life lessons. He encourages the narrator to rebel against social rules, to free himself from social restraints, and to learn to "hit the bottom" or to go to the extreme without fear of pain or death. He pours lye on the narrator's hand and tells him to bravely bear it :

"This is a chemical burn," Tyler said, and it will hurt more than you've ever been burned. (74)

"Come back to the pain," Tyler says. (75)

"Listen to me," Tyler says. "Open your eyes." (76)

"...In ancient history, human sacrifices were made on a hill above a river. Thousands of people. Listen to me. The sacrifices were made and bodies were burned on a pyre..." (76)

“...You can cry. You can go to the sink and run water over your hand, but you have to know you’re stupid and you will die. Look at me. Someday you will die, and until you know that, you’re useless to me. (76)

Congratulations, Tyler says. You’re a step closer to hitting bottom. (78)

He also puts the gun into the narrator’s mouth and tells him not to be afraid of death: “This isn’t really death,” Tyler says. “We’ll be legend. We won’t grow old” (11). Without Tyler, the narrator will not be able to discover what he himself really wants. Without Tyler, the narrator will never be able to find the way to express his male identity and masculinity.

Since the narrator is “very close” to Tyler, the narrator sometimes considers Tyler to be more than his friend. He seems to see Tyler as partner or even his lover. He, therefore, does not like anyone Tyler is acquainted with, probably for fear that Tyler might be taken away from him, or that Tyler’s attention might be distracted from him. This possessive relationship between the narrator and Tyler has a homosexual overtone. Traditionally, people should have such a close relationship with the opposite sex. The narrator is, however, different for he is surrounded by men and hardly interacts with women. This is why he feels safer and more comfortable with men. In this novel, men create their own territory where women are not allowed.

We can see that the narrator dislikes Marla and Mister Angel. In the former case, besides intruding into his support groups, Marla also steps into his life: she comes into his house and has sex with Tyler. The complicated relationship between the narrator, Tyler, and Marla will be discussed in the following section. As for Mister Angel, although he is a man, he has a beautiful face like a woman, and Tyler

seems to care about him. This is why the narrator becomes jealous. After seeing Tyler talking with Mister Angel, he asks himself how he can win over Tyler. Another hint at the homosexual relationship is that the narrator seems quite feminine and domesticated: he loves collecting household furniture and would rather have a peaceful life. On the contrary, Tyler enjoys running wild and doing hazardous activities.

Toward the end of the story, the narrator discovers that Tyler is in fact his enemy. He, then, tries to eliminate Tyler because the latter causes too many troubles such as exploding high buildings and threatening a provincial officer. With Tyler around him, the narrator cannot control himself but has to follow Tyler. After identifying Tyler as his dark side, he does not let Tyler direct his life anymore. If he wants to discover his true self-identity, he has to be able to separate fantasy from reality.

The complex relationship between the narrator and Tyler suggests the central role of one's subconsciousness. Here, the readers are invited to consider the truth about their own dark side. To learn more about oneself including one's own dark side is crucial, but it does not mean that one has to blindly obey what it tells him/ her to do. One has to think carefully if those activities will cause him/her difficulties. The two male characters' relationship goes further to form an enigmatic triangle affair between the narrator, Tyler, and Marla which the narrator considers fundamental to consequent problems. He says that the whole story is about them: "We have sort of a triangle thing going on here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me"(4). The meaning of this will be pursued in the next section.

## 2.2 Conflicts with Marla Singer

Marla is the only outstanding female character in **Fight Club**, and seems to have great impact on the narrator. As mentioned above, the narrator himself states that the whole story is about Marla. He has an ambivalent attitude toward her.



Mostly, he dislikes her and, therefore, their relationship is quite negative. Yet, he actually also regards her as his reflection and his surrogate mother. Basically, the narrator and Marla encounter similar problems in having an aimless life and trying to find a place to belong to. The narrator cannot bear to look at Marla as her behavior reflects his. The reflection suggests not only similarity, but also contrast.

The similarity between these two characters is that both are fakers. They both encounter the spiritual emptiness and go to the support groups to find a sanctum. Although Marla has got lumps, they are not serious ones. Compared to other members in the support groups, Marla and the narrator do not really have physical problems; their problems are spiritual. For the narrator Marla is, thus, the reflection of his lie as she knows that the narrator does not have a cancer: "To Marla I'm a fake. Since the second night I saw her, I can't sleep. Still, I was the first fake... In this one moment, Marla's lie reflects my lie, and all I can see are lies" (23). However, Marla's lifestyle differs from the narrator's. She uses the second-handed things--things that others see as precious just once and then throw away whereas the narrator lives his life on luxury. Marla is down to earth while the narrator is clearly a materialist. Moreover, although Marla faces the same problems as he does, she is able to live her life freely. Marla dares to express herself. She enters men's world, like Men Remaining Together and the testicle cancer group. She is not afraid to be the only woman in the men's club. On this point, both Marla and the narrator seem to contradict the traditional gender concept.

The narrator does not like Marla because he thinks she threatens his male identity. She is not afraid of letting others know her real name while the narrator has never told his real name to anyone. He uses many different names in the support groups. As a person, Marla is visible whereas the narrator is relatively invisible as he does not even have a name. He tries to stay away from her so that he will not feel threatened. In fact, with no experience of a close relationship with any women, he does not know how to interact with them.

Besides being the narrator's reflection, Marla is his surrogate mother. This is evidently seen in the relationship between the narrator, Tyler and Marla. An incident in the novel suggests that the narrator has the Oedipus complex: he sees Tyler has sex with Marla and is upset and jealous of Tyler. He thinks that it is his own fault not going to see Marla when she calls, otherwise, Tyler would not have gone to see her and begins this affair: "If I had only wasted a couple of minutes and gone over to watch Marla die, none of this would have happened" (60). In this situation, Tyler assumes the role of the narrator's surrogate father while Marla his surrogate mother. The son in the narrator is jealous of his surrogate father who has sex with his surrogate mother for whom he has sexual desire. When considering the relationship between Tyler and Marla, he is reminded of his carrying messages back and forth between his father and mother : "Me, I'm six years old, again, and taking messages back and forth between my estranged parents. I hated this when I was six. I hate it now"(66). Moreover, the narrator is suspicious of Tyler and Marla being the same person because they are never in the same room, "I'm starting to wonder if Tyler and Marla are the same person. Except for their humping, every night in Marla's room" (65). When either of them appears, one of them will disappear.

In fact, the narrator likes Marla at the beginning, but he does not know how to deal with women. As a result, he needs somebody to do this job for him, and he unconsciously creates Tyler to help him interact with Marla. Actually, he himself, not Tyler, wants Marla. Realizing this, he tries to save her from being killed by the members of Project Mayhem. The relationship between the narrator and Marla, however, develops and becomes better after he decides to move in with Marla.

They are together without quarrelling. "Every night, Marla and I walk in the garden until I'm sure that Tyler's not coming home that night" (132). Later, the author adds: "On Paper Street, Marla and I walk through the garden at night with our bare feet, every step brushing up the smell of sage and lemon verbena and rose geranium..." (135). The narrators show their intimacy by using pronoun 'we' without

the feeling of dislike when he says that he and Marla are in the same situation : “It looks like we’ve both been dumped” (136).

After the narrator realizes that he is Tyler, Marla is the first person he thinks of and calls to inform her. He also hurriedly returns home and tells Marla what happens to him. He even tells Marla to keep watching for him as he does not know what he will do at night:

From now on, I tell Marla, she has to follow me everywhere at night, and write down everywhere I go. Who do I see. Do I castrate anyone important. That sort of detail. (172)

At this point, it is obvious that Marla is the only person the narrator relies on. The narrator says that he wants Tyler to do things he himself cannot, and Tyler wants Marla so that he can show his power over her and assure himself of his male identity, while Marla wants the narrator because she likes him and feels that he encounters the same problems as she does.

The relationship between men and women in the novel does not seem healthy. The problem is men attempt to subdue women. It is interesting to note that this perspective portrays men with evident frustration over women’s increasing power as it happens in the present society nowadays. At the end of the story, the narrator and Marla get along well with each other. He no longer dislikes her nor fears her. An implication is that men and women have to help each other. Neither men nor women can live by themselves, and thus, should try to understand each other.

### 2.3 Conflicts with his Boss

The narrator’s boss represents social constraints as he represents rules for the employers at the workplace, a microcosm of the society. At the office, the

narrator, like other colleagues, has to obey him, if he does not want to be fired. Personally, the narrator does not have any conflicts with his boss; it is his job and the routine that he does not like. “The truth is I like my boss. Besides, I’m enlightened now” (69). What makes him dislike his boss at the beginning of the story is the way his boss behaves and looks which reminds him of the humdrum routine and life that he wants to get away. His boss’s life follows the same pattern, “My boss, with his extra-starched shirts and standing appointment for a haircut every Tuesday...”(96). The narrator can even tell what day it is by looking at his boss’s tie: “My boss is wearing his gray tie so today must be a Tuesday” (96).

Since the narrator does not have so many friends, his world involves only a few people, mainly the three characters: Tyler, Marla and his boss. Their interaction is because it emphasizes his identity crisis he confronts. His conflicts with Tyler illustrate the fight with his dark side; his conflicts with Marla raise the subject about women’s increasing power in society and its effects on men; and the conflicts with his boss reinforce the mundane life the narrator wants to escape.

### 3. Social Conflicts

Because people inevitably live within their social environment and are accordingly conditioned, society has an immense impact on people’s identity. In **Fight Club**, the author indicates that social organizations and the business system deprive us of our identity and freedom. In this novel, after a series of rebellious acts, Project Mayhem is finally invented to annihilate those organizations and business system in order to free those under their control.

As the most prevalent contemporary social values are overwhelmingly influenced by consumerism, people adore materials and they think that materials identify who they are. Aristotle (quoted in Berger, 1995) notes that “people need goods to help them establish a sense of identity”. People believe that consumption gives them

power since it shows that their taste is signaled by what they buy and eat. In fact, power in the consumer culture is the ability to afford goods. The narrator is a big consumer who acquires objects without considering their necessities. Like most people, the narrator is a victim of consumerism:

The Alle cutlery service. Stainless steel. Dishwasher safe.

The Vild hall clock made of galvanized steel, oh, I had to have that.

The Klipsk shelving unit, oh, yeah. (43)

The narrator also points out that he is not the only person trapped in this consumer culture; others also are:

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.

We all have the same Johanneshov armchair in the Strinne green stripe pattern. Mine fell fifteen stories, burning, into a fountain.

We all have the same Rislampa/Har paper lamps made from wire and environmentally friendly unbleached paper.(43) Mine are confetti.  
(54)

It is noteworthy that the narrator here simply repeats advertisement language and suggests that advertisement reinforces the power of consumerism for it induces people to buy goods. Berger (1995:54) explains this point as follows :

The institution of advertisement is of central importance in bourgeois consumer cultures, for it is advertising that makes people aware of the

various products to be had and gives products and services symbolic significance. It is advertising that creates fashion (a form of collective behavior), gives people a sense of style, and offers information about what kinds of commodities should be consumed to generate a particular image. There are now many cable television channels devoted to shopping, the most important new genre developed for television since the commercial.

Advertisement persuades people how to live, act or even eat. In a way advertisement seems to assume the role of a preacher and replaces the traditional role of religion as a spiritual guide. When men are confused of their proper social roles or identity as in **Fight Club**, advertisements often guidance and give them false identity. They tell men what kind of clothes they should wear, what the proper manner they should adopt, and how they should look. The advertisements even try to construct the identity for men. However, their influence reduces men's self-confidence because they are not sure whether their own male identity will be accepted. The advertisements brainwash them to unwittingly blend into a mindless mass culture. The result is the loss of conscious decision of an individual to be oneself.

From the above, some of the protagonist's conflicts are complex: he is more than an insomniac and asocial person. However, he does not let those crises destroy the rest of his life. He attempts several ways to get away from his conflicts. Besides the complicated identity crisis, his self-identification approaches are strange as well. His self-identification process will be analyzed in the next section.

### **The Protagonist's Self-Identification Process**

In order to search for his identity, the narrator attempts several approaches. Although he does not find an absolute answer, his self-identification

process is meaningful, for it give him an opportunity to squarely look at himself. Below is how each approach turns out.

### 1. Attending Support Groups

In his attempts to deal with his insomnia, the narrator's first solution is to attend support groups. He visits several support groups but they do not really help. Then, he temporarily recovers from insomnia when he joins the testicle cancer group, Men Remaining Together. Here, he meets Bob who relieves him from all the tension he has. This is probably because it is a support group that includes only men. He feels secure here because he is not threatened by women's power. What he sees are men who have cancer and going to die soon while he himself is healthy. He, therefore, feels confident and superior to those men. Ironically, here he meets Bob, who reminds him of his mother because Bob' big breasts, are like women's. The narrator, therefore, feels warm and relieved while he is hugging Bob.

Raised only by his mother, the narrator remembers only what his mother has done for him. Although the narrator does not have a close relationship with her, for he lives mostly by himself, he longs for the warmth from his mother. Notably, women in this novel are portrayed as providers of warmth to men and at the same time, threats to men's identity. After being embraced by Bob, the narrator recovers from insomnia. But he does not have a good time for long: his male world at Men Remaining Together is intruded by the woman named Marla Singer, and his insomniac returns. Consequently, he fails to find his identity by this method.

Support groups give the narrator a sense of belonging and being accepted. Here, everyone gives him full attention because they think he has a cancer and will die soon: "This is why I loved the support groups so much, if people thought you were dying, they gave you their full attention" (107). In the support groups, he is visible. Being in support groups, however, only gives him a collective identity but he

still cannot find his self-identity. He still does not feel self-worth. Support groups only offer the way to escape from the painful reality. All the activities: guided meditation, telling one another about their hardship, hugging and crying, aim to comfort people from their suffering but they do not really help to solve the problems. Even the names of the groups do not refer to the real disease at all ; they suggest escapes, not confrontation.

When you look for these support groups, they all have vague upbeat names. My Thursday evening group for blood parasites, it's called Free and Clear. The group I go to for brain parasites is called Above and Beyond. (18)

Support groups, where the members participate in hugging, and meditation, are only the temporary sanctuaries for the narrator: they cannot give him genuine happiness. Here is just the first step of self- identification process which does not cannot help him to achieve real freedom; it only gives a consolation. Thus, the narrator redirects his search for self-identification to other directions.

## 2. Creating an Alter-Ego

After realizing that attending the support groups cannot cure his insomnia, the narrator seeks a new and more effective solution : creating an alter ego or second self, Tyler. Like taking a life journey, to find one's identity requires experience before knowing if it is what one is looking for. Moreover, as one cannot easily get away from the social constraints, to create an alter ego is a crucial step toward freedom and to follow one's own chosen path. Since his alter ego emerges from his subconscious, Tyler is everything the narrator wishes to be but has consciously suppressed.



Tyler's behavior is very different from the narrator's. He offers the narrator wild ways to live his life out of the routine. All the things Tyler suggests to the narrator are so outrageous and exciting that the narrator feels that there is something to be discovered, and this makes his life worth living. Tyler tries to bring masculinity and male identity back to the narrator. While Tyler appears to be macho, the narrator's character and his lifestyle are very feminine. As seen in the story, Tyler loves to run wild and rebel against society. He dares to urinate in the soup he serves in a fine restaurant and threatens Raymond Kay with death in order to make him aware of his aims in life. On the contrary, the narrator prefers to stay home and collect all kinds of furniture, all generally considered feminine behaviour. Tyler tries to bring the narrator's identity back by asking him to punch him and then inventing Fight Club.

Tyler, however, is not the narrator's real solution for self-identification because the narrator realizes almost at the end of the story that Tyler causes too many troubles and he cannot bear him any longer. This is why he decides to kill Tyler. His resort to kill Tyler means it is impossible to fight against social rules. The author might want to convey this message in a sarcastic way that society and social rules have so powerful a control over humans that few people dare to rebel against them and follow their heart. Even the brave and rebellious have limitation in their fight. After the narrator creates his dark side, Tyler becomes the narrator's hero and has more and more power. One of the most outrageous activities Tyler initiates which become the highlight of this novel is inventing Fight Club, the place which leads to the other wild incidents.

### 3. Inventing Fight Club

Before eliminating Tyler, the narrator and Tyler together help establish Fight Club, the place where men get together in order to fight one another. For men, fighting represents masculinity and male identity because men traditionally consider

violence and aggression as their main characteristics. At their workplace, especially of sedentary jobs, many are bored, particularly employees who have to be under the control of their boss, working routines and rules. In such environment, men cannot fully express themselves and become alienated. They work like an insignificant part of a machine and lose their self-identity. As a result, they look for a place where they can be proud of being themselves. Fight club can serve this need, and thus Fight Club becomes men's paradise:

You aren't alive anywhere 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 a 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 trusts himself to handle anything . (51)

The narrator as well as other men is very happy to join Fight Club. Here, everyone is equal; no boss, no employee. They come with the same purpose : to fight and stop only when one wants to.

The fact that Fight Club is exclusively a men's club suggests the psychological state of men at present. They are confused about certain aspects of their roles of women's rising power. They do not have all the power they used to have over women anymore. Men feel insecure and need a place where they are able to regain the power, a place where they need not fear that women might take over. Fight Club is, thus, regarded as men's society. Since everyone here has the same aim, they feel that they are accepted and belong to certain group.

Fighting, the main activity in this club, also reveals another aspect of self-identification. Generally, people are afraid of pain and death. Their fear prevents

them from freely pursue their way. Involving in Fight Club forces the participants to “hit the bottom” or to bravely confront pain or even death. The narrator, therefore, feels more self-confident and free from anxiety after he has gone through a fight. He also learns to let go of his own possessions or even his own body parts: “Nothing static. Even the *Mona Lisa* is falling apart. Since fight club, I can wiggle half of the teeth in my jaw”(49). From this point, he can freely rebel against the social constraints. He dares to wear a bloody shirt without tie to the office. He goes to work with bruises and blood on some parts of his face:

My boss sends me home because of all the dried blood on my pants, and I am overjoyed.

The hole punched through my cheek doesn't ever heal. I'm going to work, and my punched-out eye sockets are two swollen-up black bagels around the little piss holes I have left to see through. (63)

However, going to Fight Club is like escaping from the real world into fantasy because Fight Club does not last for a whole day, but exists only for some hours: “You don't say anything because fight club operates only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends”(48). After a Fight Club session, the members have to come back to reality, to their boring job and life. They have completely two different societies and life styles: “Who guys are in fight club is not who they are in the real world. Even if you told the kid in the copy center that he had a good fight, you wouldn't be talking to the same man”(49). In a way, the club members have split personality. Yet, because Fight Club exists only for a short duration, the narrator and other members treasure Fight Club so much.

#### 4. Writing Haikus

Writing haikus is another way for the narrator to release his tension and express himself. Haiku is a kind of Japanese poem with only three lines of 17 words. For Zen, writing haiku is a way of enlightening or knowing one's self by a sudden flash of intuition. The narrator, therefore, chooses to write haiku when he feels uneasy and wants to find the way out but there is no other better way. In the story, he writes haiku six times. He writes it down in computer only once and sends it out to his colleagues. Other five haikus are composed in his mind and arise after involving in Fight Club. He creates two haikus when he wants Marla to get away from him. Another haiku emerges when he tries to ignore what Tyler has done (after creating Project Mayhem), and the last, after realizing that Tyler is his split personality. As seen above, the narrator creates haikus when he encounters troubles and wants to flee from them. However, writing haikus does not help him to find his true self. It, hence, appears to be just a short-term alternative for the narrator.

#### 5. Establishing Project Mayhem

Fight Club is not the narrator's answer when he feels that he wants to destroy "something beautiful", not only the beautiful face but all the civilization. He starts to realize that history is the crucial factor that controls people's lives. It prevents people from finding their self-identity. To be utterly free, history should be destroyed so that people do not have to follow the social memory or comply to what dead people or ancient people tell them to do. Without history, people are then able to start their own lives. They can lead their lives the way they want to. Without history to direct their lives, it is easier to find their self-identity. To effectively achieve this aim, Project Mayhem is invented to destroy civilization, the heritage of human history, for

“the goal of Project Mayhem, according to Tyler, is, the complete and right-away destruction of civilization” (125).

Civilization has been rooted in society, and has an overwhelming power over people’s life. Civilization gives people false identity, a collective and conventional identity which can be irrelevant to those in the present context. People do things according to what they have been taught without being aware of their real personal desire. Moreover, civilization includes high technology which reduces people’s awareness of their true selves. When civilization emphasizes materialism, and impersonal control of bureaucracy and machines, individuals goes on doing things more like a machine. Ironically, once the project picks up its pace, the participants seem mere automatons, following their leaders without their own conscious decision.

There are both good and bad activities in Project Mayhem. Most of the activities can be considered wicked as they are not socially accepted. Yet, what they do at night is not always bad; some are even very good, because it makes the project members think about others and do not overlook that we, humans, are all related, and should not ignore others who superficially do not seem important to us. Whether one’s position is high or low, and it is one’s task to support others:

“Remember this,” Tyler said. “The people you’re to step on, we’re everyone you depend on. We’re the people who do your laundry and cook your food and serve your dinner. We make your bed. We guard you while you’re asleep. We drive the ambulances. We direct your call. We are cooks and taxi drivers and we know everything about you. We process your insurance claims and credit card charges. We control every part of your life.” (166)

Underneath the violence and aggression in Project Mayhem lie some thoughtful philosophy and fruitful ideas for finding one’s true identity. Most activities

make people aware of their true need. In an activity, Tyler threatens Raymond Kay Hessel with the gun to force him to really think of his goal in life and make it come true. Raymond Kay Hessel, a twenty-three-year-old man, used to study in college but he now works at a convenient store. He is an example of most adolescents who lack aims in life and live with no ambition nor inspiration to pursue their goal. If Tyler does not threaten him with death, Raymond will probably never think of his true desire throughout his entire life, nor will ever think of coming back to study to fulfill his wish.

To eliminate civilization that lure people from their true selves, the narrator chooses to destroy all the beautiful things and high technology represented by ATM or high buildings in order to be free from civilization and history that dominate everyone. Eventually, however, the narrator thinks that Project Mayhem is not the real answer to find self-identification. He, thus, decides to stop the Project members from the planned destruction.

Ironically, Project Mayhem can never really destroy history. In fact, it simply sets another history. With its own rules, the Project is nothing different from the old set of social rules. Moreover, Project Mayhem members who are called “space monkeys” are also brainwashed by Tyler’s teaching. They are trained to act with no chance to ask about the Project. Neither do they have any clues what exactly the given assignments will involve.

From all the activities the narrator has done, hitting the bottom seems to be the most significant way to find one’s own self. Hitting the bottom is mentioned throughout the entire story as a key to freedom from social rules, pain, and death-- all that prevents people from finding their real identity. Bravery relates to freedom because it opens us to new possibilities and challenges in order to learn about ourself. It forces us to confront undesirable experience or awful situations that most people want to escape. After getting through them, one feels that nothing really matters anymore, and can face anything. Once we are free, we will feel alive and active. We

will have more energy and most importantly, we will be proud of ourselves and find life worth living.

As a whole, the protagonist's identity search is both for personal and collective identity. His process starts with gaining collective identity. He is accepted and belongs to the support groups where the members pay full attention to him because they think he has a cancer. Yet, collective society cannot fully give him self-identity as it still restricts his freedom. The narrator, therefore, has to look for another ways for self-expression. Creating an alter-ego is the commencement of gaining personal identity. His alter ego, or his double, introduces him to the experience of bravery and freedom which become the important tools in achieving identity. Letting his dark side emerge is a promising sign for the narrator because it encourages him to continue the search. With the emergence of his dark side, the narrator gradually perceives his personal identity because the rash activities at Fight Club give him self-worth derived from both personal and collective identities. Personal identity seems to be more crucial for the narrator than the collective one because it satisfies his need, while the other still has some limitations. Although he has learned so much from his self-identification, he still does not succeed in finding his self-identity. Since his dark side and all the mischief give him so many troubles instead of giving him happiness. However, success is not the major point that Palahniuk wants to convey. The more important message is that the narrator learns to realize his true desire and self-worth which are the essence of self-identification process.

### **Presentation Techniques**

While the presentation of **Fight Club** seems complex or even confusing, the understanding techniques are important keys what lies beneath this novel. Like many other novels, **Fight Club** cannot be comprehended at once. It needs to be read over again in order to capture details that lead to the core of the theme.

Under a close examination, Palahniuk's puzzling novel gives the readers clues to the intended message. Relevant literary elements will be analyzed here are theme, plot and structure, point of view, symbolism and allegory, as well as tone and language.

As the author deals with contemporary issues such as the chaotic world of identity crisis, uncertainty in human mind and the unpleasant cultural environment, he needs a style to highlight his theme. To do this, he chooses a complex plot, a subjective and shifting point of view, black humor, surrealism and repetition, all seemingly puzzling until they are solved at the end of the story. Palahniuk's postmodernist style produces confusion throughout the story as it first of all distracts the readers from realizing that Tyler is the narrator. Also readers might be bewildered by the lack of chronological order and the way the story is told especially the fragmented and often unspecified narrative voice. While being busy trying to catch what the narrator says and what happens one may not notice that Tyler is the narrator's split personality.

The central theme of the novel evolves around the search of self-identity. According to the novel, success in searching is less important than the realization of the need to know oneself and the process. Eventually, the narrator does not succeed in his search but he learns from it. He has an opportunity to do things that he has never done before and he gets to know himself better. The author urges the readers to look beyond the social boundary and do something new, for social restraints and values distort our sense of identity.

The subthemes of this novel include male identity and masculinity. Palahniuk also presents the unhealthy relationship between men and women which is men's frustration over women's increasing power. One of the author's implied messages at the end is that men and women should live in compromise. Neither of them can live alone. Since men and women complement each other, it is necessary for them to keep a healthy relationship.



## 1. Plot and Structure

The readers may not be able to understand **Fight Club** at once because of its complicated plot and structure. It is the author's intention to make it this way in order to reflect the narrator's state of mind which is full of confusion, hesitation and frustration as he does not know who he is, what he wants, nor what is right or wrong. **Fight Club** is not presented in chronological order. It is told in a flashback and sub-flashbacks within the main flashback. The novel opens with the narrator being threatened with a gun by Tyler on the Parker Morris Building. The following chapters are his narration of what happened before, totally told as a long flashback. But even in this main flashback, the story is not told in chronological order. Rather, it is narrated in psychological order; that is, in the sequence of whatever comes up to his mind. For example, the narrator mentions Bob and talks about him for awhile then changes to other subjects and come back again to introduce who Bob is. The following is the first account of Bob at the beginning of chapter 2:

**Bob's Big Arms** were closed around to hold me inside, and I was in the dark between Bob's new sweating tits that hang enormous, the way we think of God's as big. Going around the church basement full of men, each night we met ; this is Art, this is Paul, this is Bob; Bob's big shoulders made me think of the horizon. Bob's thick blond hair was what you get when hair cream calls itself sculpting mousse, so thick and blond and the part is so straight. (16)

Notice that after talking about Bob for a while, the narrator switches to talk about others. After this, he mentions the support groups, how he finds them. Marla, and Chloe who has brain parasites, and then return to introduce the readers who Big Bob is and how he has big breast and testicle cancer:

Then there was Bob. The first time I went to testicular cancer, Bob the big moosie, the big chseesebread moved in on top of me in Remaining Men Together and started crying...

Big Bob was a juicer, he said. All those salad days on Dianabol and then the racehorse steroid, Winstrol. His own gym, Big Bob owned a gym. He'd been married three times. he'd done product endorsements, and had I seen him on television ever? The whole how-to program about expanding your chest was practically his invention. (21)

The readers have no clue who Big Bob is because the narrator ignores clear logical narration. To be more comprehensible, the narrator should have told the readers where he meets Big Bob and introduced who he is and how he gets the testicle cancer before describing his being hugged in Big Bob's arms. As it is, the narrator says what comes up to his head. He does not care whether the way he tells it is confusing or not. In fact, it is likely that the author intends to make it seem chaotic to suggest the narrator's befuddled mind and his chaotic world. As presented, it is the readers' job to make sense out of the confusing information.

The beginning and the chapter right before the end of the story are the same. The first chapter begins at the Parker Morris Building, where Tyler is going to shoot the narrator: "So Tyler and I are on the top of the Parker Morris Building with the gun stuck in my mouth, and we hear glass breaking" (12). In chapter 29 (the chapter before the last), almost the same sentence appears again, "So Tyler and I are up on the top of the Parker Morris Building with the gun stuck in my mouth" (203). The end of **Fight Club** is inconclusive. Although the narrator "goes to heaven" at the end, it does not mean he is dead and really goes to the heaven. Heaven here seems only an implication. It is the author's intention not to tell the readers exactly what happens

to the narrator after he figures out that Tyler and himself are the same person and decides to eliminate Tyler.

Everything in heaven is white on white.

Faker.

Everything in the heaven is quiet, rubber- soled shoes.

I can sleep in heaven.

People write to me in heaven and tell me I'm remembered.

That I'm their hero. I'll get better. (206-207)

The author does not give the readers a clear answer if the narrator would rather stay in heaven or want to come back to earth and continue his self-identification process. On the one hand, this fantastic scene emphasizes the narrator's delirious state of mind. On the other hand, such inconclusive ending is one of the most popular techniques of postmodernist writing, which is to have the ending open for the reader to think further or to decide for themselves what is going on:

But I don't want to go back. Not yet.

Just because.

Because every once in a while, somebody brings me my lunch tray and my meds and he has a black eye or his forehead is swollen with stitches, and he says

"We miss you Mr. Durden."

Or somebody with a broken nose pushes a mop past me and whispers :

"Everything's going according to the plan."

Whispers :

"We're going to break up civilization so we can make

something better out of the world.”

Whispers :

“We look forward to getting you back.” (207-208)

However, it is equally likely that the author wants the readers to know where Tyler goes after his death. (The character seems more like Tyler than the narrator because he is, basically, anti-god.) The description of the encounter with God is harmoniously iconoclastic. First of all, the “God” figure is described just like a medical doctor in his clinic. In the conversation, though Tyler is in Heaven, the place where God presides, the narrator/Tyler rejects God’s words: God says that everyone is special, a unique creation of love whereas the newcomer in heaven thinks that nobody is special. While God tries to comfort or make people from the cruel world feel much better, the newcomer attaches no special meaning to his existence which he considers accidental:

I’ve met God across his long walnut desk with his diplomas hanging on the wall behind him, and God asked me, “Why?”

Why did I cause so much pain?

Didn’t I realize that each of us is a sacred, unique snowflake of special unique specialness?

Can’t I see how we’re all manifestations of love?

I look at God behind his desk, taking notes on a pad, but God’s got this all wrong.

We are not special.

We are not crap or trash, either.

We just are.

We just are, and what happens just happens.

And God says, “No, that’s not right.” (207)

However, he finally gives up the argument : “Yeah. Well. Whatever. You can’t teach God anything” (207). Whether Tyler in the last chapter is the narrator himself or his dark side, neither of them seems happy in Heaven because this character thinks heaven is fake. The implication is clear: the traditional guidance prescribed by religion is definitely not the answer for the spiritual maladies of a postmodern man.

## 2. Point of View

**Fight Club** is presented through the narrator’s point of view, an unreliable point of view, since the narrator himself confesses that he does not even know whether he is asleep or awake, “Am I sleeping? Have I slept at all? This is the insomnia” (162). As a result, the readers cannot rely on what he said. It is probably the author’s intention to present the story through the eyes of such dubious person to make it confusing. Through his post-modern treatment of the narrator, Palahniuk seems to indicate that the “civilized” and hi-tech world today is in chaos. His narrative confusion distracts the readers from noticing that Tyler is the narrator himself. What astonishes the readers the most and seems to be the highlight of the story is to realize that they have misunderstood or been deceived throughout the story that Tyler is another character, the narrator’s close friend.

Knowing the story through this unreliable nameless narrator is both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, we know the narrator much better through his perspectives. The more we know about Tyler, the more we are acquainted with the narrator because all Tyler has done emerges from the narrator’s subconscious. At the same time, we know other characters through the narrator’s points of view only. Yet, we cannot be sure if all the information we get from the narrator is accurate, for the narrator himself is not really reliable.

What happens to him or those he talks about, thus, cannot be totally trusted. For example, the narrator says that he meets Tyler for the first time at the nude beach:

How I met Tyler was I went to a nude beach. This was the very end of summer, and I was asleep. Tyler was naked and sweating, gritty with sand , his hair wet and stringy, hanging in his face”. (32)

But before this he has already told the readers once that he meets Tyler at the airport:

Every takeoff 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.

This is how I met Tyler Durden. (25)

It is clearly seen from this example that his narration is not consistent. Furthermore, one of the characters, Marla, uses the third person pronoun to talk about herself. She talks about herself in the third person when she tells the police what kind of person the girl in the room is, “The girl in 8G has no faith in herself,” Marla shouts, “and she’s worried that as she grows older, she’ll have fewer and fewer options”(61). It is another good way for the readers to receive more information about Marla. This kind of point of view is, however, appropriate for **Fight Club** because it reinforces what the narrator is like: an insomniac. He himself does not even know whether he is asleep or awake.

### 3. Characterization

As we cannot completely trust the narrator's story, we can decipher it through our observation of the delineation of the characters and their interactions, especially the main characters: Tyler , Marla, the narrator himself.

#### 3.1 The Narrator

The narrator is a thirty-years-old man who works in a car company as a campaign coordinator. He is a good example of round characters. His development is very prominent. He suffers from insomnia but attempts to solve this problem. He cannot tolerate his boring life and takes a journey to find his own identity in order to better his life and make it worthwhile. His mundane life is confusing and empty. A significant cause is his family problem: the absence of his father which deprives him of a role model. Although he looks for a surrogate father, he does not long for his real father. This is probably because he thinks his father does not have responsibility and is not good enough to be his role model. Whenever the narrator talks about his father, his tone is negative. He says his father deserted him when he was young and often had a new family in a few years. He compares his father's having new families to starting a franchise: "This is exactly how my parents were invisible to each other. Then my father went off to start another franchise" (66). He even declares that "maybe we [didn't] need a father to complete ourselves" (54). Moreover, his father cannot give him good advice when he needs it. When he graduates from college, he asks his father what he should do next, but the answer he gets does not help him at all:

My father never went to college so it was really important I go to college. After college, I called him long distance and said, now, what?

My dad didn't know.

When I got a job and turned twenty-five, long distance, I said, now what? My dad didn't know, so he said, get married.

(50-51)

Although the narrator is raised by his mother, that he does not have a close relationship with women. He scarcely mentions his mother or shows his interest in women : He even says "I'm a thirty-year-old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need"(51). To him, women seem to bring trouble. He does not know how to interact with them. That is why he does not want to be near Marla. He always feels uncomfortable, threatened and inferior to women. This is shown when he compares himself to Chloe. He says although Chloe is going to die soon, she still has her own identity. By contrast, he is invisible. Talking about Chloe, he mentions that even though she looks like a skeleton she still has her own identity while he doesn't: "Chloe looking the way she is, I am nothing. Not even nothing" (20). A similar reaction recurs when Marla appears at the support groups. He does not like her because she is his reflection. She reminds him of being a faker and liar:

To Marla I'm a fake. Since the second night I saw her, I can't sleep. Still, I was the first faker, unless, maybe all these people are faking with their lesions and their coughs and tumors, even Big Bob, the big moosie. The big cheesebread.

In this moment, Marla's lie reflects my lie, all I can see are lies. (23)



### 3.2 Tyler Durden

Tyler is nihilistic. He believes in self-destruction, rebelling and destroying civilization. He works part time jobs as a movie projectionist and a banquet waiter. He works only at night. As a rebel, he has done many vulgar activities during his work. He follows what his dark instinct dictates in order to destroy law and order which, in his opinion, have powerful over control people nowadays. As a movie projectionist, he slices some pornographic scenes into family movies. While working at a hotel as a banquet waiter, he urinates in the soup before serving it. Tyler is also an iconoclast. For him, God does not give man solutions to their problems, but prevents people from finding their true selves. Tyler believes we have to look for our own way to find our identity instead of not relying on God because God cannot help us. We must face reality, pain and even self-destruction in order to overcome our identity crisis.

In fact, Tyler is anti-god and acts like Satan. He has his own preaching and most of it is against God's way. Tyler's words pass through his men in Project Mayhem. For example, the mechanic tells the narrator about Tyler's dogma: "What you end up doing, is the possibility that God doesn't like you. Could be, God hates us. This is not the worst thing that can happen" (141). It seems Tyler tries to take God's place. He invents his own belief and kingdoms: Fight Club and Project Mayhem. Here, the members regard him as their master, idol or even their new God. Tyler often tells the members about his own belief as if to rid them of their old religious belief. He destroys their faith in God by saying that God does not really care how people live and suffer: "We are God's middle children, according to Tyler Durden, with no special place in history and no special attention" (141). Fight Club's and Project Mayhem's members listen to and believe in Tyler's words and have no doubt against Tyler's teaching.

As the narrator's split personality, Tyler is completely opposite to the narrator. All the things he has done, however, are also a part of the narrator. As tools for self-identification, Tyler advocates violence and self-destruction which are traditionally associated with men's attributes of strength and aggressiveness. This is to amuse men's strength and power in the present society where women's power increases. Like most men, Tyler and the narrator have never been in a fight before. Tyler feels that a fight can make him hit the bottom. He always talks about to "hit the bottom" which means doing something utterly wild, especially activities that lead to pain. He thinks that after undergoing pain, one will not be afraid of anything in the world, even death. Tyler does so many things in order to get over the pain, such as fighting, pouring lye on the hand, being in the car crash. As a strong man with his own dogma and leadership, he is not afraid of anything. In fact, all of these characteristics are what the narrator wishes to have. Tyler is the important person to lead the narrator to the journey of actual life, in the search of self-identity. Without Tyler, the narrator will never learn how to "hit the bottom", experience pain and eventually realize what is right for him. Although what Tyler has done is mostly mischievous, it makes the narrator recognize his being and potentials.

### 3.3 Marla Singer

Superficially, Marla seems to be just a minor character who causes troubles in the narrator's life. If we, the readers, pay close attention to her, we will see that she is a very important character who, through causing the narrator troubles, changes his life. Notably, the narrator mentions in the very first chapter that everything that happens to him is caused by Marla: "...I know all of this: the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer" (14). Despite being the only main female character, this enigmatic woman is negatively presented throughout the story which seems to be about men, their problems, and told in their perspectives. Even though

men, particularly the narrator, dislike and look down on Marla, she often involves in male situations and activities. Moreover, her appearance seems to make men especially the narrator feel uncomfortable whereas she herself is indifferent. She does not even realize that she is the only woman in men's arena. She does not really care if the narrator and other men in *Remaining Men Together* accept her presence, for instance. Men are upset and threatened by Marla who, according to the narrator's description, has nothing to be afraid of. She is just a girl who leads an aimless life. Yet, Marla does not regard herself a marginalized girl as she seems to be in the story; it is the male characters who try to marginalize her.

Marla is the representative of contemporary women with increasing ability and power, who intrudes into men's sphere and threatens men's traditional authority. Her intrusion is firstly seen when she enters into the narrator's life and makes him feel insecure. Although she is also aimless and bored, she is more confident and dares to act than the narrator does.

Marla does not have a luxurious life. She lives on taking advantages from others. She earns her living by stealing some clothes from the laundry and selling them at a second-hand store:

Never, no, never had Tyler ever paid cash for anything. For clothes, Tyler goes to gyms and hotels and claims clothing out of the lost and found.

This is better than Marla, who goes to Laundromats to steal jeans out of the dryers and sell them at twelve dollars a pair to those places that buy used jeans.(89)

Moreover, she gets food for free from Meals on Wheels that is supposed to deliver to her neighbors but they are all dead. She, therefore, gets that food instead.

Marla's intrusion into men's arena occurs again when she enters the testicle cancer group, which is, of course, only for men. Obviously, Marla disturbs the male members, especially the narrator. Even though the narrator does not have cancer, he faces the same problems with other members. He is psychologically ill and looks for the place that can make him feel warm and safe. Unlike other members, Marla does not have anything to do with the testicle cancer. She comes here just because it is another support group. Her intrusion has a significant impact on the narrator as it emphasizes his weakness he does not want to reveal while Marla is in the support group.

#### 4. Symbolism

Symbols are important keys to the understanding of the story. There are several symbols in **Fight Club**, but only those relating to self-identification will be discussed here. Those symbols are the iced cave, the penguin, space monkeys, and the Fight Club itself.

The iced cave appears in the story as a place to retreat from the painful situation the cancer patients have to face. In their support groups, there are different ways to comfort cancer patients. Guided meditation is used to heal the group members of brain parasites who are told to think about a cave. The leader does not specify the kind of cave, and the narrator chooses an iced cave where his chosen power animal, the penguin, can live as his retreat. Symbolically, the iced cave suggests a place to retreat from the painful situation the narrator is confronting. Notably, the cave is covered with ice because it signifies the narrator's coldness, his lack of feeling or passion. His passionlessness is obviously seen in the story because he has neither girlfriends nor interaction with any women, except Marla. In his iced cave, there is only his power animal which is an interesting symbol. In *Fight Club*, there are two

animal symbols, penguin and space monkeys that are outstanding and will be investigated respectively.

Naturally, the penguin lives in groups, but his power animal is the penguin that lives alone in the iced cave which is against penguins' social nature. This penguin, thus, flees from reality. It dissociates from its group just like the narrator who feels alienated and disassociates himself from society for his individual pursuit. Ironically, in the narrator's second guided meditation, Marla is in his iced cave instead of the penguin. This implies that the narrator cannot get away from his natural instinct--his desire for woman which he consciously and strongly denies. In fact, subconsciously, he likes her and wants to be with her. He does not show her his affection, but she appears in his cave, his personal secret place. Appropriately, the woman intrudes to "break the ice" that isolates the penguin (whose well-known nickname is "the gentleman in tuxedo").

Another animal symbol is what is called "space monkeys". This symbol is very appropriate as it suggests many diverse meanings. These space monkeys represent the unthinking nameless mass, not only in America but all over the world, who do things according to established tradition generation after generation without questioning or wondering whether it is right or wrong, suitable or not. In **Fight Club**, space monkeys follow the rules of Project Mayhem that are constructed by Tyler. They do not even have their name in Project Mayhem. They do not feel guilty about their mischievous conduct. They act as if they do not have their own thoughts. They do not have questions about any rules nor any audacious schemes Tyler tells them to do. People like space monkeys are everywhere. As seen in society, most people follow social rules and rarely ask themselves if they really want to do them.

However, "space monkeys" can remind us of monkeys used in space experiments. This gives a connotation of the state of being exploited creatures whose status is less than humans'. Such fate is not unknown even in civilized cultures. Also, "space" can refer to high technology while monkey refers to our relatives--of another

species. In this interpretation, space monkeys are people who live in high technology society where materials become their God. Since those materials give them a designated place in society, they hardly have any space left for exploring their inner self. They do things just because they want to belong to the society they live in. They do not dare to break the rules and follow their own desire because they are afraid of being outsiders. Being space monkeys, hence, can give them a collective identity but deprive them of personal identity which is the most important of all identities as it makes people aware of their existence and unique dignity.

Fight Club, the last symbol, is not only the place for men to beat one another; it also signifies an exclusive arena where men encounter their crisis caused by the rise of women's power and the influence of media. They have to fight against women's power in order to get their identity back and to survive in society. Here, they do not have to be afraid of the power of the opposite sex anymore. They can show their power and express their male identity and masculinity by fighting. Symbolically, Fight Club is for everyone in society: men as well as women should join in the club since everyone has to struggle to search for their own identity, to be aware of what they want, who they are, and where they belong. People have to fight very hard in order to discover or rediscover those things.

##### 5. Tone: Black Humor, Irony and Surrealism

The overall tone of **Fight Club** is distinctly satirical. To achieve this, Palahniuk brings together black humor, irony and surrealism. Black humor, one of the most eminent postmodernist characteristics will be analyzed together with irony, and surrealism.

Black humor is often employed in order to discuss an unpleasant situation in a humorous tone as if there is nothing awful. Black humor can point to striking absurdity in our way of life. An outstanding instance of black humor in this

novel is when Tyler and the mechanic go to steal fat from the medical waste dump to make soap and sell it back to those women whose fat has been sucked out:

“Fat,” the mechanic says, “liposuctioned fat sucked out of the richest thighs in America. The richest, fattest thighs in the world. Our goal is the big red bags of liposuctioned fat we’ll haul back to Paper Street and render and mix with lye and rosemary and sell back to the very people who paid to have it sucked out. At twenty bucks a bar, these are the folks who can afford it. (150)

According to Tyler, soap is related to human sacrifice since it was made of human ashes. Nowadays it becomes an important goods and some of them are expensive. Tyler, thus, wants to satirize soap culture which gain advantages from making soap out of fat. He gets fat from Marla’s mother and the medical waste dump. Fat, here, is surplus because Tyler gets it from the obese women. Tyler gets a lot of money from selling soap. At the same time, he does not have to invest for any ingredients since he gets fat, the main ingredient, for free.

Here, the author satirizes the affluent society through Tyler’s soap production. In American culture, body parts are sacred. Soap is, thus, necessary to clean the body in order to save life. On the contrary, it is absurd to use soap for beauty purpose. Palahniuk ridicules the excessive use of soap by shocking the readers through Tyler’s horrible but logical reuse of fat to indicate that wealthy society causes superabundance. Fat remainders illustrate human’s ill-fitting. The writer pokes fun at the rich and privileged who consider themselves superior to others. They believe that what they buy give them their desired prestigious self-identity. They often purchase expensive “superior” goods. In this case, the producer does not have to pay anything for soap manufacture and can make a fortune out of it. At the same time, the buyers think it is the best soap without knowing that an ingredient comes from them.

Another prominent example of ironic black humor relates to self-identification. This is when the narrator threatens Raymond Kay Hessel to go back to study:

Listen, now, you're going to die, Raymond K.K.K. Hessel, tonight.  
 You might die in one second or in one hour, you decide. So lie to me.  
 Tell me the first thing off the top of your head. Make something up.  
 I don't give a shit. I have a gun.

Fill in the blank. What does Raymond Hessel want to be when he grows up? ...A vet, you said. You want to be a vet, veterinarian... You could be in school working your ass off, Raymond Hessel, or you could be dead. You choose... Is that what you want to be, Dr. Raymond K.K.K.K. Hessel, a veterinarian?... Get out of here, and do your little life, but remember I'm watching you, Raymond Hessel, and I'd rather kill you than seeing you working a shit job for just enough money to buy cheese and watch television. (153-154)

Sometimes people do not really think about what they should do to fulfill their lives or to find their true need until someone forces them to consider it. Raymond is one of those who do not care about their real goal in life. They would rather go through day-to-day life. Ironically, he needs another to threaten him to be serious about his personal pursuit.

Irony is effective in reminding the readers to think carefully about certain important points they might overlook. According to Palahniuk, history has a great impact on people's identity. In the novel, Tyler declares that people do not have their own identity because they are conditioned by history, which, in turn, is a product of tradition, culture, social values handed down generations after generations. For most



people, history is a source of “true” accounts of human race valuable thing they should treasure. They do not realize that history sometimes gives them a false identity. Although Tyler wants to be free from history, ironically he himself talks about being legend which is a kind of records of the past, very similar to history: “This isn’t really death,” Tyler says. “We’ll be legend. We won’t grow old.” (11). While Tyler wants to get rid of history, he thinks of being legend, to be talked about after death. Another obvious example of irony is about fight club’s rules. The first and the second rules of the Fight Club are not to talk about the Fight Club’s rules. Apparently, there are more and more men coming to join Fight Club which means that everyone who comes to the club including the narrator break the first two rules of Fight Club.

Besides being humorously ironic, the novel is fantastically narrated, using surrealistic techniques. Many actions or events cannot be seriously taken as real. For example, one with a split personality cannot really separate himself into two autonomous persons. Some mischief disclosed in the story is too violent or too fantastic to really occur in reality: stealing fat from medical waste dump to make soap, slicing some pornography and inserting it in family movies, or urinating into the soup served in a banquet. Notably, black humor, irony and surrealism are all related and reinforce one another. What is considered black humor is often ironic and can be presented in surrealism.

## 6. Language Style

An author’s language style strengthens the overall meaning of a literary work. In this novel, the prominent characteristics are the use of repetition, fragmentation, free indirect speech, and intentional use of colloquialism and even vulgarism. This kind of language gives readers clues to the theme and the protagonist’s character. Repetition which appears throughout the book is a key to solve the puzzle in **Fight Club**. The two kinds of repetition in this work are repeated sentences and

repeated sentence patterns. The important clue that helps the readers to conclude that the narrator is the same person as Tyler is the repeated sentence: “I know this because Tyler knows this” (12, 26, 112 ). Although the author does not reveal this truth, he repeats the hint as to the close relationship between the narrator and Tyler. But no matter how close two persons are, they will not be able to completely read the other’s mind unless they are the same person. The readers, however, might overlook this repetition when they first read it. But when they read it the second time or pay very close attention, they will realize that this sentence is the crucial key.

A number of repeated sentence patterns are also employed. The outstanding one relating to self-identification is the prayer-like request:

Deliver me from Swedish furniture.

Deliver me from clever art.

Deliver me from being perfect and complete. (46)

This indicates the feeling of the narrator who struggles from the lack of self-identity. At this point, he is very bored and does not know what to do to make his life better. At first, he thinks all the luxurious commodities he owns will give him happiness and makes him perfect. When this does not work, he asks for help from Tyler to make him free and find the way to self-identity as if Tyler were his God. In those paralleling sentences above, the repeated word ‘deliver’ which means “to save” or “to set free” is used as in the form of an earnest prayer in which the deliverer is God and the things to be saved from are serious matters. For example, “May God deliver us from temptations.” The repetition of this pattern here is, therefore, a parody.

A similar prayer-like pattern or a request for god’s blessing is that with the modal ‘may’ at the beginning of the sentence expressing the narrator’s wishes or high hopes. Again, this sentence pattern often appears in the Bible such as

May god give you plenty of rain and good soil so that you will have plenty of grain and new wine.

May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you.

May everyone who curses you be cursed,  
and may everyone who blesses you be blessed.” (Genesis 27 : 24)

In **Fight Club**, however, a similar pattern is found when the narrator asks Tyler to help him get away from his well-being. Instead of asking for something good, the narrator asks for something bad or negative to happen in his life. Such request for “blessings” is clearly a humorous satire.

May I never be complete.

May I never be content.

May I never be perfect. (46)

However, the readers know from the irreligious prayer that the narrator is hopeless and does not pay attention to any other things besides his problems. Being a perfectionist does not give him real happiness in life. He, therefore, wonders if there are some other things that can fulfill his life.

The second prominent kind of linguistic features used in this novel is sentence fragments or incomplete and often unconnected phrases. The author’s purpose in writing this way is to make the unclear narration reflects the narrator’s mental state and character. We can see the narrator change the subject rapidly due to his lack of solid sense of self. His mind drifts from one thing to another and he says whatever comes up from his mind. As a result, most of his narration is a stream of consciousness, full of fragments. He often starts his sentences with conjunctions instead of using them to combine two sentences together. In these quotations, the underlies are added to highlight the similar patterns in focus.

I hope you make your connection.

Yeah, me too.

And this is how long your moment lasted. And life goes on.

And somehow, by accident, Tyler and I met.

It was time for a vacation. (31-32)

The second job was lye only burns when you combine it with water.

Or saliva. (74)

Then I hear one

of the doctors, lawyers, whatever, say how a hepatitis bug can live on stainless steel for six months. You have to wonder how long this bug can live on Run Custard Charlotte Russe.

Or Salmon Timbale. (85)

Everything goes to the medical waste dump, he says.

And he laughs. (85)

And I used to be such a nice person. (114)

Or if I am Tyler's dream. (138)

Until my teeth bite through the inside of my cheek. (200)

Until the hole in my cheek meets the corner of my mouth, the two run together into a ragged leer that opens from under my nose to under my my ear.

Until I'm crying . (200)

Furthermore, a single sentence or a phrase is used without primary causes, or left unfinished. This bewilders the readers because they do not know what he is talking about. The narrator assumes that the readers know everything he says or is thinking :

My doctor said, if I wanted to see real pain, I should swing by first Eucharist on a Tuesday night. See the brain parasites. See the degenerative bone diseases. The organic brain dysfunctions. See the cancer patients getting by.

So I went. (19)

Chloe looking the way she is, I'm nothing. Not even nothing. Still, Chole's shoulder pokes mine when we sit around a circle on the shag carpet. (20)

The way the narrator talks, in fact, reveals a cognitive schizophrenic symptom of which a main characteristic is "the difficulty with attention"(Rickabaugh and Sdorow, 2002 : 420). The schizophrenic of this type is said to be easily distracted by things around him/her, and "cognitive fragmentation" is "the hallmark of schizophrenia".

The use of fragmentation also illustrates fear and frustration. This is obvious in the scene that Tyler and the space monkeys threaten to castrate the commissioners. In this scene, the readers see the fact that when in fear, one cannot control his or her behavior:

Tyler nodded to the space monkey with the knife between the commissioner's legs.

Tyler asked, “Imagine the rest of your life with your bag flapping empty”.

The commissioners said, no.

And don't.

Stop.

Please.

Oh.

God.

Help.

Me.

Help.

No.

Me.

God.

Me.

Stop.

Them. (165-166)

The employment of free indirect speech is utilized throughout the story and mostly with the narrator. Notably, his direct speech has no quotation marks whereas the sentences of other characters are put under quotation marks. This suggests the narrator's invisibility resulted by his lack of self-confidence. He feels worthless and inferior to others. To suggest this, the author makes him invisible through the use of free indirect speech discourse. His invisibility is seen more clearly when the author puts the narrator's free indirect speech side by side with other characters, especially with Tyler and Marla:

“I need you to do me another favor,” Tyler says.

This is about Marla isn't it?

“Don't ever talk to her about me. Don't talk about me behind my back.

Do you promise?” Tyler says.

I promise.

Tyler says, “Now remember, that was three times that you promised.”

A layer of something thick and clear is collecting on top of the tallow in the fridge.

The tallow, I say, it's separating. (72)

Tyler said, “Surprise me.”

I said I had never hit anybody.

Tyler said, “So go crazy, man.”

I said, close your eyes.

Tyler said, “No.” (52)

Marla yells, “Tyler. Can I come in? Are you home?”

I yell, Tyler's not home.

Marla yells, “Don't be mean.”

Another remarkable trait of the language is the mix-up of tenses. In telling the story, the past simple tense is normally employed, but in **Fight Club**, the narrative is in both the past simple and the present simple. Since this story is told in a flashback, the entire story should be told in the past simple. In fact, the past and the present simple are mixed up all over the text.

I went to my first support group two years ago, after I'd gone to my doctor about my insomnia, again. (19)

Three weeks and I hadn't slept. Three weeks without sleep, and everything becomes an out-of- body experience. My doctor said, “insomnia is just the symptom of something larger. Find out what’s actually wrong. Listen to your body”. (18-19)

The mixture of the past and the present simple in the narration reinforces the narrator’s insomniac symptom. He does not know whether he is asleep or awake. He cannot differentiate reality from fantasy, or past from present. Through this technique the author can also distract the readers from realizing that the entire story is told in flashback by using both past and present tense in the narration.

Since **Fight Club** is about dark side and instinct, obscene words are seen throughout the story to indicate that the characters can act freely without letting any social rules to curb their words or actions. As a result, all kinds of taboo words are used : “...when it comes time to hug, I’ll grab the little bitch”(24), “... sitting on the sticky paper with my dick on fire with liquid nitrogen...(104), “...Don’t fuck with fight club”(190).

As a result, the author suggests that one should keep the relationship between id, ego and superego in equilibrium. In **Fight Club**, the imbalance of consciousness and unconsciousness is highlighted. The narrator’s discontent with life is first caused by excessive emergence of superego. Superego suppresses id so much that he feels uncomfortable. As a result, he lets his id run wild after a long term of suppression. Palahniuk, thus, recommends that one cannot live in this world if he/she lets his/her id run amok. To be able to live happily with a healthy sense of identity, should keep his/her id, ego and superego in balance.

In this novel, the narrator first learns to know himself through his self-identification process which is primarily letting free his dark side and acting the traditionally forbidden acts. However this is not complete; it is still in progress. Yet, he knows himself much better. He learns what is right or wrong through this process. At



the end of the story, the narrator realizes that his dark side and all the mischief he has done cannot help him to find his self-identity. Therefore, he decides to stop them, but still attempts to find other means to achieve self-identity. He needs sometime to think back about all the things he has done and what he will do next. Palahniuk wants to show that one's process of self-identification can occur at any time in life. It is a continuing process. One might search for his/her identity for his/her entire life and never find it or find it sometimes during his/her journey of life.





