

THE FIGHT FOR
SELF:

The Language of the
Unconscious in *Fight Club*.

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You are not your job.
You are not how much money you have in the bank.
You are not the car you drive.
You are not the contents of your wallet.
You are not your fucking khakis.
(Tyler Durden, *Fight Club*)¹

Introduction

Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* is a commentary on the alienation and struggle for the search for self, and the dependence on consumer products for that sense of self that would appear evident in modern western societies. The men contained within the story literally fight each other in order that they can assert their masculinity and in turn find a sense of self that has not been pre-chosen, shrink-wrapped and sold to them by a corporation.² The primary focus of the motion picture is on the neurotic narrator, who begins the film merely as an insomniac, but as the film progresses we see that his personality has been fractured by the alienation that he suffers. His lack of parental care, ineffective interaction with others, a codified and systematised lifestyle, and his un-stimulating job have left him wishing for his business trips to end with a plane crash, to in turn end his miserable existence. The film's narrator is not a whole person; he is merely the representation of a person's ego that, for the duration of the film, lets go of the reigns of control attached to his id. The narrator projects this id externally in the shape of the character Tyler Durden. Accordingly, Tyler leads both of them on a journey that is an exploration of his (the narrator's) desires and of destruction. Tyler's journey involves letting "that which does not matter, truly slide."³ The film climaxes with the narrator made stronger by the power that he has drawn from the id and in command of his destructive id. In the process of this essay I intend to explore certain notions of identity and self by using the psychoanalytical concepts such as the ego, super-ego and the id; because they are primary in the formation self/identity. Drawing on the works of Sigmund Freud and to an extent Jacques Lacan as

¹ David Fincher, *Fight Club*, (motion picture, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2000.)

² Women are almost totally absent from the story and with one exception play no part in the evolution of the plot.

³ Fincher.

cornerstone reference points this essay will link up with other writers along the way, some with obvious links (E. T. A. Hoffmann, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) and some with more obscure connections (A. A. Milne).⁴ Also, as identity does not form in a vacuum and is created through social pressures it has also been important to broaden the analysis further and talk about the forces that have an impact on identity formation. Still, this will be done within the framework of psychoanalytic theory. In the name of interdisciplinary and to illustrate many of the points made, references will be made to Chuck Palahniuk's darkly comic novel *Fight Club* and more often the excellent cinematic rendering of it directed by David Fincher.⁵

What is Fight Club?

As *Fight Club* is being used as an illustration it might be helpful to briefly offer some plot details. The narrator is an unnamed insurance adjuster with insomnia who discovers that releasing his emotion at self-help groups for the terminally ill is the only thing that allows him to sleep. Thus, he becomes addicted to the comfort that they provide. On one of his business trips he meets a man named Tyler Durden and is intrigued by his interesting worldview. When he returns from this trip he learns that his apartment and all his belongings have been blown up; as he has no friends or family he decides to call Tyler. After sharing three pitchers of beer together, Tyler offers the use of his house; however, he has one unusual request. Tyler says, "I want you to hit me as hard as you can."⁶ Together, with a group of other men they meet up in the evenings to fight each other, their Fight Club is born. Fight Club, as with all clubs has very strict rules that the members must adhere to:

1. You do not talk about 'Fight Club'.
2. You do not talk about 'Fight Club'.

⁴ Hoffmann's short story "The Sandman" is the illustration of Freud's essay "The Uncanny" in Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, London: Penguin, 1985. Goethe is quoted many times in various works.

⁵ Fincher.

⁶ Palahniuk, p. 46.

3. When someone yells "Stop" or goes limp, or taps out, the fight is over.
4. Only two guys to a fight.
5. One fight at a time.
6. No shirts, no shoes.
7. Fights go on as long as they have to.
8. If this is your first night at 'Fight Club', you have to fight.⁷

After a while Tyler goes missing and, while searching for him, the narrator discovers Fight Clubs in all of the major cities that he visits, in the process he also discovers that he and Tyler Durden are in fact the same person.

The connection that we shall draw between psychoanalytic theory and the film *Fight Club* is simple and is this; the narrator is a representation of the ego, for Tyler Durden we can substitute the id.

The Narrator/The Ego

In the Freudian psychic model the ego is the civilised part of consciousness. The ego is that part of the psychic apparatus that is modified so that a being can interact safely with other beings and thus remain accepted within the social group. It is important for identity formation that the individual is accepted by the group (that is wider society) therefore, a controlled id is of paramount importance, as we will see later. For Freud the ego/id relationship is "...like a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider tries to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces."⁸ For him the ego was central to his model. In contrast Lacan argues that the ego is not at all central but is in fact an object (that is to say it is distinct) formed in what he refers to as "the Mirror Stage."⁹ In this stage of development the pre-autonomous child becomes alienated when she discovers her

⁷ Fincher.

⁸ Taken from Freud's "The Ego and The Id" found in Sigmund Freud, (Ed. Peter Gay), *The Freud Reader*, (London: Vintage, 1995.), p. 636 In his original writings Freud used *Ich*, which his English translators termed ego. The subtle differences in translation become more apparent in the works of Lacan. In French, *Ich* could also be substituted for *Je* or *Moi*. Both of which have different connotations. The implications of misunderstanding the meaning of terms is quite far reaching, particularly when you have a language-based theory such as Lacan.

⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, (Trans. Alan Sheridan), (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977.), pp. 1-7

reflection in the mirror. For the first time the child sees herself as an exterior being amongst beings. As well as being the experiential being that sees the reflection and processes the information she also sees herself as others do, and more importantly identifies with this image. Both me and not-me at the same time. The resulting fracture leads to the manufacture and donning of "...the armour of an alienating identity which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development."¹⁰ Thus for Lacan the ego is the seat of the subject's alienation. This differs from Freud in the sense that Freud believed it necessary to strengthen the ego through the medium of psychoanalytic treatment.¹¹ As the ego is the source of the subject's alienation however, Lacan would argue that this would be counter-productive.

The narrator of *Fight Club*, due to his sleep deprivation, is barely aware of his surroundings and is ultimately alienated. He is never really awake but never quite asleep. He has no concept of self to the point that he uses consumer goods to define him as a person and his relationship with other people. To him he is the Swedish furniture that he owns, he relates to his objects on a pseudo-sexual level and associates them with pornography. As he explains in an early sequence, "I would flip through catalogues and wonder, 'What kind of dining set defines me as a person?'...We used to read pornography, now it was the Horchow Collection."¹² He is alienated from the neurotic society that spawned him. His identity is lost within the mêlée of consumerism that he observes, but nonetheless adds to. In his peculiar sleep state he is aware of the situation that he is in. He sees that it is not just him that is half dreaming in this society.¹³ Along with him, he observes that many others have also "...become slaves to the IKEA nesting instinct."¹⁴

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹¹ J. N. Isbister, *Freud: An Introduction to his Life and Work*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985). p. 174.

¹² Fincher.

¹³ And perhaps in the process also dreaming the society.

¹⁴ Fincher.

When he makes the above observations it is perhaps the earliest stages of the narrator's id coming to power. Clearly, the narrator has managed to get himself a good job though living a controlled existence. Therefore he displays that, until now, his ego was functioning well enough. It is only as he suffers sleep deprivation that his dream/id can start making such remarks. The narrator as ego is the perfect cubicle working civilised being. His id is contained, his desires are self-policed and restricted to what is offered and is acceptable to the greater society, namely, consumer goods. However, because he suffers physical symptoms that have an impact on his mental welfare (insomnia), the power of his ego becomes limited. So, the powerful horse that is the id slips its reins and leads the ego where it (id) wishes to go.

The narrator's projection of his repressed desires outward is reminiscent of what R. D. Laing refers to as *elusion*. This is there where the subject imagines themselves away from their original self and then that imagined self imagines the original self. It seems a crazy convoluted, however, think of it thus - the narrator is an illusion (for we do not know his real identity), this illusion then imagines his id as an external entity (Tyler), this entity then interacts with the original illusion; thus, reinforcing the illusion that the narrator *is*. Laing sees no natural conclusion to this cycle of pretence. "I am. I pretend I am not. I pretend I am. I pretend I am not pretending to be pretending..." and so on.¹⁵ The suggestion here is that there is another party, whom we are not introduced to. This party is the physical being that contains the ego and id, which play out the story. The evidence for this in the film is the narrator constantly referring to himself, to begin with, as a part of a third party's anatomy and latterly that person's emotional state. For example "I am Jack's cold sweat, I am Jack's broken heart, I am Jack's complete lack of surprise" and so forth. The narrator (or whoever the narrator is) is using pretence as a defence mechanism. He feels insecure, perhaps as a result of paternal deprivation, thus he lives vicariously through an imaginary

¹⁵ R. D. Laing, *Self and Others* (2nd Edition), (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961.) p. 30.

friend. He can do bad things without fear of reproach. Anna Freud discusses these ideas in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence* she cites as an example a poem by A. A. Milne “Nursery Chairs”.¹⁶ In this poem Milne depicts a small boy that uses chairs in play. On the first chair he *is* an explorer, on the second he *is* a lion, and on the third he *is* the captain of ship. However, the fourth chair is a different story

Whenever I sit in a high chair
For breakfast or dinner or tea,
I *try to pretend* that it's my chair,
And that I'm a baby of three.¹⁷

What this illustrates is the ease in which we can become something else in order to enliven our existence and the difficulty that can be had attempting to be one's self. The child in the poem can escape into wonderful worlds with the aid of a simple chair it when it comes to living in the real world no amount of imagining can help. Similarly, the narrator of *Fight Club* uses the tools of Fight Club and Tyler Durden to enact a life that has danger and excitement because no amount of imagining will allow him any stimulation out of the “versatile solutions to modern living” with which he filled his life.¹⁸

Who is Tyler Durden?

As we have seen in the discussion of the ego, the id is likened to a natural force. In fact in Freud tells us “...we must recognise the id as [a] great reservoir of libido.”¹⁹ Both Lacan and Freud agree on its power and they both believe that this is the job of the ego to bridle that power. Without the id the ego would have nothing, it effectively draws its strength like electricity from the national grid. The way that Lacan and Freud differ in their explanation of the id is that Lacan shies away any biological definition and conceives of the id in linguistic terms. Rather than the living being in Freud's horse analogy we are left with

¹⁶ Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defence*, (Trans. Cecil Baines), (London:Hogarth Press, 1966.) p. 89

¹⁷ (My emphasis) A. A. Milne, *The World of Christopher Robin*, (London: Methuen Children's Books, 1959.) p. 35 (See appendices for the wonderful illustrations of this poem by E. H. Shepard. Note the grandness of the drawing of the explorer compared to the simplicity of the child of three.)

¹⁸ Fincher.

¹⁹ Freud, (1995), p. 639.

more of an abstract conception. Man is not lived through the id as Freud might argue but is instead “spoken” by the id.²⁰ Despite this difference of interpretation the similarity in terms of power is clear. In fact Lacan’s definition seems to have more potency despite its complexity. If the id is expressed in terms of the power of speech (not the speech itself, but the power contained within the interpretation of the speaking) then we can easily draw connections with the passionate id of Freud. Expressions such as poetry and other literature can ooze such strength, whereas the words that carry the meanings are often no more than an empty vessel. It is the meanings that are all important.

In this way, much of Tyler Durden’s power comes from the way he is expressed. He utters numerous slogans, such as the example at the very beginning of this essay. Often though, his words have a different carrier. On many occasions the narrator does the speaking.²¹ This does not go unnoticed by him, even before he discovers that he and Tyler are the same person. At numerous junctures we hear the narrator almost lament, “[t]hese are Tyler’s words coming out of my mouth.”²² However, it is much more subtle than that, it is not simply Tyler’s words coming out of the narrator’s mouth. As we by now know, Tyler does not exist; except in the mind of whoever the narrator actually is.²³ He is the fragment of a neurotic’s disjointed psyche. As Tyler is just an imagination of a fragment of a split personality it is in fact Tyler himself coming out of the narrator’s mouth. The narrator “speaks” Tyler Durden, or rather the Tyler/id induces the speech within the narrator. Tyler here is clearly expressed in terms of Lacan’s language/id.

Tyler focuses on trying to get the narrator to rid himself of his controlling ego traits. In effect he wants the narrator to do away with himself. At one point Tyler screams at him “[h]itting bottom is not a weekend retreat. It is not a goddamned seminar. Stop

²⁰ Evans, p.80

²¹ This is, of course, the job of a narrator.

²² Palahniuk, p.155

²³ For indeed we do not know who he is either as he uses many different names in the film.

trying to control everything and just let go!”²⁴ The narrator says that he will and Tyler lets go of the wheel of the car they are both in and allows it to crash. Here we see a hint that the narrator and Tyler are the same person. Before the crash Tyler was driving and yet we see Tyler getting out of the passenger side to help the narrator out from behind the wheel. In another scene Tyler wants the narrator to give in to his pain and his inevitable death. To this end, Tyler burns the narrator’s hand with lye. The narrator attempts to control this intense pain by using a meditation technique that he learned at one of his self-help groups. Tyler, as he is inside the narrator’s head, knows exactly what he is doing and stops him. He slaps him around the face crying, “No! Don’t deal with it like those dead people do. This is your pain...your burning hand...this is the greatest moment of your life and you are off somewhere else.”²⁵ Tyler forces to confront and accept the fact that he is just decaying matter that will eventually die. He refuses to neutralise the burn until the narrator gives up until he knows and not fears “...that some day [he is] gonna to die.”²⁶ By accepting his inevitable death the narrator will be able to experience his life. Until that point he will continue to be involved in the IKEA nesting instinct. This focus on the death instinct is stated again and again. Perhaps the clearest example is as follows. At a convenience store, Tyler places a gun at the assistant’s head and forces him to tell him his unrealised dreams. He takes Raymond K. Hessel’s driving licence and tells him that if he were not on the way to realising his dreams within six weeks then he would find him and kill him. As Raymond runs off Tyler explains to a dismayed narrator “[t]omorrow will be the most beautiful day of Raymond K. Hessel’s life. His breakfast will taste better than any meal you and I have ever tasted.”²⁷ This is because it will be the first day of Raymond newly focussed life; it will be a life focussed on his dreams. This moment also captures a certain Nietzsche quality to Tyler Durden also. He rejects the invented values and moral system of the society he

²⁴ Fincher.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Distant Minds, Fight Club Quotes, <http://jacksurl.distantminds.com/> (15/05/02)

lives in, as he believes that it is built on a fallacious assumption. Here he convinces Raymond that it is the moments of your life that are precious. To be sure, one of the earliest instances of the narrator speaking Tyler's words is when he states "This is your life and it is ending one minute at a time."²⁸

Tyler originally presents himself after the narrator's period of sleep deprivation. Freud sees dreams as the context where repressed desire is let loose, where the restrictions of a repressive society cease to exert their limiting power. In this place, what would be impossible for the real self, the dreaming self would have no difficulty with.²⁹ The narrator is unable to release any libidinal desires through dreams as his neurotic insomnia has disallowed any natural sleep. Thus, he expressed these desires instead as Tyler Durden. Tyler is the full expression of the narrator's id; he embodies everything that the narrator unconsciously wishes for, literally while the narrator is unconscious. Tyler only exists for as long as Tyler realises him as subjective other. In Freud's essay on the uncanny he discusses another embodiment of psychic attachment E. T. A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*.³⁰ In this story the young man Nathanael projects his fears in a similar way. Nathanael identifies the advocate Coppélius as the Sandman of his nurse's tales and there is an horrific scene in which Coppélius threatens to remove his eyes where we are left in some doubt as to the reality of the situation. After this the boy is ill for a great deal of time, but retains this image of Coppélius until young adulthood. He tries to convince his betrothed, Clara, of the reality of the evil contained within Coppélius. Her response is quite clear, she agrees that he does have considerable power "...but only if you fail to dismiss him from your mind. As long as you believe in him, he is real and active; his power consists only in your belief."³¹ This

²⁸ Fincher. Nietzsche is mentioned at this point to highlight that a connection has been made between the text and his works. A further essay might focus solely on Tyler Durden in terms of Nietzsche as much of his philosophy can be found contained in both the book and the film. In retrospect this might have been a more interesting topic to approach.

²⁹ Freud, (1995), pp. 142-72

³⁰ E. T. A. Hoffmann, *The Golden Pot and Other Tales* (Trans. & Ed. Ritchie Robertson), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.101. Coincidentally perhaps, Nathanael also returns from this visit to discover that his house has been burned down.

realisation is also contained in *Fight Club*. In the final moments of the film the narrator shoots himself in the face in a symbolic “killing” of Tyler. In this moment the narrator gives in to his super-ego or ego ideal. He states that he no longer wants what Tyler wants and just before he pulls the trigger states, “...my eyes are open”.³² He has been pulled out of the quasi-dream state that filled his life with the illusion of the personification of his innermost desires, and reborn as a new person.

The idea of rebirth through destruction is a constant theme within the movie. As we see above it is only by the destruction of his alter ego that the narrator can continue his new life. We are also reminded of the scene including Raymond K. Hessel and wonder how the events that have unfolded in the film will affect the narrator’s life now he has conquered his marauding id. We are led to expect that through the death of Tyler a new more whole narrator has been born. Indeed, I would like to suggest that at this point in the film we are at last introduced to the individual that the ego and id belong to. The struggle between the life and death instincts litter Freud’s writing. The death instinct, which Tyler is arousing, is linked to the ego through the id. In *Civilization and its Discontents* Freud states that

[t]he instinct of destruction, moderated and tamed, and, as it were, inhibited in its aim, must, when it is directed towards objects, provide the ego with satisfaction of its vital needs and with control over nature.³³

Here in this short selection we see the relationship between the wild and hard-to-tame id, which if left unchecked would spiral into a destructive pattern, and the ego. Also, this text links the id to the death instinct, and accordingly their relationship to civilisation, discussed later.

³² Fincher.

³³ Freud, (1975), p. 58

Freud illustrates the id's appetite for destruction with a short section of Goethe's *Faust*.³⁴ It is interesting to note, furthermore, that Mephistopheles in *Faust*, although clearly the devil is also a representation of the id. Indeed, perhaps this is the function of the devil; he reconciles the hard to control parts of our "nature". If we compare

I am the spirit of perpetual negation;
And rightly so, for all things that exist
Deserve to perish, and would not be missed³⁵

With Tyler...

In the world I see...you're stalking elk through the damp
canyon forests around the ruins of Rockefeller Center You will
climb the wrist-thick kudzu vines that wrap the Sears Tower. You
will see tiny figures pounding corn and laying-strips of venison on
the empty car pool lane of the ruins of a superhighway.³⁶

Mankind's achievements are to be negated in Tyler's vision of the future. He calls into question whether they are in fact achievements at all. These remarks also echo those made by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*. While he, on the one hand discusses how useful it is for him to be able to contact far away relatives using the telephone he balances this remark by saying that if there had been no railway in the first place then his relatives would not have been able to move so far away, therefore he would have no need for this form of communication.

The Super-ego

We must now ask ourselves in this analysis "what place does the super-ego have?" If in reality we can use both the narrator and Tyler to illustrate certain parts of this psychic model, then where does the ego ideal fit in to the equation? On first glance this contributor considered that the super-ego was also the narrator. On the occasions when these two fought there seemed to be the assertion of power that I was looking for. I was particularly drawn to this conclusion after the final scene and the "death" of Tyler. However, this

³⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, (Trans. David Luke), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.42.

³⁶ Distant Minds.

analysis did not hold water for me. If the ego and the id were real tangible objects they might conflict with each other in this fashion in order to gain dominance anyway. The solution that I was looking for was in fact more obvious and is evident in Freud's own writings. Civilization is the aspect that controls the controlling ego. Without civilization there would be no need for the ego. Indeed, Freud is quite explicit about this in *Civilization and its Discontents*. "There it is taken over by a portion of the ego, which sets itself over against the rest of the ego as super-ego...in the form of conscience."³⁷ Conscience and guilt and the need for punishment are products that are refined in a civilised society. Freud continues, "[c]ivilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual's dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it..."³⁸ In order that civilization can be maintained it must first be internalised by the individual. Therefore, the super-ego is the internalised versions of structures put in place by society.³⁹ This is perhaps most evident in the fact that it is "civilisation" that seems to get the full brunt of Tyler's ire. He disagrees that the society we exist in is a positive progression he considers it to be a civilization that dis-empowers and emasculates. He declares

Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes. Working jobs we hate so that we can buy shit we don't need...[w]e've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars. But we won't. We're slowly learning that fact. And we're very, very pissed off.⁴⁰

Again, we hear Freud resonating through Tyler's rhetoric. In *Civilization and its Discontents* he declares that there is a trade-off happening in the development of civilization. Mankind sacrifices certain aspects of his freedom in exchange for an assured amount of security. However, it is this aspect of human nature (the freedom) that Tyler argues that we need. The implication is that we have been ripped off in this particular deal. For him

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 60

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁹ Although "society" is something that first has to be put in place by the individual. There can be no society without the individual and *vice versa*.

⁴⁰ Fincher.

civilization has made us soft and wasteful. Civilization makes us desire things that we could otherwise do without that then become necessary to our existence. At one point he asks the narrator if he knew what a duvet was, to which the narrator responded “a comforter.”⁴¹ Tyler retaliates “...it is just a blanket. Why do guys like you and I know what a duvet it? Is it essential to our survival in the hunter-gatherer sense of the word?”⁴² They both conclude that the society has turned them into merely consumers. A point that was made by the narrator earlier in the film and earlier in this analysis. It is this consumer society that Tyler is rebelling against, and it is the civilizing process that contains it that Freud designates as creator of the super-ego. Thus it is these civilisation and consumer society that represent the super-ego within the context of the movie.

As asserted earlier, the super-ego is where the individual’s guilt originates; this sense of guilt also originates from authority figures. Or rather, it would seem that the sense of guilt originates from the authority figure or disembodied authority and it then is internalised to form the section of the psyche called the super-ego. Fear of conscience, which is effectively fear of punishment from a stronger other, is what forces us to self-monitor our behaviour. Once this instinctual behaviour is monitored it is easier for human beings to form communities. The formation of such communities can only be achieved through “...an ever-increasing reinforcement of the sense of guilt.”⁴³ Consequently, Freud concludes that the advances in civilisation result in a loss of happiness and he continues to diagnose civilisation as being neurotic in the same way that an individual might be as a result of the forces of culture. Tyler Durden is a reaction against this sense of guilt. He rejects the civilising process of looking for completion. For him, perfection is failure and leads to predictability. His mantra is that the human race should stop trying to control its path and evolve, and “...let the chips fall where they may” because fundamentally, “...the

⁴¹ Fincher

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Freud (1975), p. 70.

things you own end up owning you.”⁴⁴ The “things that you own” are the by-products of the ever-present, over-protective, super-ego of society and Tyler’s fight against these by-products are a symptomatic of the neurotic behaviour that Freud discusses.

Conclusion

This essay has drawn connections between a psychoanalytic framework and a piece of modern American cinema. The purpose of this has been twofold: to illustrate the works of the chosen authors and, although this was never explicit in the outset, to effect a commentary on modern society. First of all, the film provides clear examples of Freudian psychoanalytic theory in terms of the ego and the id. This has been shown in expressions of the narrator/ego and Tyler/id illustrations. These illustrations work well enough in themselves however, what arises from this is a further analysis of the society that spawned such a neurotic identity that may feel the need to project such an imaginary friend in order that he can feel assured that his feelings and thoughts are not invalid. Most “properly” socialised people repress such desires as required by the process of civilisations that Freud describes in *Civilization and its Discontents*. It is because of this that societies can form and a sense of community exists. In *Fight Club*, we also get a clear feeling of a puritan conviction: the only way to cleanse yourself is to renounce the world of commodities and begin anew in a world free from moral and aesthetics decadence. Tyler’s vision seems to be one of the best answers to the numbing effect of the commodified reality of late capitalism and the commodity aesthetic but it is in actuality too extreme.

Through its ego/id/super-go relationship *Fight Club* in both its book and film versions both explore a certain malaise that society is feeling, if not expressing totally. The tale reveals itself not only as an exploration of the human psyche but also it reveals the type of society that creates the kind of individual that possesses such an out of shape reality.

Here is the film’s real power. It exposes the consumer society and blames it for the

⁴⁴ Fincher.

neurosis that the narrator feels. After, the ego regains control the new amalgamation of narrator and Tyler watch as the buildings of all of the financial institutions are blown up by the other men of Fight Club. This amalgamation will be part of a world that can rebuild from scratch, this time with a new morality. A morality that is more community led. Though, not without rules of its own as the rules of Fight Club, mentioned earlier, prove. Unfortunately, the film's solution, which is to simply get rid of all vestiges of consumerism and start again, is not as powerful as the way in which the book resolves the issue. For, in the book, the unfortunate narrator is incarcerated in a lunatic asylum because in reality it is important not to have such dangerous individuals running around undermining society. Unlike the film, there is no assertion of super-ego; the ego does not take control. The narrator shoots himself in the face to rid himself, and the world, of Tyler Durden and then copes with his new surroundings using the only method he knows how. He imagines that he has died and that the madhouse, that he now finds himself in, is heaven. Perhaps, now that he has purged himself of his troublesome and wild id his ego has no reservoir of strength to draw on and thus lacks the strength to cope with reality.

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- Rycroft, Charles, A Critical Dictionary of Psychoanalysis, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Illustrations⁴⁵



Figure 1 – The Explorer by E. H. Shepard

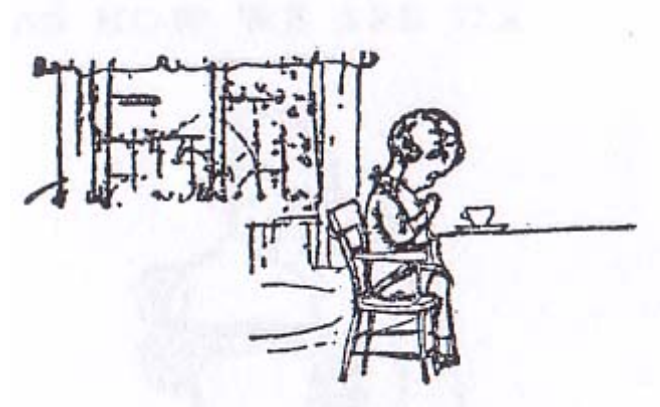


Figure 2 – Baby of Three by E. H. Shepard

⁴⁵ Taken from A. A. Milne The World of Christopher Robin, London: Methuen Children's Books, 1959. pp. 32-5