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## Prometheus Unhinged—Madness, Myth, Terrorism, and Outcast Identity in *Fight Club*

**Abstract:** Identity, in all its simplicity and complexity, can be defined as a continuum of the ego or the sum of the representations of the self. However, when the different parts in the sum wage war to one another in a split personality that stems from the unbearable weariness of the Byung-Chul Han's achievement-subject, how can one's identity be defined and realized? This article answers this question by using Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* and its protagonist, and to this end, a post-structural, psychoanalytical analysis is provided which explains how *Fight Club* can act as a revisitation of the Promethean myth in a comparison with Kafka's *Tired Prometheus*, and how Byung-Chul Han's *Burnout Society* and Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism* can help explain the context of the mythical struggle between the neglected subject and its creator, and why it occurs thus in a post-industrial society.

**Keywords:** Myth of Prometheus, *Fight Club*, process of individuation, outcast, identity, madness

*THERE ARE four legends concerning Prometheus:  
[...] According to the fourth everyone grew weary of the meaningless affair.  
The gods grew weary, the eagles grew weary, the wound closed wearily.  
(Kafka)*

### Introduction

"[T]he contemporary achievement-subject inflicting violence on, and waging war with, itself. [...] Prometheus, the subject of self-exploitation, has been seized by overwhelming fatigue." With these sentences, Byung-Chul Han (35) draws a comparison between the classical myth of Prometheus, and the modern citizen in postindustrial societies who, past the stage of being an obedience-subject and into the stage of achievement-subject now, bounds himself to work and productivity by means of the values taught by society: motivation, consumerism, initiative, and a quest for perfection. The Narrator in Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* (1996) is first presented as a person dealing with extreme fatigue and a near pathological obsession with creating a perfect life through consumerism and the adherence to social expectations. His inability to stand out, to clearly understand who he is or what he wants, or his lack of a name clearly point to an unfulfilled quest for identity and psychosexual development process.

This essay provides an analysis of *Fight Club* and its protagonist through a poststructuralist approach. The first part of the essay examines the issue of the achievement-subject as the Own and the immunological-subject as the Other through Byung-Chul Han's theories in *The Burnout Society* (2015), the relationship between virality, terrorism, and duality in modern society through Jean Baudrillard's *The Spirit of Terrorism* (2013), and how both approaches are linked to identity in *Fight Club*. After this, a comparison is drawn to link the promethean myth to the Narrator in *Fight Club* through philosophy and myth criticism. The second part of the essay analyses the Narrator's quest for identity and his attempts to undergo a process of psychological individuation. To this end, Jacques Lacan's theory of psychosexual development and Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection are used.

### Madness, Terrorism, Duality and Myth

In his seminal work *The Burnout Society*, Byung-Chul Han first presented his idea of the *burnout*, an undefined feeling of fatigue in response to what he termed the achievement society. According to him, having moved from Foucault's disciplinary society (1977) on to a society that conditioned individuals through "projects, initiatives and motivation" (Han 9) had also changed the paradigm and modal verb that governed society from *May Not* to *Can*. More specifically, Byung-Chul argues that the problem mostly resides in how *Unlimited Can* was the positive modal verb of achievement society and that the affirmation "'Yes, we can'—epitomizes achievement society's positive orientation" (8). The old paradigm had controlled subjects through constant vigilance and laws. The new one coaxed subjects into labor in hopes of fulfilling societally imposed *false needs* (Horkheimer and Adorno 20-21). Such false needs and excess of positivity—represented by the modal *Can* in opposition to the former *May Not*—lead to an ennui that has traditionally been linked to postindustrial societies. For Ehrenberg, depression appears in response to the necessity to govern and become oneself. Once freed from the tenets of disciplinary society, the new subject is made to believe they work for themselves, and they belong to themselves alone. He claims, "The depressed individual is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself" (Ehrenberg 4) and this inability to fulfill the new *Unlimited Can* is what makes subjects depressed. This phenomenon has neither been addressed by philosophers alone nor is it something new; it is deeply related to Maslow's self-actualization, and it was framed by Carl Rogers as "the curative force in psychotherapy—man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities [...] to express and activate all the capacities of the organism" (4). According to Han, it is the inability to fulfill the unlimited ability that society has convinced us of having that leads to that madness: "The complaint of the depressive individual, 'Nothing is possible,' can only occur in a society that thinks, 'Nothing is impossible.' No-longer-being-able-to-be-able leads to destructive self-reproach and auto-aggression" (11). Paradoxically, the societally wrought illusion of unlimited power leads the individual to becoming more conscious of their own limitations than ever before.

It is that desperate struggle to *have* and to *become* that provokes, in turn, this depression. It must be noted, however, that when Ehrenberg speaks of depression, he is not speaking about Major Depressive Disorder, but about a struggle to fulfill or self-actualize on several levels, namely agency, potentiality, and identity. The depressed individual, first of all believes through experience that "nothing is possible," as mentioned above, but they are also made to believe that "everything is possible" (Ehrenberg 11). This inability to fulfill their perceived potentialities triggers a split in their identity, in turn; it results in "identity insecurity and [...] the inability to act," which in turn creates a new, more capable identity that can deal with the *Unlimited Can*: "the individual emerges from this unknown person she cannot control, this irreducible part that Westerners call the unconscious" (228). Likewise, this split identity is one of the defining features of the depressed achievement-subject for Han. Stemming from a "decline of conflict as a reference point," depression can be explained through the lack of conflict in the achievement society. Now, "the totality of capital, which seems to be absorbing everything, represents consensual violence" (46-47) and also the violence that is redirected inwards: in a paradigm of *compulsive freedom*, auto-exploitation becomes the norm, and "[t]he exploiter is simultaneously the exploited" (11). This duality of the identity is explained by how, in achievement societies, the superego is positivized into the ideal-ego, and this makes the achievement-subject project themselves onto the ideal-ego in turn (46). This projection pushes the achievement-subject down to lower levels of self-esteem and to crave resemblance to their ideal-ego even more pressingly: "In view of the ego ideal, the real ego appears as a loser buried in self-reproach. The ego wages war with itself," explains Han, who then concludes with the idea that the "gap between the real ego and the ego ideal then brings forth auto-aggression" (46-47). At this point, it is legitimate to speak of a personality split in a war between the ego and the ideal-ego.

This struggle between the ego and the ideal-ego in the insecure identity of the achievement-subject is related to Han's immunological model of society and subject, as well. Just like the Narrator in *Fight Club* eventually suffers a split and a struggle ensues between the Own and the Other thereafter, the reflection of this fight in society will take place throughout the novel, too. As Han says, in an epoch where society tries to distinguish between "inside and outside, friend and foe, self and other," everything foreign is fought and cast out: "every immune reaction is a reaction to Otherness" (1-2). This Otherness usually provokes an immune reaction that dissolves boundaries; the Other intrudes into the Own and seeks to negate it. Such a dissolution of boundaries and negation of the Self can only be prevented by "a small amount of self-inflicted harm [that] protects one from a much larger danger, which proves deadly" (4). Han explains how dealing with the internal Other is much more difficult than with any external enemy, because it inhabits the deepest fathoms of our own psyche and Self. The Other acts out with viral violence (6), "slipping in everywhere like a virus, welling up from all the interstices of power" (Baudrillard, *Spirit of Terrorism* 15). This viral nature of the Other is equated to the way a sleeper cell works, undermining the Self from within. To Baudrillard, viral violence in the Self works like a terrorist sleeper cell, and represents a revolt of the singular against the global (qtd. in Han 6). This is a really appropriate allegory, given *Fight Club* portrays the internal struggle between the Narrator and his viral Other, Tyler Durden, but also between the Narrator and society at large. Arundhati Roy explains this dyadic nature, claiming that terrorism acts as society's Other, "as its twin—the diabolical twin of the system" (qtd. in Han 53). Baudrillard also frames terrorism as society's other; as he states, society—the West—creates the conditions for the appearance of terrorism, and that, by "seizing all the cards for itself, it forced the Other to change the rules" (*Spirit of Terrorism* 9). Likewise, the Narrator eventually creates his own club and project with their own rules against society, and Durden likewise creates rules against the Narrator, when the new rules force the Narrator to occupy a liminal place outside the Club, after he is told that leaders should be outside now, in the shadow, and is commanded to "clear the center of the club" (Palahniuk 142, 179). It has to be said that Durden's fight club does not seek political power or leverage, but to change the status quo and liberate men: "to teach each man in the project that he had the power to change history. We, each of us, can take control of the world" (122). As Baudrillard says, "the aim is no longer to transform [...] but to radicalize it by sacrifice" (*Spirit of Terrorism* 11). It is, indeed, a revolution to liberate others. Baudrillard also draws a parallelism between society and God in his work: "'Even God cannot declare war on Himself.' Well, He can. The West, in the position of God [...] has become suicidal and declared war on itself" (*Spirit of Terrorism* 7). Thus, just like Byung-Chul Han's achievement-subject wages war on itself through otherization, Baudrillard's West—in the position of God—declares war on itself, and Zeus creates the condition wherefrom Prometheus starts his rebellion, the Narrator creates Durden to wage war on himself, and Fight Club to wage war on society—his God—.

In this regard, the Narrator can be read as a modern version of Prometheus. The Narrator is an immunological-subject that has been otherized by society and now acts like a virus in it, while at the same time having his own viral Other inside, Durden. His otherized and viral nature might initially make it seem that Durden is an unwelcome split in the Narrator's personality, but it is said in the novel that he would not even be there if the Narrator did not want him (Palahniuk 168); indeed, the Narrator, bereft of identity, purpose, a father figure and a God that he can trust, creates that alternative identity when he suffers his split. In *Fight Club*, the Narrator rebels against God—society—, like a modern Prometheus, to liberate other men. Also, he symbolically sacrifices fat in the form of soap for that society; Prometheus robs Zeus of the best part of the animal to be offered up and gives him fat and bones instead just like Durden robs bags of fat to make soap and gives that back to society. Likewise, like a modern Prometheus, he receives divine retribution; a just *nemesis* for his *hubris*. Lacking a father figure and a God, he subconsciously creates one—Tyler—but that takes the form of a punishment, too. The

Narrator describes how he died and was reborn every day, just like Prometheus is attacked by an eagle every day and regenerates at night. In this case, the Narrator does not only feel fatigued because of society, but also because of Tyler. Unbeknownst to him, his split identity is already taking control of his body every night, making him grow weary like Kafka's Prometheus (Kafka 475), subjected to self-exploitation and seized by overwhelming fatigue, like Han's Prometheus (Han 35). Eventually, just like the Narrator has to rise up against society, he ends up having to rise against Durden too, now elevated to a divine figure, "Tyler Durden the Great and Powerful. God and father" (Palahniuk 199) and "Everybody in Project Mayhem is part of Tyler Durden and vice versa" (155). Indeed, even if the Narrator creates Durden as an act of rebellion against his first God—society—, he promptly substitutes it with another divine figure, thus losing the freedom and autonomy that he wants for humankind, and therefore making his quest for an identity impossible. Eventually, the Narrator also rebels against this second God—Durden—and completely loses his freedom in a psychiatric ward. Just like Prometheus, he ends up permanently bound for seeking to rebel against God to help humankind.

### **Durden: Savior and Villain**

If you're male and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never know your father, if your father bails out and dies or is never at home, what do you believe about God? [...] you spend your life searching for a father and God. (Palahniuk141)

This quotation frames one of the main themes of this novel: lost faith and abandonment. *Fight Club* portrays problems of both social and personal identity in middle-class white-collar males who feel at a loss in modern western society, and whose parents can no longer provide any insight. This poses the question that the Narrator, throughout the novel, will try to work out and answer: What now?

The Narrator is presented as a typical middle-class white-collar male. Initially, and from what he describes about his lifestyle, it would be reasonable to assume that he should be satisfied with it. However, within the Introduction to the novel, the first signpost of what will become one of the biggest motifs in the literary work is found: "men with good white-collar jobs and absent fathers." These absent fathers are a symbol of the loss of identity and values that the Narrator suffers, an idea that is strengthened by his lack of a name. Along with the references to God, it can be read as an inability to rely on traditional values and Manichean concepts of Good and Evil, something that leaves the Narrator alone to fend in a society which makes no sense to him, and bereft of objectives: "Pull a lever. Push a button. You don't understand any of it, and then you just die" (12). The mindlessness evoked in this second quotation marks the failure of modern society to provide any fulfilling new roles for middle-class workers, who live "a copy of a copy of a copy" (21) and helps explain the Narrator's pathology. As Han states, "Burnout syndrome occurs when the ego overheats, which follows from too much of the Same" (7). The idea that repetition can cause systemic violence is also developed by Baudrillard who claims, "He who lives by the Same shall die by the Same" (*Transparency of Evil* 65). The Narrator's pathology stems from a life of mindless repetition and imitation—doing the *Same* and trying to become the *Same*—, no real objectives, and being encouraged to do more. He is Han's achievement-subject, and his split personality, Durden, an immunological-subject, will therefore redirect that viral violence towards society and its rules. When they mention that the Parker Morris building is about to collapse, and "slam down on the national museum which is Tyler's real target" (Palahniuk 14), the real intentions of his fight club are revealed: a total war on western culture—the first God, according to Baudrillard—. The name chosen for the building that they target, Parker Morris, can be read as a reference to the Parker Morris Committee, an institution that set the standards for living and dimensions in typical furniture and houses, in 1961 in their *Homes for Today and Tomorrow*. In other words, they target an institution that

claims to show how people should live, a representation of Lacan's Name-of-the-Father (67). The Narrator stands against his symbolic father figure—law—and against his God—society—just like Prometheus does against Zeus, father of the gods.

This cultural war, this Promethean rebellion against Baudrillard's God, starts in the second chapter. The Narrator's first symptom, insomnia, links back to Han's ideas: just like Han's tired Prometheus, the Narrator is exhausted from having to become himself (4), and the split in his identity now leaves him awake at night. He asks for "lipstick-red Seconals" (19), a symbol of the feminine company that he craves, but it is denied to him by his doctor. This introduces another central topic: the conflict between masculinity and femininity in the Narrator's individuation process. The Narrator exhibits traits traditionally coded as feminine: his hobbies comprise collecting condiments and redecorating his flat, which he defines as his "nesting instinct": "the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you" (43-44). The Narrator is given *false needs* (Horkheimer and Adorno 20-21) by society to make up for his lack of goals, but that only makes the problem worse. Moreover, the Narrator's lack of identity signals he is, in a psychosexual development sense, still a child. His mother is never mentioned, and his father is, as remarked before, an unreliable role model: "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. I'm a thirty-year-old boy, and I'm wondering if another woman is really the answer I need" (Palahniuk 51).

The father's failure to guide the Narrator in life makes him doubt his father because he cannot reconcile that fact with the triumphant and resourceful idea of man that he has been spoon-fed since childhood. He needs a nurturing figure he can reject, and a father he can confront, but he had neither of them. In this light, it makes sense that his insomnia should be cured when he finally finds a womb where he can feel protected. The first female character in the book, Chloe, cannot satisfy the Narrator's needs because he needs a symbolic mother figure and she can only offer sex, and even her "therapeutic physical contact" fails to help him because she, whom he describes as "a skeleton dipped in yellow wax" (19), does not have the physical traits that Jack identifies with motherhood. It will be in Bob where Jack finally finds a place where he can finally let his guard down and seek protection: "Bob was closing in around me with his arms, and his head folding down to cover me. Then I was lost inside oblivion, dark and silent, and complete, and when I finally stepped away from his soft chest, the front of Bob's shirt was a wet mask of how I looked crying" (22).

Bob, a man with no testicles, an excess of estrogen, and what the Narrator describes as "bitchtits," provides him with the womb that he needs to heal and grow. He even states that every evening he died and then he was born (22) every time he cried on Bob's chest; he is being punished every night by his split identity, Tyler, who leaves him damaged and exhausted like Kafka's tired Prometheus, and every morning he resurrects, regenerated. The Narrator also remarks that it was the loss of all hope that meant freedom to him, which would be the main idea behind *Fight Club* when they first create it; again, the Narrator's objective is to free humankind, and "to teach every man" (122), just like Prometheus brings knowledge and fire to humankind to free them. When he starts losing sleep again after meeting Marla, who, he claims, reflected his lie, he cannot recognize her for the mother figure that he needs because of her traditionally-coded-as-masculine traits: Marla is a carefree character who smokes, has a raspy voice, is assertive and commanding, and easily controls the Narrator in their first exchange (37-39). The dynamic that the Narrator has with both Chloe and Marla is also reflective of one of the main topics in the book. Not only is he devoid of real and tangible new values to associate to a healthy masculinity; the Narrator still has internalized sexism and relies on traditional masculine values that stop him from being able to relate to women in a healthy, functional way. He feels threatened by Chloe's sexual forwardness and bold ways, and by Marla's assertiveness when occupying what he describes as



"his" groups. This is linked to the fears of liberated women that were reflected in early Gothic doppelganger literature. As Linda Dryden claims in her *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* (2003), not only did unstable identity become "closely linked with the labyrinthine metropolis" (19), but also with women who, increasingly, "were claiming the streets and the public spaces of the city for themselves" (62). Walkowitz also elaborates on this point, explaining that the presence of liberated women in traditional man's spaces "provoked territorial tensions and hostile social acts on the part of men towards women" (50).

When the Narrator first becomes acquainted with Tyler, his split and double, the reader is presented with a deeply symbolic and obscure character: Tyler can appear to be the Narrator's necessary father figure at first, but it actually represents Jack Lacan's ideal-ego, an idealized version of the Self. Tyler is attractive, assertive, and carefree. Tyler also works as a banquet waiter where he continually sabotages food by urinating or ejaculating in it, or as a film projectionist where he splices images of genitalia into the reels. This can be understood as Tyler possessing Lacan's symbolic phallus (281), something that the Narrator needs for his own individuation in his pro-Oedipal phase. So far, he has surrounded himself with castrated men (Palahniuk 21) in his groups, but now he has a father figure that he could confront to continue his individuation process. Tyler, however, and just like the Narrator, has a repetitive and mindless job. Where the Narrator simply has to apply a formula to see if initiating a recall is necessary after a car crash, Tyler simply stands "between the two projectors with a lever in each hand, and watch the corner of the screen" waiting for a signal to pull the lever (28) and is, therefore, also immersed in the same toxic routine of repetition that, as Han and Baudrillard explain, engenders violence. So far, the Narrator's problems can be traced back to his lack of parental figures, identity issues, and the ego exhaustion from repetition. It will be these issues which will prompt his subconscious Ideal-ego, Tyler Durden, to create Fight Club.

Fight Club is a powerful and complex symbol in the novel. First of all, it helps the Narrator to improve what Han terms "insecure identity" (228), in accordance to social theory, which states that people see themselves more as the interchangeable exemplar of a social category than as unique personalities defined by their differences from others (Turner) and that depressed or threatened self-esteem promotes intergroup discrimination (Hogg). Social theory also postulates that depersonalization is not a loss of Self, but a redefinition of the Self in terms of group membership (McGarty) and that said depersonalized Self,—social identity—is as meaningful as a personalized Self—personal identity—to the subject (Haslam *et al.*). Therefore, the creation of the club allows the Narrator to redefine his identity through social group definition. He had been an outcast in his previous groups, a "faker" and a "tourist" (Palahniuk 24, 35), but this new group gathers disenfranchised men without goals and who feel imprisoned in society. Again, as a creator of Fight Club and by trying to teach and grant freedom to other men, he becomes a Promethean figure. Before the creation of Project Mayhem, however, it only serves the purpose of fighting things the Narrator and Tyler hated, like the memories of their fathers: "Me, I knew my father for about six years, but I don't remember anything. My dad, he starts a family every six years. This isn't so much like a family as it's like he sets up a franchise" (50). Tyler himself claims that he never knew his father (49), because he had already rejected his idea. Tyler is portrayed as an ideal role model at the beginning, and possesses all the traits the Narrator would like for himself, such as total independence from a father figure, sexual assertiveness, confidence, and leadership skills. After their first fight, Tyler reveals that he had been fighting his father, and the Narrator comes to the conclusion that they "didn't need a father to complete themselves" (53-54). This is a turning point as it signals how the reference model will complete its shift from the Narrator's father to Tyler. This shift, also, will change his relationship with Marla after this point.

Marla, initially regarded as just an intruder in his life for "stealing his groups," will progressively take more and more of his and Tyler's attention. After she calls him for help, the first instance where Marla

will seek the Narrator instead of the other way around, and he ignores her call, Tyler saves her from her suicide attempt (59). Bereft of his original father figure, and now feeling that he is losing Tyler's attention (60), the Narrator starts devoting himself more to the fight club, something that will eventually make it lose its capacity to find freedom and heal, as he needed to give up all hope and all worldly possessions, and the club holds more relevance in his life every day, as their leader: "Worker bees can leave. Even drones can fly away. The queen is their slave" (63). This marks the failure of the Narrator to fulfill his individuation process. Tyler, first elevated to a father figure, is slowly losing interest in him because of Marla, and the club can no longer fulfill its initial intended role. Tyler, also, is for the first time presented in a darker light. After the Narrator takes up a job as a waiter and needs to wash his trousers, Tyler sets to cooking fat to make soap, making Tyler more of a Promethean figure in possession of knowledge and wisdom who can teach the Narrator, and he guides him through a symbolic ritual (66-72). In the ritual, Tyler claims that until the Narrator internalizes the fact that he is going to die someday, he is useless to him, and recreates a symbolic sacrifice by burning the Narrator's hand with lye: "You have to see [...] how the first soap was made of heroes. Think about the animals used in product testing [...] the monkeys shot into space. [...] Without their death, their pain, without their sacrifice [...] we would have nothing" (77-78). This symbolic sacrifice foreshadows Tyler's ultimate intention: he will offer up the Narrator and the fight club members, whom he will call space monkeys later, for the sake of his crusade against society. Also, he is first acting as the Narrator's *abject*, since the Narrator is confronted by the sheer experience of corporeal reality and death when Tyler first hurts him (Kristeva 4, 15). In this part of the book, the Narrator starts to feel the punishment from acting out against society to free other men. Playing with the mythical trick that Prometheus plays on Zeus, the image reverses the offerings and, where the Narrator expects Tyler to cook fat into soap, he instead tricks him and burns the Narrator's flesh. This also brings a new light to Tyler's symbolism that starts sharing traits of the Narrator's symbolic father and those of a god that punishes him for his acts. Later, when the Narrator and Tyler discuss ways to make some money for Tyler's project: he reveals that he had sent Marla's mother fifteen pounds of chocolate, and telegrams her to make her undergo liposuction surgery and send him back the fat, which Tyler would later use to make soap bars. It is implied that the Narrator was not aware, and that "for weeks" he "had ignored what Tyler had been up to" (88-89). However, when confronted about his now-secretive behavior, Tyler says that if the Narrator loved him, he would have to trust him. This action strains the friendship that the Narrator thinks he has with Marla, and marks the first time that he distrusts Tyler, while also further cementing him in a god-like position that asks not for understanding but blind trust (89). Later, the Narrator, when confronted by his boss about his misuse of the printer to reproduce fight club's rules, Tyler's venomous influence comes to the surface, and the Narrator threatens to kill his boss and office workmates (98). After the confrontation, he learns that Tyler has been starting new fight clubs elsewhere—just like his father stopped giving him attention and started setting up new family franchises elsewhere—when Bob recommends that he attends one of the night meetings. For the first time, too, the Narrator is asked whether or not he knows who Tyler is, signaling that he is growing stronger: he is increasingly unaware of Tyler's actions, while Tyler is becoming a cult-like figure (101). This, also, starts slowly moving Tyler from the symbolic Lacanian father figure that the Narrator needed him to be for his individuation process.

With the gradually growing detachment between Tyler and the Narrator, the latter starts becoming more involved with Marla. After she calls him to help her determine whether she has a lump in her breast, he tries to comfort her while he feels her breast, their symbolic first sexual encounter: "Marla isn't laughing. I want to make her laugh, to warm her up. To make her forgive me [...] Marla has the scar from Tyler's kiss on the back of her hand" (104-106). Again, he realizes that he has completely lost track of Tyler's actions, and that not only do they bring about pain for the Narrator, but also for the people surrounding him. He also starts growing interested in Marla: now, finally, the former child-like Narrator



is developing a sexual interest in Marla's mother figure, and, therefore, envying Tyler, who acts as a Lacanian father figure due to being the only one who maintains sexual relationships with Marla. In this scene, she finds two lumps in her breast and decides that, "if she was going to die, Marla didn't want to know about it" (108). She and the Narrator are afflicted by very real problems, unlike Tyler, who seeks self-destruction as a form of perfection: "Disaster is a natural part of my evolution [...] toward tragedy and dissolution [...] because only through destroying myself can I discover the greater power of my spirit" (110). Again, Tyler foreshadows his murder-suicide intention, while the Narrator is informed by the police that his flat had been destroyed by a home-made explosive device. With a parallel between both characters, when they resign their jobs after blackmailing their bosses with making all of their deeds public, all of Tyler's actions start making more sense. The Narrator realizes that Tyler had wanted to be made redundant all along, and his sabotaging was but a mere leverage to coax their companies into paying them while Tyler could devote himself to bigger projects: the creation of Project Mayhem and vandalizing the Hein Tower by burning an angry face along five floors on the façade: "Of course you read this, and want to know right away if it was part of Project Mayhem." The Narrator also learns of the other groups that Tyler has organized behind his back, organized like his original support groups: "Arson meets on Monday. Assault on Tuesday. Mischief meets on Wednesday. And Misinformation meets on Thursday. Support groups. Sort of" (119). Here, as explained by Han, the Other's violence is becoming viral (6) and acts "slipping in everywhere like a virus, welling up from all the interstices of power" (Baudrillard, *Spirit of Terrorism* 15). Fight club and Project Mayhem take on a terrorist organization's sleeper cell structure: "No one guy understands the whole plan, but each is trained to do one simple task perfectly. The rule in Project Mayhem is you have to trust Tyler" (Palahniuk 130). Increasingly presented in a darker light, Tyler keeps being cemented in a divine position that needs to be trusted blindly and, now, also as a representation of Baudrillard's God—Western society—; he is subjecting the so-called "space monkeys" to the same repetitive and identity-dissolving tasks that the Narrator had tried to escape from, and from which viral violence stems, according to Han (6).

With new fight clubs being created everywhere, it is obvious that Tyler's plans completely escape the Narrator and are bigger than initially thought. In this part, Tyler is equated to the Narrator's father again, who had left him to start new families just like Tyler had stopped giving him attention to start new fight clubs: "I am Joe's Broken Heart because Tyler's dumped me. Because my father dumped me" (134). The Narrator acknowledges that he fights because he wants to destroy "everything beautiful [he'd] never have" (123), a confirmation of his entering the next stage of father envy. On the other hand, Tyler claims that, "It's Project Mayhem that's going to save the world. A cultural ice age" (125), thus revealing for the first time his real intentions behind fight club: the aforementioned total war on western culture—Baudrillard's God—. This new phase marks another failure in the Narrator's individuation process: while he has started being intimate with Marla, Tyler has not confronted him with castration, nullifying himself as a father figure in that regard. Tyler, however, is still seen as a divine figure who must be obeyed and trusted blindly, and as a father who marks everyone just like he did the Narrator and Marla: "Tyler was never at home but after a month a few of the space monkeys had Tyler's kiss burned into the back of their hand. Then those space monkeys were gone, too" (133). The Narrator has come full circle; he can no longer find catharsis in fight club, Tyler seems to be gone, and he is, again, at a loss: "I'm not sure if Tyler is in my dream. Or if I am in Tyler's dream" (138). The Narrator has not reached the Lacanian imaginary stage yet, where the Ideal-ego is separated from the ego, and cannot recognize himself in Tyler. After waking up in his office one night, he can smell gasoline on his hands, and is taken on a car trip by some club members. The driver, paraphrasing Tyler, tells him: "If you're a male and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God. And if you never knew your father, if your father bails out or dies, what do you believe about God? [...] God's hate is better than His indifference" (141).

The Narrator, who had come to see Tyler as a father figure, realizes that he needs not only Marla's attention, but also Tyler's. Unfortunately, Tyler has completely disappeared and none of the club's members will provide him with information. He asks in every bar that he sees during his job trips, only to find out he has visited all those places: "Every bar I've walked into this week, everybody's called me sir. How can a stranger know who I am? 'Everybody in Project Mayhem knows, Mr Durden'" (158). The Narrator later realizes, when speaking with Marla, that it had been him who had saved her life, thus helping him finally realize that he and Tyler had been the same person all along. The Narrator reaches the imaginary and individuation stage. And if they are the same person, can Tyler be his father figure? Tyler appears again that night, and after the Narrator asks him if he had been following him, he answers, "I wanted to ask you the same thing. You talked about me to other people, you little shit. You broke your promise. [...] There isn't a me and a you anymore" (162). Tyler is here also finally revealed as an evil twin, the Narrator's violent Other who, following Han's theory, acts in a viral way. He, with his space monkeys, has been infiltrating every interstice of society to rebel: "The people you're trying 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 control every part of your life" (166). In this part, as well, it is explained why Tyler had never confronted the Narrator about his relationship with Marla; he acts like a father figure to his space monkeys, solely, and threatens to castrate—not figuratively or symbolically, in this case—those who threaten Project Mayhem.

Tyler is revealed to live in a liminal space. He is neither subject nor object, and simply takes control of the Narrator's body when he falls asleep (163-168). Tyler, then, works more like the Narrator's abject, a meta-liminal force within himself "which disrupts social reason," and whose encounter is traumatic because of existing outside the symbolic order (Kristeva 15). This causes a cognitive dissonance in the Narrator, who initially denies Tyler's existence:

Oh, this is bullshit. This is a dream. Tyler is a projection. [...] a dissociative personality disorder [...] my hallucination.

"Fuck that shit," Tyler says, "Maybe you're my schizophrenic hallucination."

I was here first.

Tyler says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, well let's just see who's here last." (168)

With the last line, the Narrator finally understands that not only is Tyler his abject and not his role model, but also, he now threatens him, too. When he talks to Marla after his epiphany, he claims "Tyler Durden is a separate personality I've created, and now he's threatening to take over my real life" (173). The next step in the Narrator's healing will come from Bob. Bob, who had acted as a symbolic mother at the beginning, providing Jack with a womb where he could feel at peace, dies in one of the club's assignments, thus signaling Jack's loss of his mother figure, a necessary step in the process of psychosexual development in order to create an identity. Also, not only does the Narrator finally lose Bob, his mother figure, but he also rejects fight club, which had been a nurturing and guiding institution for him until recently. It had been his support group. After Bob's death he declares fight club dissolved, and tells everybody to go home. The local club's leader shouts thrice "clear the center of the club" (179), a symbolic act that tries to move the Narrator to a secondary position in the club while Tyler takes command of everything, thus reflecting in reality the Narrator's inner struggle between both personalities. The confrontation between the Narrator and the club leader and his attempt to end the club promptly ends with his being cast out: the Narrator is now his outcasts club's outcast.

This confrontation, however, does not go unpunished. He has threatened the club, so he is apprehended by fight club members, who had been instructed by Tyler to castrate him; again, a highly

allegorical attack that acts as a symbol of Jack's lost masculinity and a necessary step in the individuation process. However, they only put him to sleep with drugs and leave him in his burnt down condo, after which he decides to go warn Marla of Tyler's viral violence which is, again, affecting all those around him, "The cancer I don't have is everywhere, now." He learns from her that he had killed somebody else in his sleep, and had also attacked Marla. Jack finally acknowledges he is attracted to Marla, another necessary step in his psychosexual development, from lust towards the Mother, to confronting the Father, losing the Mother, and now seeking a new one. The Narrator decides to tag everybody that night for a fight, hoping that, in a near-death experience, Tyler would disappear from his psyche and he would be able to have an identity. As he claims, "only in death do we have names. Only in death are we no longer part of fight club" (201). The Narrator is woken up by Tyler back at home: "The last thing we have to do is your martyrdom thing. Your big death thing" (203). Tyler plans to kill themselves as a public symbol for his cause, "on top of the world's tallest building," thus ending the Narrator's life and substituting his quiet and unknown persona with Tyler's. Nobody would remember him but for what Tyler did. He would, therefore, completely lose his identity, erased with the same history of Western society that Tyler wants to destroy. The Narrator, holding a gun in his own mouth, and waiting for the Parker-Morris building to collapse, is interrupted by Marla and the support groups' members. In a moment of clarity, and free from Tyler's influence after having been asked by Marla and the support group members not to kill himself, the Narrator resolves to pull the trigger, blowing his cheek and killing his split, Tyler. With a recreation of his previous support groups where he would pretend to be figuratively on his death bed, so he could have other people's attention and support, now everybody wants to stop him from killing himself. This is linked to Han's theory of immunology: "negation of negation occurs without the danger of death, because the immune system does not confront the Other itself. A small amount of self-inflicted harm protects one from a much larger danger, which would prove deadly" (4). The Narrator, acting as the Self and against the immunological subject, his Other, damages himself to prevent a bigger harm, namely his loss of identity and death. After the grand finale, the Narrator wakes up again in a mental institution: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (Palahniuk 208). Here, the psychiatrist seeing him is equated with and referred to as God throughout the chapter. This, finally, gives the Narrator an actual chance at confronting his symbolic Father figure, and his God, which are said to be the same by Durden "If you're a male and you're Christian and living in America, your father is your model for God" (141). However, if this is indeed an opportunity to confront the Father, the Narrator seems to be unable to find his original personality. Nevertheless, he is now less anxious and appears to be at ease with the adopted personality of Tyler. With his evil twin—his immunological-subject and Other—gone, he is still known to the whole world because of Tyler Durden's actions and project: "People write to me in heaven and tell me I'm remembered. That I'm their hero [...] We miss you, Mr. Durden" (207-208). This can also be read as Prometheus' return to the Olympus after having been freed by Hercules; after a long time of punishment and being cast out of society, he is eventually pardoned and comes back to God, who questions his ways and his reasons to lash out. However, as Mr. Durden says—for he now accepts this identity as his—, "Yeah. Well. Whatever. You can't teach God anything" (207).

## Conclusion

"Our culture has made us all the same. No one is truly white or black or rich, anymore. We all want the same. Individually, we are nothing" (134). This quote by one of Tyler's space monkeys frames the main issue in *Fight Club*: identity. Identity in *Fight Club* ceases to be a psychological issue and process to become a social one. The protagonist cannot *become*, for, as Ehrenberg says, "The depressed individual is tired of having to become himself" (4). Likewise, he cannot *belong*, as Han says: "the social imperative

only to belong to oneself makes one depressive" (10). Finally, he cannot *bond*, as Han says, too: "The late-modern achievement-subject, with a surplus of options at its disposal, proves incapable of intensive bonding" (43). All of these impossibilities, when raised in a reality where the achievement-subject is made to believe that everything is possible, are what triggers the Narrator's split: "The complaint of the depressive individual, 'Nothing is possible,' can only occur in a society that thinks, 'Nothing is impossible.' No-longer-being-able-to-be-able leads to destructive self-reproach and auto-aggression" (Han 11). Thus, this achievement-subject suffers his split—"In view of the ego ideal, the real ego appears as a loser buried in self-reproach. The ego wages war with itself"—and projects itself into the Ideal-ego. This provides a rich scenario to revisit the myth of Prometheus' rebellion and divine punishment. The myth of Prometheus works conceptually on a double level in *Fight Club*. First, the Narrator, Han's achievement-subject and, as described by him, "a tired Prometheus" (35) lashes out against Western society—Baudrillard's God—after his split. On this first level, the Narrator/Tyler act in a sacrificial way to liberate and bring knowledge to men: "to teach each man in the project that he had the power to change history" (Palahniuk 122). On the second level, the Narrator remains the only Promethean figure, since Tyler increasingly resembles an authoritarian God. On this level, the Narrator will both challenge him as a Father and as a divine figure, which will bring about the threat of castration and also of death, before the end. In the final struggle, it is implied that whoever holds more sway over their body at the moment of the murder-suicide would seemingly survive, since the Narrator shoots himself at a moment when he is both free of Tyler's influence and when Tyler's Promethean symbolism fails, since he is no longer portrayed as the sole possessor of wisdom and scientific knowledge: "This is like a total epiphany moment for me. [...] I say, Tyler, you mixed the nitro with paraffin, didn't you. Paraffin never works" (204-205). This, ultimately leaves the Narrator in a strengthened position due to a more stable identity because of the support groups' members and Marla's love and recognition. As Bertens claims, "identity is constituted in interaction with what is outside of us and reflects us," and "we need the response and recognition of others [...] to arrive at what we experience as our identity" (135). However, if these factors momentarily affect and bolster the Narrator's identity, they certainly do not close the dialectic circle; in the last chapter—his reconciliation with and rejection of God—he seems to be at ease with his identity, although he is referred to as Mr. Durden. Perhaps, after all, for Durden, and in a society where everything is "a copy of a copy of a copy" (21), being a recognizable Other is better than being an anonymous Self. Perhaps, like in Kafka's *Prometheus*, and given the Narrator was tired of having to become oneself (Ehrenberg 4), he ended up growing weary of "the meaningless affair" (Kafka 475). Perhaps God grew weary, the eagles grew weary, and even the wound open by the split in his personality wearily closed.

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