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Fight Club - Book Review

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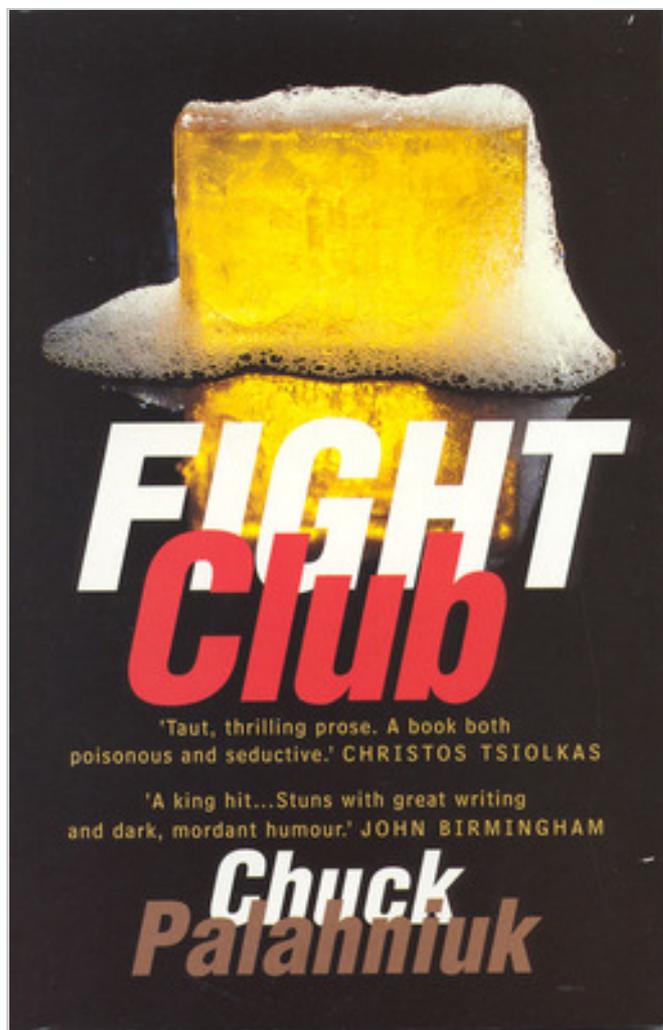


by [Chrystal Byrne](#) ([subscribe](#))

Freelance writer living on Brisbane's north side. Studied creative industries - c
studying library and information services.

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Fight Club by [Chuck Palahniuk](#) (published in 1996 by [Random House](#)) presents t
as an important site at which power and resistance are both registered – in the vi
of destruction.



Fight Club 1996

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Fight Club is a text which attempts to depict issues of masculine identity in a capitalist consumer society where the class/wealth hierarchy is extremely divided and the unnamed narrator, experiences a 'rebirth' in masculinity caused by the manifestation of Tyler Durden, a personality that embodies the narrator's subconscious desire for essentialist notions of a masculine identity. The 'body' has strong significance throughout Fight Club, and is portrayed as a site of both power and resistance through the mode of destruction.



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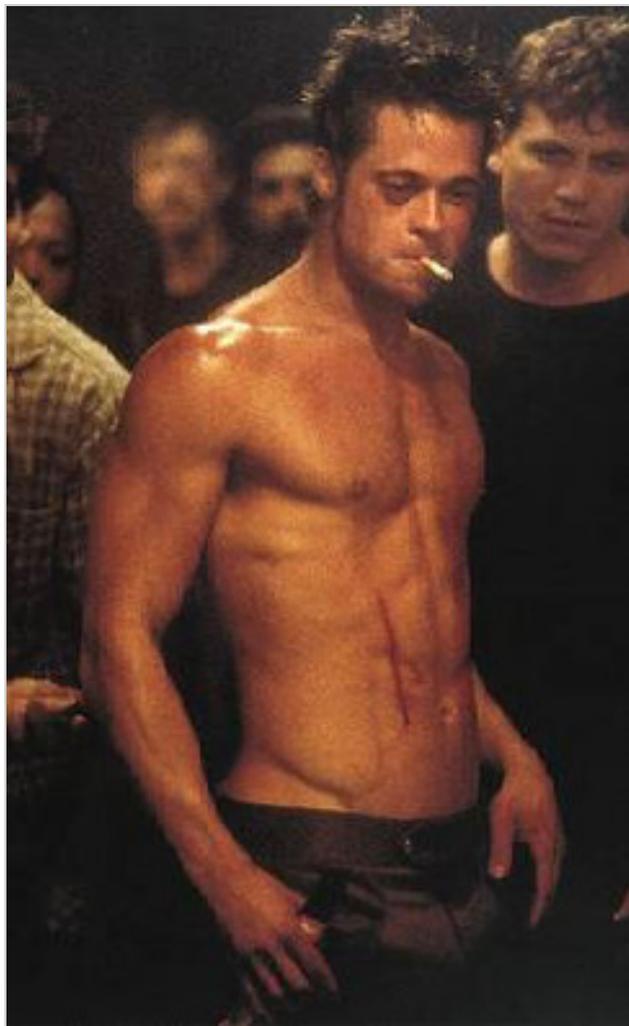
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Fight Club starts with the narrator and his life. His "home life (and identity) is crisscrossed with consumer goods" (Muller 2010, [QUT Blackboard](#)), he's an insomniac (showing th

no control over his body), hates his dead-end job as a "recall campaign officer" (F 1996, 31) and feels trapped and mistreated by society and disconnected from his identity (Muller 2010), until Tyler Durden appears.

The first obvious act of identity destruction occurs when the narrator's apartment is destroyed, and non-coincidentally after his first meeting with Tyler Durden. The destruction of the apartment leaves the narrator feeling confused and lost, as if a part of him has been dismembered. The narrator feels as if his destroyed belongings were a part of his body, of his person.

"That was my whole life. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The cabinets were me. The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that bl..." (Palahniuk 1996, 111).



Tyler Durden (played by Brad Pitt) in the 1999 film adaptation

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After meeting in a bar, Tyler Durden and the narrator fight in the parking lot which is their first destructive act upon the body. Pain leads to exhilaration and they sit bloodied and blissful after their brute encounter – empowered (Giroux 2000). The narrator then moves in with Tyler, a character who "represents the redemption of masculinity repackaged as the promise of violence in the interests of social and political anarchy."

2000, *Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: Fight Club, Patriarchy, and the I Masculine Violence*).

This initial fight leads them to fighting each night in the parking lot, then drawing in new male participants, and eventually to the bar's basement for the beginning of Fight Club, a new religion and secret society for males who want to reclaim their instincts as humans within a society that has turned them into consumers. Fight Club provides a space in which men can transcend the reality of their lifestyle, their jobs, and their bodies. The film begins to present the body as a site of power and resistance to its followers, through violence and destruction.

For Tyler, physical violence becomes the necessary foundation for masculinity, and he says, "*Self-improvement isn't the answer... self-destruction is the answer*" (Palahniuk 1996). Tyler befriends the narrator and encourages him to engage his primal instincts, reassert his virility and the flesh, the body and control. "*[M]aybe we have to break everything and get something better out of ourselves,*" (Palahniuk 1996, 52) the narrator considers. The film's attitudes and beliefs resist the ideal consumer-driven society that the novel illustrates. In doing so, it empowers the characters.



The narrator (played by Edward Norton) in the 1999 film adaptation

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Tyler and the narrator begin a journey, along with the members of fight club, to re-examine their hunter/protector backgrounds and fully envelop the essentialist ideas of masculinity. Tyler emphasises throughout the novel the importance of pain and destruction of the body as a means of experience, and hints that the masculine self can only be reclaimed through the literal destruction of their present selves (Giroux 2000). Tyler attempts to portray his body as a symbol of destructive power, resisting corporate culture and the pitfalls of the feminine.

"Disaster is a natural part of evolution, toward tragedy and dissolution. I'm breaking my attachment to physical power and possessions; because only through destroying myself I can discover the greater power of my spirit" (Palahniuk 1996, 110).

Fight Club presents the body as an important site at which power and resistance are registered in the form of destruction. Through destruction of the body, Tyler and the narrator resist the ideals of society and experience power. During Fight Club (and Project Mayhem) members experience power through their destructive and resistant actions against society and the pain they inflict on their collective bodies. The body, in its reborn, masculine physicality, is a site/weapon of violent and destructive power, being a site for physical and social resistance. The circle and themes are evident.

Tyler initiates the narrator further into his destructive principles by pouring concrete onto a kiss on his hand. *"In retrospect when the reader understands that Tyler is not a physical entity but just a figment of the narrator's mind, this scene is especially powerful"* (Fight Club 2001 xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/freed/fightclub/intro.htm). The pain the narrator undergoes is a test, proof of his endurance, his ability to allow this self-destruction on his body. *"Come back to the pain,"* Tyler says, *"don't shut this out"* (Palahniuk 1996).

"Violence in this instance signals its crucial function in both affirming the natural order of men and providing them with a concrete experience that allows them to connect to a primal level" (Giroux 2000, Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: Fight Club, Patriarchy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence).



The narrator (played by Edward Norton) in the 1999 film adaptation

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Throughout *Fight Club*, the body becomes the representation of destruction, pain, and resistance. The body, in its physical form, loses its defining edges through insomnia (the narrator), becomes battered, broken and scarred through self and collective destruction (narrator, Tyler, fight club), decays and eventually dies (terminally ill support group member, Chloe, Bob). It is also seen to become developed and defined through physical exertion. *Fight Club* also presents the possibility of the body being shared by two separate individuals, as seen with the relationship between the narrator and Tyler Durden. The narrator (the narrator) says, "We both use the same body but at different times" (Palahniuk 1996, 164).

Tyler and the narrator epitomise the conscious/sub(un)conscious parts of the self. The narrator says that, "*Tyler enacts the narrator's rejection of his society and consumer driven lifestyle*". Tyler acts upon the narrator's sub(un)conscious desires for retribution and resistance against a world that he finds meaningless. "*Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and comfortable*" the narrator says on page 46 (Palahniuk 1996). Tyler embodies the narrator's ideas of masculinity by being powerful, resistant and destructive, and sets out to "destroy the system that destroys them" (Muller 2010, [QUT Blackboard](#)).

Fight Club portrays its members as being reflexive sado-masochists, men who feel empowered by self-destruction. "*Reflexive sado-masochism allows the individual to become himself as victim while also feeling powerful because of his ability to endure pain. Pain becomes desirable*" (*Fight Club* 2001, [Fight Club Introduction](#)). Reflexive sado-masochism allows the fractured individual (the narrator, Tyler, Bob) to inscribe history on their bodies and express the ephemeral nature of salvation through violence and pain.

"Inflicting pain on the body becomes a means of exhibiting endurance through various signifiers like blood, cuts, and bruises. Wounding the self is a way to experience the

certainty of existence known only through pain" (Fight Club 2001, [Fight Club Introduction](#)).

Throughout the text, Tyler attempts to portray the philosophy of regeneration through violence, and endeavours to emphasize the importance of pain to the narrator's experience: "*Without pain, without sacrifice, you would have nothing*" (Palahniuk 1996, 51). Tyler's philosophy on regeneration through violence demonstrates 'the body' as both power and resistance through the mode of destruction, and the narrator demonstrates his understanding of rebirth through violence by describing how a "*you feel saved*" (Palahniuk 1996, 51). Tyler furthers this notion by saying, "*Only a disaster can we be resurrected*" (Palahniuk 1996, 70).



Tyler Durden and the narrator in the 1999 film adaptation

Fight Club ends with the narrator shooting himself in order to destroy Tyler, his alter ego or schizoid personality. The infliction of this violence to destroy a manifestation of the narrator's mind is the way in which the narrator is able to forge a connection between the real and the unreal. Throughout the novel, violence is used as a necessary means by which the men in fight club feel 'saved,' and the narrator is reborn as the hunter/protector who is saved from a capitalist consumer-driven society. The idea of regeneration through violence is then applied to the end, as, in order to 'save' himself, the narrator has to destroy a part of himself, leading readers to question whether the narrator can ever be a fully 'healed' individual again (Fight Club, 2001).

Fight Club, by Chuck Palahniuk presents the body as an important site at which resistance are both registered. The text portrays issues of the masculine identity in a capitalist consumer society, depicts destruction as the core of power and resistance, and connects this with the understanding of the body.

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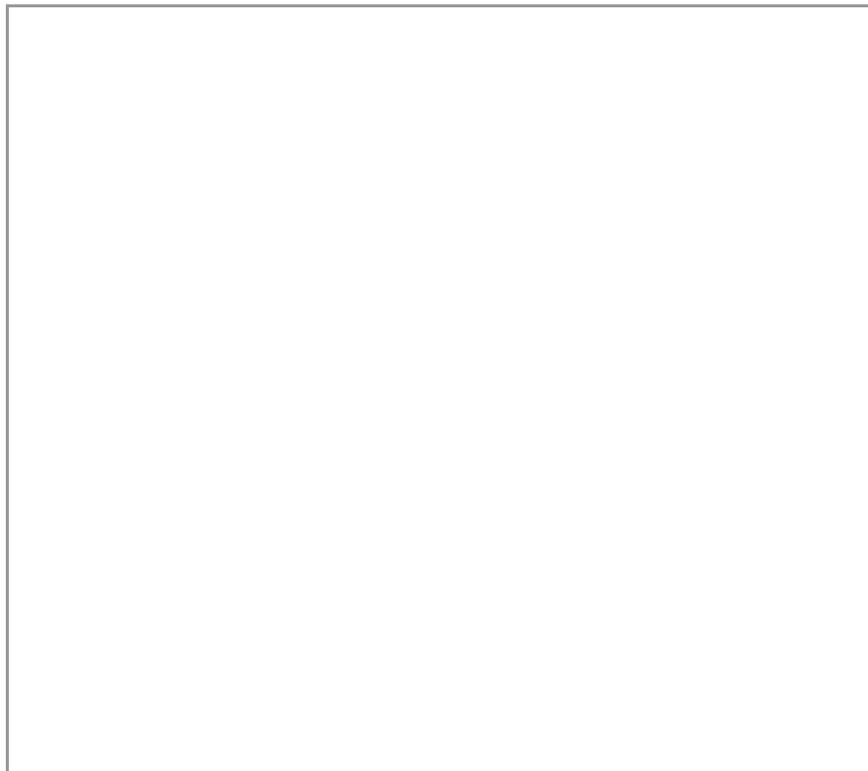
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