

# Subverting capitalism in fight club



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Tyler Durden in Fight Club attempts to subvert the capitalist, consumerist system through civil disobedience and Fight Club itself. Secondly, Chuck Palahniuk uses Tyler Durden and his insurgency to criticise contemporary capitalism, by showing the negative effect that consumerism has had on society as a whole. However, ultimately Tyler Durden does not effectively subvert the oppressive system because of constant contradictions in his behaviour.

Tyler Durden endeavours to undermine the capitalist, consumerist system in part by exposing the feebleness of consumerist goods. For example, he burns down the narrator's apartment - effectively starting the relationship between himself and the narrator. He continues on this path of destruction by blowing up buildings and encouraging fighting in the Fight Club. Tyler explains his actions by saying: " It's only after you've lost everything that you're free to do anything" (70). He believes that to find yourself in a world trying to conform you, you have to lose the materials that bind you to that life. Thus he starts Project Mayhem, where the men who join must forgo everything but absolute necessities. In addition, Tyler rejects the traditional working life: " I'd rather kill you than see you working a shit job... " (155). To him, being a part of such a system is to suffer a worse fate than death, and thus he rails against it with all his might.

Palahniuk uses Tyler and his apparent uprising to criticize contemporary capitalism by showing that consumerism has turned society into greedy beings who are unconcerned with those things that they see as having no function. The novel depicts this idea through Marla, who goes to visit Animal Shelters: "...where all the animals, the little doggies and kitties that people

loved and then dumped" (67). This extract suggests that society has turned into a self-absorbed robot - men and woman of our society have no empathy for those whom they feel offer nothing of value. Tyler puts forth the idea that society has become obsessed with things, rather than people: " This isn't about love as in caring. This is about property as in ownership" (14).

Palaniuck attempts to subvert not only consumerism, but also what society sees as important. The novel attempts to link the two by showing that consumerism leads to inappropriate importance being placed on trivial aspects of life: " Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own now they own you" (44). In Tyler's view, society seems to place more importance on what you have, than who you are.

Tyler Durden is not truly effective in subverting the capitalist system, as there are many contradictions within the text itself and the messages being portrayed. For example, he abhors the idea of many materialistic possessions but also sells homemade soap to chain stores for \$20 and creates his own company, and tirades against consumerism even as he imbibes in mass-produced beer and cigarettes. He regularly orates that no single individual is especially exceptional: " You are not a beautiful and unique snowflake. You are the same decaying organic matter as everyone else, and we are all part of the same compost pile" (134), yet in Fight Club, he relentlessly repeats that he is the leader and creator. He sees himself as being more important than others, which means that he needs to be treated as a superior, despite his many vocalizations to the contrast. It is also interesting that Tyler is an advocate of losing control and letting go of the

ties that bind the men to a life that Tyler sees as being without meaning, yet he also appeals throughout the novel to rules and structure.

By being aware of the contradictions present with the novel, the reading of the novel becomes more strained, as the reader becomes more aware of the hypocrisy present with the main character of Tyler Durden. The idea enters the reader's head that perhaps Tyler is not against consumerism based on a moral standing, but because of jealousy: "I wanted to destroy everything beautiful I'd never have" (123). This quote shows that Tyler wanted to be rid of the things that made him feel like he didn't have enough, instead of focusing on working harder and getting that which he so desired. It seems that Tyler has a different form of consumerism in mind; as some critics suggest, in *Fight Club* "People replace objects as possessions, especially in Tyler Durden's eyes" (Caruso, Roth, Wilkinson, & Chow). Because of Tyler's narcissistic view of the world, and of people, the reader finds it difficult to sympathize with him, and subsequently disregards his claims of moral superiority. This makes it difficult for the reader to take seriously the notion that Palahniuk tries to put forth that consumerism must be beaten.

In conclusion, it can be seen that although the character of Tyler Durden attempts to subvert the capitalist, consumerist ideology permeating his society, he falls short of the mark because of hypocritical idiosyncrasies within himself, which actually subvert the very subversion he is attempting. This makes it difficult for the reader to take seriously the ideology that Tyler tries to enforce, and ultimately makes the reader judge the integrity of the entire novel.