THE AMERICAN ADAMS AND EVES: GENDER, SIMULACRA, AND POST-HISTORY IN THE ECO-DYSTOPIAN LANDSCAPES OF WEST COAST LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

The protagonists in eco-dystopian literature are Adams in the city and usually have adversarial interactions with the Eves in the city who are depicted in the texts as tempting them to eat the metaphorical apple, destroying nature in pursuit of wealth and the placation of women. This relationship leads men to act in ways that are, paradoxically, destructive to the species, yet necessary for the short-term propagation of their own genetic line. In fact, this relationship, in which men are encouraged to attain material wealth, much of it with no actual intrinsic value or practical purpose, at the expense of the natural environment, is the cause of the eco-dystopian landscapes these texts depict. The subconscious knowledge of this paradox places extreme stress upon the psyches of men, and the results of this stress play out in the noir, cynicism, and male-centeredness of eco-dystopian literature.

Raymond Chandler’s The Big Sleep lets us see an eco-dystopian world through the eyes of Detective Marlowe, a private detective who is keenly wary of femme fatales and who, at least in this text, manages to avoid the snares of multiple women. Douglas Coupland’s Generation X achieves a similar effect by delivering a narrator who is very close to being devoid of gender. In sharp contrast, at least from the perspective of gender, Chuck Palahniuk’s Fight Club may very well be the most masculine text ever written, and Tyler Durden may very well be the most hyper-masculine character. This text actually portrays the literal split of a male mind, so traumatized by the constant pressure to destroy in order to profit, that it creates a separate personality, one that does not obey the male gender role. Lastly, William Gibson’s Neuromancer explodes the whole dilemma by not just disobeying the male gender role, but by actually abandoning
what is male altogether – that being the physical body. The main character, Case, has
developed a distain for his own flesh, and desires to escape it and exist within the matrix,
a computer generated cyberspace in which a human consciousness can exist outside the
confines of flesh.
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Chapter I – Introduction
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This project will build upon the foundations I laid in my fourth-year graduating essay. In that paper, I coined the term *eco-dystopian literature*. Eco-dystopia is an evolution in the dystopian genre from the classical dystopian texts such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four*, in which some revolutionary outside force, such as a militaristic government, oppresses the story’s characters with a radical ideology. In contrast, *eco-dystopian* texts focus on *evolution* rather than *revolution*, suggesting that because of the insidious nature of the world’s current socio-political conditions, these dystopian visions will arise without the help of any outside force; they are the logical outcome of the world’s current direction. An excellent example of an *eco-dystopian* text is William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, but there are numerous others, such as Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, and Larry and Andy Wachowski’s shooting script for *The Matrix*. Defining *eco-dystopian* texts is crucial to my work because, unlike their classical counterparts, they are being generated largely on the West Coast of North America. Indeed, Grace L. Dillon, in a book she edited entitled, *Hive of Dreams: contemporary science fiction from the Pacific Northwest*, similarly observed that this groundbreaking trend in science fiction was connected to the West Coast. Additionally, eco-dystopian literature is not limited to speculative fiction, but can also be applied to many works that are set in the present. These texts criticize current conditions, arguing that the time in which the book takes place is already an eco-dystopia. Examples of these kinds of texts are Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club*, Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*, and Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*; this project will focus on these
three texts, as well as William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*. These texts share some distinctive and extraordinary commonalities and many of these commonalities have been noted in the scholarly discourse generated by the novels. The commonalities of which I will focus in this project are: they are all generated on the West Coast of North America and, therefore, respond either consciously or unconsciously to the “go west” mythology of North America, they are all self-consciously concerned with the historical context in which they are set (*Generation X* and *Fight Club* in particular), each text works with themes of reality versus illusion, and, finally, each text has an extraordinarily problematic and, at times, misogynistic relationship with women.

1.1 GO WEST, YOUNG MAN

First and foremost, all of these works are West Coast novels and thus, connect to the “go west” mythology of North America. I will partially frame my arguments with the help of R.W.B. Lewis’s *The American Adam*, in which he examines the formation of an American mythology in 19th century literature that finds its origins in the Bible’s creation story, as well as with Frederick Jackson Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in which Turner argues that the continued western push of the frontier line contributed to the development of American character. Turner argues

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward – with its few opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating
American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West. (Turner 1)

The American character of which Turner speaks is framed, according to Lewis, as Adam from the Bible. This framing occurs naturally in a Christian country where the Bible’s imagery and the story give direction and impetus to the intellectual debate [of that time] itself; and they may sometimes be detected, hidden within the argument, charging the rational terms with unaccustomed energy. But the debate in turn can contribute to the shaping of the story; and when the results of rational inquiry are transformed into conscious and coherent narrative by the best-attuned artists of the time, the culture has finally yielded up its own special and identifying myth. (Lewis 3)

Thus, to Lewis, the continual rebirth and “newness” of the American frontier contributed to the creation by the artists of the time of an American mythological archetype and

[it] was not surprising, in a Bible-reading generation, that the new hero (in praise or disapproval) was most easily identified with Adam before the Fall. Adam was the first, the archetypal, man. His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally
innocent. The world and history lay all before him.... All this and more were contained in the image of the American Adam. (Lewis 5)

Lewis greatly influenced Robert B. Parker's PhD dissertation in which he wrote that the "hero of the modern hard-boiled detective story is Adam in the city," (Parker iii) responding to Lewis's own musings as to "what would happen to [Adam] if he entered the world as it really is?" ([my italics] qtd in Parker iv). This question can be applied to all of the primary texts of which this paper is concerned; in each of these works, the frontier has closed and the characters must deal with the clash between the mythology of their cultures and the reality of the worlds in which they live. Indeed, when Turner wrote his thesis in 1893, the frontier line had only recently reached the Pacific. The Census Report of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890 confirmed "there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it cannot, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports" (1). At that point, Turner argued, "four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history" (14). All four of these primary texts examined in this project are examples of some of the "best-attuned artists" of their respective times, dealing with the aftermath of this closing, and transforming their experiences "into conscious and coherent" narratives.
1.2 ABSENT HISTORY

Additionally, these texts are all self-consciously concerned, to varying degrees, with the historical context in which they are set. Chandler's novel, *The Big Sleep*, was published in 1939, and is one of the earliest examples, only 49 years after the frontier line was said to be no more, of an Adam existing in "an urban world that is shaped, in part, by the social conditions and tensions of modern industrial society" (Porter 412). In an article fittingly titled: "The End of the Trail: The American West of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler," Joseph C. Porter argues that the West Coast landscape depicted by Hammett and Chandler is "an expression of the tension between the cherished hopes and the disappointments of reality" (413) of the American West. Indeed, perhaps needless to say, it is more difficult to find a critic who does not make note of the historical periodization in *The Big Sleep* than it is to find one who does. Robert B. Parker, as mentioned above, certainly makes this argument, as well as Fontana, who notes that, rather than a "pristine California frontier," Chandler presents a "post-industrial Los Angeles" and a "world of enervated consumption"(163). Meanwhile, Marxist, postmodernist critic, Frederic Jameson describes the novel as a reaction "against the growth of an industrial society" by contrasting it with the reader's own "nostalgia for Jeffersonian America ... or for the conditions of the frontier" (On Raymond Chandler 76). Even Chandler himself wrote about the world he depicts in "The Simple Art of Murder" and it contrasts dramatically with the myth of the American West. It is a world in which
This excerpt from Chandler is a beautiful definition of the socio-political elements of eco-dystopias, and the clear disdain for “what we call civilization” is in clear contrast to the “Golden West” myth Porter describes.
Not coincidentally, many critics have also noted the influence Chandler’s depiction of urban decay has had upon William Gibson’s depictions of urban sprawl in the unspecified future time of Neuromancer. Joe Nazare explicitly focuses on this influence in his article, “Marlowe in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk (Re-)Vision of Chandler.” Like the critics above, Nazare theorizes that Chandler’s novel is a response to the “California dream trap (manifest destiny turned nightmare destination)” (387) and notes that Case, the protagonist in Neuromancer inhabits a similar urban environment that he repeatedly describes as “Chandleresque” (384). Neil Easterbrook also makes note of Gibson’s borrowing of “hard-boiled noir... a literary genre developed by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler” (3). However, although I would argue that Gibson’s novel does react to the same American West mythology as Chandler’s, it is important to note that forty-five years have passed since Chandler wrote The Big Sleep, and further, Gibson is actually pointing his historical focus into the future. While this statement may sound oxymoronical, Gibson himself has said, “Science Fiction tends to behave like a species of history pointing in the opposite direction, up the timeline rather than back” (Burning Chrome xv). Richard Lederer agrees, describing the writer of dystopian fictions as “historians situated in the future looking backward” (1132). This view of history is strikingly post-modern, and much of the critical response to Gibson comes from a post-modernist and even post-humanist perspective. Thus, Nazare goes on to assert that Case tries to simulate the “go west,” or as Parker describes it, “light out for the territories” (iv) dogma of the American West mythology by seeking out a new geography in the “sensations of cyberspace” (387). Jameson describes Case as one of “the oddballs and marginals of the new frontiers to come” (Fear and Loathing in Globalization 105), further
adding to the analogousness of the “go west” American West mythology to the escape into cyberspace. Claire Sponsler’s description of Gibson’s eco-dystopian landscape recalls Chandler’s own description of the world he created for *The Big Sleep*:

Gibson is notable for taking seriously recent developments in technology, culture, and socioeconomic organization, attempting in his stories to convey what he sees as their inevitable consequences. The future his novels imagine is one in which multinational corporations control global economies, urban blight has devoured the countryside, crime and violence are inescapable events of urban life, and technology has shaped new modes of consciousness and behavior. Set not in a distant and alien universe but in a recognizable, near-future permutation of our own world, Gibson’s stories postulate what our reality might all too soon be like and experiment with narrative modes of enacting these changes. (626)

After her articulate description of the eco-dystopian landscape Case inhabits, Sponsler contrasts this with cyberspace, which she says offers a “glimpse of a breathtakingly new place” (628), calling to mind, once again, the American frontier myth’s desire for new beginnings. Scott Bukatman continues the analogy in “Postcards from the Posthuman Solar System,” in which he also notes that Gibson’s text is “replete with echoes of his literary antecedents and pop-culture forerunners (such as Raymond Chandler)” (4) and suggests that an escape might be possible from the urban decay Case inhabits by abandoning his body and achieving a technological “fantasy of the Body without Organs”
or the "BwO" (9). This abandoning of the body for a "new place" may not sound pleasant, but in many ways, this look towards a future free of the disappointment in the reality of the West is the most hopeful option offered by any of the primary texts in this project.

Indeed, Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X* and Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* exhibit extremely adversarial relationships with their strikingly similar conceptions of history or, perhaps it is more accurate to say lack thereof. Written just five years apart, these novels document a similar time in West Coast history and so they share a perception of history, “genuine capital H history times” (151) as Coupland describes it, being absent. This phenomenon is explored in G.P. Lainsbury’s essay, “*Generation X* and the end of history” in which she states that “*Generation X* is a meditation on the end of history” and an exploration of the aftermath of the events that “mark the great divide between historical and posthistorical eras” (3). *Fight Club* shares this conception of history as being absent, as noted in Krister Friday’s “A Generation of Men Without History: *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and the Historical Symptom.” In this essay, Friday argues that the characters in *Fight Club* are trying to create a new history, so that they can escape the “absence of periodization” (13) in which they inhabit. This points to the main difference between *Generation X*’s and *Fight Club*’s portrayals of their historical conditions. Although the overall conception of history is the same, if anything has changed in the five years between the novels, it is that Generation X has become hostile towards their belief that they will be forgotten by history, and Palahniuk’s novel is indicative of a genX desire to “blast the world free from History” (Palahniuk 124), or at
least to blast free from the posthistorical era they inhabit and begin to create a new era so that they can become, as the protagonist Tyler Durden asserts, "legend" (11).

1.3 THE BIG SLEEP

Further, these novels also share a very conscious concern with reality versus illusion. The Baudrillardian and Debordian conceptions of simulation and spectacle, respectively, come into play in a major way in each of these works. *The Big Sleep* anticipates these postmodernist theories by delivering characters and settings that strike the narrator, Marlowe, as unreal. The text is rife with too many examples to list here of Marlowe observing theatricality from the other characters. Marlowe also references a chessboard in his apartment and makes the analogy between the literal chess game and the "game" or simulation he is playing. He says, "I looked down at the chessboard. The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn’t a game for knights" (156). Marlowe constantly skirts above the crevice between simulation and reality, trying to remain genuine and real, not "putting on much of a front" (Chandler 56) as one of the characters in the novel tells him, and working towards his goal of seeing some form of justice done. Jameson makes note of tension between simulation and reality in *The Big Sleep*, asserting that

Chandler’s picture of America has an intellectual content... it is the converse, the darker concrete reality of an abstract intellectual illusion about the United States. The federal system and archaic federal Constitution developed in Americans a double image of their country’s political reality, a double system of political thoughts which never
intersect with each other. On the one hand, a glamorous national politics whose distant leading figures are invested with charisma, an unreal, distinguished quality.... On the other hand, local politics, with its odium, its everpresent corruption. (71)

Jameson’s description of unreality and illusion in Chandler’s world is astute and this unreality connects *The Big Sleep* to its antecedent eco-dystopian texts.

One of these texts is Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*. Like Chandler’s Marlowe, the main characters in Coupland’s novel are aware, at least on some level, of the simulation in which they inhabit. Robert McGill’s essay, “The Sublime Simulacrum: Vancouver in Douglas Coupland’s Geography of Apocalypse,” is actually focused on one of Coupland’s later books, *Girlfriend in a Coma*, but McGill notes that this text has much in common with Coupland’s earlier work. Both novels are hyperconscious of their West Coast geography and each is also, almost pathologically, focused on apocalypse. McGill references the “Californian Simulacrum” (263), as well as Baudrillard’s *America*, noting that the American West’s “geological – and hence metaphysical – monumentality’ asserts that ‘A human race has to invent sacrifices equal to the natural cataclysmic order that surrounds it’” (263). It then follows that West Coast writers such as Douglas Coupland are fascinated with apocalypse and the “end of history,” as these metaphysical concepts equal the geological and geographical significance of the West Coast.

Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* also has a powerful strain of the Baudrillardian simulation running through it. This strain is obvious from the texts itself and is noted by Krister
Friday, who postulates that the feeling of simulation is related to the feeling of history’s absence. “The narrator, could, in other worlds, identify with his insomnia as a defining symptom of his own, postmodern time and become one more postmodern subject who laments his Baudrillardian, simulated condition” (15). Friday’s surmising appears to be supported by the text itself, in which the narrator describes his inability to cry, even when faced with the heart wrenching circumstances he encounters repeatedly in the support groups he visits: “This is how it is with insomnia. Everything is so far away, a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy. The insomnia distance of everything, you can’t touch anything and nothing can touch you” (20). The narrator, popularly referred to as “Jack” by critics and fans of the book, perfectly describes the Baudrillardian experience of living within simulation. Everything is a “copy of a copy,” but it also brings to mind Debord’s vision: in the “society of the spectacle” in which Jack lives, “[as] long as the realm of necessity remains a social dream, dreaming will remain a social necessity. The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep” (18). In *Fight Club*, Jack is not able to sleep until he finally cries at a support group. Until he cries, he is, in a sense, sleeping through his life, and he cannot literally sleep. Once he cries, he breaks through the simulation and experiences “the desert of the real,” to borrow Baudrillard’s term, and breaks out of the insomnia of simulation.

Perhaps William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* has the most interesting relationship with Baudrillardian simulation. Interpretations can go in two directions along these lines. The first of these directions is to focus on the matrix, the computer generated illusion into which Case jacks in during much of the novel, as being the unreal
space. The Wachowski brothers certainly seem to interpret the situation this way in their film, *The Matrix* and its accompanying shooting script. The Wachowski brothers borrow heavily from *Neuromancer* and focus their film on this concept of a computer-generated cyberspace into which a human can "jack." In their script, the matrix works as a metaphor for the Baudrillardian simulation; Morpheus even makes an explicit reference to this when he tells Neo that, "You have been living inside a dreamworld, Neo. As in Baudrillard's vision, your whole life has been spent inside the map, not the territory" (38). Gibson, himself, writes the forward for the shooting script and asserts his opinion that, "The ultimate goal in *The Matrix* is not the Force but the Real. When the film's Judas-figure betrays the heroes, he does so in order to be returned to illusion and denial, the false reality that Neo struggles to escape and overthrow" (viii). This is a very commonsense interpretation of *The Matrix* and it can easily be applied to *Neuromancer* as well. What is interesting, however, is that many critics read the urban dystopian landscape as, ironically, the simulation and simulacra and see cyberspace and the matrix as the new place for escape. Indeed, Sponsler describes Gibson's eco-dystopian urban landscape as a "totally designed perceptual experience" (630). Likewise, Giuliana Bruno, in a reading of the very similar urban landscape presented in Ridley Scott's 1982 film, *Blade Runner*, comments that postindustrial landscapes depicted in both works are the "societ[ies] of the spectacle," living in the 'ecstasy of communication.' Addressing this aspect of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard speaks of a twist in the relationship between the real and its reproduction. The process of reproducibility is pushed to the limit. As a result, "the real is not what can be reproduced, but that which is always already reproduced... the hyperreal... which is entirely in simulation" (67).
In an ironic twist, Bukatman takes on the arguments of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who propose that, “Where psychoanalysis says, ‘Stop, find your self again,’ we should say instead, ‘Let’s go further still, we haven’t found our BwO [Body without Organs] yet, we haven’t sufficiently dismantled our self.’” Bukatman goes on to assert that, “In dismantling the self, the body can fuse with the world” (8). Although, upon hearing this the first time, the argument sounds counterintuitive and even nonsensical, a closer look gives it credence. If the Baudrillardian simulation is created by something insidious within the human species, something imprinted upon us biologically or sociologically or a combination of the two, then the only way to escape that is to escape the body.

1.4 AMERICAN EVE

This brings me to the final striking commonality these texts share that I will explore in this project: their extraordinarily problematic and, at times, misogynistic relationships with women. Many of the above critics have noted, almost in passing, the masculinity of the hard-boiled and neo-hard-boiled in Marlowe and Case respectively. Additionally, Fight Club is obviously an extraordinarily masculine text, and Krister Friday takes some time in detailing that, “masculine identity is celebrated in the text [as] a performative tautology – one that takes its own act of self-assertion as proof of its ‘history’” (9). Likewise, Megan E. Abbott thoroughly examines Marlowe’s masculinity and draws a sharp distinction between the Marlowe of Chandler’s novels, whom she sees as an “often hysterical” character who bears “minimal relation to any individual film”
portrayals of the character; in her view, these film portrayals of the hard-boiled detective are generated by a cultural "nostalgic vision of the tough guy" (306).

There are few other thorough examinations of the problematic and tension-infused interactions between the sexes in these novels. My project will be a starting point, rough as it might be, toward explaining this eco-dystopian gender-related phenomenon in relation to the other commonalities explored above. Indeed, by looking at the failed and perverse relationships in these novels, we can see that these texts all believe that broken heterosexual relations are at the root of modern degeneration and will lead to the end of the species. R.W.B. Lewis's *The American Adam* will be a starting point from which, it seems to me, a look at "The American Eve" will be a natural extension. According to these texts, the protagonists in eco-dystopian literature are Adams in the city, interacting with the Eves in the city and resisting a metaphorical apple in the form of the destruction of nature in pursuit of wealth and status to makes themselves more attractive to their female counterparts. Indeed, the male protagonists of these texts are portrayed as the heroes of a late capitalism not anticipated by Frederic Jameson or even Karl Marx, in which the alienation from the self does not arise from the direct relationship to a machine, but rather from the catastrophically dysfunctional relationship between the sexes themselves.
Chapter II – The Big Sleep

Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* was his first novel and is considered by many critics to be his finest. It was published in 1939, forty-nine years after the Census report that Turner argues was the unofficial close of the Western frontier (1). In that relatively short amount of time, the wilderness of the frontier has been transformed, according to Chandler’s eco-dystopian vision, into a “wet emptiness” (139). Ernest Fontana describes the novel as “Chandler’s first sustained negotiation with post-industrialist Los Angeles” (159). Similarly, Tom S. Reck describes *The Big Sleep* as Chandler’s first outing as “Los Angeles laureate,” and notes that he “wrote the city in scathing ridicule when it was still held to be ‘an Eden’” (109). This last assertion lines up nicely with Lewis’s argument in *The American Adam* that 19th century American literature had developed an archetypal hero in the form of Adam “before the Fall” (5). Chandler’s hero, Private Detective Philip Marlowe, stands in the aftermath of this American mythology, an early (and perhaps the most popular) example of Adam “in the world as it really exists” (Lewis qtd in Parker iv).

In this Chapter I will emulate Robert B. Parker’s PhD dissertation in which he first made the connection between Lewis’s and Chandler’s works. My project will build from Parker’s assertions and observations on the subject of Adam in the city and explore the relations between the American Adams and Eves. With regards to *The Big Sleep*, I will offer a possible explanation of Marlowe’s strained relationship with the many femme fatales with whom he comes into contact. My close reading of the text will draw connections between the novel’s eco-dystopian Western landscape, the time in which the novel is written and set, the Baudrillardian and Debordian themes of simulation and spectacle, respectively, and the problematic and misogynistic relationship between the
novel and its female characters. Indeed, by examining the eco-dystopian landscape in *The Big Sleep*, we can see that the text argues that sex is blamed for being the major source of human misery and decline. It should not be surprising, in a society that saw its Western frontier as analogous to Eden, and which, as Lewis argues, held up Adam as its archetypal hero, that once Eden has disappeared, Eve is made the scapegoat.

With the exception of Marlowe, who removes himself from the broken hetero-normative relations in this novel, it is the women in *The Big Sleep* who have the power. Reck argues that these women “are further symbols of the city’s psychosis. They evoke a sinister sexuality” and he argues that, “Chandler sees sex, Los Angeles style, as an evil…. it has been corrupted from its proper functions of love and procreation” (114). The novel portrays female sexuality as a commodity to gain leverage. A clear example of this is the aggressive pursuit of Marlowe by both of the Sternwood sisters on the same night. After Vivian Regan, the older Sternwood sister, stages a mugging so that Marlowe will save her and then kisses him afterwards on the drive to her residence, Carmen Sternwood strips naked and offers herself to Marlowe in his apartment. Marlowe sees right through their attempts to manipulate him and bring him under their control as evidenced by his assertion that the “Sternwood sisters we’re giving me both barrels that night” (155). The image of “both barrels” being fired at Marlowe explodes the stereotypical conception that the male phallice denotes power and strength; in this novel it is the women who aggressively pursue sex, using it as a weapon to gain advantage and improve their own situations.
In contrast, the heterosexual males have very little, if any, power in this novel; they have given the power away so that they can please the text's women. Our first glimpse of this loss of power comes at the beginning of the novel when Marlowe meets his client, General Sternwood. General Sternwood is now in his seventies, but has two daughters in their “dangerous twenties” and has very little control over them. The initial description of him contrasts him with a portrait that Marlowe surmises may be the General’s grandfather; the portrait “was a stiffly posed job of an officer in full regimentals of about the time of the Mexican war. The officer had neat black imperial, black mustachios, hot hard coal-black eyes, and the general look of a man it would pay to get along with” (4). This description exudes masculine power, complete with military power, eyes that are “hard” which, it could be argued, subtly suggests sexual potency, and the insinuation that this man had the kind of power that instilled fear in others. General Sternwood is now a far cry from this kind of power. He is depicted in his wheelchair as an “obviously dying man [who] watched us come with black eyes from which all the fire had died long ago.... The rest of his face was a leaden mask, with the bloodless lips and sharp nose and sunken temples and the outward-turning earlobes of approaching dissolution” (8). In contrast to his Grandfather, it could be argued that this man symbolizes impotence; unable to walk or move, he describes himself as existing “largely on heat, like a newborn spider” (9), in what Fontana describes as a “living death” (163). We get a hint as to how General Sternwood has reached this sad state immediately afterwards when he asks Marlowe is he likes orchids. Not surprisingly, Marlowe does not care for them, and the General concurs. “They are nasty things. Their flesh is too much like the flesh of men. And their perfume has the rotten sweetness of a prostitute”
Fontana argues that the orchids are “metaphors for [the General’s] daughters” (162) and the symbolism seems obvious; the orchid, a flower that commonly represents sexuality and virility, is reviled by these men, even eliciting a connection in the General’s mind to the “rotten sweetness of a prostitute.” The words “rotten sweetness” stand out immediately as an oxymoron, yet they perfectly represent the broken hetero-normative relations in this text. There is something sweet and wonderful about mating, the carrying on of one’s genes into the next generation, but it is mixed with something vile and rotten, the destruction of the earth’s ecosystem and the eventual extinction of the species. Fascinatingly, although very little mention is made about the deceased mother of the Sternwood girls, the General is clearly full of regrets about his choice to procreate. At one point, the General “leaned his head back and closed his eyes, then opened them again suddenly: ‘I need not add that a man who indulges in parenthood for the first time at the age of fifty-four deserves all he gets’” (13). Much can be gleaned from this passage. The General had resisted participation in the hetero-normative mating strategy up until that point in his life, but he relented, probably realizing that he did not have much time left to pass his genes along, and succumbing to this strategy has lead him to be in a very bad way. Although he is not yet dead, the description of him seems to be of a barely living corpse, and in this novel those men who submit to the broken hetero-normative mating strategy always pay a heavy price. General Sternwood’s circumstances simply set the tone.

Indeed, there are several examples of men coming to a bad end because of their relationships with women. At least two of these characters come to a bad end because of a dangerous blonde named Agnes. After Agnes loses out on an opportunity to extort
money from the Sternwoods, using a grifter named Brody, who ends up dead because of the scheme, as her front-man, she latches onto yet another grifter named Harry Jones. The case of Harry Jones in particular is an extraordinarily clear example of what happens in Chandler’s eco-dystopian vision to men who come into contact with the Eves of the city. Shortly after Marlowe proclaims “Women made me sick,” Harry Jones, a smalltime grifter and former liquor runner, approaches him on the street. Harry is as small in stature as he is in his career choice, standing “not more than five feet three and would hardly weigh as much as a butcher’s thumb” (161). Harry Jones has fallen for the charms of blonde Agnes, and he has come to offer information to Marlowe in exchange for two hundred dollars for get out of town money for the couple. He is a man with honour like Marlowe, but unlike Marlowe he is unable to see through Agnes’s manipulation. He says, “Agnes is a nice girl. You can’t hold that stuff on her. It’s not easy for a dame to get by these days.” Marlowe replies that, “‘She’s too big for you,’ I said, ‘She’ll roll on you and smother you’” (164). Marlowe, of course, turns out to be completely right. Harry Jones ends up sacrificing his life to protect Agnes. When confronted by a psychopathic gangster named Canino, Harry Jones refuses to give up Agnes’s whereabouts: “She’s my girl now, Canino. I don’t put my girl in the middle for anybody,” (173). Eventually he gives Canino the wrong address, and Canino poisons Harry Jones immediately after receiving the false information. After Canino has left the scene of the crime, Marlowe speaks allowed to Harry Jones’s lifeless body, observing that he had lied to Canino and “drank your cyanide like a little gentleman. You died like a poisoned rat, Harry, but you’re no rat to me” (178). Agnes never learns about Harry’s death because Marlowe tells her that he ran away, knowing that she never cared about him anyway. He tells her
to “forget about Harry” and give him the information for which he has paid two hundred
dollars. Agnes passes the information along and then says to Marlowe, “Good-bye,
copper, and wish me luck. I got a raw deal.” Marlowe responds, “Like hell you did”
before watching as “blonde Agnes wiped herself off the slate for good.... Three men
dead, Geiger, Brody, and Harry Jones, and the woman went riding off in the rain with my
two hundred in her bag and not a mark on her” (182). Marlowe could not be clearer in
his summation of the situation. Brody and Jones in particular have died for Agnes; they
put their desire to mate with a beautiful young partner above all else, tried desperately to
accrue wealth for her and risked their lives to do so, and they have ended up dead because
of it. Failure to rise above the immediate desire to secure a mate and to keep one’s wits
about him, accepting the metaphorical apple, is the ultimate death trap in this novel.

An in-depth examination of the sexually charged interactions that Marlowe has
with both of the Sternwood girls will be illustrative of the Garden of Eden motif and its
relationship to the West Coast landscape. We first get a sense of Marlowe’s extremely
sophisticated perspective of the relationship between the sexes in the very first page of
the novel. Marlowe has just entered the Sternwood residence and, ever the trained
detective, is noticing the details of his surroundings:

...there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in a dark armor
rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on but
some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed his vizor of
his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the
ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn’t seem to be really trying. (3,4)

With regards to this image, Fontana surmises:

Of course, the lady is Carmen Sternwood whom Marlowe will find nude twice in the novel, first in the murdered Geiger’s living room and then in his own bed. In the traditional romance, the tied nude ‘lady’ has been abducted and tied by a villain. The knight-hero’s rescue of the lady involves slaying her abductor and evil guardian. In The Big Sleep there is, however, no external villain, no seamonster for Marlowe-Perseus-St. George to slay in order to rescue Carmen-Andromeda. (160)

There is no external villain, but according to the logic of the text, it is the “lady,” the “damsel in distress,” who turns out to be the real villain.

Another crucial aspect of the depiction in the stained-glass is the pervasive unreality of the situation and disingenuousness of both parties. First of all, there seems to be a pervasive lack of danger in the scene. The knight has his vizor pushed back so that he can be “sociable” with the damsel, and you would think that he could cut the ropes with his sword, assuming that a knight always has a sword, if he were worried about their possible impending demise. Likewise, the woman has been tied to a tree, but there are no
fire-breathing dragons nearby, add that to the fact that her hair has managed to "conveniently" cover her sexual organs, and one gets the sense that she may very well have had a friend tie her to the tree so that this charming knight would have to save her. The last part of this passage is perhaps the most telling. Marlowe, the symbol of the Baudrillardian real in this novel, says that "sooner or later" he would have to climb up and help the knight untie the lady because "He didn’t seem to be really trying" ([my italics] 4). The word "really" is the key to the scene. The two figures are playing out the broken hetero-normative gender roles that most of the characters in this text play, but Marlowe sees through it immediately and zeroes in on the unreality. The knight and the lady know it too, at least on some level, or else the knight would be trying harder and the lady's conveniently placed hair might slip. Here, only Marlowe exists as "the desert of the real," the world-weary alcoholic detective, while the rest of the heterosexual characters play out their roles.

Immediately after our exposure to the brilliant symbolism of the stained-glass panel, we get to see life imitate art and Marlowe's resistance to his scripted role. The novel's two principle female characters will both interact with Marlowe before he leaves the Sternwood residence and each will try to use their sexuality to their own advantage. Carmen takes a crack at Marlowe first, approaching him as he waits alone in the main hallway to be taken to see the General. Marlowe describes her as having "a fine tawny wave cut much shorter than the current fashion of pageboy tresses curled in at the bottom. Her eyes were slate-gray, and had almost no expression as they looked at me. She came over near me and smiled with her mouth and she had little sharp predatory teeth." Carmen's "predatory teeth" make it extraordinarily clear who the aggressor is in this
scene. Carmen does do her best to play her hetero-normative feminine role though. Marlowe makes special note of a gesture in which Carmen “lowered her lashes until they almost cuddled her cheeks and slowly raised them again, like a theatre curtain. I was to get to know that trick. That was supposed to make me roll over on my back with all four paws in the air” (5). It is important to note that Marlowe compares her eyes opening to being like a theatre curtain going up, suggesting the unreality and insincerity of her gesture; it is just a role she is playing. According to the logic of the novel, Marlowe, as the Adam figure, is supposed to play along and allow Carmen to take complete control of the situation. When he does not, she tosses her head angrily, calls him a “big tease” and then takes her attempts at seduction up a considerable notch. Marlowe relays that Carmen “put a thumb up and bit it. It was a curiously shaped thumb, thin and narrow like an extra finger, with no curve at the first joint. She bit it and sucked it slowly, turning it around in her mouth like a baby with a comforter” (6); clearly, this gesture is meant to be seductive. When Marlowe still has not succumbed to Carmen’s charms, she tries to simulate the image in the stained-glass panel, turning her back to Marlowe and falling straight back into his arms. “I had to catch her or let her crack her head on the tessellated floor. I caught her under her arms and she went rubber-legged on me instantly. I had to hold her close to hold her up. When her head was against my chest she screwed it around and giggled at me” (6). In this instance, Carmen was willing to risk hurting herself in order to play the role of the damsel in distress, even if she is fully aware that it is only a game. She is so sure that men will play their allotted roles that she knows Marlowe will save her. Although he does keep her from hurting herself, he never falls for her charms.
When the butler interrupts the scene Marlowe tells him, regarding Carmen, “You ought to wean her. She looks old enough (7).

Marlowe gets the second barrel, so to speak, after meeting with General Sternwood and being called for by the older of the Sternwood girls, Vivian Regan. Vivian wants to know for what Marlowe has been hired and attempts to use her sexuality to get Marlowe’s cooperation. Vivian is “worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed to be arranged to stare at. They were visible to the knee and one of them well beyond” (17). Again, Marlowe makes note of the disingenuousness of the situation and the staged manner in which the scene takes place. As Debord and Baudrillard have suggested, the ocular surface level is where most of these characters choose to operate, but Marlowe succeeds because of his ability to see the falseness. It should be noted that although Marlowe does stare at Vivian’s legs, he never actually takes the bait and falls under her control. As Chandler has written about the detective, clearly describing Marlowe’s attributes in his essay “The Simple Art of Murder,” “he is neither a eunuch or a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things” (18). Marlowe is a heterosexual male and does desire women as is demonstrated throughout the text and the rest of the Marlowe novels, but he rarely allows this desire to compromise him, and he never does it in The Big Sleep. A little later in the same scene, Vivian loses her patience as her attempts to get answers fail. The following exchange is emblematic of the power struggle that is the crux of the novel:
“I don’t see what there is to be cagey about,” she snapped. “And I don’t like your manners.”

“I’m not crazy about yours,” I said. “I didn’t ask to see you. You sent for me. I don’t mind your ritzing me or drinking your lunch out of a Scotch bottle. I don’t mind your showing me your legs. They’re very swell legs and it’s a pleasure to make their acquaintance. I don’t mind if you don’t like my manners. They’re pretty bad. I grieve over them during the long winter evenings. But don’t waste your time trying to cross-examine me.”

She slammed her glass down so hard that it slopped over on an ivory cushion. She swung her legs to the floor and stood up with her eyes sparkling fire and her nostrils wide. Her mouth was open and her bright teeth glared at me. Her knuckles were white.

“People don’t talk like that to me,” she said thickly. (19)

People do not talk that way to her because, in Chandler’s eco-dystopian world, most people fall on their backs with all four paws in the air, to borrow a phrase, whenever beautiful women wish it to be so. When Marlowe refuses to play along, Vivian turns on him and, in an atavistic manner, becomes threatening. We see how little Vivian actually cares for Marlowe at the end of the scene when he lets slip that he does not have the information that she thought he had. She dismisses him curtly saying, “I’m sure I don’t care what you say” (20). For these girls, sex is an act in the theatrical sense, and its
purpose is to gain control over men and to obtain economic advantage. The men become worthless if they cannot provide these things.

The theatricality continues later in the novel when Vivian and Eddie Mars stage a mugging outside of Eddie Mars’s casino so that Marlowe will believe that that Vivian and Mars are at odds. Marlowe rescues Vivian but soon sees through the fraud. Vivian kisses him when they are in Marlowe’s car afterwards and then takes it even further by asking him where he lives – an obvious proposition. Marlowe tells her and asks her if she would like to see it. She replies, “Yes” but is immediately shot down when Marlowe asks her why she put on the act with Eddie Mars. Marlowe has picked up on some things that do not add up, telling Vivian that Eddie Mars had let her win a lot of money at the casino and then sent a “gunpoke around to take it back for him. You’re not more than mildly surprised. You didn’t even thank me for saving it for you. I think the whole thing was just some kind of an act” ([my italics] 152). Once again, Marlowe chooses reality over the simulation – the territory as opposed to the map, to use Baudrillard’s terms. In this novel, what is false is connected to corruption, and the only way to remove oneself from the corruption is to always choose reality and see beyond the act. This motif is furthered as the scene continues. Marlowe tells Vivian that,

‘Kissing you is nice, but your father didn’t hire me to sleep with you.’

‘You son of a bitch,’ she said calmly, without moving.
I laughed in her face. ‘Don’t think I’m an icicle,’ I said. ‘I’m not blind or without senses. I have warm blood like the next guy. You’re easy to take – too damned easy. What has Eddie Mars got on you?’

‘If you say that again, I’ll scream.’

“Go ahead and scream.”

She jerked away and pulled herself upright, far back in the corner of the car.

‘Men have been shot for little things like that, Marlowe.’

‘Men have been shot for practically nothing. The first time we met I told you I was a detective. Get it through your lovely head. I work at it, lady. I don’t play at it.’ (Chandler 151)

Vivian’s not so subtle threat on Marlowe’s life is typical for this novel, but Marlowe once again makes it perfectly clear that he, unlike the other characters, is not playing a role. Marlowe really is a detective, a seeker of truth, and it does not matter what advantage he may gain by selling out, whether is be sexual or financial, he will remain real.

This argument contradicts critics who read Marlowe as, himself an actor. Megan E. Abbot suggests that Marlowe’s masculinity is fragile and is structured “as a house of cards.” Abbot is right in recognizing the falseness of the male and female roles being played in this novel. She pinpoints the scene in which Marlowe tosses Carmen Sternwood out of his apartment after she strips naked and offers herself to him, as the best example of how fragile is Marlowe’s tough guy façade.
Marlowe returns to his apartment one night to find disturbed femme fatale Carmen Sternwood in his bed. He ejects her from his apartment with seeming composed impassivity but, after she departs, his calmness evaporates and readers are afforded a peek behind the curtain. He relays, “I went back to the bed and looked down at it. The imprint of her head was still in the pillow, of her small corrupt body still on the sheets. I put my empty glass down and tore the bed to pieces savagely” (159). The moment is startling because it comes with no warning or precedent for such an emotional display. It appears Marlowe cannot bear the thought that this woman has contaminated his apartment, his very bed. It wrecks him and animalizes him just as Marlowe’s rhetoric animalizes Carmen and her “jungle emotion” (158) throughout the novel. Particularly crucial here is the extent to which Marlowe has revealed his sardonic tough guy act as just that: an act.” (308 Abbott)

In contrast to Abbott, I would suggest that what is occurring in the scene in which Marlowe returns to his apartment to find it already occupied by Carmen, is a clash between the main adversaries in this novel, physically represented by Marlowe and Carmen, but truly the clash between the map and the territory. Marlowe represents the real, while Carmen represents simulation. She comes to Marlowe’s only sanctuary and plays her feminine role, polluting it not just with the fact that she is the novel’s main “Eve,” but also with her falseness. Marlowe even refers to her as “something” (153)
when he first realizes she is in the room. He describes her tawny wave of hair as being "spread out on the pillow as if by a careful and artificial hand" (154). Words like "something" and "artificial" are not throwaway words in this instance; it is clear that Chandler is making a point about Carmen’s constructedness. Carmen represents everything that is wrong in eco-dystopian Los Angeles. Her use of sex for power is "corrupt" (Reck 114). Sex has become false, and this falseness is connected to the "post industrial culture of consumption." Marlowe resists this culture, "living ascetically in his apartment at Franklin and Kenmore, from which he drives Carmen, his nude intruder and seductress, an act for which he will be almost killed. Marlowe’s isolation stems from his refusal to enter the new hedonistic economy of consumption" (Fontana 163). This economy of consumption is what has, according to the logic of the novel, created the eco-dystopian landscape.

Further evidence that Marlowe is aware of the disingenuous aspect of the "mating game" is found in Marlowe’s distraction by a chessboard across the room. As a beautiful naked women waits for him to come to bed and have sex, Marlowe begins to think about how best to solve a problem in chess. "I couldn’t solve it," he says, "like a lot of my problems" (154). Clearly, Marlowe sees the analogy between the chess game and the game he has to play with Carmen. Marlowe knows that there “is no other game in sight, except supine submission to a collective entropic adversary” (Fontana 161). He must decide how to play the game in such a way so that he does not become part of the corruption that always results from the imperfect and destructive “mating game.” When Marlowe attempts to be chivalrous, truly chivalrous unlike the knight in the stained-glass panel from the beginning of the story, and asks Carmen to leave, explaining that he
cannot sleep with her out of loyalty to her father, his actions do not even compute with her. Marlowe describes her eyes as “empty” and explains that there “was a vague glimmer of doubt starting to get born in her somewhere. She didn’t know about it yet. It’s so hard for women – even nice women – to realize that their bodies are not irresistible” (156). Carmen is so entrenched in the game, in the simulation of reality, that she cannot interact with another character if he or she is not playing their role. He says, “I looked down at the chessboard. The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn’t a game for knights” (156). Here, Marlowe begins to realize that he cannot introduce a new character into this game without conflict; the other characters do not understand the character of the truly chivalrous knight.

Even worse, when the regular players of the mating game do not understand the other players, they act out towards them in hostility. This is the driving force behind the action that sets this entire novel into motion when Carmen kills Rusty Regan for not sleeping with her. Marlowe gets a taste of just how savagely Carmen reacts to rejection after he ignores her naked body and her attempts to seduce him by performing more of her simulated felatio on her thumb. When Marlowe insists that she get dressed, she parts her lips and hisses. After he leaves the room to get her a drink, she has relented and smiles again, revealing her naked body once again and playing the role of a “cute” seductress, pretending to give the physical power to the male. Marlowe repeats his insistence that she must get dressed, and her reaction is startling:
Then I was aware of the hissing noise very sudden and sharp. It startled me into looking at her again. She sat there naked, propped on her hands, her mouth open a little, her face like scraped bone. The hissing noise came tearing out of her mouth as if she had nothing to do with it. There was something behind her eyes, blank as they were, that I had never seen in a woman’s eyes.

Then her lips moved very slowly and carefully, as if they were artificial lips and had to be manipulated with springs.

She called me a filthy name. (157)

This passage is striking on a number of fronts. First, Chandler once again makes note of Carmen’s falseness, describing her as being almost like a puppet – a thing just moving its lips and acting out with nothing behind it. Even more striking, however, is the image of Carmen on her stomach, her mouth open slightly as she hisses; this immediately brings to mind an image of a snake, and might be considered further evidence of Lewis’s assertion of the influence of the creation story in the Bible upon American artists. It is an extraordinarily appropriate image when one takes into account the similar themes that The Big Sleep shares with the bible’s creation story and with the human condition in Chandler’s eco-dystopian landscape. When the scene is read in this context, it makes much more sense that Marlowe rips apart his bed once Carmen leaves. It is not just “female contamination,” but rather it is the contamination of Marlowe’s small sanctuary – his tiny Eden. Marlowe describes his feelings before he loses his temper and rips the bed apart:
I didn’t mind that. I didn’t mind what she called me, what anybody called me. But this was the room I had to live in. It was all I had in the way of a home. In it was everything that was mine, that had any association for me, any past, anything that took the place of a family. Not much; a few books, pictures, radio, chessmen, old letters, stuff like that. Nothing. Such as they were they had all my memories.

I couldn’t stand her in that room any longer. What she called me only reminded me of that. (158)

It may not sound like Eden, but Marlowe’s apartment is, as he says, “all I had in the way of a home.” Marlowe’s apartment represents an “inner-psyche Eden,” so to speak. Within the confines of those walls is the “desert of the real” as Baudrillard terms it; it is a tattered remnant of what paradise once was. It is no longer the lush garden over which Adam had been given mastery, but for Marlowe, it remains a place of innocence. When Carmen, posing as both Eve and the Satan, enters his apartment, Marlowe loses the last tiny shred he had of paradise. He rips the bed apart because he has been infected by the corruption of his world. He says as much at the close of the novel, when he laments that, “Me, I was part of the nastiness now” (230).

Another intriguing aspect of this scene is the “filthy name” that Carmen calls Marlowe when he turns her out of his apartment. Although there is no way to be one hundred percent sure, it is possible that Vivian makes some sort of homophobic slur. If we assume this is the case, then we can assume that the vitriol with which she makes the slur is the result of her inability to understand a character who does not play “the game.”
Carmen connects Marlowe to the only population of males of which she is aware who would not fall under her control. In a sense, homosexuals, like Marlowe, refuse to take part in the imperfect hetero-normative mating strategy of the species.

This refusal to take part in the self-destructive and suicidal narrative of the text’s heterosexuals, however, does not win homosexuals any points in Marlowe’s mind. Indeed, he sees homosexuals as emblematic of the corruption in this dystopian landscape. After killing the man that he believed killed his lover, Carol Lundgren is apprehended by Marlowe and taken back to the scene of the original murder, the residence of Arthur Gwynn Geiger. Not surprisingly, Marlowe is pretty hard on someone whom he knows is a killer, but he focuses most of his threats and insults on Carol’s sexual orientation. When Carol claims that he does not have a key for Geiger’s residence, Marlowe responds, “Don’t kid me, son. The fag gave you one. You’ve got a nice manly little room in there. He shooed you out and locked it up when he had lady visitors. He was like Caesar, a husband to women and a wife to men. Think I can’t figure people like him and you out?” ([my italics] 100) To Marlowe, replacing one flawed mating strategy with another is not the answer. Geiger’s laissez faire bisexuality simply replaces one suicidal strategy with another, and Carol Lundgren’s homosexuality is lumped along with it. Marlowe seems to genuinely hate Carol as he beats him into submission, commenting that, “a pansy has no iron in his bones,” (100) and, as they struggle with one another, he describes himself and Carol as “grotesque creatures,” (101) seemingly disgusted that he has to touch someone who, in his view, is so corrupt.
Like the femme fatales that populate *The Big Sleep*, homosexuals also represent simulation and unreality. When Marlowe eventually does gain entry into Geiger's home to investigate the crime scene once again, he makes note of the falseness that pervades the scene:

Geiger lay on the bed. The two missing strips of Chinese tapestry made a St. Andrews Cross over the middle of his body, hiding the blood-smeared front of his Chinese coat. Below the cross his black-pajama'd legs lay stiff and straight. His feet were in the slippers with thick white felt soles. Above the cross his arms were crossed at the wrists and his hands lay flat against his shoulders, palms down, fingers close together and stretched out evenly. His mouth was closed and his Charlie Chan moustache was as *unreal* as a toupee. His broad nose was pinched and white. His eyes were almost closed, but not entirely. The faint glitter of his glass eye caught the light and winked at me...... The black candles guttered in the draft from the open door. Drops of black wax crawled down their sides. The air of the room was *poisonous and unreal*. ([my italics] 102, 103)

Throughout the novel, Marlowe is hyperaware of unreality, and he is never more cognizant of it then during this scene. Geiger surrounds himself in things – in commodities, as Debord would say. Again, Geiger has a reason for surrounding himself in spectacle that goes beyond a sexual fetish for the commodity itself; Geiger is a trafficker of pornography and therefore sells simulations of sexuality. Despite his
homosexuality, Geiger is, in a sense, the heart that pumps the most simulation through the veins of the dystopian landscape of Los Angeles. He profits from the heteronormative "mating game" and therefore drapes himself in the illusion that those who are invested in the system need and demand.

Unreality and spectacle are not the exclusive domains of private citizens in The Big Sleep. Indeed, when a system is so important to a civilization, you can bet that its institutions will also promote and protect the status quo. In this novel, the highest-ranking representative of institution is District Attorney Taggart Wilde. Marlowe's physical description of Wilde subtly suggests that the District Attorney of Los Angeles in Chandler's vision is Oscar Wilde's doppelganger: "Taggart Wilde sat behind a desk, a middle-aged plump man with clear blue eyes that managed to have a friendly expression without really having any expression at all" (105). Taggart Wilde has all of the telltale attributes of an Aesthete; his manners are impeccable and Victorian: "He took a silk handkerchief from the breast pocket of the dinner jacket he was wearing and touched his lips with it and tucked it away again" (107). Additionally, his home is lavish in Marlowe's description as he walks, "into a paneled study with an open French door at the end and a view of a dark garden and mysterious trees. A smell of wet earth and flowers came in at the window. There were large dim oils on the walls, easy chairs, books, a smell of good cigar smoke which blended with the smell of wet earth and flowers" (105). The D.A. also seems to have a streak of the Aesthete's ironic wit, commenting that, "Grand Juries do ask those embarrassing questions sometimes – in a rather vain effort to find out just why cities are run as they are run" (113). Chandler's choice to employ an
Oscar Wilde’s double as the ultimate representative of law and order in this novel fits perfectly with the overall logic of the book. D.A. Wilde, like Oscar Wilde himself, is a clever man primarily concerned with the surface level of things. Early in the novel, Marlowe relates to General Sternwood that he used to work in the D.A.’s office, but that he “was fired. For insubordination. I test very high on insubordination, General” (10). Marlowe’s firing is predicted by the major thematic conflict in the novel; a D.A. whose primary concern is with appearances is not likely to get along with an honest investigator who always puts truth and reality first. Marlowe explicates the conflict between the two characters best when he tells Wilde, after Wilde asks him why he is willing to risk the ire of the Los Angeles police to protect his client, that:

I’m on a case. I’m selling what I have to sell to make a living. What little guts and intelligence the Lord gave me and a willingness to get pushed around in order to protect a client. It’s against my principles to tell as much as I’ve told tonight, without consulting the General. As for the cover-up, I’ve been in police business myself, as you know. They come a dime a dozen in any big city. Cops get very large and emphatic when an outsider tries to hide anything, but they do the same things themselves ever other day, to oblige their friends or anybody with a little pull. ([my italics] 114)

The “cover-up” to which Marlowe is referring is Wilde’s attempt to cover up the blackmail angle of Marlowe’s case so that it does not come to light that the Hollywood
police were allowing Arthur Gwynn Geiger’s pornography shop to remain open in plain sight. Marlowe suggests that the police allowed it to remain open “for their own reasons” (113), which implies that they were either customers themselves or they were paid bribes to turn a blind eye. Either way, it is clear that Wilde’s function goes hand in hand with Geiger’s; Wilde protects the “corrupt” (Reck 114) sexuality of Los Angeles, promotes spectacle and simulation, and therefore, protects the post-industrial culture of consumption.

In the end, Wilde is protecting falseness so that the characters in Chandler’s eco-dystopia can continue down their self-destructive and suicidal course. Debord wrote that, “The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish for sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep” (18). Wilde, in all of his aesthetic finest, is the spectacle, protecting the bad dream of society in chains. Marlowe contemplates “the big sleep” at the close of the novel, suggesting that those who died were safe from having to be part of “the nastiness.” In a sense, however, Marlowe is one of the only characters in this novel who is not sleeping “the big sleep.” He is, indeed, “part of the nastiness now” (230) as he says, and this is his victory. Had Marlowe succumbed to the nastiness and allowed himself to start truly playing a role, to become part of the spectacle, he would have failed. Marlowe wins in this novel because he does not commit metaphysical suicide; he remains real. Reck asserts, “if Los Angeles is mainly a picture of purgatory, onto which [Chandler] pinned the label of Los Angeles, that does not detract from his portrait of fallen man and the banality of evil” (115). If
eco-dystopian Los Angeles is Chandler's vision of purgatory, at least one Adam does not repeat the mistakes of his predecessors.
...it scares me that I don’t see a future. And I don’t understand this reflex of mine to be such a smartass about everything. It really scares me. I may not look like I’m paying any attention to anything, Andy, but I am. But I can’t allow myself to show it. And I don’t know why. — Generation X

No one ever seemed to have sex… — Generation X

Just as Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* responds to the cultural paradigm shift away from the American frontier myth, Douglas Coupland’s first, and arguably best, novel responds, and even names, another major historical and cultural paradigm shift. *Generation X* shares much in common with *The Big Sleep*; both novels are situated in California, both novels describe a contemporary eco-dystopian wasteland, and the main narration of both novels is dripping with cynicism, sarcasm, and irony. Yet, if Marlowe is modernism’s Adam, then the main characters of *Generation X* are the Adams and Eves of postmodernism. In Coupland’s novel it seems that the suicidal hetero-normative tendencies of the species and the resulting decades of waste since Chandler’s time have begun to blur the distinction between the map and the territory. Spectacle and simulation are beginning to ware thin in the dystopian landscape presented in *Generation X* and many of the novel’s characters, including its main narrator, Andrew Palmer, are becoming aware that there is something more to life than just what is presented on the surface. However, despite getting incredibly close to verbalizing what it is that irks him so much, Andrew Palmer and the other characters in the novel never find any solutions
and never become fully aware of what the problem even is. Their inability speaks to the power of the spectacle and simulation around them, of which they make constant reference, to defy comprehension and to remain hidden, so to speak, even in plain sight.

The eco-dystopia of *Generation X* also shares with *The Big Sleep* the motivational factors for Andrew Palmer to opt out of the broken hetero-normative mating strategy depicted in the novel. Unlike Marlowe, Andrew does not find himself resisting the females he encounters in *Generation X*, rather, sexual encounters are never an issue for him, as he appears to be a nonsexual entity. His nonsexual status allows him to observe the mating strategies of the other characters in the novel from a privileged and non-invested perspective and, as the window through which the reader sees the action in the novel, the reader gains this perspective as well. Palmer’s non-sexuality seems to be hinted at by his name – Andrew is the “everyman’s” name (Andro = Man) while “Palmer” could suggest “palming,” a slang term for masturbation. If Andrew is a name that suggests “everyman,” and we accept this somewhat allegorical reading of the text, then the main character, by extension, represents the impotency of an entire generation of males. Of course, evidence of Andrew’s impotency goes well beyond his name; the text is rife with examples of it. Beyond just his “pencil thin” and “practically albino” (3) exterior, hardly the virile American described by Turner, Andrew also relates his desire to “be obscure, to be hidden – to be generic” (15). This flies in the face of Turner’s description of the characteristics of an American in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History”:
That coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom. (14)

Clearly, in the one hundred years since the closing of the frontier, something has happened to the American character.

In perhaps the most telling moments in the novel about Andrew, he admits to the reader that he and Claire, one of the novel’s other main characters and his neighbour, “never fell in love, even though we both tried hard. It happens.” Although Andrew is, of course, right in saying that sometimes people just do not fall in love, that does not account for the fact that Andrew is extremely close to Claire physically, and yet the two never consummate a physical relationship. The oddness of this strikes Claire’s brothers in particular when they come to visit her in California. Andrew describes his and Dag’s (the third member of the novel’s main trio) relationships with Claire as being ones where they are just “pals.” Claire’s brothers, fully inculcated in the dominant hetero-normative mating strategy, cannot fathom that Claire is not engaged in a sexual relationship with her two neighbours. They are so desperate to incorporate their conception of their sister and her two friends into their understanding of how the world works that they take the unusual step of actually searching “her bedsheets for strange hairs.” Their explanation
for this behavior is the refrain, “guys just aren’t friends with girls,” (or in the logic of my project, Adams are rarely just friends with Eves) and, in truth, the hetero-normative mating strategy does make platonic friendships with the opposite sex the exception rather than the rule. Yet this is exactly the type of relationship that Claire has with Andrew and Dag, as exemplified by their willingness to give one another nonsexual physical contact: “Claire was rubbing Dag’s neck and ... this gesture was entirely platonic. And at the end of my story, Claire clapped her hands, told Dag it was his turn for a story, and then came over and sat in front of me, requesting to have her back rubbed – it was just as platonic, too. *Easy*” ([my italics] 61). This last comment, that the platonic aspect of their relationships made things “easy,” is emblematic of one of the most important themes of the story. Andrew and his friends are aware on some level of the wretchedness of the system of which they have been a part, but to which they have not been able to give a name. They are a generation, an *X generation*, that wants to get off the destructive track that the novel seems to argue the species is on, but they do not know how. The decision of these characters to not consummate with one another suggests that they are employing a new strategy, one in which they drop out of the traditional system and observe the destruction of the species from the outside looking in. It is important to note, however, that none of the characters believes this is a solution. Andrew remarks that, “I’ve never been in love, and that’s a problem. I just seem to end up as friends with everyone, and I tell you, I really hate it. I want to fall in love. Or at least I think I do. I’m not sure. It looks so... *messy*. All right, all right, I do at least recognize the fact that I *don’t* want to go through life alone (47). This concession is important, not only to Andrew, but to the themes in the novel as well. *Generation X* does not provide any answers to the problems
in its eco-dystopian landscape of which it so cleverly observes. The novel is a snapshot of a moment in time, crystallized by Coupland’s coining of the term Generation X, a generation that felt there was nothing to look forward to other than the slow decline of civilization.

And speaking of the end of civilization, immediately following Andrew’s explanation to the reader of his non-sexuality, Dag removes his shirt, garnering no sexual interest from Claire, and declares that he has “an end of the world story,” (62) that he would like to tell his friends. Dag situates his end of the world story in a shopping mall, noting that the “ten thousand square miles of shopping malls,” signal that, “something, somewhere, has gone very very cuckoo” (62). Dag’s description of the actual moment is striking in that it describes the blending of simulation and reality. He writes, “It’s here: the soundtrack to hell – wailing, flaring, warbling, and unreal – collapsing and confusing both time and space the way an ex-smoker collapses time and space at night when they dream in horror that they find themselves smoking” (63). Here, Dag is recognizing that in a moment of true reality, in this instance a nuclear attack that virtually guarantees that there will be no survival, all pretenses come immediately into question, and simulation and reality, or the map and the territory, suddenly become intertwined. It is in this moment that Coupland chooses to bring the question of sexuality back into the mix. In the final moments before the annihilation of the characters in Dag’s story, Dag describes a scene in which “your best friend cranes his neck, lurches over where you lie, and kisses you on the mouth, after which he says to you, ‘There. I’ve always wanted to do that’” (64). Dag lives out the kiss himself at the end of the novel when, fearing that he is about to be
arrested, he kisses Andy; immediately after this, he tells another end of the world story. The kiss is homosexual and suggests an alternative to the hetero-normative mating strategy, but just as in Chandler's text, homosexuality is not an answer, as it is inscribed with its own suicidal narrative: the inability to create a new generation. This moment is fitting in a novel that is about the end of the world but in which no solutions are offered that might prevent this result.

The novel is also jam packed with examples too numerous to list of characters taking part in a broken hetero-normative mating strategy. Claire's mom, for instance, remarries during the course of events in the novel, leading Claire to declare that, "Mom's new husband Armand is just loaded" (153). Like her mother, Claire's sexual interest is focused on a wealthy male. Although she clearly is at her best and her most real when spending time with Andrew and Dag, they are not concerned with money and only work to make enough to pay the bills. Claire appears to want something else in the novel. This is exemplified best at the opening of the text. In her first appearance in the narration, Claire tells Andrew and Dag about a terrible date. The reasons for her negative summation of the experience are telling.

Out on Highway 111 in Cathedral City there's this store that sells chickens that have been taxidermied. We were driving by and I just about fainted from wanting to have one, they were so cute, but Dan (that's his name) says, 'Now Claire, you don't need a chicken,' to which I said, 'That's not the point, Dan. The point is that I want a chicken.' He
thereupon commenced giving me this fantastically boring lecture about how the only reason I want a stuffed chicken is because they look so good in a shop window, and that the moment I received one I’d start dreaming up ways to ditch it. True enough. But then I tried to tell him that stuffed chickens are what life and new relationships was all about, but my explanation collapsed somewhere – the analogy became too mangled – and there was that awful woe-to-the-human-race silence you get from pedants who think they’re talking to half-wits. I wanted to throttle him.

(6)

This insight into Claire, placed beautifully at the beginning of the novel just as the stained-glass panel was placed at the opening of *The Big Sleep*, sets up the main themes of the text. Claire, like most genXers in the narrative, believes that her eyes are open, so she resents being lectured to about the “woe-to-the-human-race.” Yet when she tries to explain her reasons for wanting the chicken, the explanation falls apart. She says it is what “life and new relationships” are all about and, according the anti-sexual logic of the text, she is right, but she is unable to explain why that is. As a woman who performs the hetero-normative mating strategy, Claire appears to want to have the chicken purchased for her by the man she is with. The taxidermied chicken is symbolically perfect, as it represents both the natural environment and death. For the majority of the heterosexual characters in this eco-dystopian novel, that really is what life and new relationships are all about – the destruction of the natural environment and the purchase of new
commodities. When Dan does not play his role, Claire’s reaction is a mild version of what we saw in the femme fatales from *The Big Sleep* – she wants to “throttle him.”

Evidence for Claire’s subconscious inner-conflict regarding the hetero-normative mating strategy can be found in the bedtime story that she shares with Andrew and Dag. She sets her story in “Texlahoma,” which the threesome call a “sad Everyplace” that represents the genXer’s cynical view of North American life. Claire’s story deals explicitly with the heterosexual mating game and can be read symbolically as such. The story is about an astronaut named Buck who crashes on Texlahoma. He crash-lands in the backyard of the suburban Monroe family and Mrs. Monroe takes him into her home and offers him a meal. She then begins to suggest ways that Buck could make more money after he retires from being an astronaut:

‘You ever thought of being a rep for aloe products after you retire from being an astronaut, Buck?’

‘No ma’am,’ said Buck, ‘I hadn’t.’

‘Give it a thought. All you have to do is get a chain of reps working under you, and before you know it, you don’t have to work at all – just sit back and skim the profit.’

‘Well, I’ll be darned.’ (40)

Mrs. Monroe is concerned with Buck’s financial status and her aloe scheme can be read metaphorically as the hedonistic economy of consumption – that old enemy of
Baudrillard and Debord. Indeed, Debord would not be surprised by what happens to Buck once he begins to consider Mrs. Monroe's idea and to neglect his truer passion for space travel:

But suddenly something went wrong. Right before Mrs. Monroe's eyes, Buck began to turn pale green, and his head began to turn boxy and veined, like Frankenstein's. Buck raced to look at a little budgie mirror, the only mirror available, and knew instantly what had happened: he had developed space poisoning. He would start to look like a monster, and shortly, he would fall into an almost permanent sleep" (41).

Clearly, as soon as Buck decides to perform his hetero-normative gender role and become a breadwinner at the behest of a lady, he becomes part of the simulation and spectacle that is Texlahoma and he begins to sleep, "the big sleep."

It is obvious that despite her uneasy relationship with the hetero-normative mating strategy that the text depicts, Claire is completely caught up in it. As was established by her relation of the story of a bad date at the beginning of the novel, Claire actually wants to play out her role, even if she is subconsciously aware that it is both self and species-destructive. Claire is fixated on a handsome and rich young man named Tobias and she explains her fascination with him to Andrew by saying, "Everybody has a 'gripping stranger' in their lives, Andy, a stranger who unwittingly possesses a bizarre hold over you..... and mine, unfortunately... is Tobias" (79). Andrew describes Tobias further by
explaining that he “had one of those bankish money jobs of the sort that when, at parties, he tell you what he does, you start to forget as soon as he tells you,” and that, “he likes to make jokes about paving Alaska and nuking Iran” (80). Clearly, Tobias is the broken hetero-normative mating strategy’s prime example of the alpha-male – the man every woman wants. He has the wealth and the social status that Claire seems to subconsciously desire and he does not seem to have a problem with the idea of destroying the environment or waging war if it means personal gain. He feminizes Andy by calling him “Candy” and Andy does nothing in response. Tobias, in sharp contrast, is all about potency, bragging that he does not use condoms and jokingly asking Andy, in reference to Claire, “what do you say – should I impregnate her?” Claire’s response shows how helpless she is under the weight of her gender role: “At this point Claire’s face indicates that she is well aware of feminist rhetoric and dialectic but is beyond being able to extract an appropriate quote. She actually giggles” (82). Again, despite her awareness of the game she is playing, the allure of the game and the easiness of the mating strategy, allows her to slip into her role and play out her part in the simulation. Perhaps appropriately, the couple then heads to bed, to sleep metaphorically if not literally.

Surprisingly, however, Tobias, who has seemed on the surface to be one of the most flat characters in the novel, provides what is, arguably, the novel’s biggest turn. Tobias listens along with Dag, Andrew, and Claire, to their friend Elvissa’s story about her first love. Elvissa describes a sexual encounter when she is young with a neighbourhood boy, and then meeting up with him again several years later. The boy has lost a testicle, literally becoming half-castrated, and is now spending his time living off of
wealthy women. He is a wreck when Elvissa meets him again, and he relates to her a
dream he has had where hummingbirds are pecking out his eyes. The loss of his eyes can
be read as a symbolic castration, and it appears that this is exactly how Tobias
understands the tale. Immediately following the story, Andrew sees Tobias looking at his
eyes in the rearview mirror of his car, and knows, right then and there, “that it’s all over
between him and Claire. Call it a hunch” (104). The hunch turns out to be completely
correct, as Tobias does indeed end it with Claire. When Claire next meets Tobias, several
months later in New York, Tobias reveals through his rage just how aware he is of the
role he is playing in the hetero-normative mating strategy as it is depicted in the text.
Tobias interprets Evlissa’s story about a man who reverses the traditional gender roles
only to end in misery, as proof that there is no escape from the system the hetero-
normativity has created. Claire related to Andrew that Tobias told her that his main
attraction for him was the “conviction that I knew a secret about life – some magic
insight I had that gave me the strength to quit everyday existence. He said he was curious
about the lives you, Dag, and I have built here on the fringe out in California. And he
wanted to get my secret for himself – for an escape he hoped to make” (157). This is
clear evidence that Tobias is not a flat character after all, and even though he was playing
his gender role perfectly earlier in the novel, on some level, he was aware that it was just
a role and hoped that Claire, Andrew, and Dag might be able to show him the way to
reality. The hopelessness in Evlissa’s story seems to have driven that hope from him. He
becomes increasingly agitated as he speaks to Claire and as he becomes more honest, the
curtains, so to speak, fall away from his pretensions and he describes a version of reality
that lines up extraordinarily well with this project’s arguments. “You’re just so sublime,
aren't you Claire. Looking for your delicate little insights with your hothouse freak show buddies out in Hell-with-Palm-Trees, aren't you? Well I'll tell you something, I like my job here in the city. I like the hours and the mind games and the battling for money and status tokens, even though you think I'm sick for wanting any part of it" (159). There are a few points in this early portion of Tobias's rant that need mentioning. First, his sarcastic condemnation of her for being "sublime" powerfully demonstrates his frustration with her for thinking of herself as "above" the fray of simulation in their world. It is also interesting to note here that, in a sense, Andrew, Dag, and Claire, who live in the desert, seem to be attempting to get more "real," by living in there. It is possible that they hope, albeit on a semi-conscious level, just as Tobias hoped, that they would discover a true desert of the real as in Baudrillard's vision. There home, however, potted with civilization's cast offs, does appear more like "Hell-with-Palm-Trees" as Tobias asserts, and perfectly exemplifies Generation X's inability to provide any real solutions to the problems that it depicts. Tobias also references "status tokens" in his rant, able to name them and yet determined to attain even more of them. Here, Tobias is committing a metaphysical suicide, surrendering his true self, whatever that may be, to the simulation that envelops Coupland's eco-dystopian vision. He holds a metaphorical gun to his head as he exclaims, "fuck sublime, Claire. I don't want dainty little moments of insight. I want everything and I want it now. I want to be ice-picked on the head by a herd of angry cheerleaders, Claire. Angry cheerleaders on drugs. You don't get that do you?" (159). This is exactly the opposite direction that Marlowe goes during the course of The Big Sleep. While Marlowe is victorious in the end of that novel because he has not surrendered himself to simulation and unreality by acquiescing to femme fatales,
Tobias quite obviously wants to surrender himself to the Eves that inhabit his world. To finish off his rant, Tobias puts the icing on the cake by adding that, not surprisingly, this surrender to the hetero-normative mating strategy entails the destruction of the natural environment: "I want to be naked and windburned and riding the lead missile of the herd heading over to bomb every little fucking village in New Zealand" (159).

Tobias's rant is one of the most important moments in the novel because it makes it clear that this book is not about providing an answer. Just like the generation that it named, Generation X is a novel that is primarily about eco-dystopia. It should not be surprising that the book is also so fixated on relationships between the genders. Although Coupland, along with the characters he has created, may not fully realize it, the eco-dystopian landscape of which they inhabit has developed because of the strategies that Tobias abandons himself to at the end of the text. Although, at the point in history that is so vividly captured by Coupland's novel, circumstances have gotten so bad sociologically, economically, and environmentally that an entire generation was beginning to wake up and identify what it was that made their lives so depressing, the fact remains that there are no simple answers, and this is why Tobias chooses to rush back into the system, rather than to remain in the liminal space between the map and the territory in which Andrew, Claire, and Dag are trapped.

Being trapped in this liminal space leads to a loss of subjectivity for these characters, a loss that is felt by each of the characters and expressed in the novel's preoccupation with, and fear of, history. As Lainsbury asserts, "Generation X is a
meditation on the end of history” (3). Indeed, Andrew seems to really believe that history has ended, even looking back with a small degree of fondness on the Vietnam War because, “they were ugly times. But they were also the only times I’ll ever get – genuine capital H history times, before history was turned into a press release, a marketing strategy, and a cynical campaign tool” (151). His words indicate and underlying desire to be part of something real, yet he mistakenly equates war and misery with genuineness. Fight Club’s Tyler Durden makes the same mistake but actually does something about it, building an army so that he can spread misery and, therefore, he can have a part in history. Andrew’s reaction is much more typical of Generation X, as he simply laments rather than taking action:

You see, when you’re the middle class, you have to live with the fact that history will ignore you. You have to live with the fact that history can never champion your causes and that history will never feel sorry for you. It is the price that is paid for day – to day – comfort and silence. And because of this price, all happinesses are sterile; all sadesses go unpitied. (147)

Andrew’s lack of action is par for the course for his life and also for the plot of Generation X. It is interesting to note that Douglas Coupland originally intended this book to be a “nonfiction handbook of Gen X behaviors and attitudes” (Lainsbury 2). This might account for the lack of plot and emotional arks, especially at the end of the book. Yet, considering the content of Generation X, its structure seems to be utterly
appropriate. The novel does not really satisfy, reads mostly as a list of depressing and cynical observations, and just happens to perfectly resemble the time and the generation that it named.
Chapter IV – Fight Club

We are God’s middle children according to Tyler Durden, with no special place in History and no special attention. Unless we get God’s attention, we have no hope of damnation or redemption. Which is worse, hell or nothing? Only if we’re caught and punished can we be saved. (Fight Club)

I know all of this: the gun, the anarchy, the explosion is really about Marla Singer. (Fight Club)

When I first met Chuck Palahniuk last spring, I did not even recognize him. I had seen his picture dozens of times; anyone who buys a copy of his books needs only to flip to the back to see his handsome and masculine features. When I purchased one of his books last summer in a bookstore in Victoria with my mother at my side, she gasped when she realized I had interviewed him and immediately encouraged me to invite him over for dinner. I told her I did not have a close personal relationship with him and that he was too young for her anyway. Her reaction to his appearance was not surprising, however. Palahniuk is featured on his books, either smiling with a rustic pine setting in the background, or with long tangled hair and a very faint smile, suggesting a tough guy you would not want to meet in a dark alley if you were on his bad side.

That is why, when I first encountered him at our designated meeting place in Vancouver in February of 2006 outside of the CBC studios, I let him walk right by me. “That couldn’t be him,” I thought. “Sure he was the right age, he had a female handler with him who had been taking him to his appointments around town that day, but still, that’s not Chuck Palahniuk. Chuck oozes machismo. He walks larger than life. He
makes women swoon. That man there... well, he looks like a dork.” He was small in stature. On Internet Movie Data Base he is listed as 5’11, but he slouched down to my height of 5’8. He hunched down, kept his eyes on the ground, had very conservative and neatly trimmed hair, and wore a beige and gray flannel jacket. He did not make eye contact with me as I waited for him, and I had to follow him inside CBC and wait to get another look at his face, just to confirm that, “no that could not be him.” But in a quick upward glance at me, I saw him – the man from the jacket covers. He was there all right, but hiding.

He asked me if I was David and I confirmed it and shook his hand. He smiled, but still made very little eye contact. His primary concern was finding out where the bathroom was, and when I told him he disappeared without a word. As I sat down and waited for him, I could not help thinking to myself, “That is the man who wrote *Fight Club.* He’s responsible for the most masculine, macho, text I have ever read; from his mind birthed those iconic images of Brad Pitt, blood and sweat dripping, his muscles rippling after defeating another man in combat. From his mind birthed the demolition of corporate buildings before 9/11 made it an unfashionable reality. It all came from him. Now how the hell did that happen?” When he returned, he asked me where I would be interviewing him as he glanced around, looking a little lost. I brought him upstairs to a room, appropriately enough for an interview, called “The Fishbowl.” He settled down into a chair and I set up my equipment. There was an uncomfortable silence as he sat quietly waiting so I decided to fill it. I told him how long the interview would be, briefly what the subject would be, suggested that he could feel comfortable giving long answers if he liked and that he should not feel rushed, and I also warned him that I would not be
reacting verbally because it was important not to have my voice on the interview track. I do not know why I was surprised that it felt like this. He was exactly like everyone else I have ever interviewed – a little bit nervous, a little bit unsure, and very happy to have instructions beforehand. I suppose I just expected him to take over the process, the way Tyler Durden might, and that I would have to hang on for dear life until he finally got sick of the process and firebombed the building. The interview itself went very smoothly, and once he had a real question into which he could sink his impressive intellect, we seemed to become friends. After the interview he was much more comfortable, seemed as though he did not really want to leave, and suggested to me, “Bill and Doug,” (William Gibson and Douglas Coupland) “will think this is really cool.” I did not share his optimism but I appreciated it and thanked him. We left each other on very friendly terms, both our minds stimulated by a great conversation. Hopefully I will meet that Chuck again some day.

I did meet Chuck Palahniuk again later that night, but it was not the same Chuck. This Chuck was completely different. I was going to a joint reading by Palahniuk and Douglas Coupland at Freddy Wood Theatre at UBC and showed up early. Palahniuk was already there on the stage, an hour before the reading was to begin, signing autographs. I was stunned by his appearance. Now he was dressed in black with a silver vest to emphasize his broad chest that he stuck proudly out for the public’s admiration. He arched his shoulders back confidently and held his head and gaze high for everyone to see. I had brought my then girlfriend with me and we got into line like everyone else. I mentioned to her how different he looked from that morning. We watched his theatrics, thoroughly entertained as he gave roses to everyone who came up to have a book signed.
On occasion, his fans would ask to have a picture taken with him. He happily obliged. For the men, he put his arm around them and smiled. For the women, he pulled a disembodied mannequin arm, complete with stage blood coating the elbow joint where it was supposed to have been torn from the body, and held it out so that the hand would cup the woman’s breast for the photo. There was no saying “no” to this. Although many women looked very uncomfortable as they had their breast cupped, if you were a woman and wanted a picture, you had to be prepared for fondling by plastic. This was out in the open, in front of about a hundred spectators at the time, and it was repeated. Now this, this was Tyler Durden. When my companion and I made it to the front of the line, Palahniuk looked up and recognized me. It was not the same friendly look I had seen as we parted ways just hours before. This was Durden now, in full flight. He looked at my companion and said to her, “You’re with him? Do you know what he does for a living? I guess you don’t like money.” He then signed my books. He signed *Fight Club*, “I am David’s book – Chuck Palahniuk.” He signed *Haunted*, “Happy pearl diving, David! Chuck Palahniuk,” a reference to a story in the novel about a masturbation incident gone horribly, horribly wrong – no, the regular rules did not apply anymore. Tyler made the rules. It did not end there; he went ahead with his reading, was very open and entertaining, but at the end of the show threw rubber dog crap into the audience and detonated stink bombs to clear out the theatre.

And suddenly, it was all too clear how that little man I had interviewed earlier in the day could have written *Fight Club*; Chuck Palahniuk was *Fight Club*. I had interviewed a man who’s EGO kept him under control, to the point that you would describe him as meek and mild mannered, and then watched his ID, perhaps not
completely unleashed, but kept on a much shorter one than the rest of us are allowed in our daily lives, and experienced the vicarious venting of the stressors that we all, male and female, share every day. Just as in his fiction, Palahniuk was allowed to let loose — we want him to — we pay him money to do it, because if we cannot do it ourselves, we have to experience it through someone else. This may partially explain why the novels I am exploring in this project are so popular. Like Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, Andrew and co in *Generation X*, and Case in *Neuromancer*, Tyler Durden provides the reader with a character with whom he or even she can vicariously experience an alternative to a system these novels demonize as species-destructive.

Tyler Durden exists, in fact, as a mental stressor relief for the narrator of *Fight Club*, unnamed in the text but popularly referred to as Jack. Jack hates his job, which is to coldly calculate the cost of out of court settlements and weigh them against doing complete product-recalls for a major car company, and he hates his life, which he spends in a condominium that he describes as a “filing cabinet” (41). He suffers from insomnia, which ironically, is because he is sleeping his way through life in the Debordian sense, experiencing the artificiality of the dystopia he inhabits, where “everything is a copy of a copy of a copy” (97). Jack is desperate to make contact with the Baudrillardian real and that is why, in the early stages of the novel, he is participating in support groups for people with serious medical issues and addictions. It is important to note, of course, that the first support group into which Palahniuk chooses to drop Jack is “Remaining Men Together, the testicular cancer support group” (18). Castration is a crucially important recurring motif in this text and, also crucially important and intertwined, is the motif of
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reality versus the Baudrillardian *simulation* or Debordian *sleep*. Jack visits the support groups so that he can cry. He explains that he cries when he realizes that “everything you will ever accomplish will end up as trash” and that on “a long enough time line, the survival rate for everyone will drop to zero” (17). He makes this realization when he is confronted with real human misery – in this instance it is exemplified by Bob, a man who has had his testicles removed and who has developed female breasts because of the resulting hormone therapy. Bob’s situation is so extreme that it is impossible to incorporate his circumstances into the mind-numbing simulation of daily life. His lack of testicles and his female breasts also make it impossible for him to be part of the heteronormative mating strategy. When Bob embraces Jack and relates his circumstances, Jack explains to the reader that, “Strangers with this kind of honesty make me go a big rubbery one” (21). Here, Jack reveals that encounters with honesty and reality make him feel more masculine and potent; the suggestion then, is that those activities that are artificial, such as playing a gender role and being part of the simulation in daily life, have the effect of metaphorically castrating him.

Not surprisingly, it is a woman who acts as a barrier between Jack and his experience of reality. Marla Singer, the only female character in the novel of any note, is also visiting the support groups; she is even in the testicular cancer support group. Her presence taints Jack’s experience of reality. She is a “Faker” and he complains to the reader that, “I can’t cry with her watching” (19) because “with her watching, I’m a liar” (23). Jack needs the support groups in order to move from simulation to reality. His condo life is the map, whereas the support groups are the deserts of the real, the only place where Jack can “ever really relax and give up. This is my vacation” (18). During
guided meditation, Jack usually pictures a penguin who helps him slide "through tunnels and galleries" (20) within a cave. In Freudian terms, the cave could represent a female vagina, and the ease with which Jack feels he can move around within it is indicative of the feeling of masculine empowerment that his contact with the real has provided him. The movements come very easily, but once Marla arrives on the scene, she takes the place of the penguin and stands, seemingly defiant, in the cave. Her being there prevents Jack from experiencing the feeling of being alive that the groups bring him. He begins to fantasize about confronting her and telling her that the groups are "the one real thing in my life and you're wrecking it" ([my italics] 24). It is fascinating that Jack sees his infiltration of the support groups as the only real thing in his life, considering the pretenses under which he gains access to them. Yet it is the experiences themselves, the experience of really meeting someone who lives with a horrible illness or who is truly facing death, that give Jack a sense of reality. Ironically, despite the fact that Jack sees Marla as a faker and a threat to his experience of reality, Marla is actually there for the same reason as he. She explains that she comes to the groups so that she can get away from the abstract experience of death represented by funerals; in contrast, the groups provide "the real experience of death" (38). Once again, it is reality for which the characters are searching. Despite her sincere desire to experience reality and her identical motives for visiting the groups, she still represents falseness for Jack, and therefore ruins his experience of reality. When Jack loses this outlet, this avenue for venting the stresses he experiences in the simulation of daily life, his psyche splits and creates Tyler Durden.
It is helpful to think of Jack as the map in Baudrillardian terms and Tyler as the territory. Jack is analogous in many ways to Andrew Palmer in Generation X in that he realizes that there is something inherently wrong with the eco-dystopian landscape in which he resides, yet, like Andrew, he does not have a solution. After he and Tyler start Fight Club, he sincerely believes that he has his answer. He tells Tyler that, “I’m enlightened now. You know, only Buddha-style behavior. Spider chrysanthemums. The Diamond Sutra and the Blue Cliff Record. Hari Rama, you know, Krishna, Krishna. You know, Enlightened.” Tyler, however, knows that Jack’s proclaimed “enlightenment” is only another level of simulation, explaining to him that, “Sticking feathers up your butt...does not make you a chicken” (69). In a sense, Tyler has a similar reaction to Jack’s sense of enlightenment to that of Tobias to Claire’s “sublimity” in Generation X. Tobias’s reaction is to delve even further into the simulation, while Tyler’s reaction is to tear the simulation down completely. Tyler begins to explain this to Jack, saying that Jack is nowhere near hitting the bottom, yet. And if I don’t fall all the way, I can’t be saved. Jesus did it with his crucifixion thing. I shouldn’t just abandon money and property and knowledge. This isn’t just about a weekend retreat. I should run from self-improvement, and should be running toward disaster. I can’t just play it safe anymore.

This isn’t a seminar.

“If you lose your nerve before you hit the bottom,” Tyler says, “you’ll never really succeed.”
Only after disaster can we be resurrected.

“It’s only after you’ve lost everything,” Tyler says, “that you’re free to do anything.” (70)

Tyler plans to achieve this by destroying as much as he possibly can.

Before he can do this, however, he has to recruit an army, and he begins this process by creating fight club. Fight club, literally, is a series of clubs in which men meet in the basements of various establishments throughout the city and fight one another, two at a time, one fight at a time, until one of the combatants goes limp or taps out. The fight clubs, however, are more than just places for men to fight one another — they are places of reality — they are temporary portals out of the simulation of daily life and into the real. Jack explains the reality of fight club this way:

Fight Club is not football on television. You aren’t watching a bunch of men you don’t know halfway around the world beating on each other live by satellite with a two-minute delay, commercials pitching beer every ten minutes, and a pause now for station identification. After you’ve been to fight club, watching football on television is watching pornography when you could be having great sex. Fight Club gets to be your reason for going to the gym and keeping your hair cut short and cutting your nails. The gyms you to go are crowded with guys trying to
look like men, as if being a man means looking the way a sculptor or an
art director says. (50)

Here, Palahniuk is clearly intertwining the concepts of reality and masculinity together. Fight club is real in the same way that the support groups were real in that it forced individuals to come together and experience life in brutal ways with no room for pretense. Jack contrasts this experience with the artificiality of television and the concept of maleness that is sold to men in the society of the spectacle.

Tyler's goal is to give this experience of reality to as many men as possible. Eventually, he sends the members of fight club out into the streets to pick a fight with a stranger and allow the other man to win. "Let him experience winning for the first time in his life. Get him to explode. Give him permission to beat the crap out of you... What we have to do, people... is remind these guys what kind of power they still have" (120). The power that they still have is the power to destroy the system in which they live.

In Fight Club, unlike in Generation X, the characters make an attempt, lead by Tyler Durden, to destroy the system that we have been calling the simulation or the spectacle, by destroying "history" so that a new history will record their existence. Tyler, Jack, and the members of fight club, along with all of the other characters in the novel for that matter, exist in a world that, as in Generation X, seems to be absent of history. Certainly things have happened before the novel begins and Tyler is aware of previous history. His view is strikingly postmodernist: "everything up to now is a story... and everything after now is a story," (75) suggesting that Tyler buys into the postmodernist
view that history always has a fictive element. Tyler’s problem is that he believes he exists in a time when history is, in a sense, over. The West has been won, consumerism has taken control of the world, and all that is left to do now is wait for the eventual end of the species, an end that will come with a whimper rather than a bang. Krister Friday explains Tyler’s motives this way:

Tyler’s reasons for the necessity of both the fight clubs and Project Mayhem are explained in conspicuously historical terms: it is not simply that contemporary consumer culture has emasculated men, but rather, the identity crises afflicting the (white) male subject should be read as the result of a postmodern “present: bereft of historical distinctiveness or identity. In other words, Tyler reads the crisis of masculinity and concomitant need for masochism as imbricated within a larger historical condition. Variants of this “Tyler Durden dogma” (141) are expressed through both Fight Club texts, and Fincher’s film wisely condenses them in a manifesto-like speech given by Tyler Durden at the beginning of the first fight club:

We are the middle children of History, man, with no purpose or place; we have no great war, no great depression; our great war is a spirit war, our great depression’s our lives. (Fincher)

It is here that we can first glimpse Fight Club’s anxiety over historical periodization, or more precisely, an anxiety over the absence of periodization that could serve as the proper context/support for identity.
What Tyler announces is a familiar form of postmodern historical self-consciousness – one in which the “present” is conceived in crepuscular terms as an aftermath without recourse to a form of History predicated on the event. It is the even that anchors traditional History and makes periodization possible by negotiating sameness and difference: it is the event that distinguishes one time from another, and it is the event that marks/creates any particular period, which in turn is governed by the logic of the same. Without the demarcation of the event, periodization as a form of sameness is impossible, and without periodization, identity as a form of temporal distinctiveness is impossible. (Friday 13, 14)

Tyler explains the dilemma this way, saying, “We are God’s middle children... with no special place in History and no special attention. Unless we get God’s attention, we have no hope of damnation or redemption. Which is worse, hell or nothing? Only if we’re caught and punished can we be saved” (141). By now, it should be clear that Tyler’s solution to the problem of living in his postmodern eco-dystopia and fading away into obscurity, is to force reality upon the world by tearing down the fictive history of the past and replacing it with a new history, a history created by Tyler Durden, one that will make he and the narrator, “legend” (11). Tyler plans to achieve this by killing two birds with one stone, so to speak, blowing up the world’s largest building, the “Parker-Morris Building,” and bringing all “one hundred and ninety-one floors... down on the national museum which is Tyler’s real target” (14).
Once again, this fascination with history can be directly linked to Turner's frontier thesis. This novel takes place on the West Coast, although the city is never actually named. We know that it takes place on the West Coast because the narrator returns home and must set his watch back three hours, putting him on pacific time. Palahniuk lives in Portland, so it is a fair guess that most of the novel takes place there, but it is also possible that Palahniuk leaves the city unnamed so that the city becomes an 'Everyplace' like Texlahoma in Coupland's *Generation X*. The fact that this city is situated on the West Coast and is the brainchild of an author from the West Coast is not surprising. The "go west" mythology of America and its place in the creation of American history, a history that, according to the postmodern conception of history in general, must be, at least partially, fictional, has been, essentially over for nearly a hundred years when these novels were written. Although the story of the West did continue, a history in which the environment degraded while the population grew and consumerism took hold, an end seems to have been reached. Coupland attempts to place a date on it – the year 1974, "starting from which real wages in the U.S. never grew again" (Coupland 40). Whether this date has any validity is moot; what matters is that something, whether it is termed history or something else, seems to have come to an end. This feeling of ending explains the fixation that both of these novels have with Armageddon and the end of the world.
Chapter V -- Neuromancer

The opening of Rob Latham's paper "Cyberpunk = Gibson = Neuromancer," hints at the popular appeal of the themes explored in both Neuromancer and ecodystopian literature:

In the informal interview that closes Fiction 2000 (a collection of essays from 'an international symposium on the nature of fiction at the end of the twentieth century... held in Leeds, England... [in 1989 and focusing] specifically on the form of science fiction called cyberpunk'[279]), Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, responding to a remark that the conference had featured 'an emphasis on [William] Gibson's Neuromancer,' replies: 'I think the impression that much of the conference centered on Neuromancer may actually just be an effect of the convergence in time of the talks. I don't perceive this as having been a Neuromancer conference at all' (280-81). Csiscery-Ronay is wrong. It was a Neuromancer conference, at least judging by the essays gathered in the proceedings. (266)

Indeed, in a conference focusing on the "nature of fiction at the end of the twentieth century," the issues brought to light by Neuromancer generated most of the thought at the proceedings, and it should not be surprising that at the time of these talks, as history begins to feel as though it is at an end, yet another novel is generated on the West Coast that seems to encapsulate the gestalt of the time. If Marlowe is a modernist Adam and
Andrew Palmer and Tyler Durden are postmodernist Adams, then Case is the post-human Adam.

Still, with each of the novels we have explored, there is a clear lack of any reasonable solutions offered to the terminal outcome of the species of which the texts suggest is coming. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, which is, in many ways, the darkest of the novels explored in this project, may also contain within it the seeds of some hope. The hope comes in the form of what Deleuze and Gauttari term, "the Body without Organs (or the BwO, as they would have it)" (1 Bukatman 7). Bukatman applies this term to Gibson and the cyberpunk genre to which Gibson gave birth, explaining that cyberpunk has a surrealistic perspective that revels in the deformation and destruction, the resurrection and the reformation, of the human....the technotactics of cyberpunk transform the rational structures of technological discourse to produce instead a highly poetized, dreamlike liberation. The languages of science and technology are inverted by a metaphorical system of language which effaces the borders between conscious and unconscious, physical and phenomenal realities, subject and object, individual and group, reality and simulacrum, life and death, body and subject, future and present. The Shaper/Mechanist and Cyberspace fictions construct collages, placing the subject in urbaneque cyberspaces, or within insect mechanisms in alien habitats. The human is emplaced within the machine;
the human becomes an adjunct to the machine: the cyborg is a cut-up, a juxtaposition, a *bricolage* of found objects. (7)

Only cyberpunk can offer this kind of escape from the terminal fate of the species. Although BwO may not sound like an appealing alternative, it may indeed be an alternative, and *Neuromancer*'s protagonist, Case, is desperate to obtain it. In an age where "lighting out for the territories" (Parker) may not be possible any longer in a physical sense, in the eco-dystopian future imagined by Gibson, lighting out for the infinity of cyberspace is possible, leaving the physical body and the urban corruption he inhabits behind.

Comparing and contrasting *The Big Sleep* and *Neuromancer* seems a natural way to explore cyberspace's relation to the main focus of this paper. Indeed, many critics have noted the similarities between Chandler's work and Gibson's, including Gibson himself who noted it after being read an excerpt from *Neuromancer* (No Maps for these Territories). The excerpt he heard was the description of 'Night City," part of 'the Sprawl,' an urban area along this futuristic eastern seaboard of the United States. "Night City was like a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button. Stop hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too swiftly and you'd break the fragile surface tension of the black market" (7). The reference to Darwin conjures clear images of the nineteenth century laissez-faire economies in Europe and America that were modeled on a misguided interpretation of Darwin's theories, pitting person against person in a "natural"
struggle in which only the strongest survived. In Night City, we see the return of this kind of economy, absent of any kind of social safety net, and we see the frightening results. The narrator informs us that, since Case had been damaged and unable to enter the matrix to make his living, he had “killed two men and a woman over sums that a year before would have seemed ludicrous” (7). Clearly, life in the Sprawl is kill or be killed if you do not have the physical advantage you need to rise above the crowd. The Sprawl consists of “heavies showing off grafts and implants, and a dozen distinct species of hustler, all swarming the street in an intricate dance of desire and commerce” (Gibson 11). Case, just like Marlowe, is weary of the world he inhabits. Marlowe deals with it by becoming an alcoholic, while Case is addicted to nervous system stimulants. Their shared environments have lead to more than just their shared cynical outlook on life. Nazare notes that the two characters have also developed a

body disgust – Marlowe’s dis-ease with his aging, mortal coil, his distaste for nymphets like Carmen Sternwood in The Big Sleep – is not limited to discussion of Chandler. Marlowe, repulsed by Carmen’s ‘small corrupt body,’ grousers that ‘[w]omen made [him] sick’ (159), but Neuromancer’s hotshot hacker Case, who ‘lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace’ (6), also spurns his girlfriend Linda Lee because she betokens the carnal: ‘All the meat, he thought, and all that it wants’ (9).” (Nazare 386.

According the logic established by my project, the disgust case feels toward the physical body, especially when it comes to mating, is not surprising. Subconsciously aware that
physical desires have lead to the disgusting circumstances of humanity, Case has developed an aversion to the physical. Yet Nazare has a slightly different and illuminating explanation:

Case actually does not express 'nostalgia for hard-boiled masculinity' (Ross 153). No male hysteric using cyborg fortification as a prophylactic against contamination by the feminine, Case yearns to 'jack in' to the immersive data flow of the cyberspace 'matrix' (a return to the maternal womb, to draw upon the latinate etymology of the world). It is Case's almost sexual addiction to cyberspace (and not Marlowe's uneasy mix of misogyny and chivalry) that has led to real-world body disgust; this fact also points to a difference between Case's and the hard-boiled detective's experience of the urban condition. If the 'dilemma of the private eye is that of the closing of the frontier, the loss of the lure of a golden land ever beckoning the unsatisfied loner' (Carper 180), Case's closed frontier is the cyberspace technosphere that he has been denied access to, not the California dream trap (manifest destiny turned nightmare destination) of Chandleresque Los Angeles. (Nazare 386, 387)

Nazare's assertion that Case's experience of cyberspace has sexual elements is fascinating. Indeed, Case does compare orgasming inside Molly to his experiences in the matrix, suggesting a strong metaphorical connection between sexual consummation and the escape into cyberspace. This, in relation to Nazare's argument that the etymology of
the word “matrix” indicates an overt sexuality, suggests that Case has made a
subconscious connection between escaping the simulacra of his urban environment and
resistance to the emasculating elements of “the meat,” the imperfect mating strategy, and
his expected hetero-normative gender role.

Without question, despite the repeated references to Case as a “cowboy” in the
text, a clever reference helping to solidify the connection between Gibson’s Cyberspace
and Chandler’s closed Western frontier, Case is not a hyper-masculine character; he is
not even a very masculine character for that matter, and he suffers under the constant
threat of castration. Much of this threat comes from Neuromancer’s main female
character, Molly. When she meets Case, the exchange is extraordinary in its
emasculating of Case.

“‘Molly, Case. My name’s Molly. I’m collecting you for the man
I work for. Just wants to talk, is all. Nobody wants to hurt you.’

‘That’s good.’

‘Cept I do hurt people sometimes, Case. I guess it’s just the way
I’m wired.’ She wore tight black gloveleather jeans and a bulky black
jacket cut from some matte fabric that seemed to absorb light. ‘If I put this
dartgun away, will you be easy, Case? You look like you like to take
stupid chances.’

‘Hey, I’m very easy. I’m a pushover, no problem.’
‘That’s fine, man.’ The fletcher vanished into the black jacket.

‘Because you try to fuck around with me, you’ll be taking one of the stupidest chances of your whole life.’

She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four-centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails.

She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew. “(25)

The connotation is clear: Molly is in control and as long as Case remains with her, she owns his manhood. Molly also has glasses, or perhaps it is better to describe them as lenses, surgically “inset, sealing her sockets” (Gibson 24). The narrator describes the lenses as seeming to “grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones” (Gibson 24). The implants are not simply there for fashion; Molly can see in the dark thanks to her lenses and she has a digital time display that is constantly in her peripheral vision. In addition to the lenses, Molly’s scalpel blades slide out whenever she is embroiled in a struggle for her life, something that happens to her often in her job as a hired assassin (among other things) for a shadowy figure named Armitage. All in all, it is obvious that Molly, like the Sternwood sisters in The Big Sleep, is a femme fatale, even if she is “femme fatale 2.0.”

Unlike Marlowe, however, Case submits to Molly sexually repeatedly throughout the text. Molly does not play the role of the submissive female very well, although she regularly refers to Case as a “cowboy” and uses her sexuality as part of her strategy to
bring him under her control. It works. Case risks his life to take part in an extraordinarily dangerous hack that promises to pay Molly and her employers an enormous sum of money. After their success, Molly disappears. The first words of the novel's last chapter are “She was gone,” (267) and are followed by Molly's succinct note to Case: “HEY ITS OKAY BUT ITS TAKING THE EDGE OFF MY GAME, I PAID THE BILL ALREADY. IT'S THE WAY IM WIRED I GUESS, WATCH YOUR ASS OKAY? XXX MOLLY” (267). Indeed, despite the fact that Molly is clearly an example of the blending of human and machine, she still succumbs to the, perhaps natural and inborn, desire to use her sexuality to manipulate men to gain profit, even telling him at one point to “earn your keep for a change” (76). As she says to Case herself early in the novel, what “I always think about first, Case, is my own sweet ass” (30). In this respect, her actions mirror those of the Sternwood sisters and Blonde Agnes in *The Big Sleep*. The final line of *Neuromancer* reinforces the importance of Case’s relationship to Molly to the events of the novel: “He never saw Molly again” (271). Clearly, this loss is devastating to him, and will only reinforce his distaste for “meat.” In an almost humorous twist, even the artificial intelligence known as Neuromancer actually tries to act as a sort of Eve to try to gain control over Case so that Case will do what it wants. After Case walks away from a holographic representation of his former girlfriend, Linda Lee, while inside a computer generated program, the A.I. concedes defeat: “You have already won, don’t you see? You won when you walked away from her on the beach. She was my last line of defense” (259). In a sense, Case wins the same way Marlowe does in this instance – by refusing to live within an illusion, a literal simulation of reality, and to commit a metaphysical suicide.
Once again, the protagonists in eco-dystopian literature are Adam's in the city, resisting the Eves who wish to tempt them into joining them in a dream world with their sexuality. Although, like the other novels with which this project is chiefly concerned, *Neuromancer* does not explicitly implicate or indict the broken hetero-normative mating patterns of the species, it does make explicit reference to the creation story of the bible, harkening back to the mythology of the American West. On only the sixth page of the novel, as Case stews in a seedy bar while remembering how his ability to jack into the matrix was stolen from him thanks to nerve toxin poisoning, we learn that, for Case, "who had lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" ([my italics] 6). This short passage is crucial, as it, all at once, makes reference to the Western Frontier mythology with the cowboy allusion, connects that mythology with the Eden myth that Lewis argues was so important to early American literature, and provides a possible alternative to "the Fall." Within the logic of this project, the fall of man in the bible is a story that is more about our future than our past. It is a story about the end of the species, more so than its beginning. This postmodernist reading of the Eden myth allows us to actually claim the creation story as eco-dystopian, and it works whether we shine the light of history backwards or forwards. Indeed, if the story is about our creation, it is a story of environmental degradation caused by human selfishness, and if we shine history's light forward, just as Gibson does in his writing, then the story becomes the earliest instance of speculative fiction in western culture. Gibson writes that, "Science fiction tends to behave like a species of history pointing in the opposite direction, up the
timeline rather than back. But you can’t draw imaginary future histories without a map of the past that your readers will accept as their own’’ (2 Gibson xv). For Neuromancer and the other main works explored in this project, the Garden of Eden myth and the close of the Western frontier have been yoked together to form the map of the past from which present and future histories are written; these histories do, indeed follow the map, and whether we are looking backward or forward, the result is the same: destruction.

However, Neuromancer does have, as stated above, an alternative. If the destruction of the species is the result of the broken and perverse hetero-normative relationship depicted in the text then escaping the “meat” of the body might be an answer. Again, Gibson falls back on the Eden myth while explaining Case’s motives for wanting to escape the prison of his own body. After getting “rewired” so to speak, so that he can jack back into the matrix, he begins working with a character who has actually achieved the BwO ideal: the Flatline. The Flatline is a former “cowboy” who died while doing a hack after running into a lethal corporate security system. The Flatline’s body died instantly from heart failure, but the Flatline’s consciousness remained within the matrix. It is appropriate that it is this character who begins the dialogue in chapter six, telling Case, “You want you a paradise,” (81) after Case explains his circumstances to him. Gibson’s word choice is more than a simple coincidence; to Case, cyberspace is paradise. It is, ironically, where he feels the most real. While the physical world is enslaved to the Baudrillardian simulation of daily life, the matrix is exciting, allowing you to be “totally engaged but set apart from it all” (16). Without destructive physical desires, all that is left to do is explore the “distanceless infinity” (52) of the matrix. Existing outside the realm of the physical, the matrix solves the problems of over overpopulation and
environmental degradation. As the narrator describes, "In the nonspace of the matrix, the interior of a given data construct possessed unlimited subjective dimension; a child's toy calculator, accessed through Case's Sendai, would have presented limitless gulfs of nothingness" (63). With unlimited space at one's disposal, and with questions of physical needs such as hunger, sex, and wealth, seemingly made meaningless, perhaps Case has found an escape clause from the eco-dystopia he inhabits.
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