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The American History of Repression (a Camp Parody): Performance, Identity, and Society in James Ellroy's Underworld USA Trilogy

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by

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For Jamie Bernard

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Introduction

James Ellroy, best known for his books *The Black Dahlia* and *L.A. Confidential*, is generally categorized as a crime writer, but is more accurately a historical fiction writer with a very specific focus. As Luc Sante writes, "[For Ellroy] crime is an underlying reality, not an exceptional circumstance. He views the history of the United States in the twentieth century as something like an extended caper novel…and he clearly intends to be the Balzac of this epic" ("Low Lifes"). Ellroy's novels, particularly *The Black Dahlia* and *L.A. Confidential* (part of his L.A. Quartet along with *The Big Nowhere* and *White Jazz*) involve white cops who investigate gruesome murders, which lead inexorably to historic moments of city development. Crime is a means to which Ellroy investigates his pet interest, namely class and race struggle facilitated by Los Angeles' population explosion after the Second World War. The white cops are generally burdened by emotional trauma and are further compromised psychologically when they are required to participate in racist violence by the LAPD. As historian Jonathan Walker writes, "Murders…are always symptoms, expressive of and intimately connected to the wider culture, not just isolated causes mechanically driving a plot. In other words, the psychosexual disorders of his murderers are presented as microcosms of wider social practices" (183). Ellroy writes history as political oppression and psychological repression.

Recently, Ellroy finished his Underworld USA Trilogy, which is comprised first of *American Tabloid* (1995), then *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001), and finally *Blood's a Rover* (2009). Ellroy takes his particular lens to the '60s and '70s and expands his scope to America as a whole. The books are structured around the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and the death of J. Edgar Hoover. The books are highly unusual crime thrillers. They are manic, dense, and massive. They require the reader to keep track of an unwieldy

amount of information, which is conveyed in a blunt, compressed style that is alternately seductive and alienating. Events occur at such a rapid clip that they confuse. The content of the trilogy is repellent—the violence is brutal, the heroes and villains are evil, and the narrative voice delights in racist, homophobic, and sexist invective. Everything from content to form is exaggerated to the point of self-parody.

In short, the trilogy is a tough sell even for fans. It seems as if Ellroy wrote the novels with his particular fanbase in mind. There is a general assumption his reader has already taken the leap into his dark, moral worldview. The assumption he makes about his audience is partly why, despite the fact that his novels are bestsellers, he is only talked about in niche circles. His public persona doesn't help—it oscillates between self-immolating and endearing (mostly the latter), a character that would launch a reading with the ridiculous "Good evening, peepers, prowlers, pederasts, and pedants" and declare himself "the white knight of the far right" (Timberg, "James Ellroy's L.A.") then speak movingly about his mother's murder and the shadow it cast over his life. It usually takes several minutes for an interviewer to break past the clown persona and get at the "real" Ellroy, who at this point in time, has spun his autobiography into his own myth. These details are fascinating (his memoir *My Dark Places*) and his stated obsessions inform his work. However, reviewers and academics have a tendency to use these details to psychoanalyze him through his writing. Earlier this year, Ellroy had a TV show called *James Ellroy's L.A.: City of Demons*. In the pilot, he discussed the death of his mother, the Black Dahlia murder, and his obsession with these dead women. He appeared opposite a talking, computer-generated pit bull named Barko. If it isn't entirely obvious, his tongue is planted firmly in his cheek. I remember reading on an Internet comment board that Ellroy created a persona that

was the type of person who writes the sort of books he writes: loony, self-promoting, funny, abrasive, desperately seeking attention, and grating.

Disregarding Ellroy's persona, there is a complicated investigation of performance in the three novels. In the novels, a white power structure runs the country. It is a chaotic structure formed out of strained allegiance between the FBI, CIA, and the Mafia. Over the course of the novel, characters have to perform roles in order to participate in this society. In *American Tabloid*, Kemper Boyd, a WASP performs variations of his white identity to ingratiate himself with the John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, the Ku Klux Klan, and the mafia, among others. He is a "glib dissembler" (54). Wayne Tedrow, in *The Cold Six Thousand*, attempts to perform a progressive white cop identity that roundly fails. In *Blood's a Rover*, Marshall Bowen, a undercover gay black cop, is allowed into the white power structure and has to mimic white authority. Undercover, he has to perform as a black militant for the white authority.

It is useful to provide a brief summary of the books themselves, seeing as they are crowded and intricately plotted. *American Tabloid* takes place between 1958 and 1964, beginning with Howard Hughes' purchase of the fictional tabloid *Hush-Hush* and ending in John F. Kennedy's assassination. It's told in third-person perspective and is limited to the perspectives of Pete Bondurant, Kemper Boyd, and Ward Littell. Pete is an enforcer for both Howard Hughes and Jimmy Hoffa. In the beginning of the novel, he flies to Miami to kill an informant on Hoffa's Teamsters to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, who is targeting the mob through the McClellan Committee. The McClellan Committee investigated organized crime during the time period and focused their efforts on Hoffa and the Chicago Mob. Miami has a seductive hold over Pete, who becomes increasingly involved with Hoffa's Tiger Kab taxi chain and its Cuban employees. After Pete is arrested in Miami, he is bailed out by the CIA and becomes part of an

unofficial operation to oust Fidel Castro. The operation is supported by the Mafia, whose casino's Castro nationalized, and staffed by the Ku Klux Klan. The operation is funded through the distribution of heroin to non-white Miami neighborhoods. The operation ends in the Bay of Pigs fiasco in 1961.

Kemper Boyd is a corrupt federal agent who FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover plants in Senator John F. Kennedy's inner circle. The Kennedys pose a significant threat to Hoover—Robert F. Kennedy's anti-Mob investigations contradict FBI mandate. The FBI refused to recognize organized crime and focused its efforts largely on left-wing activists. A Kennedy in the White House could be the end of his career. Kemper's goal is to both observe and subvert the campaign. However, Kemper becomes entranced with the Kennedy family, falling in love with John's personality and Robert's sense of justice. He is contacted by the CIA and moonlights as a trainer for the anti-Castro Cubans. Robert Kennedy takes a pro-civil rights stance, further incensing Hoover, who considered the movement a Communist rebellion. Kemper asks to be assigned to the Justice Department's civil rights squad, which enforced integration in the south. Both the right-wing Cubans and the left-wing civil rights activists move him. The Kennedy family shuns him when they suspect him of sabotaging the family.

Ward Littell is another FBI agent and Kemper's best friend. He is bullied for his liberal politics and alcoholism at work and is assigned the humiliating task of investigating left-wing activists for the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO). COINTELPRO was a series of surveillance projects that targeted subversives, in this book suspected Communists, through a variety of illegal means—wire-tapping, blackmail, and harassment. Littell desires to be part of the Top Hood Program, which Hoover created to appease Littell's idol Robert Kennedy. He has a deep hatred for the mafia that rivals Kennedy's own. Through Boyd, Littell becomes Kennedy's

secret agent in Chicago. Kennedy only knows him by the alias the Chicago Phantom. His reckless and obsessive behavior compromises his investigation. When he gets close to the Teamster's secret fundbooks and tapes, the evidence that could send the Mafia's top brass to prison, Pete is called in and beats him within an inch of his life. Littell manages to steal the fundbooks, then discovers proof that the Mafia funded John F. Kennedy's campaign. The FBI disowns him and Kennedy follows suit. Littell suffers a breakdown and becomes his opposite, an apathetic Mafia lawyer to seek revenge on the Kennedy family. He coerces Kemper and Pete in the Mafia plot to kill Kennedy. Kemper ruins his plan and Littell kills him. The Mafia formulates a new plan and kills Kennedy.

The Cold Six Thousand is even more plotted and suffers under the strain. Pete and Littell return and Wayne Tedrow Jr. takes Kemper's place. The weakest part of the novel (and the trilogy) involves Pete. Still aching from the failed Cuban cause allies himself with the CIA in the insane hope of resurrecting another anti-Castro movement. It repeats the same beats from the previous novel—Pete goes to Southeast Asia with the CIA to coopt land from South Vietnam and Laos in order to produce heroin. The heroin is sold to poor communities in Las Vegas in order to keep the civil rights movement away from the city. Pete learns that CIA agents and the mafia had no interest in Cuba. He kills the agents and retires.

Much more interesting are Littell and Wayne's storylines. Events following the Kennedy assassination reignite his liberal passions. He falls in love with a woman who discovered the assassination conspiracy when she was investigating the Mafia to avenge her father's death. He witnesses Robert F. Kennedy's comeback from his brother's death and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s growing success in the South. However, he's enslaved to Hoover and the mafia. The mafia assigns him to eavesdrops on Kennedy's conversations and Hoover tasks him with donating dirty

money to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in order to defame them. Littell participates in Hoover's anti-civil rights Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), a mandate to entrap and defame the movement. He attempts to subvert Hoover and the mafia and experience the growing liberalism vicariously through Kennedy and SCLC advisor Bayard Rustin. The COINTELPRO fails and King is assassinated. When King and Kennedy are assassinated, he is wracked by guilt and commits suicide.

Wayne Tedrow Jr. begins the novel as a progressive cop. He is coerced by his hate-propagandist father and the mob to find and kill Wendell Durfee, a black criminal who maimed a casino croupier in self-defense. He finds Durfee and lets him run away. However, Durfee turns out to be a sexual psychopath. Wayne's wife is murdered and he descends into racist violence. A brilliant chemist, he joins Pete in Southeast Asia and cooks heroin. When he returns, he is given information regarding Durfee's whereabouts and finally kills him. Dwight Holly, Wayne's childhood friend and corrupt FBI agent, threatens him with arrest. Holly and his father force Wayne to participate in the King assassination. By the end of the novel, he and his stepmother murder his father out of revenge.

The plot of the *Blood's a Rover* is much stranger than the previous novels. The oppression-via-heroin motif persists, though this time the actual distribution of drugs is less schematic. Dwight Holly and Wayne return. Both are involved in an FBI plot to discredit the rising Black Nationalist movements like the Black Panthers by entrapping smaller criminal organizations in heroin distribution. They employ Marshall Bowen, a gay black cop. Wayne has an apostasy when he falls in love with Mary Beth Hazzard, a black woman he widowed, and searches for her lost son Reginald. Dwight's relationships to two white liberal women, the radical Joan Klein and the pacifist Karen Sifakis, force him to reconcile his political beliefs. Dwight and

Joan conspire to assassinate Hoover. Karen is responsible for the 1972 Media, Pennsylvania Break-In—activists broke into an FBI archive and stole files pertaining to COINTELPRO. A new protagonist, the voyeuristic private investigator Don "Crutch" Crutchfield investigates a ritualistic murder in Los Angeles, which leads him to a shadow economy of emeralds that unites the characters in the books.

In this project, I will analyze the first two books, *American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*, through two different frameworks. In my analysis of *American Tabloid*, I will three articles, two critiques of the American zeitgeist and a recent tabloid story to give an overview of the emotional world Ellroy attempts to recreate. Then, I will examine *American Tabloid* as an exaggerated parody of crime fiction. I use Susan Sontag's "Notes on Camp" and Andrew Britton's "Notes Against Camp" to examine the camp sensibility, the performance of a subject flouting social mores by mimicking them, and the social issues camp performance raise. I will look at the construction of archetypes in the crime genre as represented by Pete Bondurant and Barbara Jahelka Lindscott as well as the performers of camp in Kemper Boyd and the secondary characters Laura Hughes and Lenny Sands. In the end, I hope to show how the exaggerated genre parody interacts with the performance of the characters to imitate and critique an oppressive society. Through these characters, I will examine Ellroy's perspective on the relationship between identity and an oppressive society and how he uses narrative voice to mimic this relationship.

In *The Cold Six Thousand*, the themes of identity and repression are much more pronounced. The plot of the novel concerns the collapse of identity, of sense of self. Wayne Tedrow Jr. and Ward Littell suffer from the failures their "stable" identities. I will examine the novel using Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In

the essay, I will discuss the composition of the white power structure--the alliance of the FBI, the Mafia, the old Ku Klux Klan—and chart its gradual disintegration caused by the civil rights movement. The large-scale psychological movements are reflected in the two protagonist's own psychologies. Because of their place in the white power structure, the protagonists find their current identities (Wayne as a white progressive cop and Littell as an apathetic mafia lawyer invalid) and locate their angst in the oppressed to negative and positive ends. I will use the schemes provided by Deleuze and Guattari of the schizophrenic, the neurotic, and the revolutionary. To put it in simple terms that may threaten to reduce them: the schizophrenic is able to split from the demands society places on him but remains apart; the neurotic is a one who splits from society, identifies the flows that repress him, but returns in self-defeat to participate in the system that represses his desires; and the revolutionary is a one who splits and is able to free the flows that repress him and reinvest those flows into society. In *The Cold Six Thousand*, the schizophrenic is Littell. He desires to be part of an egalitarian social system, something his new identity as a FBI agent and mafia lawyer makes impossible. Like Kemper Boyd, he becomes different persona, identifying equally as an FBI agent, as a mafia lawyer, and as the liberal crusader he once thought he was. Because of his dissembling and because of social forces he cannot control, he remains on the fringe and commits suicide. The neurotic is Wayne, who identifies himself as a progressive authority figure. It is destroyed rather violently by Wendell Durfee, and Wayne descends into racist hatred. He returns to society as a soldier in the race war, and ousts his father as a major power player in the white power structure. The revolutionary is Martin Luther King Jr. who realizes that true equality would be impossible without economic equality, attempts to free flows of money capital, and reinvest them back into society.

In the conclusion, I unpack the ending monologue of *Blood's a Rover* and briefly examine the characters with first-person accounts: Joan Klein, Marshall Bowen, and Don Crutchfield in order to call attention to the shifts in psychology in the three novels. The book ends in an epilogue that, while overblown, is a significant change in form.

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Spite, Camp, and Gossip-Rags in *American Tabloid*

The alternative news website *The Exiled Online* was originally a tabloid set up by journalists Mark Ames and Matt Taibbi in post-Soviet Russia. After some time of mocking the oligarchs, journalists, and ex-pats, the KGB got bored with them and kicked them out, but they still publish online and have recently broken a story that links the Tea Party to corporate financiers. Their leitmotif of 2011 is this: American culture thrives on spite, malice, and petty jealousy. Culture critic Eileen Jones' a commentator on the site, she declares that celebrity is a reminder of the goal of capitalist life: "It's part of our social contract that we should all try to 'make it,' i.e. become rich and/or famous. If we do manage to beat the incredible odds against us…we get invited to 'The Party.'" The party she has in mind is America as Xanadu, a pleasure land roped-off from the plebians who can only stand glower spitefully over the bouncer's shoulder. "It [is] the whole point of becoming rich/famous…to have the waters part before you everywhere you go" (Jones, "Charlie Sheen and the Pursuit of Happiness"). Journalist Mark Ames takes the cynicism even further, saying that the spite one feels when watching the rich and famous drives white middle-class males to vote against their own interests. Looking at the failure of John Kerry to beat George W. Bush in the 2004 election, he draws on the media representation of Kerry. To the spiteful, John Kerry's purple hearts were achievements that they were too cowardly to achieve. The image of him "[riding] up the Mekong, clutching his M-16 like some fucking action hero movie star" was "the life every dead-ender American wishes he had lived, daydreaming about courage in his wretched cubicle." Kerry's downfall was the picture of him "wind-surfing like some happy coastal Californian celebrity" (Ames, "We the Spiteful"). Put aside the exaggerations, the ad-hominem attacks, and the mockery, both writers are onto something. Though Ames' article is more worthwhile, attempt to pinpoint American social

anxiety in a way that explains how we would allow ourselves to protest the government for the benefit of oligarchs or why we would revel in a chemically-compromised wife-beater's antics.

Early in 2011, a story—"InterContinental 'Killer' Confesses to Castrating Dead Journalist"—was published in the right-wing tabloid the *NY Post*. It fits within Rupert Murdoch's framework. He is the owner of the *Post*, several tabloids in Australia and the UK and FOX News. Recall the infamous op-ed cartoon where two police officers gun down a chimpanzee from two years ago. One of them says, "They'll have to find someone else to write the next stimulus bill." The cartoonist cites a weird-but-true story about a Connecticut woman who was attacked by a chimp, likens it to Barack Obama's passing of his stimulus package, and then kills the chimp with three bullets from quipping white cops. (Stein, "New York Chimp"). It's a racist image. "InterContinental Killer" is similar in its excess and hatred—both homophobic and xenophobic. The quotes around "killer" already arouse suspicion, but the order of events posed by the syntax even more so. The quotes play to a mock journalistic objectivity:

> A male model has confessed to brutally torturing his journalist sugar daddy in a Midtown hotel for more than an hour – and then castrating him with a wine corkscrew – to get rid of "demons and a virus," law-enforcement sources said yesterday.
>
> "I'm not gay anymore!" accused killer Renato Seabra 20, told investigators he raged to popular Portuguese fashion columnist Carlos Castro, 65. (Celona et. al)

Homosexuality and spiritual deviance are tenuously linked in these two sentences. There is also the dubious assertion that homosexuality is a choice. The reference to Castro as a "journalist sugar daddy" throws any notions of objectivity out the window.

Despite the seeming malice with which this was written, the writers attend to the first sentence with a degree of craft. Each dash is designed for you to gasp. The castration isn't coupled with the brutal torture, its separated by dashes. The selective use of quotes is the icing on the cake—nothing is being made up, law enforcement can prove it. Finally, there's the police

quote that provides "proof", but makes the sentence explode in strangeness. In "The Decay of Lying," Wilde writes, "How different [political rhetoric is] from the temper of the true liar, with his frank, fearless statements, his superb irresponsibility, his healthy, natural disdain of proof of any kind! After all, what is a fine lie? Simply that which is its own evidence" (Wilde 292). There are a few lies by omission within that short article, but you have to research outside of it to get the truth. The truth, as usual, is more interesting: Castro was a LGBT activist and, ironically, a notorious gossip journalist in Portugal (Parascandola et al, "Carlos Castro") The authors made a choice to make these omissions and it seems that they intended the story to stand on its own by its strangeness. The authors are trying to create a narrative verisimilitude, the likeness of truth. They, in Wilde's fashion, craft a little narrative lie that works because it provides its own evidence.

Why take such a sleazy tabloid story so seriously? Claire Bond Potter, writing about the gossip surrounding J. Edgar Hoover's sexuality, suggests that it "might permit us to historicize homophobia as a form of knowledge that is not about LGBTQ people at all. Rather, it needs to be read for the stories it tells about power in language borrowed from gender and sexuality" (369). *American Tabloid* is an attempt to historicize not just homophobia, but other societal fears and anxieties. It adopts prose that revels in racist, sexist, and homophobic language. It is written in the way the *NY Post* article is written, sensationally and with similar omissions and targets. Unlike the article, the book is intended to be read critically. It performs white masculinity and requires the reader to question the performance. Take for instance a scene where protagonist Pete Bondurant quizzes Lenny Sands, a closeted gay comedian about '60s gossip. The quiz is for a position as a tabloid writer. First, Pete asks where one could find prostitutes on the Sunset Strip for a hundred dollar bill. Then, he asks, "Suppose I want nigger stuff?" and finally, "Suppose I

want boys?...I know you hate fags, but answer the question" (144-5). The way the questions are ordered is telling—prostitutes are arranged by race and class. The questions are arranged by what society considers deviant and they are expected to get consecutively harder to answer. Pete, a symbol of the power structure (moving freely between Hollywood, the mafia underworld, and politics) reinforces Lenny's marginalization.

In Susan Sontag's Wildean "Notes on Camp," she lists the tabloid the *Enquirer* as an example of a Camp work. Her essay is a series of observations of the Camp sensibility, all hinting at a certain logical structure. Camp works undermine everything in their crosshairs while celebrating the flaws they criticize. It's a curious game. Satire is a comic genre aimed to radically change its subject. It critically assesses an object and amplifies the flaws so as to suggest that object's illogic. Satire offers pragmatic or moral solutions. Camp, however, identifies and mocks problems, but celebrates their existence and revels in its ability to do so:

> Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation—not judgment. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it's not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.) Camp taste doesn't propose that it is in bad taste to be serious; it doesn't sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures. (57)

Camp is based on paradoxes. Is a "ruthless but a sweet cynicism" really cynicism at all? How can "passionate failures" be successful? It is essential to read *American Tabloid* with these paradoxes in mind. "Camp is a vision of the world in terms of style—but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not" (58). Ellroy's novel is a Camp parody of crime fiction. He exaggerates everything (the clipped style, the character types, the violence) and pushes them all towards the breaking point. However, Ellroy differs from Sontag when she suggests, "It goes without saying that the Camp sensibility is disengaged, depoliticized—or at least apolitical" (Sontag 56). Ellroy may mock history, but it is in the service

of social critique. In his essay "Notes Against Camp," Andrew Britton writes, "Camp behaviour is only recognizable as a deviation from an implied norm, and without that norm it would cease to exist, it would lack definition" (138). He goes further, arguing that Camp is a way of recuperating social oppression. A Camp performer acknowledges the social constructions (race, gender/sexual normatives, class) that oppress him and flaunts them to knowing smiles. His performance requires those constructions to exist.

American Tabloid is a parodic work that mocks, criticizes, and celebrates American nastiness as seen in private conversation and public policy. It embraces the tabloid perspective and Camp sensibility while exploring the implications of both. Tabloids feed on spite and revel in fame. Ellroy attempts to mimic tabloids through style and features them in his plot to criticize spite and reduce the role of fame in American life. Tabloids lie, omit, and exaggerate. Ellroy attempts use these traits to get at some emotional truth about America. In the introduction, he proposes a "reckless verisimilitude" to uncover the truth behind this event—meaning that he wants to create the likeness of truth to tell the reader what is actually true in American history. The truth behind the assassination isn't really a conspiracy—it's the atmosphere of hate, anger, jealousy, and angst that are symptomatic of the social structures we're invested in. These are the emotions he wants the reader to enjoy and laugh at, and they are the cause of one of the greatest tragedies in the 20th century.

In Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Lord Darlington imagines a scenario where he absconds from dreary London with the much-younger Lady Windermere, and says, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars" (110). Darlington acknowledges his own unhappiness but revels in (by this point in the narrative) impossible and scandalous fantasy. The disjunction between the gutter and the stars is the source of this unhappiness. In spite of his

considerable outward charm, manifested in his ability to simultaneously deride and flatter, he's doomed to unrequited love. While Sontag looks at Camp as a sort of empowerment, there is a limit that she doesn't observe. The Camp sensibility is a sensibility that allows people to approach their lives with a great deal of humor. They can laugh at sadness, using an observer's cynicism and/or romanticism to mock the world around them. A Camp personality can entertain a group, but they cannot be part of it. All they can do is look. In *American Tabloid*, the narrator proposes "It's time to demythologize an era and build a new myth from the gutter to the stars. It's time to embrace bad men and the price they paid to secretly define their time. Here's to them" (4). In *American Tabloid*, Ellroy attempts to close the distance between the gutter and the stars. He has much in common with Andrew Britton—he diagnoses the oppressive forces that create this separation and creates a narrative that explores the tragedy of people performing the oppression they suffer from society.

In a Camp reading of the novel, there needs to be a distinction between two types of characters—characters with a Camp sensibility and Camp characters. The distinction is important in recognizing where *American Tabloid* works as a novel and where it doesn't, or rather, where it uses parody to achieve ends greater than mere mimicry. One particular observation from "Notes on Camp" helps distinguish characters with a Camp sensibility: "To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing-a-Role. It is the farthest extension, in sensibility, of the metaphor of life as theater" (Sontag 56). The characters, for the most part, are similarly invested in performance. A good deal of scenes are set up like theatrical productions—a character performs and is perceived by an audience. Kemper Boyd, Laura Hughes, and Lenny Sands perform Camp throughout the novel. Through them, Ellroy explores the concerns raised by Andrew Britton. Kemper is undone when his performance fails. Laura and

Lenny can only be part of society by performing their oppression. Ellroy is interested in these performative characters, the social structures they inhabit, and the language they use to define their status within it.

Sometimes, Ellroy doesn't rise above mere parody. This isn't to dismiss the effort—the novel is incredibly funny and successfully sends up hard-boiled crime fiction and detective archetypes: the cool, witty, moral detective (Chandler's Philip Marlowe) the hyper-masculine hard-boiled cop (Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer) the femme fatale that kick-started much of Hollywood's early actresses are present in the novel. All of these are rooted in male fantasy—the desire to be morally right, dry of wit, and physically strong; to get the perfect woman or, failing that, prove that this failure is due to feminine evil and exploitation. Kemper superficially resembles Marlowe, Pete Bondurant is very much Hammer, and Laura and Barbara Jahelka Lindscott are femme fatales. Kemper and Laura rise above their types. Pete and Barb, however, are Camp parodies of their types, meaning they are exaggerated in order to point out the type's inherent silliness. Barb exhibits the "corny flamboyant female-ness" of Jayne Mansfield, Jane Russell, and others. Pete demonstrates the "exaggerated he-manness of Steve Reeves, Victor Mature" (Sontag 56). Ellroy uses Pete effectively to achieve his ends—the hard-boiled cop in *American Tabloid*'s world is a fascist goon who commits terrifying acts of violence. Ellroy, however, tries to subvert the femme fatale type with Barb and draw her as a three-dimensional character. He doesn't entirely succeed, only managing to use her to pointedly laugh at the fantasy.

Kemper is characterized quite similarly to Lord Darlington. He is "a glib dissembler," according to Littell (54). He begins the novel as an undercover car thief, entrapping criminals in

an auto-theft ring for the FBI. Despite the police and FBI faking his death in federal custody, Kemper still finds himself in prison:

> The cell looked familiar. He swung his legs off the bunk and got his identity straight.
> I'm Special Agent Kemper C. Boyd, FBI, Interstate car theft infiltrator.
> I'm *not* Bob Aiken, freelance car thief.
>
> I'm forty-two years old. I'm a Yale Law School grad. I'm a seventeen-year Bureau veteran, divorced, with a daughter in college—and a long-time FBI-sanctioned car booster.
>
> He placed his cell: tier B at the Philly Fed Building.
>
> His head throbbed. His wrists and ankles ached. He tamped down his identity a last notch.
>
> I've rigged auto-job evidence and skimmed money off of it for years. IS THIS AN INTERNAL BUREAU ROUST? (20-1)

Sweating it out in a jail cell, Kemper has to get his identity straight, or more accurately, sort it out aesthetically. First, there's the basic truth, this is his name this is what he does. He is not his undercover alias. Then more truth: the most nominal facts about his life. Then, in physical pain, he gets at the essence of his character—he's a paranoid crook and liar. The all-caps last sentence is seemingly an unnecessary embellishment, but it works stylistically—put a halftone picture of a man in a jail cell and that sentence and one gets a tabloid cover. The sentence is emphasized logically, as it is a reaction to the collision of separate identities: Kemper as Bob Aiken, Kemper as a FBI veteran, and Kemper as a corrupt cop. He reacts to the potential discovery of the third. After seeing a newspaper article that confirms his alias' "death," he is handed off to J. Edgar Hoover who briefs him for an undercover job where he is to spy on Robert Kennedy. He is a sort of interstitial being and much of his action derives from his ability to become different persons for different groups of people.

In Philip Core's book *Camp: The Lie That Tells the Truth*, Core proposes a list of rules that help identify Camp works. Many of them apply to *American Tabloid*:

- "CAMP is character limited to context"

- "Camp is not necessarily homosexual. Anyone or anything can be camp. But it takes one to know one"
- "CAMP is a disguise that fails"
- "CAMP is a lifeboat for men at sea." (Core 80)

In the discussion of Kemper Boyd, these rules apply. Kemper imitates American aristocracy, civil-rights humanism, and reactionary Anti-Castroism. The disguises fail and reveal genuine wants and beliefs. There is a moment where Kemper follows John F. Kennedy's campaign: "Jack knew he'd win. Kemper knew he'd impersonate greatness with the force of an enigma granted form. This new freedom would make people love him" (275). The awkward pronoun confusion (who is "he"?) occurs often in the three novels. It is intentional. The trilogy explores identity as a construct founded on abstractions and events in the novels lead to that construct's implosion. "Impersonating greatness with the force of an enigma granted form" applies to both Kennedy and Kemper. For Kennedy, it merely means campaigning as if he had already won the election. For Kemper, this carries more weight. He wanders between classes and political movements with panache and part of his appeal with other characters is the aura of mysteriousness he exudes. In the end, the collision of politics and loyalties eviscerate his aesthetic, revealing a child foolishly seeking validation from a celebrity.

Sontag writes, "There are only two things essential to camp: a secret within the personality which one ironically wishes to conceal and to exploit; and a peculiar way of seeing things, affected by spiritual isolation, but strong enough to impose itself on others through acts or creations" (82). Before ingratiating himself with the Kennedy family, Kemper goes to his closet and formulates a new identity. He predicates it on a Wildean thesis: "heroic aristocrats form a common bond" (24). He ironically distinguishes the Kennedys from the rest of the class. Heroism, class, and the connection between people who identify with these traits, are all aesthetic constructs. He builds his identity on similarity: "He liked women, and cheated on his

wife throughout their marriage. Jack Kennedy liked women—and held his marriage vows expedient and whimsical. Bobby liked his wife and kept her pregnant—insider talk tagged him faithful." Kemper "likes" women, rather than "loves" them, and he locates this distinction in the two Kennedys. His dissembling is described further: "Yale for him; Harvard for the Kennedys. Filthy-rich Irish Catholics; filthy-rich Tennessee Anglicans gone bankrupt. Their family was large and photogenic; his family was broke and dead. Someday he might tell Jack and Bobby how his father shot himself and took a month to die." The projection is made very clear, as one can see in the order of the sentences. The names in the sentence are interchanged, first Kemper and then the Kennedys. Then the names are inverted. The narration continues, "Southerners and Boston Irish: both afflicted with incongruous accents. He'd resurrect the drawl it took so long to lose." Accents are manifestations of class and upbringing and both Southern and Boston Irish accents suggest working class origins. Part of the mainstream appeal of the Kennedys was the incongruence between their social position and the accent. To American audiences, they were proletarians who made it to the top without losing sight of their origins. By resurrecting his Southern drawl, Kemper can suggest a similar background. He looks into his closet, which is "twelve feet deep," and comes up with an exterior. "The charcoal worsted for the interview. A holstered .38 to impress tough guy Bobby. No Yale cuff links—Bobby might possess a proletarian streak." (24-25). He constructs a masculine identity from a large wardrobe, a detail that is stereotypically feminine. In the passage, Ellroy writes Boyd as an aesthetic object. Hoover assigns Kemper to infiltrate the Kennedy clan to ruin John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign. He impersonates and dissembles. He exploits long-repressed emotional trauma by transforming his past into an identity. Kemper performs a persona constructed from autobiographical details. He doesn't reclaim an identity, but rather reappropriates it.

Kemper meets Laura Hughes at an aristocrat's ball. It's a Carlyle bash lousy with Hollywood celebrities and politicians: singer Maria Callas, actor Peter Lawford, Senator Dean Acheson, and the entire Kennedy family. Her appearance recalls that of Miss Erlynne's entrance in the Winderemere's ballroom in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. In the play, she turns the aristocracy on its head, exploiting the jealousies of the men and women alike for her own amusement. "Charming ball it has been! Quite reminds me of old days. And I see that there are just as many fools in society as there used to be. So pleased to find nothing has altered!" (74) she announces as the party winds down. Laura's entrance at the ball resembles Erlynne's, just rapidly condensed. She inspires several different reactions, from spite to lust, and she acts with party-crashing aplomb: "She made a butler pet her coat. She insisted that Leonard Bernstein try it on. She mambo-stepped through the crowd and snatched Joe Kennedy's drink." Joe Kennedy gives "her a small, gift-wrapped box. The woman tucked it in her purse. Three Kennedy sisters walked off in a huff." To top it off, "Peter Lawford ogled the woman. Bennet Cerf slid by and peeked down her dress" (113). It's amusing, but is seems like the "corny flamboyant female-ness" that Sontag identifies as an element of Camp (Sontag 56). There is a quality of classic cinema, the femme fatale, namely Hitchcockian thrillers and film noir melodramas, where, as soon as an impossibly sexy woman smiles at the male protagonist, the movie slows down to a halt. One knows just how doomed the male protagonist is. There's also the fantastical element that, somewhere, a man can look at the other end of the party floor and lock eyes with that perfect, sexy woman. Ellroy subverts this through an ironic distance. The aristocrats are the audience in this case, and they (particularly the men) act as people in a movie theater would act.

Laura is the daughter of Gloria Swanson and Joseph Kennedy, a coupling that somehow eluded the tabloids. Swanson, unwilling to risk an abortion, keeps Laura. Laura says:

> "My movie-star mom disowned me, but my father enjoys flaunting me in front of his legitimate family once a year. The boys like me because I'm provocative, and they think I'm nifty because they can't fuck me, because I'm their half-sister. The girls hate me because I'm a coded message from their father that says men can fuck around, but women can't. Do you get the picture, Mr. Boyd?"

She has an acute awareness of the Kennedy family due to her position, technically inside the clique, but is forbidden real entry. Joseph Kennedy helped her way through life out of real feeling that defies his character. She says, "My father is evil and grasping…I hate everything about him except the money he gives me and the fact that he would probably destroy anybody who tried to hurt me as well" (149). Because of her dependence, her revenge can only be petty. First, she takes the name Hughes after Howard Hughes, who was Joseph Kennedy's biggest competitor in Hollywood in the '30s. At the party, Joseph Kennedy gives Laura a gift. It's an emerald broach wrapped in thousand-dollar bill. She gives the broach to a homeless man, much to Kemper's amusement. "Aren't the Kennedy's vulgar?" she wryly asks (115). Her existence fits in with the aesthetic of the novel: she's the angry offspring of politics and Hollywood. She combats the sadness of her life with wit. She doesn't flaunt class so much as flaunt her existence, which is only a mild insult to the Kennedy family. When Kemper first enters her apartment, he notices that the apartment was decorated to resemble the Kennedy's suite (147). Laura's an interesting foil for Kemper. She was born into the world of celebrity as a bastard child. She can't get out, so she flaunts her family's excess satirically. The family-less Kemper lies his way into the Kennedy clan through impersonation and by embracing his own traumas.

With Laura, Ellroy subverts his own need to make women into redemptive objects. Any redemption she offers would be small and fleeting. She's too involved in the world that created and is destroying Kemper to suggest any sort of future. In a key scene, Kemper is sitting in a bugged hotel room, brainstorming a way to plan the Bay of Pigs operation under FBI

surveillance. He puts two TVs together, sees John Kennedy on one and Marilyn Monroe on the other and snaps "to the ultimate tweak-Hoover embellishment." He creates "Voyeur/Wiretap Heaven. Hoover would cream his jeans and maybe even spawn some crazy myth" (303). It's a funny little aside, but he unwittingly parodies Laura's origins as a bastard child of a dalliance between a Kennedy and a Hollywood starlet. At this point of the novel, his relationship with Laura is serious and he is aware of that such a scandalous relationship wreaked such hell on her life. Later, J. Edgar Hoover (a sort of Greek chorus) sends Kemper a letter, which reads:

> Three-fold congratulations.
>
> One your recent evasion tactics were superbly efficacious. Two your Marilyn Monroe aside had me going for quite some time. What a myth you have created! With luck, it will enter what Hush-Hush would call the "Peephole Pantheon!"
>
> Thirdly, bravo for your appointment as roving Justice Department counsel. My contacts tell me you'll be concentrating on voting rights abuse in the south. How fitting! Now you'll be able to champion left-inclined negroes with the same tenacity that you embrace right-wing Cubans!
>
> I think you've found your métier. I would be hard-pressed to conceive of work more suitable for a man with such a lenient code of loyalty. (342)

Hoover, obviously, was not spited by Kemper's tactic. Following the letter, Kemper meets with Laura. He had been asked to break off his relationship by Robert Kennedy, but sees her secretly. When he gets there, Laura is crying and informs him that the Kennedy family gave her a check for three million dollars on the condition that she never contacts her family again. He suggests, "You could rip it up," to which Laura replies "Would you?" Finally she gives him an ultimatum, the one that in another book (perhaps one of Ellroy's earlier novels) would be a choice akin to getting on a life-raft or staying on the sinking *Titanic*: "Them or me?" He chooses the Kennedy family. Kemper is geared towards glamour and power at the cost of self-identity. Laura's own dissemblage has collapsed: "her mascara was running. Her whole face looked off-kilter" (343). She's an aesthetic failure, vulnerable and positively unglamorous. For Kemper, leaving Laura is the obvious decision. Laura's character fits in within aesthetic of the novel, not just the campy

trappings of crime and noir novels.

The destruction of Kemper's disguise occurs near the end of the novel. It reads like a joke. Much ado is made about Kemper's ability to infiltrate high society, but we learn that it never really worked. Pete, betrayed by John F. Kennedy's indecision on the Bay of Pigs invasion, creates a scandal by entrapping the President with his love-interest Barb in a bugged hotel room. Kemper is brought up. The post-coital transcript reads:

> JFK: [Kemper] makes me uncomfortable because his one great regret is that he's not a Kennedy, which is quite a tough regret to respect. He's been dealing with some of those lowlife exiles for Bobby's Study Group [an investigation into the Bay of Pigs fiasco] and I think in some ways he's no better than they are. He just went to Yale Law School, latched onto me and proved himself useful…
> Kemper's no Peter Lawford, I'll say that for him. Peter's got no soul to sell, and Kemper sold his at a pretty steep price and didn't even know it…I can't go into details, but he threw over the woman he was engaged to curry favor with me and my family. You see, he came from money, but his father lost it all and killed himself. He's living out some unsavory fantasy with me, and once you recognize it, the man becomes hard to take. (465-6).

Despite the acrimony between the Kennedy family and Laura, Kennedy regards Laura as some sort of redemptive force in Kemper's life. For Kennedy, Laura stands on a pedestal and he mocks Kemper for his failure to recognize this reality and for Kemper's decision to engage in an aristocratic fantasy with the Kennedy family. The text does not support Kennedy's argument. After all, Kemper broke from Laura for aesthetic reasons—the fantasy of a future with her crumbled, revealing an unappealing reality.

Barb differs from Laura in that the deconstruction of archetypes is significantly more limited. She is an archetypal foil for Pete, which is appropriate as Pete is an archetype himself. Pete is the violent, hard-boiled cop. Ellroy simply places Pete in the real world and imagines who that character would be: a simplistic, fascist goon. Ellroy, in the LA Quartet series and in *Brown's Requiem*, has a tendency to complicate his protagonists to the point where one wonders

why they don't commit suicide halfway through the novels. Pete is weirdly uncomplicated. While Kemper Boyd at least creates personas to compensate for his shallow personality and while Ward Littell is driven by idealism and revenge, Pete's motivations are simple. He begins the novel as bored and greedy, then devotes himself to imperial politics, and finally falls in simple "love." Pete's falling in love may be one of the most stupid things in the book, for reasons intentional and unintentional. Even though Ellroy casts women as these savior types, the attraction men have towards them is because of either competence or shared trauma. This is exemplified interestingly in the Kemper-Laura relationship. Pete and Barb are attracted to the exaggeration of one another's sexuality. Their relationship is an outright parody of the worst of genre conventions and it's depicted appropriately Camp.

The physical description of the main characters are epitomized in one salient detail. Kemper always wears a suit, Ward Littell always wears glasses, and Pete rubs the knuckles of his fists. In this, he's the condensation of masculinity and violence of Ellroy's America condensed in one grotesque cartoon. In the book's first few pages, this point is made clear. Ellroy summarises Pete's own personal history:

> June '52. L.A. County Deputy Sheriff Pete Bondurant—night watch commander at the San Dimas Substation. That one shitty night: a nigger rape-o at large, the drunk tank packed with howling juiceheads.
>
> This wino gave him grief. "I know you, tough guy. You kill innocent women and your own—"
>
> He beat the man to death barefisted.
>
> The Sheriff's hushed it up. An eyeball witness squealed to the Feds. The L.A. agent-in-charge tagged Joe Wino "Joe Civil Rights Victim."
>
> Two agents leaned on him: Kemper Boyd and Ward J. Littell. Howard Hughes saw his picture in the paper and sensed strongarm potential. Hughes got the beef quashed and offered him a job: fixer, pimp, dope conduit. (8)

Pete kills the drunkard, presumably black (considering the "Civil Rights Victim" tag), not because of a power trip or a race hit, because the man has access to Pete's past. Later on, its

revealed that L.A. gangster Mickey Cohen enlisted Pete to kill a man who robbed one of his poker games, as well as whoever else was in the house he was with. He ends up killing the man, as well as the man's 56-year-old mother, a pregnant woman, and his own brother. The drunkard is made a cause-celebre for civil rights (which he is, after all a man beaten to death in police custody by a cop is a civil rights abuse) and the FBI investigates. It's all silenced—money wins in the end. Someone leaks the information to Pete's parents, and they commit suicide. Like everything else in the novel, the three spheres of organized crime, politics, and Hollywood converge, and in this movement, there's a real and personal cost.

When Howard Hughes buys *Hush-Hush*, he becomes the "story verifier," a job that is just a further extension of Pete's fists. Howard Hughes explicitly co-opts *Hush-Hush* to smear the Kennedy's and promote his own crack-pot, right-wing values. There are multiple points in the novel where we see Pete work his knuckles—like Kemper's suits, it is Pete's defining detail. There are no further glimpses into his past. His actions are always immediate and violent. Unlike Littell, who is haunted by every one of his violent acts, or Kemper who can readapt his past into performance, Pete simply plows through the present. Pete explains, "Story verification' means 'Don't sue the magazine or I'll hurt you'" (10). Pete's job is to repress dissent—anybody who can provide the facts that contradict a stories verisimilitude is threatened with violence.

Aside from verifying stories for Hughes, he eradicates snitches for Jimmy Hoffa and extorts unfaithful husbands. After we learn about the obliteration of Pete's family, Pete and his *Hush-Hush* co-worker and girlfriend Gail Hendee work an extortion case. They are hired by a rich woman to entrap her husband in a moment of infidelity so she can swing her divorce in her favor. In the scene, we get a performance much like Kemper Boyd's own. As Pete watches the seduction in a bar, "Helpless Gail searched her purse for matches. Helpful Walt flicked his

lighter and smiled. Sexy Walt was dripping scalp flakes all over the back of his jacket. Gail smiled. Sexy Walt smiled. Well-dressed Walt wore white socks with a three-piece chalk-stripe suit." While Walt may find himself genuinely sexy, he is described with comic irony. Gail, however, is simply performing. Gail "touched Walt's arm. Her guilty heart showed plain—except for the money she hates it." Already, we see that despite the inherent comedy in this there is some sadness. Yet it goes on. Pete "heard Lonely Walt pitch some boo-hoo: my wife and kids don't know a man has certain needs. Gail said, Why'd you have *seven* kids then? Walt said, It keeps my wife at home, where a woman belongs." They finally go at it, "There: Gail and Walter P. Kinnard fucking. In the missionary style, with their heads close together—courtroom adultery evidence. Walt was loving it. Gail was feigning ecstasy and picking at a hangnail." Pete then breaks down the door. "One, two, three—flashbulb blips Tommy-gun fast. The whole goddamn room went glare bright. Kinnard shrieked and pulled out dishrag limp. Gail tumbled off the bed and ran for the bathroom. Sexy buck-naked Walt: 5'9", 210, pudgy." Pete roughs up Walt, picks him up by the neck, and then gives him his wife's demands for their upcoming divorce. Walt "popped spit-bubbles. Pete admired his color: half shock-blue, half cardiac-red." Finally, "Gail walked out of a steam cloud. Her 'I can't take much more of this' was no big surprise" (13-4). This scene, while simply funny in Walt's pathetic display, Gail's seeming apathy, and Pete's extreme behavior—there's a bored, workmanlike quality to the whole episode (the countdowns, the picking at hangnail), which showcases Ellroy's sensibility for better and for worse. The free and indirect perspective privileges Pete. It's funny because he thinks it's funny. Whatever pain Gail or even Walt experience is promptly written off in the narrative voice. The voice acknowledges it, but for Pete and Gail, it's all par for the course. The only people that are performing in the situation are the men. Gail goes through the motions, and in the narrative, is

clearly bored, exhausted, and guilty.

The voice always privileges Pete and always mocks characters' perceived weakness and sadness. The narrative voice apes a sexist, racist, homophobic, and reactionary, bully. These qualities are more suppressed here than in the sequels, namely *The Cold Six Thousand*, where it's exaggerated to maximum discomfort. Not long after the Walter Kinnard extortion, Hughes presents Pete with tabloid headlines, hoping to take the paper to a new direction. "Pete slouched in a chair and thumbed last week's issue. On the cover: 'Migrant Workers Carry VD Plague!' A co-feature: 'Hollywood Ranch Market—Homo Heaven.'" Hughes tells him to get Sol Maltzman, an embittered blacklisted Communist, to write "Negroes: Overbreeding Creates TB Epidemic". To this, Pete replies, "That sounds pretty far-fetched." Hughes responds, "Facts can be bent to conform to any thesis" (39). The headlines are patently ridiculous, though unnerving. First there's the inane headlines and Hughes' non-answer. Pete's says, "Will I get you some more dope and disposable hypos? *Yes, sir!*" and Hughes' motion towards the TV to watch kids cartoons. In doing this, the prose favors Pete's point-of-view. Pete reduces a reactionary to an addict, then to a child. While the humor is a little *too* much, there's a subtle jab at tabloid culture. Tabloids favor the celebrity. Is there anything more unglamorous to a presumably white 1950s audience than migrant workers, a supermarket notorious for its dirtiness, and African-Americans?

Pete tracks Kemper to a hotel, and from there discovers Kemper and Ward Littell bugging an escort's house. J. Edgar Hoover gives Kemper her name to pass on to John F. Kennedy. Pete, seeing "$$$'s—like a 3-across slot-machine jackpot," has private investigator Fred Turentine piggy-back on the wiretap. Hughes, gladly, funds the operation. They think they get the story of the century—Senator Kennedy's back giving out after six-minutes with a hooker. To their disappointment, Gail writes "Senator John F. Kennedy is rather a tenuously tumescent

tomcat, with a tantalizingly trenchant taste for those finely-furred and felicitous felines who find him fantastically fetching themselves!" She's criticized by the narrative voice for not being vicious enough: Gail "plays it half-assed" (83). John F. Kennedy is attractive and he likes attractive women, who find him attractive in turn. This is one of the few moments of actual human decency in the novel. Unlike Hughes, whose paranoia can only produce vague, propagandist, headlines, she creates something that is so clever and purposeful in its awfulness that it is impossible to take seriously. In the action of the novel, though, her decision to play it safe and campy is partly an issue of individual respect. "[John F. Kennedy] was nice, though. He never said, 'Honey, let's get a divorce racket going,'" she tells Pete (82). However, after federal agents confiscate all outgoing issues of the magazine and raid the offices, it is suggested that her actions are mostly vengeful. Earlier, her friend Sol Maltzman, a black-listed Communist, committed suicide after Pete fired him and robbed him of his files. The files exposed Richard Nixon and the House Un-American Activists Committee for corruption.

The reader is reminded of Pete's loneliness over the course of the novel with an appropriately Neanderthal leitmotif: "Big Pete wants a woman. Extortion experience preferred, but not necessary." Lenny writes to Hughes about a "gorgeous redhead singer Barb Jahelka" who was arrested for extortion. She first appears in the novel on stage performing for her junkie husband's terrible band. Once again, there are two audiences, the protagonist and the public. "Barb Jahelka slinked up to the mike. Barb oozed healthy pulchritude. Barb was no show-biz subspecies junkie" (444). It's almost as if Ellroy ran out of ways to describe a woman's sexuality. It's hard to imagine a word like "pulchritude" (an antiquated word for "beauty") coming out of Pete's mouth. The last sentence, misogynistic as it is, mirrors Pete's desperation and surprise. He continues watching both her and the audience. She's sexualized throughout the performance.

"Dig that tight, low cut gown. Dig the heels that put her over six feet." Continued, "Barb sang weak-voiced and monotonous. Barb put out unique gyrations flat-out concurrent. She kicked her shoes off. She thrust her hips out and popped seams down her leg…Pete chain-smoked. Barb lost a breast and tucked it back before the Twist fiends noticed. Pete smiled-oops!-dazzling" (443-4). What Pete sees is an exaggerated and parodic femininity. She's his female equivalent in raw physicality and hyper-sexuality.

The description is embarrassing, but considering how Ellroy's prose allows for Laura Hughes and Gail Hendee to live as characters, it *is supposed* to be embarrassing. Ellroy then presents a litany of her traumas—her sister was raped by four men and an addict tight with the mafia had three of those men eradicated in exchange for marriage. Her backstory is intended to give her depth, to at least subvert expectations of the over-sexed, freewheeling archetype in the crime genre. The disjunction between her behavior and her past gives the sense that she was a comic figure first and a three-dimensional character second. She serves to undercut the male fantasy at play—Pete looks across the room and sees his version of a perfect woman. However, she performs this very version. This is clear when Littell and Pete brace Barb for the Kennedy shakedown:

> Littell smiled, "If you meet President Kennedy and wanted to impress him, how would you act?
>
> Barb blew perfect smoke rings. "I'd act profane and funny."
> "What would you wear?"
> "Flat heels."
> "Why?"
> "Men like women they can look down to."
> Littell laughed. (451)

Barb knowingly and willfully participates in masculine fantasy, where gender roles ultimately comes down to "Men like women they can look down to." Through her romance with Pete, she serves a role in deconstructing this fantasy.

The romance is played for laughs—Pete transforms into a kid with an impossible celebrity crush. After Pete voyeurs on Barb and John F. Kennedy, Pete "studies the foldout [of Barb] for the ten millionth time." He "called Barb once a week. He tossed out little love checks—You don't *really* dig Jack, do you?" It's the question a schoolgirl asks a paparazzi photo of her favorite celebrity walking hand-in-hand with a significant other ("You don't really love her do you?" to which the imaginary reply is "No, darling. I love you, it's just that my agent…"). Barb denies any affection for the President, but admires his allure. Barb is then filtered through the narrative voice: "Jack was just a six-minute erection and some chuckles". As Pete chats with her on the phone, he tries to reconcile the Bay of Pigs fallout. He draws "little hearts and arrows, ad fucking infinitum" (469). The image is comic, the apathetic "story-verifier" Pete is transformed into a drooling fan. Ellroy cements the joke when Pete has sex with Barb. It begins, "Pete tripped out of his pants. Barb pulled off her Twist gown. Loose rhinestones hit the floor—Pete gouged his feet on them. Barb kicked his holster under the bed. Pete pulled the covers down. The stale perfume stuck to the sheets made him sneeze." Both of their sexualities are aesthetic. The gown is cheap, the perfume is stale. The fact that Pete has his holster in the first place is a detail that plays to cop fantasy. Finally, "He came without her even touching him. He shook and sobbed and kept tasting her." Pete touches Barb, but Barb never touches him. Ellroy takes the male fantasy of the hyper-masculine cop and the hyper-feminine femme fatale and demolishes it in the first sentence. "She spasmed. She bit through the sheets. She lulled and spasmed, lulled and spasmed, lulled and spasmed" (494). The sex scene, the only one in the novel, is parody but there's something fairly dark occurring. If this was a mere joke on male fantasy, then Ellroy could have focused on his premature orgasm and his sobbing. Instead, the narrative voice focuses on and exaggerates her orgasm. There is a disjunction between what is

going on in the scene and what is going on in the text.

The limits of camp are embodied in Lenny Sands, the gay, Jewish comedian who slums in Teamster junkets. Lenny Sands may be the most tragic character in the novel. Performing in front of Hoffa's Teamster Union, Lenny Sands camps. Looking at his jokes, one can see a hack routine done quite cleverly. However, there are two audiences, the Teamsters and Littell, and we see the routine from the latter's perspective. "A stripper brought ice refills by—Littell caught a breast in the face. Lenny said, “It sure is hot up here!” The stripper hopped on stage and dropped ice cubes down his pants. The audience howled; the man beside Littell squealed and spat bourbon" (97). Lenny turns himself into an androgynous entity, by way of a symbolic castration. The stripper's sexual suggestion is over the top and Lenny responds in kind by doing a spit-take and mugging. His homosexuality isn't hidden. He performs the social image of a gay man and it's well-recieved. To the teamsters in the bar, they don't know that he is gay, just that he performs gayness quite well. As far as Camp is concerned, Lenny's performance is especially layered:

> Lenny made ecstatic faces. Lenny shook his trouser legs until the ice dropped out.
>
> The crowd wolf-whistled and shrieked and thumped their tables-The stripper ducked behind a curtain. (98)

Like Kemper, Lenny imitates the Kennedys. However, it isn't nearly as involved as Kemper's dissemblage. Rather Lenny imitates the exteriority of Bobby Kennedy, appropriating the incongruous Boston accent and pushes it into "soprano range":

> “Now you listen to me, Mr. Hoffa! You quit associating with those nasty gangsters and nasty truck drivers and snitch off all your friends or I’ll tell my daddy on you!”
>
> The room rocked. The room rolled. Foot stomps had the floor shaking.
>
> “Mr. Hoffa, you’re a no-goodnik and a nasty man! You quit trying to unionize my six children or I’ll tell my daddy and my big brother Jack on you! You be nice or I’ll tell my daddy to buy your union and make all your nasty truck drivers servants at our family compound in Hyannis Port!”

The room roared. Littell felt queasy-hot and lightheaded. (98)

Hoffa's teamsters don't even pretend to hide the fact that they're bad people. "Nasty," with a falsetto, is a compliment. The jokes play towards their spite and politics. The insults themselves don't really make any logical sense. Bobby Kennedy, in the routine, is a stereotypical gay man with six kids. He's a rich and powerful enforcer who resorts to squealing and ironic flirtation to get what he wants. It doesn't hurt because it doesn't make sense. Like tabloids, it revels in the selected details, logical or not. Lenny's skit is designed to maximize enjoyment. To enjoy something is to validate it. He camps to the audience. Through Littell, however, we view it from an outsider's point of view and from there, we only see the performance and the reaction it gets from the audience. Most importantly, appreciation of this sort of thing from this point of view is theoretical. Littell is enamored by Bobby Kennedy, knows the true evil of Lenny's audience, and has some background on Lenny's closeted homosexuality. In this moment on stage, a man displaying aspects of his personality they can be torn down. Lenny's not empowered by camp, as Sontag imagined in her essay.

Throughout the novel, Lenny is Shanghaied by the oppressive forces in the novel. Andrew Britton writes, "in a contemporary context, gay camp seems little more than a kind of anaesthetic, allowing one to remain inside oppressive relations while enjoying the illusory confidence that one is flouting them." (139) This sentiment is taken to an extreme. First, Lenny minstrels for the mob and gets a healthy paycheck in return. Then, he sees feared mobster Tony "Icepick" Iannone in a gay bar. Iannone chases him, fearing that his own sexuality isn't revealed, and Lenny kills Iannone in self-defense. Littell blackmails him to work for the FBI. There's a scene where both Littell and Kemper lean on Lenny in his apartment. Kemper forces Littell to beat Lenny. Lenny plants his tongue in his cheek and mocks them, which is another way of

egging them on. Kemper tells Lenny, "You're a homosexual and a murderer. You have no rights. You're a Federal informant, and the Chicago FBI owns you." They threaten him with an autopsy photo of Iannone's lover, who the mob killed in retribution for Iannone's death. For them, any gay man would do, and they dispatch Iannone's lover monstrously—castrating him and stuffing the genitals into his mouth. Lenny's immediate reaction to the photo is to perform. He shudders, then puts on "an instant rough-trade face" and "smiles this preposterous pseudo-tough-guy smile" (132). His camp impulse is to mock Littell and Kemper. He imitates Kemper's tough-cop routine and is rewarded with a punch to the face. After more painful grilling, Lenny "sounded calm. He sounded like an actor who just figured out his role" (133). Littell gives Lenny his next assignment, to which Lenny responds, "'Oh yes, yes, Mr. Littell, sir'—arch-ugly-faggot inflected" (134). He minstrels a sarcastic agreement and resigns himself to slavery. Once again, the narrative voice intrudes. What does "arch-ugly-faggot inflected" sound like? Could such an inflection be determined from his response, which is composed of monosyllabic words? The narrative voice determines the inflection to cement his place in society.

Lenny later writes for *Hush-Hush* under the pseudonym Peerless Politicopundit. Unlike Gail Hendee, who wrote harmless articles, Lenny writes propaganda. He is the mouthpiece of the misguided American invasion of Cuba, which in the novel, is a coalition of the CIA, Ku Klux Klan, and anti-Castro Cuban expatriates funded by heroin distribution in black Miami neighborhoods. He produces two articles, one during the invasion's planning phase and one after it's failure. The articles are written in the *Hush-Hush* style—excited and alliterative. His articles, unlike Hendee's articles, are satirical. The first begins with a summary of Cuban history:

> Castro ousted the democratically-elected anti-Communist Cuban Premier Fulgencio Batista last New Year's day. The bombastic bushy-beard beatnik bard promised land reforms, social justice and pickled plantains on every plate—the standard stipends of welfare-waffled Commie commissars. He took over a small bastion of freedom 90 miles

> off U.S. shores, pathologically picked the pockets of patriotic patriarchs, nauseously "nationalized" U.S.-owned hotel-casinos, fried the friendly fragrant fields of the United Fruit Company and generally absconded with astronomical amounts of America's most peon-protecting, Commie-constraining export: money!!!

Lenny toes an ironic right-wing line. He insults Castro's appearance, but doesn't criticize his promises. He then mimics the language of Hughes, Hoover, and the mafia to the point of ridiculousness: a free society has patriarchs and peons and an economy controlled by a foreign superpower. Lenny continues, "Peons passionately protected by America's altruistically-altered egalitarian economy are now welfare-wilted, pauper-periled Red Recidivists grubbing for Commie compensation" (249). Capitalism as an "altruistically-altered egalitarian economy" makes no positive sense. If an economy were egalitarian, why would it have to be adjusted? Hoover buys the story, "it was, of course, far-fetched, but subtract the purple prose and what remains is politically substantive" (250). The second article, published a week after the failed invasion, is titled "Cowardly Castrato Castro Ousted!" Sands writes, "Call the Bay of Pigs the Caribbean Carthage; Playa Giron the patriotic Parthenon. Call Castro debilitated and depilatoried—word has it that he shaved off his beard to dodge the deep and dangerous depths of revenge-seeker recognition!" (406). The article's irony is only in the context—Sands plays the story completely straight, which may be the greatest insult he could make. In his story, the invasion emasculates Castro, transforming him into a beardless castrato. Instead, it does the opposite. The final insult is given at the end, where he accuses Castro for selling heroin in black Miami neighborhoods and reports the deaths of "scores of Negro drug addicts" (407), which calls attention to the funding of the anti-Castro movement. Hoover is livid: "My contact mentioned the curiously prophetic (if historically inaccurate) Hush-Hush piece. I told him that it was merely one of life's odd coincidences, an explanation that seemed to satisfy him". He continues, "Hush-

Hush should not publish science fiction, unless it's directly in our best interest" (407-8). The reader is required to imagine Lenny's delight, as it's censored by Hoover.

Throughout the novel, Lenny mocks the power structures he's trapped in. He is not only repressed by them but is coerced into being their mouthpiece. Any expression of dissent is either physically beaten down by authority figures or has to be filtered through the language of power. Characters constantly misread him. At the end of the novel, he finally acts. Kemper, thinking that Lenny set up the Kennedy shakedown with Pete, he goes to Laura's apartment and finds Lenny, Laura, and his daughter drinking. He pulls a gun and aims it at Lenny. Lenny "flicked his cigarette at him and smiled. The tip burned his face. Ashes singed his suitcoat. He steadied his aim and pulled the trigger. The gun jammed. Lenny smiled" (502). Kemper's burnt face and singed suitcoat are significant wounds—he is described primarily by his looks. Kemper runs. Lenny finally has agency and he breaks into the Carlyle suite and ruins Pete's shakedown attempt. We learn about it first through Freddy Otash, Pete's surveillance partner and then through an anonymous Justice Department agent. Kemper is handcuffed and one of Kennedy's men tells him:

> "Lenny Sands killed himself in New York City last night. He rented a cheap hotel room, slashed his wrists and wrote 'I am a homosexual' in blood on the wall above the bed. The sink and toilet were filled with burned-up tape fragments obviously taken off a bug installed in the Kennedy family's suite at the Carlyle Hotel" (508).

Lenny's genuine attempt to save Kennedy's presidency and his suicide are filtered through an anonymous Justice Department agent. Lenny takes his own life in his only moment of freedom (one can imagine what Pete would have done to him had he been alive) and in that moment expresses himself genuinely. It's ultimately meaningless—because of the failed shakedown and the Bay of Pigs, the Mafia realizes that it has no leverage over the Kennedy family and coerces Pete and Kemper into plotting Kennedy's assassination. Before the assassination, there is a

transcript of a conversation between John Rosselli and Sam Giancana, two mobsters. John Rosselli says, "And it turned out Lenny was a faggot. Can you believe it?" Giancana, than says, "Who would have believed it?" Rosselli responds "He was Jewish, Mo. The Jewish race has a higher percentage of homos than regular white people" (511). They then change topics, dismissing Lenny's existence. They not only exclude him within the power center of the mafia, but from the white race as well.

Earlier in the novel, Laura and Kemper talk about Lenny. She tells him, "Lenny knows bad people, and bad people can make you say things you don't want to" (149). What is so interesting about the narrative voice in *American Tabloid* is that in parodying hard-boiled prose and tabloid writing, Ellroy creates a language of power that hectors, excludes, and forces . Lenny Sands is the most obvious example of this. There is almost always a disjunction between what is physically going on in a scene and the way that information is relayed back to us. The voice insists on maintaining male fantasy and anxiety in the face of the novel's reality. It comes to no surprise that the character favored in the text is the most repellent. Pete is the only character who goes largely unscathed by the narrative voice, even though he inflicts the most violence. He is only insulted when he draws little hearts and arrows on a file. At the end of the novel, the day of John F. Kennedy's assassination, Pete is at a bar watching Barb (now his wife) sing "Unchained Melody." He is preparing himself for when Barb sees Kennedy's corpse and realizes that she was complicit in the killing. As Kennedy's caravan passes, the patrons and staff vacate the bar. "He watched her. He made up his own words. She held him with her eyes and her mouth. The roar did a long slow fade. He braced himself for this big fucking scream" (576). Pete, watching his wife sing, puts words in her mouth. The book ends in a brief moment of silence.

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Schizophrenia, Repression, and Revolution
in *The Cold Six Thousand*

Ellroy's camp parody reaches its limits in *The Cold Six Thousand*. It begins moments after the JFK assassination as Wayne Tedrow Jr. flies into Dallas. His mission is summed up in two sentences of blunt prose: "They sent him to Dallas to kill a nigger pimp named Wendell Durfee. He wasn't sure he could do it" (3). A stewardess flirts with him once she recognizes his name, or rather, that of his father, who is a corrupt union boss, Klan leader, right-wing propagandist, socialite, and friend of J. Edgar Hoover. He turns her down when she calls him Junior. After Wayne lands, he walks through the terminal. "Schoolgirls blocked the gate. One girl cried. One girl fucked with prayer beads…People walked past him. They looked sucker-punched. Red eyes. Boo-hoo. Women with Kleenex" (4). The mourners are mocked—after all, someone counting the beads on a rosary isn't "fucking" with them. The writing clues you in on what to expect in the rest of the novel. Sentences, for the most part, are simplified to subject-predicate constructions. They are taken to the breaking point. The word picture is shortened to "pix," for instance. Another moment is when the narrative summarizes Wayne's alienation from his mother: "'Don't fight in silly wars.' She said, 'Don't hate like Wayne Senior.' He cut her off. Binding/permanent/4-ever" (7). The purpose of that final "word" is to highlight the stupidity of his decision, encapsulated in child-speak redundancy.

This is merely one of the *The Cold Six Thousand*'s problems. The themes and style of the first novel are amplified, but the results are often maddening. Numerous critics have taken issue with the prose. The short sentences may have an engrossing rhythm, but there's always something that's *too* crude that distracts from the reading experience. *The Cold Six Thousand* suffers from the law of diminishing returns. Much of it may be due to a misunderstanding of the previous novel's strengths and weaknesses. The clipped style, for the most part, works in

American Tabloid and Ellroy attempts to further shorten the prose to the point where they resemble hasty text messages. He also takes the themes of repression and identity to a grander level than the previous novel. On a plot level, the characters are actively involved in the repression of the civil rights movement and emerging white hate groups. The movement between the state and these movements takes a significant toll on the characters. Protagonists have to repress characteristics of their identities: past histories, sexualities, political and moral leanings. They are lost in a search for a stable self amidst the chaos of the book's events. Identity is malleable. Characters appropriate and reject qualities at the behest of the powerful. The goals and stakes in this whole experiment are clear, but the means and ends are both fascinating and problematic.

Of the three novels, *The Cold Six Thousand* explores political repression with the most ambition. Political repression in the book is the political persecution of the black civil rights movement and of violent white reactionaries by a white state authority. Littell's narrative is concerned with the oppression of the civil rights movement and his failed attempt to subvert that oppression. Through Littell, Ellroy examines the political landscape of the time. Following his perspective, the reader is given a broad view of the race war raging at the time. Wayne's narrative is an attempt to capture the era's psychology. It differs from Littell's narrative significantly. Ellroy designs Wayne's story around elements from Freudian psychoanalysis, namely Freud's work on dream-states and uncanniness (the manifestation of repressed emotions and infantile desires in an object). Littell's narrative takes place in a world that is faithful to reality in its depictions of characters and politics, but Wayne's seems to occur in a purely fictional world. The characters he encounters, mainly black criminals and white racists, are extreme stereotypes. He's seemingly trapped in an unresolved Oedipal complex and he spends

most of the novel hunting down Durfee, who enters as a Freudian uncanny. Ellroy plays with Freud's theoretical constructions and reinterprets them.

The references to Freudian psychoanalysis have a strange effect on the novel. Ellroy begins with an Oedipal triad between Wayne, his father, and his step-mother Janice. It unfolds exactly as one might expect. Wayne lusts after Janice, then sleeps with her halfway through the book. His hostility towards his father ultimately ends in his father's violent murder. Through an analysis of Wayne's storyline, one can see how his desires are fulfilled in the plot, as if it were a dream. However, the Oedipal triangle isn't enough to explain how the desires are fulfilled or what the stakes actually are. His desires are as obvious to everybody involved as it is to the reader. His stepmother "watched Wayne grow up. She torched reciprocal. She left her doors open. She invited looks. Wayne Senior knew it. Wayne Senior didn't care" (7). Additionally, the Oedipal complex is a failure to identify with the father figure. Ellroy does away with the notion in two sentences: "[Wayne's mother] asked Wayne who he loved the most. He said, 'My dad.'" (7). In Freud's reading of Sophocles' play, he writes, "Like Oedipus, we live in ignorance of these wishes, repugnant to morality, which have been forced upon us by Nature, and after their revelation we may all of us well seek to close our eyes to the scenes of our childhood (Freud 921). Wayne doesn't close his eyes to his childhood at all, his wishes are clearly on the surface of the text, and both his childhood and his wishes are obvious to even the most ancillary of characters. When Wayne descends into hatred over the course of the novel, a purely Freudian reading isn't enough.

Instead, Wayne and Littell's trajectories are more in line with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's schizoanalysis, a rejection of the Oedipal complex. For them, Freudian psychoanalysis only serves to repress individuals. The psychoanalyst diagnoses them as mentally ill through the

catch-all of a mother-father-child triad (my mother did this, my father didn't do that, and that's why I'm depressed and desire pills). Deleuze and Guattari's theories link personal repression to societal repression. The connections they observe best describe the plot movements and character motivations in Ellroy's novel. Schizoanalysis posits that the human unconscious is a composite of machines, each machine requiring another to function. At the center of the unconscious is desire, which is composed of unarticulated drives and impulses, called desiring-machines that produce the emotion (Smith 71). Desire, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is based on need, not on lack—what is missing is what Freudian psychoanalysis considers the root of desire. If one has an interest in taking up a career, there is a rational set of acts that allows one to pursue that interest (applying to school, producing a thesis, entering the job market). While one may be interested in the job, one actually desires the social system that makes that interest possible (Smith 74). Desire isn't a negative term. One can't desire something that doesn't exist. There is an object that is real and attainable. It is produced "by external causality and external mechanisms" (Deleuze 27), and produced in the unconscious as a reality. A social formation organizes certain wants and needs in order to control that society's populace. It produces machines that complete desire. In doing so, it creates a feeling of lack in a subject not lack. An extreme case: If one has an interest in killing another and he steps outside the means provided by the state (say, the army), the state will diagnose the killer and relegate him to prison. The state devalues that desire—it becomes, understandably, a sign of madness. To avoid repression by the state and participate in society, the subject represses his interests, writing them off as fantastic (Deleuze 26). Populations then desire for the state to repress these "undesirable" desires and flows, thus desiring their own repression.

Though Deleuze and Guattari undermine notions of self and identity in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, such notions exist for the characters in the novel. In schizoanalysis, the subject naturally spreads over a range of objects, locating his desires within them (Deleuze 21). Wayne and Littell resemble Deleuze-Guattarian schizophrenics (in the sense of the etymology: "split-mind"). "The schizo has long since ceased to believe in [the ego]. He is somewhere else, beyond or behind or below these problems, rather than immersed in them. And wherever he is, there are problems, insurmountable sufferings, unbearable needs." Further, "There are those who will maintain that the schizo is incapable of uttering the word *I*, and that we must restore his ability to pronounce this hallowed word." Whether or not he says "I", if the schizophrenic instead refers to himself in the third person, is of no consequence (23). Wayne and Littell attempt to structure stable identities but fail. The book is concerned with what happens after this failure, which in schizoanalysis is considered a psychological breakthrough. In Wayne's case, the failure is entirely negative—he has a self-directed hatred that he then manifests in various characters. First, he directs his emotions to black criminals, then to Martin Luther King Jr., and finally (and impotently) towards his father. Littell's trajectory is slightly more positive. The failure of identity allows him to psychologically separate from social forces. He is able to empathize with civil rights activists and the repressive social structure, but makes the moral decision to assist the latter.

Where does one go from the breakdown? Deleuze and Guattari write that there is the schizophrenic, the revolutionary, and the neurotic. "There is a whole world of difference between the schizo and the revolutionary: the difference between the one who escapes, and the one who knows how to make what he is escaping escape" (Deleuze 341). The revolutionary locates and diagnoses the repressive forces and the flows that repress, frees them, and invests it into the

social system, inciting change. The schizophrenic, in the face of chaotic movement, can only say "Leave me in peace" (Deleuze 2), but the revolutionary attempts to reenter society after he breaks free from it. The neurotic "is trapped within the residual or artificial territorialities of our society, and reduces all of them to Oedipus as the ultimate territoriality" (Deleuze 35). He is able to identify the flows of desire as well as the machines that repress him, but resorts to self-defeat by participating in repressive psychoanalysis. Littell tries to be a revolutionary and because of misguided actions and power movements he cannot control, he fails. He ends the novel as a schizophrenic, no longer desiring to participate in the social order, and kills himself. Wayne is a neurotic. He has a breakdown of identity after the murder of his wife, projects his guilt and hatred on others, and finally returns to the Oedipal complex and usurps his father's position in the repressive institutions.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism is a chaotic social formation, one that is constructed rationally on purely abstract notions. Money-capital is abstract, yet society constructs formations (class and markets, for example) dedicated to its management and facilitate its trade. Castes are formed and the ones that control the flow of money are the most powerful. However, the abstract flow of money renders the structure unstable. A capitalist social formation has to define (code) different flows of capital yet make certain flows illegitimate. As power shifts, the social formation then has to decode flows. It territorializes (establishes meaning and codes), then deterritorializes (abstracting the meaning and decoding flows), and finally reterritorializes (gives flows new meaning by recoding). In the shifts, subjects within a society are alienated both socially and mentally. They break from the flows, and society goes through a reterritorialization process where subjects are reclassified (Deleuze 320-1, Neff 311-2). *The Cold Six Thousand* takes place at the point in American history where the lines of power in America

were being redrawn. The novel chronicles the civil rights movement from John F. Kennedy's assassination to Martin Luther King Jr.'s. This process is evident in the book's take on the civil rights movement. Much of the movement was about establishing a positive black identity in the United States to combat the negative identity the white power structure had taken centuries to establish. Without this, there could be no racial equality. There would still be class inequality, however, which King hoped to end a year before his death. To do this, the whole power structure would have to be destroyed.

In Ellroy's novels, the white power structure is a disjointed entity. The structure is a chaotic composition composed of the CIA, FBI, Hughes' Las Vegas casino empire, well-established Ku Klux Klan groups, and the mafia. They have their own conflicts, but as a whole they compromise one organization that has its guns pointed at the civil rights movement and they are the most dominant centers of power in the three novels. There are, of course, outliers (Robert F. Kennedy, white Freedom Riders, and fringe-Ku Klux Klan groups) that compromise the authority of the structure and have to be repressed as well. In the case of liberal outliers, these groups challenge the authority directly. The far-right reactionaries simply embarrass the authority by breaking its laws. The mafia, surprisingly, isn't an outlier. In the books, they are tightly linked to governmental organizations (especially the CIA) through the wealth their activities acquire. Southern blacks threatened the white power structure of the American South by engaging with sites of power: schools, transportation, eateries. Likewise the white power structure had to defend its own authority and mobilized along class lines to repress the black populace. Much of the novel is concerned with this mobilization and Ellroy constructs a narrative that explores the identity conflicts at play in the white power structure.

The white power structure, as it stands in *The Cold Six Thousand* is described at a key point in the novel. The description occurs right after the murders of the three activists John Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner during the Freedom Rides in Mississippi. It was a significant moment in civil rights history as the murders of Goodman and Schwerner, two white Jewish students, forced white America to confront the abuse of power in the South. It revealed an irony: whites were being horribly persecuted in the name of segregation. The narration in the book describes a power shift that began with Lyndon B. Johnson's civil rights bill, which he pushed after the killings. "Mr. Hoover loathed [the bill]—but: Age 70 bodes. Forced retirement bodes. LBJ says, '*Stay* and strut your stuff.' Mr. Hoover gives thanks. That means quid pro quo. LBJ says, 'Now fight my Klan war'". The narration then describes the inner fighting within the Klan. A New Klan is emerging and its tactics are less about intimidation and more about outright, public violence. The Old Klan committed lynchings and mutilations, state crimes, which often were perpetrated by authority figures and legitimized. They do commit mail fraud, which the FBI mostly ignored until after the civil rights bill was passed. However, the high profile beatings and murders of activists is not a federal crime. FBI agents begin investigating the New Klan for state crimes, which "vexes" and "offends" Hoover. "LBJ mandates war. Two hundred agents descend. A hundred for Neshoba County—three probable victims—thirty-three agents per vic. Dr. King visits. Bayard Rustin visits. Bayard Rustin briefs Littell." All of this movement "pissed off [Hoover's] klavernite plants. They were shrill. They were racist." Lyndon B. Johnson's decision "bruised [Hoover's] racist aesthetic" (215). The description shows some of the reterritorialization occurring at the time. The White House forces the FBI to break from its normal code of conduct. In doing so, they define appropriate levels of violence in the citizenry.

The conflict between the white power structure and the elements it attempts to repress is encapsulated in the Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) Operation Black Rabbit. It's a fictional condensation of the real anti-left and anti-white-hate COINTELPROs. Historian David Cunningham, quoting FBI historian Kenneth O'Reilly writes, "Hoover saw the Ku Klux Klan as another subversive threat to the peace and stability of middle America, but he also saw the Klan as a threat to the good name of the anti-civil rights movement. Klansmen were discrediting all forms of resistance, including the FBI's preferred forms, and for that, the director decided that they had to be stopped" (331). Cunningham continues that the KKK's behavior "threatened the legitimacy of established authority structures" (342). "The good name of the anti-civil rights movement" is the sort of unwittingly ironic phrase that characters in *The Cold Six Thousand* would sincerely say. Indeed, Hoover's real life sentiment is echoed in the novel.

In Operation Black Rabbit, everybody is given a codename and all are anonymous to one another. Hoover tells Littell: "Martin Luther King will be RED RABBIT. Bayard Rustin will be PINK RABBIT. Lyle Holly will be WHITE RABBIT. You will be most appropriately known as CRUSADER RABBIT." Lyle Holly is the name of a plant in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and has the ear of King. The names are semi-comic. Red Rabbit is a reference to King's Socialist leanings. Pink Rabbit refers to Rustin's homosexuality. Hoover, still maintaining that Littell is a loyal goon, considers the term Crusader Rabbit ironic. However, it gets at the heart of Littell's identity. Before his transformation in *American Tabloid*, he was referred to as a liberal crusader. The rabbit, fast and unpredictable, is a perfect metaphor for Littell and his actions. Further names include Wayne Tedrow Senior as FATHER RABBIT and CIA agent Bob Relyea as WILD RABBIT. Their jobs are to curtail the New Klan while disseminating hate literature. The ultimate goal of the operation is to discredit Martin Luther

King Jr. and Bayard Rustin, producing information that alludes to "their Communist associations, hypocritical moral behavior, and sexual degeneracy" and "engender distrust and resentment…within the Negro community and undercut the recent non-Negro cache [Northern liberal activists] that RED RABBIT had engineered" (354-5) Finally, Hoover intends "to implement the WHITE-HATE arm of OPERATION BLACK RABBIT…in order to buttress the FBI's anti-Klan, anti-racist credentials and rebuff anti-FBI sentiment disseminated by civil-rights provocateurs and members of the liberal-socialist press" (345). This captures the political repression required to sustain the white power structure. The goal is to make rebellion and unsanctioned violence undesirable. Once these are made undesirable, the populace at large will begin to think that the white power structure's repression of these undesirable desires is legitimate and necessary. If successful (it isn't), Americans will desire their own repression.

In Ted Ryan's analysis of white masculinity in *American Tabloid*, he suggests, "by asking the reader to become involved with the oppressors, their prejudices, their savagery, and their crises, and by largely reducing the oppressed to the status of passive ciphers, Ellroy is also in danger of contributing to the 'process of recentering rather than decentering' whiteness" (Ryan 279). This is an ethical concern that hangs over the entire trilogy. Ryan is rightly concerned—*American Tabloid* identifies the base emotions of the oppressors, but oscillates between criticizing them and reveling in its knowing performance of them. The previous chapter doesn't go in depth in Ellroy's depiction of non-whites, but instead focuses on women and homosexuals. Blacks in *American Tabloid* are ciphers. Ellroy in *American Tabloid* is limited to the perspective of the white power structure, which dismiss non-whites, women, and homosexuals. Through the deconstruction of female archetypes and through Lenny Sands' plotline, he gives two of the three voices and presence. The blacks and Cubans don't get the same treatment. *The Cold Six*

Thousand's focus on the oppression of blacks and racist hatred attempts to keep the aesthetic of the first novel and address the concerns of a limited perspective. Littell and Wayne continually construct their own identities black people, who are much more clearly defined than they are. It's an attempt to have one's cake and eat it too.

Littell is the only protagonist in the first novel who doesn't repress aspects of his past or his political interests. Kemper Boyd exaggerates his persona, Pete hides his French-Canadian heritage and past, but Littell is an unabashed liberal. He gets beaten down throughout the beginning of the first book. First, he's trapped in a humiliating job eavesdropping for Chicago's ineffectual anti-Communist COINTELPRO (he gets caught looking at an elderly man's donut receipts), and is routinely bullied by his right-wing FBI colleagues. He quells his anxieties with alcohol. He desires to help Robert F. Kennedy to destroy Hoffa's teamsters, going so far as to rob their fundbooks. Pete Bondurant beats him to a pulp the first time around, but he's ultimately successful. Afterwards, he's abandoned by his idol Robert F. Kennedy. From the burgled fundbooks, he discovers that the mob had funded the Kennedy family, which he tracks through the three million the family used to bribe Laura Hughes. He sees that the Kennedy family is intertwined with the world he despises. His seemingly stable identity as a passionate liberal comes to a dead end. At this realization, he desires nothing but the humiliation and the destruction of Robert Kennedy, something that the white power structure approves of, as Kennedy is the common enemy between J. Edgar Hoover and the Mafia. He adopts an opposite persona—a Mafia lawyer and Hoover confidante. It is through this persona that he is given immeasurable access within the white power structure and he becomes a chief conspirator in John F. Kennedy's assassination. In *American Tabloid*, Littell's identity collapses and in order to participate in the world, he has to adopt a monstrous travesty of what he thought defined him.

Dallas, the site of JFK's assassination, is the site for a Freudian return of the repressed. With Wayne, Dallas is the site that conjures the world of racism he was brought up in. After he returns to Las Vegas, he goes to his father's house. He meets Chuck Rogers, the JFK triggerman from *American Tabloid*, who is showing a culled FBI surveillance video to some racist Mormon elders. "Chuck ran the projector. Film hit a pull screen. Tight on: Martin Luther King. He's fat. He's nude. He's ecstatic. He's fucking a white woman hard…Static hiss and film flecks. Sprocket holes and numbers—FBI code. Covert work/surveillance film/some lens distortion." Chuck reads from a hate tract that is meant to accompany the film, much to the delight of the elders. Wayne destroys the projector and film. He then uncovers a pile of hate cartoons. "Martin Luther Coon and the plump woman. Fat Jews with fangs. Martin Luther Coon—priapic. His dick's a branding iron. It's red hot. The head's a hammer-and-scythe. Wayne spat on the picture. Wayne ripped it crossways. Wayne shredded it up" (112-3). The passage is rich with psycho-sexual meaning. It's a ridiculous image, a group of clean-cut Mormon elders yukking at pornography. They co-opt a surveillance film meant to discredit Martin Luther King Jr., view it as pornography, and enjoy it as comedy. It recalls Lenny Sands' homophobic stand-up act. The King cartoon is explicit in the fears projected onto it. The branding iron points to a white man's fear that, if the civil rights movement were successful, the black man will enslave the white race under Communist rule. It recalls *Birth of a Nation*, which in the end, calls for the exclusion of blacks from the democratic process lest they chase white women and attempt to marry them. The connections are completely irrational, which is the point. These tracts are meant to provoke feelings of sexual inadequacy, fears of a changing world, and point them to a target. The image is a tactic in the race war, but its double-edged. It calls for the repression of blacks based on their perceived sexual prowess and politics. For this to work, the white audience acknowledges that Martin Luther King would be a

better lay than they are and that the "market" on white women is now open to black men. The hate tract devalues their own sexual desires (white sexuality is lesser than black sexuality, the tract proposes) and values violent and political action. What is notable is that Wayne acts impulsively. It offends him and he destroys it.

Wayne's offense is understandable given some background information that is revealed. He was a witness to the Little Rock incident, the key moment when an Arkansas public school was desegregated under the eye of the National Guard, and to the violence of the protests. "[Wayne] saw Little Rock. Wayne Senior didn't. The Klan torched a car. The gas cap blew. It put a colored boy's out. Some punks raped a colored girl. They wore rubbers. They shoved them in her mouth" (137). After witnessing this horror, he attempts to estrange himself from the world he grew up in. For a white cop in 1960's America, this is perceived as a weakness. Maynard Moore, a Dallas cop charged with silencing JFK-conspiracy witnesses and, unrelated to that assignment, the hunting down of Wendell Durfee, says to Wayne:

> I heard you got leanings your daddy don't much care for…Let's try nigger lover. Let's try you chauffeur Sonny Liston around when he comes to Vegas, 'case the PD's afraid he'll get himself in trouble with liquor and white women, and you *like* him, but you *don't* like the nice Italian folks who keep your little town clean (5).

Wayne is mocked for being a race traitor, a subservient to boxer Sonny Liston. The insistence on "like" serves to mark him as a house slave, someone who sold out to the "enemy." Moore sees this as an aesthetic stance. Wayne has a token black friend, one that has to be prevented from destroying the moral fabric of a city that the mafia is working so hard to upkeep. Wayne's stance, while valid, clashes with society. Ellroy fully intends this all to be ironic. He goes at great length to paint Maynard Moore as a moron, a belligerent racist that draws the ire of almost everybody he meets. Moore also owes money to Las Vegas mobsters—he mocks Wayne's progressive

views yet he's invested in a system that represses him by making money desirable but unattainable.

Freud defines the phenomenon of the uncanny as "that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). For uncanniness to register, the subject "identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes the extraneous self for his own" (234). Durfee arrives in the novel as a Freudian uncanny. He's an archetype of black criminality, an exaggeration that would seem to exist in the imagination of white racists. What is most surprising is that Durfee is given the most salient and complete physical description in the whole novel. Wayne is never described physically, only emotionally. At the end of the first chapter, Wayne reads Wendell Durfee's police file.

> Durfee, Wendell (NMI). Male Negro/DOB 6-6-27/Clark County, Nevada…
> Pander beefs—3/44 up. "Well known dice-game habitué." No busts outside Vegas and Dallas.
> "Known to drive Cadillacs."
> "Known to wear flamboyant attire."
> "Known to have fathered 13 children out of wedlock."
> "Known to pander Negro women, white women, male homosexuals & Mexican transvestites."
> Twenty-two pimp busts. Fourteen convictions. Nine child-support liens. Five bail jumps (8).

Durfee, Wendell: gambler pimp, fashion plate, fancy ride, absentee father, jailbird. It's a veritable checklist of African-American stereotyping. However, Wayne empathizes with him—he knows that the crime he's hunting Durfee down for was an act of self-defense. Later, Wayne and Moore track Durfee down, having a shootout with him during an alleyway dice game, then in a desert parking lot. The stereotyping continues, "Shitfire—there's Wendell Durfee. He's got pimp threads. He's got a hair net. He's got a jigaboo conk. He's got a piece—it's a quiff automatic." Wayne kills Moore and lets Durfee free. Over the course of the novel, we learn that Durfee is also a drug dealer and a serial rapist and killer claiming his wife as a victim. Not long after

Wayne destroys his father's hate propaganda, he learns that the Durfee is in Las Vegas to kill him—no motive is ever given.

Before Wayne leaves Dallas, there is one notable moment where we get a sense of *some* sort of physicality, but it's in relation to Durfee. Wayne interviews a black man who knew Durfee personally. The man's dog plays with Wayne, and the man tells him "He liked Wendell, so I liked him too." The man tells Wayne that Durfee crossed the border to Mexico. When the man sees the dog nuzzling Wayne, he tells him "Dogs can be fooled just like anyone else." Wayne lets the man in on his plan to let Durfee go, if Durfee were to return, then Wayne will arrest him. When the man asks why Wayne would take that risk for Durfee, Wayne replies, "Your dog likes me, leave it at that." There is a tenuous likeness drawn between Durfee and Wayne. The dog instinctively likes both characters—for this to happen, there has to be a physical or behavioral similarity between the two.

Wayne's trajectory is foreshadowed in the moments following Lynnette's death. When Wayne discovers her body, he attempts suicide by putting a fully loaded gun into his mouth, but the gun jams. Later, the image of her corpse haunts him: "He saw the flaps. He saw the sheared ribs. He saw where the knife snapped bone. Wayne Junior didn't blame him. Wayne Junior blamed himself" (181). Wayne takes responsibility for Lynette's death, which, more or less, attributes the blame on Durfee's existence and Wayne's own mercy. Wayne blames himself directly and Durfee by extension. On a purely formal level, Durfee's name isn't even mentioned. He is only referred to by his pronoun, meaning there are three characters (Wayne, Durfee, Lynette) and only two pronouns (he, she). Two men for one "he." At the funeral, the narration describes Wayne and Lynette's relationship by mocking the characters and their conflicts by reducing them to a base timeline. It adopts the tone of the preacher and acts as a crib sheet to his

speech. "Soldier boy. Yankee. She was seventeen. You wooed her. She killed your baby. You made her do it" (193). Then, there is a list of meaningless phrases: "Loving spirit. Sacred child. Blessed in Christ's name." Ellroy undercuts Wayne's wish for his wife's silence by making it trite. More salient is what happens outside the funeral. Wayne looks at a black chauffeur:

> The chauffeur stood around. The chauffeur filed his nails. The chauffeur wore a hair net. He had Durfee hair. He had Durfee skin. He had Durfee's lank frame.
> Wayne watched him. Wayne retouched his hair. Wayne retouched his skin. Wayne made him Wendell D.
> …The chauffeur buffed his nails.
> Wayne watched him.
> He burned his face. He smashed his teeth. He fed him Big "H." (194)

Wayne begins to project the image of Wendell Durfee onto the black chauffeur and tortures the chauffeur in his mind. The final part calls attention to one of the larger plots of the novel—the mafia, in order to keep the civil rights movement out of Las Vegas, their home base, plans on importing large quantities of heroin and distribute them to poor black communities. His imaginary torture of the black chauffeur is linked to the political repression of African-Americans in Las Vegas. Big "H": heroin, hate.

Later, there is a moment where Wayne's involvement in the King assassination is foreshadowed. Wayne, at his father's ranch, spools in the FBI video the Mormon elders were enjoying:

> Said film ran high-contrast. Black and white skin/black & white stock.
> King shut his eyes. King went ecstatic. King preached in Little Rock. He saw him live in '57.
> The woman bit her lips. Lynette always did that. The woman had Barb-style hair.
> It hurt. He watched anyway. King thrashed and threw sweat.
> The film blurred—lens haze and distortion. The skin tones blurred—King went Wendell Durfee-dark. (211)

Watching the film, Wayne first plays it in the wrong exposure so that the blacks and whites are exaggerated. King's speechmaking is then attributed to his sexual prowess, and the woman first

becomes his dead wife, then Pete's wife. This passage, compared to the description of the elders watching it earlier, is meant to show a difference between Wayne's masochistic and malleable hatred and the elders'. It recalls the difference between the New Klan and the Old Klan. As serious as the Old Klan was, their hatred was partly based on a certain set of political theories. To them, Martin Luther King Jr.'s phallus was a Communist branding iron and the video was proof of the black man's threat to their sexuality. Like Hoffa's Teamsters and Lenny Sands' camp performance, they're laughter is a result of their ability to recognize how over the top it all is. J. Edgar Hoover tells Littell that Wayne Senior's Klavern "was probably more genteel than the Klan groups currently down south." They never lynched any African-Americans, but Hoover is "certain they would have enjoyed it…Most people have entertained the notion. You must credit their restraint" (190). The New Klan, more outright in their violence sees these images and locates the base emotions they feel onto people. However, in the creation and viewing of these pictures, Wayne watches the surveillance footage primarily out of self-hatred, that self-hate symbolized in Wendell Durfee. Then, he projects that symbol onto Martin Luther King Jr. Wayne's affected identity as open-minded utterly fails. In fact, it splits. As stated earlier, Wayne's own identity is only described in relation to Wendell Durfee. Durfee's identity, in the prose, is far more tangible than Wayne's. Wayne desires the destruction of his own identity, which requires that he have one in the first place, and Durfee is the machine that can fulfill that desire. Durfee becomes an extension of Wayne and since Wayne was willing to take his own life, he is willing to take Durfee's. In Durfee's absence, black men become outlets for his suicide.

Immediately after Wayne fails to kill himself, he murders three of Durfee's associates. The murders are symptoms of Wayne's failure to repress his suicidal urge. He and Wendell Durfee are joined at the hip. Durfee is absent, Wayne fails to kill himself, so he hunts down three

heroin dealers. Wayne beats the first man Cur-ti and stuffs his mouth with heroin, overdosing him. Then, Wayne proceeds to kill his brother Otis:

> [Wayne] broke [Otis'] teeth. He broke his nose. He broke the gun butt. His lips moved. His mouth moved. His eyeballs clicked up. His eyes showed pure white.
>
> Wayne picked the TV up. Wayne dropped it on his head. The tubes burst and exploded. They burned his face up. (165)

Just as there was the pronoun confusion when Wayne blames himself for his wife's murder, it also appears here. Who's eyes showed pure white? It's obviously Otis, since he's being murdered, but on a purely grammatical level, the "he" can be either one of them. In both murders, he makes their identities unrecognizable first by burning Otis' face, then decapitating Leroy with a shotgun. Wayne gets away with the murders. Even the NAACP lets him off for it, which is a curious moment in the novel: "Sergeant Tedrow, under great personal duress, acted in a somewhat heedless but recognizably non-malicious manner that did not include racist designs" (186). This information was given to the NAACP by Ward Littell and their gesture of exoneration is done as a favor for his support. Littell and Bayard Rustin discuss Tedrow and Rustin recognizes that three men were useless to the cause: "Negro junkies weren't four girls in church" (179). The civil rights movement, in the novel, needed a positive identity. Shedding tears over three black addicts and dealers would be pointless. In a way, this devalues Wayne's crisis and keeps him out of the political sphere. He sees himself in people that simply do not exist.

In his shizoanalytic reading of *The Black Dahlia*, D.S. Neff writes that the protagonist's search for a stable self "has effectively insulated him from revolutionary insights" and placed him "from among forces perpetuating fascism and racism within an ostensibly egalitarian and democratic culture" (319). Wayne's identity collapses precisely because he thought it was stable. In the novel, there is no identity in whiteness. To think of oneself as white means one thinks of

one's self only in the power and privileges he holds over others. As historian Noel Ignatiev, founder of the progressive magazine *Race Traitor*, said in a lecture:

> Whiteness is not a culture. There is Irish culture and Italian culture and American culture—the latter…a mixture of the Yankee, the Indian, and the Negro (with a pinch of ethnic salt); there is youth culture and drug culture and queer culture; but there is no such thing as white culture. Whiteness has nothing to do with culture and everything to do with social position…Without the privileges attached to it, the white race would not exist, and the white skin would have no more social significance than big feet. ("The Point")

This gets at why Littell's identity is valid and Wayne's isn't. They're similar: They're politics are understandable and reasonable given what they've witnessed. They are both derided by the status quo. However, Wayne's stance is a statement of power. His identity is predicated on the unequality between blacks and whites. If blacks were to become agents of equal power, his identity would be meaningless. Ward's political identity is predicated on the inherent equality between the races that the status quo denies. His collapse of self in the first novel was due to the willful ignorance of his enemies' (Hoover and the Mafia) motivations and inner workings. When Littell begins working for them, he learns how they work and experiences the complexity of the power struggles as a major player. He is inspired by Robert Kennedy's comeback and the successes of the civil rights movement. Wayne searches for a stable identity, Littell reclaims his past identity and experience renders it pliable.

Just as Wayne first encounters Durfee through a rap sheet, Littell first encounters Bayard Rustin through an FBI file:

> SUBJECT RUSTIN must be viewed as a cunning subversive with a significant history of Communist-inspired alliances & as a pronounced security threat, due to his alliances with perceived "Mainstream" Negro demagogues, such as MARTIN LUTHER KING & A. PHILLIP RANDOLPH. SUBJECT RUSTIN'S radical Quaker background & his parents' association with the NAACP…point out the extent of his early radical indoctrination. (141)

There are several similarities between Littell and Rustin. Littell is a cunning subversive with Communist-inspired politics. He was allied to the Kennedy's through an alias. He also was a devout Catholic. There is one glaring difference, however. The file goes in depth with Rustin's homosexuality. "SUBJECT RUSTIN'S homosexuality is well known & is considered to be an embarrassment to the alleged 'Mainstream' Negro 'Leaders' who utilize his skills as an organizer & orator" (141). Rustin's homosexuality, according to the file, caused his expulsion from a black college and landed him in jail. Littell was likewise bullied for his politics, at one point in *American Tabloid*, his girlfriend Helen Agee was expelled from her school when Hoover discovered his involvement in Robert Kennedy's Mafia investigations. His politics cost him, just as homosexuality had cost Rustin. Unlike Littell, Rustin never gave up. Though his visibility in the civil rights movement was limited, he was still instrumental and productive.

Littell's encounter with Rustin may be his most genuine moment. Like all spy movies, the two meet on a bench in a park in Washington DC. Littell is pretending to be a fallen liberal who retired from the FBI out of disgust. More or less, he's pretending to be the person he wished he is and the person he once was. Hoover gives him the task of offering mob money to fund the SCLC. Hoover hopes that if the organization takes it, he can discredit it. Littell waits for Rustin, who arrives late. "A tall man-dressed and groomed-more gaunt than his mug shots. He sat down. He crossed his legs. He cleared bench space. Littell said, 'How did you recognize me?' Rustin smiled. 'You were the only one not involved in the democratic process'" (158). Rustin's statement cuts through Littell's mask and gets to Littell's desire for identity. Rustin has the ability to disassemble Littell. Through FBI files and surveillance information, Littell knows Rustin. They are on equal footing and instantly strike camaraderie:

> Rustin smiled. "Do you hate [Hoover]?"
>
> "No."

"After what he put you through?"
"I find it hard to hate people who are that true to themselves."
"Have you studied passive resistance?"
"No, but I've witnessed the futility of the alternative."
Rustin laughed. "That's an extraordinary statement for a Mafia lawyer to make."
A wind stirred. Littell shivered.
"I know something about you, Mr. Rustin. You're a gifted and compromised man. I may not have your gifts, but I suspect that I run neck-and-neck in the compromise department."

Littell is a walking contradiction and Rustin is savvy enough to see through the ruse and appeal to his genuine sentiments. Littell unconsciously resists his desire to open up to him. A cold wind causes him to shiver right at the moment Rustin hints at the falseness of Littell's identity as a Mafia lawyer. When Littell reveals that he admires King, he buttons his coat. Rustin tells Littell, "You'll be hearing some bad things about our Martin. Mr. Hoover has been sending out missives. Martin Luther King is the devil with horns. He seduces women and employs Communists (160)." The suggestion that Littell is still involved with Hoover, which is true, causes Littell to put his gloves on. Though Littell doesn't recognize it at the moment, his ability to participate in the civil rights movement is compromised by his allegiance with Hoover. Both characters leave and for two sentences, we're left with an empty park. "The park glowed. Mr. Hoover bestows all gifts. (160)." The narration reminds the reader that all of this occurred within Hoover's jurisdiction.

Littell is told to infiltrate the movement for Hoover by taking up this "fallen liberal" image. Hoover fully intends him to continue with that travesty of identity, a man whose genuine political desires (and his desire for validation from his heroes) are an affectation. The character Lyle Holly is another such travesty. He is a right-leaning FBI agent who in infiltrating the SCLC begins to adore Martin Luther King Jr. Lyle is the brother of Dwight Holly, one of the protagonists in *Blood's a Rover*. Both are the sons of the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan, the same Klan the Tedrow's are involved with. They grew up with Wayne (158). Unlike Wayne,

Lyle is still a believer. Hoover describes Lyle: "Lyle is more impetuous. He drinks more than he should and comes off as a hail-fellow-well-met. The Negroes adore him. He's convinced them that he's the world's most incongruously liberal ex-cop, when in fact that prize goes to you" (140). In some ways, Lyle is a reminder of the uglier aspects of Littell's past. He's regularly drunk and awfully ingratiating. "Lyle worked the Red Squad. Lyle studied the Left. Lyle talked Left and *thought* Right. They shared similar credentials. They shared the same disjuncture. Lyle cracked racial jokes. Lyle said he loved Dr. King" (158). They share a disconnection between performance and identity. The final comparison collapses their similarities in one sentence, "Lyle oozed Littell-like empathy" (158). They are both able to project they're personalities into other people and understand them. Though Lyle *thinks* right, what comes out of his mouth is an affect. Before Lyle's death, Littell confronts him at a casino in Las Vegas. Lyle tells Littell, "I think I'm schizophrenic. I work for the SCLC, I work for Mr. Hoover. I'm on Black Rabbit one minute, voting-rights drives the next. Dwight says I'm psychologically unhinged" (427). Like Littell, Lyle split his personality two ways. Unlike Littell, Lyle is trapped and hopeless—his identities clash mid-sentence. Lyle says, "Martin Luther Coon's the only saint I know, and I've got some hair-curling shit on him…or hair-*kinking* in this case." Lyle has the power to discredit King, but his admiration and racism conflict with one another. Instead of just giving this evidence to Hoover, Lyle drunkenly gambles in a casino, imagining ways to skim SCLC funds to finance his addictions. His suffering is manifest in a scene where he gambles with Sammy Davis Jr. Lyle desires his attention, and Davis uses Lyle to complete an impromptu comic double act. Lyle is the comic stooge, "a Rat Pack reject." Lyle is game, willingly embarrassing himself to a growing crowd so Davis can get a laugh. However, as Littell watches the act, he catches Lyle's mutterings: "coon" and "kike" (428-9). As soon as the crowd disperses, Lyle goes catatonic and

Littell drags him to his car. In a social atmosphere, Lyle wants to be seen as Davis' buddy yet calls him racial epithets, as if to affirm his reactionary identity.

The information Lyle compiled is proof of King's socialist agenda. Littell destroys Lyle's house to make it look like it was burglarized. He discovers Nazi regalia and finds Lyle's report in a folder covered with "Nazi maidens and shivs. It was marked. It was circled: 'Marty'" (431). Lyle's summary reads:

> MLK has discussed the following topics in high-level SCLC staff meetings, has forbidden staff members to announce them publicly…and has rebuffed all criticism that points out one obvious fact: The breadth of his socialistic agenda will divert his energies, deplete SCLC resources and undermine the credibility of the civil-rights movement. It will enrage the American status quo, perhaps cost him congressional and presidential support and will earn him the enmity of his 'limousine liberal' supporters. The true danger of his plans is that they may well serve to fuel and unite a coalition of hard-core Communists, Communist sympathizers, far-left intellectuals, disaffected college students and Negroes susceptible to inflammatory rhetoric and prone to violent action. (431-2)

The image of the Nazi doodles and the actual content of the file is symbolic of the schizophrenia Lyle suffers. This information would kill the civil rights movement and if disseminated would totally discredit it. It would fulfill Operation Black Rabbit and satisfy the desire of the white power structure to finally repress King and Rustin's rebellion. "MLK on slums: 'The economic perpetuation of Negro poverty….20th century slavery, euphemized by politicians of all stripes and creeds. A cancerous social reality and a condition which mandates a massive redistribution of assets and wealth." To Littell, Martin Luther King Jr.'s scheme is "huge. It's grand. It's magnificent. It's insane. It's megalomaniacal. Littell rubbed his eyes. Littell fought double-vision. Littell dribbled sweat" (433). The report is revolutionary in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense of the term. Martin Luther King Jr. locates the flow capitalism is based on and proposes the reinvestment of capital to create true equality. Ward knows that if the document gets into

Hoover's hands, Hoover will seek to annihilate King. He burns the report and flushes it down a sink.

When Lyle returns to his house, Littell listens in from afar. The burglary is committed while Lyle is passed out in his car as Littell drives it from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. "[Littell] gauged time. He knew booze regimens. He knew pass-outs and wake-ups. He knew pass-out stats. Three hours—four tops. Lyle wakes up/Where am I?/Oh fuck" (430). Littell, an alcoholic, knows exactly how Lyle will react down to the hour. Moreover, he goes into Lyle's head. While it isn't a stretch to imagine how one would react if they pass out in Las Vegas and wake up in Los Angeles, Ellroy takes the identification between the two further. Littell trashes Lyle's house "systematic." When the burglary is finished, he tosses out Lyle's Nazi regalia and waits outside the house. "Littell shut his eyes. He heard crash sounds. He heard toss sounds. He heard oh no yells. He opened his eyes. He checked his watch. He timed Lyle *seeing things*…Lyle ran out. Littell clocked it: 3.6 minutes" (433). When Littell systematically wrecked Lyle's place, he did so with the knowledge that Lyle would look for certain objects. First, the fascist iconography and then the file. In removing these objects, Littell removed the objects that symbolized Lyle's schizophrenia yet further entraps Lyle in this delirium. Without the file, Lyle would be forced to continue splitting himself between the SCLC and Hoover yet fail to win any sort of affirmation from either. While Sammy Davis Jr. was mocking Lyle in Las Vegas, Littell informed Hoover that Lyle was not only embarassing himself and fleecing SCLC funds. The SCLC, off-page, discovers where their money is going and stops payment. By looking at Littell's story-line, how he became an agent for the Mafia, Hoover, and the civil rights movement, one could imagine what Lyle's survival would entail. Lyle would be indebted to the Mafia and Hoover would be the only person who could protect him. He would then be indebted to Hoover, who would probably

force him to continue with Operation Black Rabbit. Lyle, however, would lose the SCLC's trust and Martin Luther King Jr.'s ear. There would be no escape from of his delirium. Suicide would be the only way out, and he takes it. Like Lyle, Littell is further entrapped. Without both the file and Lyle, Hoover has to escalate Operation Black Rabbit. It quickly grows out of control.

As King's socialist movement gathers speed, Operation Black Rabbit collapses. King announces the Poor People's March (ultimately unsuccessful after his assassination a month prior to the march). In the book, a headline reads: "KING ON SPRING MARCH: 'TIME TO CONFRONT POWER STRUCTURE MASSIVELY.'" Lyndon B. Johnson calls up Hoover and requests him to prevent the march, as it's success would be a blow to the legitimacy of his civil rights policy. He asks Hoover, "has my legislation improved the lot of the Negro people?...have I been a friend to Martin Luther King?" (590-1). Hoover's response is to comically plant his black chauffeur in the movement. They attempt to entrap Rustin in a tryst with the actor Sal Mineo, but fail. Operation Black Rabbit, through Lyle's death and the growing failures to discredit the movement, ends. King's plot, in the novel, succeeds in disrupting the power structure. Robert Kennedy joins him. Wayne Tedrow Sr. and Dwight Holly break from the operation and plot King's assassination. The presidency and the FBI are made illegitimate and a center of power forms around the repressed reactionaries. The structure deterritorializes, but then redraws the boundaries of power to include the deluded and hateful. This is evident in the sections of the book composed of document inserts: the FBI memos, wire-tap transcripts, and newspaper headlines. Late in the novel, when Wayne Senior and Dwight plot, we get hate-mail excerpts from James Earl Ray and Sirhan Sirhan. They are comically insane. Sirhan Sirhan's first letter (a short section extracted from 19 pages) to Robert F. Kennedy tells him "YOU ARE A PUS PUPPET IN THE CONTROL OF THE JEWISH VAMPIRE AND MUST STOP EMITTING

HEADACHES." James Earl Ray's letters to Dr. King are poems with *rhyme schemes*, "But the White Man's wise to your evil ways; / The bounty means you'd better pray and count your days" (557). When the two men not only enter society but are also coddled by it, possibilities are opened for Wayne. After they are used, the power structure will have to punish them in order to legitimize their authority.

Later, Wayne kills a black pimp named Bongo in Vietnam. He becomes a heroin chemist, developing drugs to be sold to poor blacks in Las Vegas' slums. He kills Bongo by injecting him with poisoned heroin and crushing his skull as he convulsed. The narration summarizes the killing: "He killed Bongo. He committed. He joined the war then. He squashed a bug. It felt right. It felt impersonal. He killed Bongo. He dumped Bongo. He took his own pulse. Sixty-two beats a minute—no malice/no stress." Killing Bongo yields no immediate satisfaction to Wayne's desire, the murder is, ironically, committed without hate or stress. The war refers to the race war rather than the Vietnam War. Wayne becomes a desensitized soldier.

Earlier in the novel, there is a chapter that begins, "HATE. It moved him. It ran him. It called his shots. He stayed cool with it. He stayed justified. He never said NIGGER. They weren't all bad." The narrative voice continues, "He never thought NIGGER. He never condoned the concept." Though Wayne doesn't think or say the word, the narrative voice has no problem doing it for him. This is where the narrative voice calls attention to a speaker. There is a voice that hectors Wayne, though he can't hear it. "He tracked THEM. He trailed THEM. He prowled West LV. He looked for Wendell Durfee. It was futile. He knew it. The HATE drew him there" (217). The "THEM" is meant to imply black criminals. Then, there's a chapter that mirrors the previous:

NIGGER.

He never thought it. He never said it. It was ugly. It was stupid. It made you THEM.

Wayne took back roads. Wayne saw shit shacks and crop rows. Wayne saw THEM.

They tilled dirt. They hauled brush. They dished slop. Wayne made them Bongo. Wayne made them Wendell D.

It is revealed that the "THEM" refers to the Klan. This is one of the strangest moments in the novel. Wayne's destructive desires are finally expanded to poor, white racists. The hate that stems from his upbringing has finally come around full circle. However, there are two elements at play that make his ability to kill them impossible. There is a fundamental disconnect between Wayne and the Klan in that they say the epithet that he refuses to even think. Oddly, Ellroy chooses to emblazon the word at the top of the chapter. Secondly, Wayne's reaction to Bongo's death should be a sign that he's trapped in a meaningless game. Killing, in Wayne's split mind, is a means towards suicide and the self-hate required to commit this act is no longer there. He folds and gives himself up to the Klan and his father. He turns to the Klan so he can learn how to "hate smart" like his father, meaning transforming hate to create order.

This sends Wayne ever hurtling towards Martin Luther King Jr., the figure that can truly create chaos in the social order. Wayne Senior's Klan intends to reestablish the old order and repress the productive chaos of King's march and the counter-productive chaos that the march will inspire. "Coloreds mock order. Coloreds foist chaos. Coloreds breed lunacy. The haters knew it. Wayne Senior knew it. *He* knew it. The haters lived to hate. That was wrong. *That* was lunacy. The haters lived disordered lives. The haters thrived on chaos. The haters mimed the hatees" (581). From this point of view, the repression of black civil rights activists would further repress the truly destructive force in the novel, the New Klan—they are the chaos the socialist movement will spawn, the force that would destroy the white power structure's legitimacy. To

learn to "hate smart," Wayne thinks he has to finally locate and locate Wendell Durfee, who he sees as the source of his hatred. The way he does so is curious—he injects him with heroin and anesthetic, then proceeds to eviscerate Durfee's body. He then sits and watches Durfee bleed to death. In the scene, there is no indication that Wayne feels anything. Instead, Ellroy describes Durfee's psychological experience. As heroin is injected into his legs, "Wendell grinned. Wendell soooooooared. Wendell smaaacked out and up" (621). The scene is brutal (Durfee's fingers and legs are eventually shot off), but it is hugely anti-climactic. The violence seems to be written only to shock. For a scene that is meant to be the manifestation of an emotion it is completely devoid of it. Considering Wayne's reaction to Bongo, it makes sense. The murder simply doesn't matter—but as the book winds down to a close, it seems Ellroy intended for it to do the opposite.

One of the flaws of the novel is mainly a failure of a pay-off. King's death was foreshadowed in the beginning. Wayne was able to project his hatred onto King and it was reasonable that this emotion stemmed from self-directed hate and guilt for Lynette's murder. His identity was pliable—he could see himself in random African-Americans and in doing so, he reacted purely emotionally. After killing Bongo in Vietnam, the emotions lose their power. One would expect Wayne to be released from this trap, but instead, he attempts to resurrect it. The emotions are no longer valid, and in a bizarre turn, Wayne attempts to rationalize his irrational emotions, to "hate smart". When Wayne kills Durfee the book seems to oscillate between the possibilities of his hate and that emotion's failure to register. Before the King assassination, Ellroy draws parallel's between Wayne and King that are meant to reinvoke the schizophrenia he suffered at the beginning of the novel:

> [Wayne] went to Little Rock. He enforced integration. He saw King there. He saw that fuck film. It was FBI-shit. He saw King there. He killed three coloreds. King indicted

> Las Vegas. King almost went there. He killed Bongo in Saigon. King hated his war. He killed Wendell Durfee. Wayne Senior found Durfee. King served his vengeance cause.
>
> Wayne Senior knew:
>
> You *want* it. I *made* you. It's *yours*. (629)

The connections are mostly unconvincing and in this sense, it works. If it was intended to be unconvincing, then it reads as if Wayne, in order to give his actions meaning draws parallels that don't exist. Moments before King's assassination, Wayne watches King through binoculars, "Wayne got King's eyes. Wayne got King's skin". The use of the word "got" rather than the word "saw" is significant. The word "got" implies a receiving. Wayne projected Durfee, a symbol of his own self-hatred, onto King and now King's features are projected back onto Wayne. As Wayne watches King on the balcony, "Wayne ran outtakes. Wayne saw that fuck film. The mattress jiggles. King's flab rolls. That ashtray drops." The language repeats after Ray shoots King, "Wayne saw the impact. Wayne saw the neck spray. Wayne saw King drop" (638). Wayne juxtaposes the FBI film and King's death, sending him back to the film. It is uncertain whether it returns him to the viewing where he ruined Chuck Rogers' screening or the moment after Lynette's funeral where he projected Durfee onto King. If King's death is intended to return him to the former, it brings him back to when he was progressive. If is intended to return him to the latter, it means nothing had changed in Wayne, which the text doesn't support. After King's death, the conspirators planned on overdosing Ray and leaving a suicide note. However, Wayne destroys the evidence and misleads the authorities. Letting Ray escape screws up the conspirators' plan. Instead of the self-contained story of a crazy white man shooting King and committing suicide, what happens is that a crazy white man assassinated King and evaded the authorities. The murder sparks riots and the coverage cause the Poor People's March to fail. The news reports then replay the negative image of African-Americans that was once used to justify their repression.

Before the assassination, Littell imagines "Martin Luther/1532. It's Europe aflame. There's the Pope. He's Mr. Hoover. His old world's aflame." He then thinks, "Retire me. I want to watch. I want to watch passively." (576) It's a schizophrenic response to the changing world: "Leave me alone." In schizoanalysis, this is considered a breakthrough. After the breakthrough, one is to move beyond this realization by returning to society and liberating it. Littell is still engaged despite his desire for an escape. Right up until the end, he continues to liason between Hughes and the Mafia and still represents the Mafia in their various engagements. He still spies on the SCLC for the FBI and still attempts to help Rustin and King. He also begins helping a Kennedy staffer with Robert Kennedy's election behind Hoover's back. He has to be different people in different situations and his pliability exhausts him.

His suicide is foreshadowed when he reads the famous blackmail threat sent by the FBI to King (577). It is only alluded to in the novel, but the end of it fits with Littell's trajectory: "King, there is only one thing left for you to do. You know what this is. You have 34 days in which to do…You are done. There is but one way out for you. You better take it before your filthy, abnormal, fraudulent self is bared to the nation" (Keady). The letter was sent with evidence of his infidelity. In the novel, Littell, after discovering King's socialist scheme, begins feeding data to Paul Horvitz, a young Kennedy aide. Littell dresses in a fake beard and affects a fey Southern accent. He tries to assist Robert F. Kennedy with a future anti-Mob campaign. Hoover catches him. As Littell waits for Paul he overhears three men (all secretly FBI agents) watching the King riots on television, saying, "Goddamn animals…We gave them their civil rights…And look what we got." They gloat over the success of white oppression. Paul arrives and attacks Littell and tells him that a federal agent showed Kennedy a picture of Littell (642). The only encounter Littell ever had with Kennedy was when, in *American Tabloid*, he

blackmailed Kennedy with evidence of a Mafia-Kennedy election. John F. Kennedy's assassination was meant to confirm the Mafia's authority over the presidency. At the scene of Robert Kennedy's assassination, Littell attempts to save him, but is knocked out by the conspirators. His past fraudulence catches up to him and negates his potential to save Kennedy. He is trapped and unable to move beyond his schizophrenic breakthrough. When Littell discovers Kennedy has been assassinated, "Ward cupped his ears. Ward shut his eyes. Ward fucking screamed" (667). The last sentence echoes the final line in *American Tabloid*, as if the scream Pete expects to hear from Barb comes out of Ward's mouth. Pete helps him hide in Lake Tahoe and tells him that the same men who killed Kennedy were responsible for King's death. Littell turns on the television:

> Littell flipped channels. Littell caught The Triad: Jack/King/Bobby. Three funeral shots. Three artful cuts. Three widows framed.
>
> I killed them. It's my fault. Their blood's on me.
>
> He waited. He watched the screen. Let's try for all three. He flipped channels. He got one and two. He lucked on all three.
>
> There—old footage. It's pre-'63.
>
> They're in the White House. Jack's at his desk. King's standing with Bobby. The image held. One picture/all three.
>
> Littell grabbed the gun. Littell ate the barrel. The muzzle roar shut off all three. (669).

Littell waits for a moment where all three victims, all of whom he both helped and harmed are located in one frame. In each case, he engaged with them through different identities. By placing them in a single frame he encapsulates the different lives he lived in different moments of time. Killing himself at the moment freezes that unification. Littell's freedom through death isn't revolutionary. It offers nothing to society. However, by calling attention to the past, Ellroy paints a picture of white power in America. Littell is symptomatic of the problems and there is value in his attempts to extract himself from the chaos and reenter it. He's the rare character who *attempts*

to do right. Littell's trajectory, I think, is one of the novels strengths. With the character, Ellroy successfully captures the stakes and costs of the world and time he engages with.

The same, unfortunately, can't be said of the denouement. Wayne returns home and the end paints him as a Deleuze-Guattarian neurotic. He is told about some of the revelations in the plot (the Pete-in-Vietnam plotline) and declares, "I just don't care" (654). It's the apathy that was described in the Bongo killing and unintentionally shows in the Durfee killing. He desires only to be with his cancer-ridden stepmother Janice. What sets him down the path towards redemption is an epiphany that comes right out of the blue. He calls his mother and "lies his life off." She tells him, "You were a tender child. You loved animals. You set trapped coyotes free. You were a brilliant child…You carried no hate. You played with colored children. You loved righteously" (655). Of course, the question is, If Wayne was so damned virtuous and intelligent, why did he do so many awful and stupid things? It is one of the major problems in the text. Then, there's what truly forces him to go back into society. His mother tells him, "I was pregnant once. It was '32—two years before you. Wayne Senior had a dream. He saw the baby as a girl. He wanted a boy. He beat my stomach in. He used brass knuckles. The baby died. Wayne Senior was right. It was a girl. The doctor told me" (655). It's a late epiphany. In the last few pages of the novel, Wayne discovers one of Littell's love-interest's anti-Mafia files and mails it to Mafioso Carlos Marcello. He plans on replacing Littell as the liason between the mob and Howard Hughes. Over the course of the novel, something in him produces a flow of desire that calls for his self-destruction (manifested in his early suicide attempt). In the end, he supposedly masters it and directs it towards his father. He asks Janice, "If I told you I could help you settle the one score that counts, would you want to do it?" She says yes. Wayne chains his father to a rail, and Janice kills him with a golf club. By killing his father, Wayne resolves an Oedipal complex that was

never taken that seriously. He joins the white power structure in earnest and represses evidence of its corruption. In this reading, Ellroy gives us a downer of an ending, but the execution doesn't necessarily work. The pacing of Wayne's storyline slackens by the time he kills Durfee. There is a disconnect between the emotions we are expected to feel and the rendering of the event on the page. The play for redemption at the end is unearned—the reader is told that Wayne is a good person, but the events don't confirm that opinion. In a schizoanalytic reading, the ending makes sense. However, Wayne's swelling of love towards his mother and step-mother is meant to be read as genuine. The killing of Wayne's father is intended to be redemptive, if mordantly so.

James Ellroy's *The Cold Six Thousand* may be the most flawed book in the trilogy. It's an attempt to describe the psychology of the America in the Sixties and to rightfully capture the violence of its history. Ellroy extends the themes of identity and persona. Instead of subverting tropes and expectations for comic and critical effect, significantly raises the stakes by locating them in political struggle. The book diagnoses the illness in American society and, for the most part, manages to convincingly present the symptoms. However, for the characters, there is no real escape from the entrapping forces Americans are subjected to. There is only the failure of their attempts. If Ellroy intended Wayne's outcome as a solution, it doesn't work. The roots of it are fantastic (the uncanny Wendell Durfee), the way the scenario unfolds requires a strong stomach and a healthy suspension of disbelief, and the outcome is unearned. Ellroy was attempting an entirely cynical novel (which is the attempt in *American Tabloid*), but that he imagined an escape and failed to execute it convincingly. It's a problem Ellroy fixes in the final novel, where he moves beyond merely diagnosing the problems, but examines the possibilities outside of them.

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Conclusion

In *American Tabloid* and *The Cold Six Thousand*, the narrative voice mimics the voice of the white power structure. In *American Tabloid*, for instance, Lenny Sands' delight at mocking Hoover with his satirical tabloid article is told through Hoover's point of view. Likewise, reactions to Sands' suicide are limited to an anonymous Justice Department agent and two mobsters who dismiss it. In *The Cold Six Thousand*, the voice screams the word "nigger" for Wayne, then proceeds to tell us that he "never condoned the concept." Throughout both novels (especially the second), one has to ask, as author Norman Rush does in his review of the trilogy, "For Christ sake, who *is telling this story*?" ("Fever Dreams of Your FBI") The answer is given in *Blood's a Rover*, and at first glance it doesn't seem to work. The voice is revealed to be Don Crutchfield's, a private investigator and one of the three protagonists. He is a voyeur, obsessive, and virgin fixated equally on finding his lost mother, the victim of a murder he investigates, and the character Joan Klein. He is constantly referred to by an assortment of nicknames: Crutch (most commonly), Dipshit, Peeper, pariguayo (literally Dominican for "party-watcher" but in slang approximates to "Dipshit"), the kid, and the boy. He is a schizophrenic character in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense: he's a fringe personality who exists outside of society and is purely driven by his desire to find his lost mother through various women. He is forced into society by the oppressive forces in the novel. He ends up in Haiti where he becomes schizophrenic in the delusory sense—he begins to hear voices and he experiences the world as a disembodied entity. Through a look at the formal construction of the novel, specifically at the book's epilogue, the revelation casts the entire trilogy in an intriguing light.

The epilogue of *Blood's a Rover* provides an optimistic coda that, upon unpacking, is completely mad. There is an incongruency between what Crutch says and the information the

reader brings to it. Crutchfield gives an explanation for all the document inserts that are incorporated into each of the novels:

> *Documents have arrived at irregular intervals. They are always anonymously sent. I have compiled diary excerpts, oral-history transcripts and police-file overflow. Elderly leftists and black militants have told me their stories and provided verification. Freedom of Information Act subpoenas have served me well.* (637)

The research he compiles is largely untrustworthy—documents have anonymous sources, the sources (diaries and oral-history transcripts) are subjective. The novel, prior to the ending, paints a picture of leftist revolutionaries as well meaning but insane. Police-file overflows, given the portraits of cops and FBI agents the trilogy provides, are probably the least trustworthy sources of all.

In the first two novels, there's a superego that orders the information made available to us. Information that isn't provided in the narration is given through document inserts. In *American Tabloid*, the document inserts are newspaper headlines, *Hush-Hush* articles, FBI memos, surveillance transcripts, Hoover's official phone conversations, and letters between the main players. A good deal of them is marked with "Extremely Confidential" notices or reminders to destroy the file. The documents the white power structure's—mainstream media, Hughes' tabloid, and the surveillance material all serve to show the inner workings, motives, and opinions between the different centers of power. By the second novel, as explained in the previous chapter, hate tracts are included with official documents. In changing times, the lines within the white power structure are redrawn. Players within the structure indulge maniacs and their ravings in order to save it. If one were to look at the white power structure as one psychology, the document inserts are the mental noise, the communications between various synapses that constitute a working entity.

If the document inserts represent the voices of the white power structure, then Hoover is the most dominant figure in it. The mafia has given up on the civil rights front, preferring to work with black criminal organizations rather than oppose them. Hughes has gone insane. Most, if not all, the memos and transcripts in the novels were recorded by the FBI. Hoover only has a few physical appearances in *American Tabloid* and is a disembodied voice in *The Cold Six Thousand*. In *Blood's a Rover*, Hoover is fading: "The old poof was frail. He slurped his soup palsy-style. He'd lost some beats, his brain still sparked, his circuits cranked on *HATE*" (30). The narration continues, "He was seventy-three. His breath reeked. His cuticles bled. He lived off digitalis and skin-pop amphetamine. A Dr. Feelgood supplied daily injections" (31). This is further reflected in the inserts that appear. Instead of official transcripts, the inserts are composed of personal diaries from subjected groups that were curiously silent in the first two novels. The diaries belong to two liberal women Joan Klein and Karen Sifakis, and gay black undercover cop Marshall Bowen. The points of view shift by the end of the novel to the point of anarchy. Along with Joan, Karen, Marsh, and Crutchfield (through first-person narration) take over the novel. A limited third-person narrative slowly gives way to first-person perspectives. Joan and Marsh's diaries, juxtaposed, summarize the plot and the fictive trajectory of the novel.

This isn’t to say that the diaries are respites from the novel's madness. Joan Klein, a radical leftist who has helped plot Communist revolutions across the globe, are genuinely unnerving. Joan assists Dwight Holly and the FBI in disseminating heroin to the black nationalist groups the Black Tribe Alliance and the Mau Mau Liberation Front who then sell the drugs to poor black neighborhoods. Joan targets the organizations because of their corruption. The goal is to discredit the Black Panthers, the most organized and least corrupt of the militants. Written in "slashing block print":

> The FBI's short-term goal is a sedated black populace; its long term goal is the perpetuation of racial servitude. I want the BTA and MMLF to move heroin. I will risk the short-term probability of squalor in fervent hope that the sustained depravity of heroin will lead to a rich expression of racial identity and ultimately to political revelation and revolt. In that sense, I see honor, hope and beauty where Dwight does not. (304-5)

Her heart is in the right place, though her mind is somewhere off in a romantic fantasy. In a later diary, Joan writes, "I have seen and done horrifying things in my long revolutionary struggle; my deployment of heroin in Algeria in '56 proved ambiguous. I sternly trust that any and all conflicts in this journey will resolve in my favor, not Dwight's and that no human beings will die" (321-2). This is the definition of insanity, repeating the same action and expecting different results. Late in the novel, Dwight has an apostasy and he and Joan begin to plot the assassination of J. Edgar Hoover, who specifically targeted her family for being liberal subversives. What is significant about Joan's diaries is that they are incorporated into the narrative when she is on the side of the white power structure. Her diaries disappear after the destruction of the BTA and MMLF, though she continues to play a significant role in the events of the plot.

The collapse of the black militant movement is told through the perspective of Marshall Bowen. His journals recall previous characters like Lenny Sands and Kemper Boyd. Because of his race, sexuality, and occupation he has to split himself between different groups with changing demands. As a cop, he has to imitate the white power structure. Undercover, he has to imitate radical blacks. An early journal reads:

> I critiqued the institutional racism of the LAPD specifically and white racist America in general and was conscious that I was shucking [the militants] as I did it, as I concurrently believed it and did not believe it…In retrospect, it felt like demagoguery, social analysis and apostolic fervor all rolled into one.

Marsh mockingly performs the language of black militancy to black militants. He camps revolutionary fervor yet begins to believe in it at the same time. In both worlds, he has to repress his homosexuality, as neither groups condone his sexual preference. When Wayne finds out, he

writes, "How did I reveal myself?...*I am not in the least effeminate and have always gone to great lengths to rid myself of the affect that men with the Bent generally possess. Do I swish?...Do I lisp? Are my shit-kicking/black male mannerisms butch queer in some codified manner?*" (366). Marsh identifies his homosexuality as "the Bent," a phrase that internalizes the social construction of a gay identity as deviant. Within this social construct, he becomes the oppressor: "I roust fags…and carry weighted sap gloves for the task. I have a rule: any fag who lisps or swishes too persistently in my presence receives a beating." He then adds, "I'm a cop" (469). He performs heterosexuality and white authority and punishes homosexuals for a perceived failure in their performance.

It is only when he extricates himself from American society that he sees all the movements of his and shifts in his identity. He gets the sense early on that he exists in a dream state when he notices ties between his undercover work and the armed-car robbery that obsesses him. The truck contained emeralds, which serve as the McGuffin (the item of mystery that drives the plot) of the novel. The emeralds are a shadow economy in the novel, first belonging to Joan Klein's family (they bought them off of left-wing Colombian rebels), stolen by Hoover, then stolen again by Reginald Hazzard, a young black man, who absconds to Haiti. Hazzard, a Deleuze-Guattarian revolutionary, sends the emeralds to poor blacks in America. The incongruence of events causes him to believe that he exists in a dream state, a mental space where "souls [are] in flux" (530). He follows the emeralds to Reginald Hazzard in Haiti. He discovers a mind-altering substance (named after Wayne):

> It is the most breathless mindscape. I often see faces out of my past in entirely altered forms. I think of my life as a middle-class black kid, a left-wing poseur, a policeman, a homosexual, a faux black militant and a killer. I live in a contemplative and unburdened state. February 24, 1964 [the date of the armored car robbery], and everything I have done to claim profit from it feels entirely irrelevant (563).

Marsh comes to terms with his identities and is able to reconcile the diverse experiences each entailed. The scene recalls the scene when Littell sees the three important men who were affected negatively by his multiple personas and grief-stricken, shoots himself in the head. Marsh is able to step back and contemplate. Marsh later gives himself up peacefully to the angels of death, Haitian men with bird wings where their right arms should be. The men appear in the novel once before and are never explained. They are part of the mystical world that inform the events of the novel. In the previous two books, the plots though intricate, unfolded in a mostly logical pattern. One event precipitates another, which precipitates another.

The mystical elements, the voodoo, the dream states, and the angels of death, which show up with greater frequency as the book moves on confound the order. When Wayne frees Haitian slaves in the Dominican Republic, winged men come out of nowhere and murder him. When Crutchfield discovers who killed the woman in the case he investigates early on, he uses an herbal concoction to kill her murderer. Finally, Crutchfield learns that Hoover targeted Joan's family for three generations and that she and Dwight considered assassinating him, but scrapped the project. Crutchfield breaks into Hoover's home and discovers the FBI director's secret hoard of FBI files. "A million voices said, '*Dipshit, Peeper, pariguayo*.' He covered his ears. It didn't stop them. The voices beat on him. He sat on the floor and let them yell themselves out" (633). He uses chemical compounds to burn the files and sees Hoover. "Crutch reached in his pocket and pulled out the emerald. Mr. Hoover trembled and homed in on it. The sparkle was incessant. It eyeball-magnetized. The green glow grew and grew. Mr. Hoover weaved and drooled. Mr. Hoover clutched his chest and staggered upstairs. (634)" Upon seeing the Hoover's files, a compilation of the voices of oppression, he experiences a schizophrenic attack. He lets it pass, then holds up a unit of the book's shadow economy. Hoover has a heart attack, then dies. Ellroy,

retroactively, draws a new frame around the trilogy. The narrative voice is Crutchfield's persona. When Hoover dies, Crutchfield takes his place as the ordering authority of the trilogy. He reinvests repressed voices back into historical narrative.

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