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Displays of Masculinity: James Ellroy and the Violent Drama of Male Subjectivity

My thesis examines the work of contemporary crime fiction author James Ellroy, focusing on his representation of the constitution of masculine subjectivity through the ritualised repetition of violence. Locating his texts in postwar America, Ellroy reconstructs this as an era saturated with violence, whose ideological fabric is woven from the intersecting strands of misogyny, racism and homophobia. Elucidating these inequitable power relations, I adapt Kristeva's theory of abjection to suggest that Ellroy divides his textual universe into the mutually exclusive realms of a domain of "viable" subjects and a sphere of abjected individuals (women, homosexual men, and men from diverse ethnic backgrounds) on whose rigorously enforced exclusion the former domain's privilege is predicated. Filtered through the perspectives of men striving for "viable" subjectivity, Ellroy's novels are concerned with crises of gender and sexual identity and the attainment of "manhood" against the background of a normative ideal of masculine behaviour. Mapping the means by which Ellroy's protagonists obtain "manhood" and "viability," I argue that this is accomplished through their participation in the violation of abjected individuals and their capacity to adopt a particular behavioural paradigm which foregrounds the capacity to disseminate and endure violence as the primary constitutive element of masculine subjectivity. Examining the implications of Ellroy's representations of masculinity and violence, I contend that his claims to merely "reflect" the "real" violence and bigotry of the postwar era mystify his naturalisation of the power imbalances undergirding this society. Rather than critiquing the logic of abjection in which his narrative universe is grounded, his fiction restates it by effacing the subjectivity of devalued individuals, reiterating the processes of objectification, specularisation and violation which enable their oppression, and valorising the violent mode of masculinity responsible for subjugating these groups. In doing so Ellroy's texts themselves constitute acts of violence against both these subordinated groups and against his readers.

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Introduction

> Ours is a gothic fiction, nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic—a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation.
>
> Leslie Fiedler[1]

When Anne Vanderlinden, a character in James Ellroy's *Suicide Hill*, charges her male lover with believing that "'violence and manhood are synonymous,'"[2] she condenses one of Ellroy's primary thematic tropes: the centrality of violence to the construction of masculine identity. The mobilisation of violent masculine agency against a background saturated with atrocity characterises the novels comprising Ellroy's "L.A. Quartet": *The Black Dahlia*, *The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*.[3] Located in the familiar hard-boiled terrain of the criminal milieu and police/jurisprudence system, this interwoven series of novels configures the postwar Los Angeles metropolitan environment as a baroque phantasmagoria of vice and terror, propelling the conventional crime trope of city as urban "hell" to a holocaustal apogee.[4] The cycle of violence

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1 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Stein and Day, 1966 [revised edition]), p. 29.

2 James Ellroy, *Suicide Hill* (New York: Mysterious, 1986a), p. 271. Further references will be cited parenthetically.

3 *The Black Dahlia* (1988; reprint: London: Arrow, 1993); *The Big Nowhere* (1989; reprint: London: Arrow, 1994); *L.A. Confidential* (1990; reprint: London: Arrow, 1994); and *White Jazz* (London: Arrow, 1992). Further references will be cited parenthetically.

4 Ross McDonald has suggested that this trope, common throughout detective fiction, stems from Baudelaire's "vision of the city as inferno" (Ross McDonald, *On Crime Writing: The Writer as Detective Hero* [Santa Barbara, CA: Capra, 1973], p. 13).

inaugurated in *The Black Dahlia* with the discovery of the titular murder victim's vivisected, eviscerated corpse culminates in the apocalyptic finale of *White Jazz*, in which a Jacobean surge of brutality leaves countless citizens, including several of the novel's main characters, dead, and engenders media panic that the "'City of the Angels'" has mutated into "'the City of the Devils'" (*White Jazz*, p. 300). The concern expressed here resonates ironically; in Ellroy's corrosively bleak vision of L.A., its mythological status as the "City of the Angels"—a "sun-kissed amalgam of beaches, palm trees and the movies"[5]—has never accorded with its actual existence as the "'City of the Fallen Angels'" (*White Jazz*, p. 5), a Gothic necropolis electric with violence—"the big nowhere," as the title of one novel reminds readers, in which it is impossible to keep "safe from the horror" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 418).

Compounding Ellroy's conceptualisation of L.A. as urban hell is the fact that the "devils" populating this domain are both its obviously monstrous manifestations of "horror"—the vampire-fixated psychopath who dismembers children to create a hybrid infant (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 46), the sadistic pimp who beats women to death with a "metal-studded dildo" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 71)—and those charged with maintaining its equilibrium: the policemen[6] who pursue these murderers. The "crime wave" threatening to overwhelm L.A. in *White Jazz* (p. 339) is orchestrated by the series' embodiment of

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5 James Ellroy, *Killer on the Road* (New York: Avon, 1986b), p. 9. Further references will be cited parenthetically.

6 I have retained the terms "policeman" and "policemen" throughout my thesis, rather than the more gender-neutral "police officer," to highlight the fact that throughout Ellroy's oeuvre—including those texts located in the 1980s—not a single female police officer is represented or even alluded to, reflecting both the relatively late inclusion of women within police forces and the thoroughly masculinist bias of Ellroy's fiction.

"evil," the corrupt, vicious Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) captain Dudley Smith, as part of his agenda to control the city's criminal underworld. Smith exemplifies Ellroy's dissolution of moral boundaries between policemen and the criminals whom they are theoretically posited against; as Kihn observed, Ellroy's "cops *are* his criminals."[7] Although the violent trajectory of *White Jazz* ultimately coheres into a confrontation between Smith and his fellow LAPD officer, the novel's narrator Dave Klein, this is less the staple Manichaean showdown of the hard-boiled genre than a conflict between "'kindred souls'" (*White Jazz*, p. 313). Klein is not a stable "moral centre"[8] against whom Smith is judged but a cold-blooded killer, a hired assassin whose colleagues consider him "as dirty as cops get" (p. 214) and who summarises his life as follows: "I killed innocent men. I betrayed sacred oaths. I reaped profit from horror" (p. 1). Ellroy's imaginative construction of L.A. as hell does not exempt his protagonists from the field of "horror"; instead, it locates and concretises it within them.

Ellroy's subsequent novel *American Tabloid*,[9] a fictionalised account of events preceding John F. Kennedy's assassination, extrapolates Ellroy's vision of L.A. as moral wasteland to a national scale. Relocating his protagonists from the California underworld to the realms of Washington government agencies and Florida-based Cuban "resistance" camps does not alter the conceptual lens through which Ellroy views postwar society. *American Tabloid*'s landscape remains dense with violence, strewn with the brutalised

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7 Martin Kihn, "Doctor Noir" in *New York* (August 24 1992), p. 114; original emphasis.

8 This phrase is used by Frank Krutnik in *In A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 39.

9 James Ellroy, *American Tabloid* (London: Arrow, 1995). Further references will be cited parenthetically.

corpses of African American children murdered by racist terrorists (*American Tabloid*, p. 530), Mafia associates savagely tortured for transgressing the organisation's codes of silence (p. 239) and the impending corpse of Kennedy, whose murder symbolises the extent to which the centrifugal forces of violence and corruption shaping the world of the "L.A. Quartet" have spiralled out of control—not even the president can be inoculated from them. Ellroy filters his depiction of this exponential escalation of brutality through the perspectives of men complicit in perpetuating it. While narrated in the third person from an "omniscient" authorial perspective, the novel imaginatively realises Kennedy's imminent assassination through the eyes of men conspiring to actualise it: the "bad men," "rogue cops" and "soldiers of fortune" whom Ellroy describes in the novel's preface (p. 5). Like Dave Klein, these characters—renegade FBI agents Kemper Boyd and Ward Littell, and Pete Bondurant, a Howard Hughes hireling—are imaged as venal, brutal men who, in the course of the novel, blithely scalp other men (p. 489) or plunge their hands into "deep friers" (p. 84); Bondurant alone is said to have killed three hundred people (p. 535). In a society moving incrementally towards a more politically progressive landscape—a paradigm shift which the racist violence threading the text occurs in reaction to—these men reproduce their culture's phobic ideologies. The openly racist Bondurant repeatedly refers casually to "niggers" and "spics" (p. 108, 185), while Boyd's ostensible promotion of racial tolerance is grounded in a paternalistic liberalism predicated on the infantilisation of ethnic groups whose struggles he claims to support.[10]

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10 Pete Bondurant accuses Boyd of possessing "'a Big White Bwana complex. You've got your spooks and your spics, and you've got this crazy notion you're their southern aristocrat savior'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 427). Boyd's treatment of African Americans reflects a stereotype reifying members of this group as "childlike" (Donald Bogle, "Black Beginnings: From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *The Birth of a Nation*" in Valerie Smith (ed.), *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video* [London: Athlone, 1997], p. 13).

Given the darkness of his vision, the cruelty and bigotry of his primary characters, and the visceral detail with which their acts of violence are textually contoured, it is perhaps unsurprising that Ellroy's work has generated a certain critical ambivalence. Lauded by critics who salute him for launching "the genre way, way past hardboiled, into the realm of the terminally scalded,"[11] Ellroy has been labelled "the outstanding crime writer of his generation";[12] his works have been deemed amongst "the world's finest contemporary fiction"[13] and even the resolutely mainstream *Time* magazine named *American Tabloid* its 1995 "Book of the Year." Despite his critical and popular successes, Ellroy's work remains overshadowed by his personal history[14] and the flamboyant public persona he has adopted: the self-styled "Demon Dog of American literature" and *enfant terrible* of hard-boiled fiction prone to such provocative declarations as "'I want to burn crime fiction to the fucking ground ... I want to destroy every last bit of niceness and cheap empathy in the American crime novel. All other crime novels are tepid compared to mine. *I want to be known as the greatest crime novelist who ever lived!*'"[15]

Ellroy's carefully sculpted identity as genre maverick has led him to inveigh against his peers for, as he says, "'kow-tow[ing] to the strictures of genre-writing'" and pandering to

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11 Paul Gray, "The Real Pulp Fiction" in *Time* (April 10 1995), p. 75.

12 Karl Miller, "Demon Dog Days" (review of *American Tabloid*) in *The Times Literary Supplement* (February 24 1995), p. 21.

13 John Krewson, "Dog's Life" in *The Onion* (20 November–3 December 1996; vol. 30 no. 15), p. 1.

14 Ellroy's mother was murdered when he was ten years old and her killer never located; Ellroy spent his adolescence and early twenties as a self-confessed petty criminal, voyeur and drug addict. These events are documented in every article written about Ellroy or review of his work and also form the basis of his most recent publication, the startlingly candid, autobiographical *My Dark Places: An L.A. Crime Memoir* (London: Century, 1996); further references will be cited parenthetically.

15 Ellroy quoted in Kihn, "Doctor Noir," p. 109; original emphasis.

their publishers by focusing on "'sympathetic characters.'"[16] His self-distancing from genre trends and conscious disavowal of what he terms the "cheap empathy" evinced by his colleagues has, however, disturbed many critics, particularly insofar as it manifests itself in a predilection for the macabre. To open an Ellroy novel is to be instantly immersed in a world of startling violence; *L.A. Confidential* commences with a sequence in which Buzz Meeks murders at least eight men before being shot and killed himself (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 5-6), while throughout his texts, as Gray observed, "Ellroy uses spurts of unimaginable violence the way other writers deploy commas and periods."[17] The pejorative flavour of Gray's remark reflects the routine problematisation of the violence reverberating throughout Ellroy's blood-drenched texts by critics who contemplate whether it is "unconscionable,"[18] "gratuitous,"[19] or even "designer carnage."[20] Ellroy himself has attributed his novels' initial lack of popularity to their "relentlessly violent" nature.[21] That his primary characters often perpetuate this violence, and that these men endorse the reactionary political agenda of their universe, has also presented problems for critics. While these men are the agents through whose perspectives Ellroy's discursive universe is perceived, their acts of violence and vitriolic

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16 Ellroy quoted in Joe Jackson, "Crimes and Misdemeanours" in *Hot Press* (1995, vol. 19 no. 3), p. 5.

17 Gray, "The Real Pulp Fiction," p. 75.

18 Gray, "The Real Pulp Fiction," p. 75.

19 William T. Vollman, "En Route to the Grassy Knoll" (review of *American Tabloid*) in *The New York Times Book Review* (February 26 1995), p. 12. Vollman's own interest in the mechanics of violence laces *The Rainbow Stories* (1989; reprint: London: Picador, 1990; chapters 1 and 11). With no apparent sense of irony, even Bret Easton Ellis—publicly excoriated for his gendered, ostensibly "affectless"representation of violence in *American Psycho*—has entered into the debate on Ellroy, admitting that while he admires Ellroy he is "'appalled by how bloody and horrific'" his novels are (Kihn, "Doctor Noir," p. 108).

20 Miller, "Demon Dog Days," p. 21.

21 Ellroy, *Dick Contino's Blues and other stories* (published in the United States as *Hollywood Nocturnes*; London: Arrow, 1994), p. 9. Further references will be cited parenthetically.

prejudices are unmediated by an authorial consciousness that explicitly locates these as unsavoury or unacceptable. Critics have seen this as amounting to an endorsement on Ellroy's part of these acts and ideologies, leading some to charge Ellroy with being, like his characters, a "'fascist, racist, homophobic, misogynistic anti-Semite.'"[22]

To conflate Ellroy and his characters and assess both against some pre-conceived register of "acceptable" political opinions seems reductive, yet it is intriguing that in defending his texts against such accusations, Ellroy has invoked precisely the formula prompting critiques of them: the textual privileging of the "bad men" of whom he writes. The inflammatory rhetoric with which Ellroy explains his status as a genre iconoclast tends to deflect attention from his narratives' imbrication in a particular conceptualisation of crime literature, North American history, and the way that these intertwine; it is perhaps this rhetoric that has led to the personalisation of attacks upon Ellroy's novels as attacks upon him. Yet Ellroy's vociferous dissociation of his work from that of his peers stems from his perception that the predominant paradigm for contemporary hard-boiled fiction is that of the "'noble loner working against authority'" model typically associated with the works of his literary antecedent Raymond Chandler. Dismissing this model as a "'superannuated'" confection, Ellroy has sought to replace it with what he describes as a more "'realistic archetype'" of crime fiction as "'the story of bad men in twentieth century

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22 Jackson, "Crimes and Misdemeanours," p. 7. See also Paul Duncan, "Call Me Dog" in Paul Duncan, *The Third Degree: Crime Writers in Conversation* (Harpenden: No Exit, 1997), p. 22; Ken Payne, "James Ellroy and the Los Angeles Crime Novel" (1997; unpublished paper delivered at 1997 conference of Australian Universities Literature and Language Association), p. 1.

America'"—or, more specifically, "'bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority."[23]

The prospect of Ellroy "redefining" the hard-boiled genre through creating texts featuring "bad white men" seems incongruous insofar as hard-boiled narratives have traditionally been "written by white males about male power in a masculine domain."[24] Yet Ellroy's desire to reconfigure the generic paradigm occurs in a literary and critical context in which the masculinist assumptions of hard-boiled fiction are rigorously critiqued by authors and theorists alike, ensuring that Ellroy's project militates against prevailing generic orthodoxies. In recent years critics analysing crime fiction have adapted feminist theoretical insights to—as deftly, if sweepingly, summarised by Babener—identify the hard-boiled genre as an "ideologically encoded form, a narrative of conservative retrenchment whose objective is to undergird the dominant order, affirm bourgeois capitalism and masculine entitlement, and resecure the gender polarities upon which Western patriarchy rests."[25] Babener's account of the genre is totalising—there have always been nodes of resistance to the formula she outlines—and any attempt to

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23 This condensation of Ellroy's arguments derives from his interviews with Laura Miller, "Oedipus Wrecks" in *Salon* (December 9 1996), p. 9; Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 22; Ron Hogan, "James Ellroy" in *Beatrice* (1995 edition), p. 6; and Tom Dewe Mathews, "Ellroy Barks His Approval" in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (October 23 1997), p. 17; and from Ellroy's succinct assessment of the "L.A. Quartet" in *My Dark Places*: "I felt the call of bad men doing bad things in the name of authority. I wanted to piss on the noble-loner myth and exalt shitbird cops out to fuck the disenfranchised" (p. 209).

24 Donald Greiner, *Women Enter The Wilderness: Male Bonding and the American Novel of the 1980s* (Columbia, NC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 4, 105.

25 Liahna Babener, "Uncloseting Ideology in the Novels of Barbara Wilson" in Kathleen Gregory Klein (ed.), *Women Times Three: Writers, Detectives, Readers* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1995c), p. 143. For an example of the type of critique to which Babener refers, see Teresa L. Ebert, "Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction" in *Rethinking Marxism* (Fall 1992; vol. 5 no. 3).

condense the history of feminist theory in which her argument is grounded will inevitably be overly schematic and will fail to do justice to the complexity with which theorists have negotiated these issues. However, to sketch this history in very broad terms, the issues of "gender polarities" and "masculine entitlement" invoked by Babener have long been engaged by feminists investigating the "power regimes of heterosexism and phallogocentrism"[26] which regulate contemporary Western society.

Developing de Beauvoir's central insight that women are the "Other" to men's "Subject,"[27] feminist theorists have argued that women are reified as this "Other" in a "sex-gender system" in which the cultural categories of "masculinity and femininity are not simply terms of a binary opposition but represent a socially constructed hierarchy [in which] the "'feminine' is not only defined in relation to, but is rendered subordinate to, the 'masculine.'"[28] The positioning of the masculine subject as the "universal subject of

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26 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 32.

27 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (trans. H.M. Parshley; 1949; reprint: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 16. Teresa de Lauretis expands on de Beauvoir's point to note that "the theoretical paradigm of a subject-object dialectic ... that subtends both the aesthetic and scientific discourses of Western culture" is predicated on "the unacknowledged assumption of sexual difference: that the human subject, Man, is the male. ... human creation and all that is human—mind, spirit, history, language, art, or symbolic capacity—is defined in contradistinction to formless chaos, *phusis* or nature, to something that is female, matrix and matter; and on this primary binary opposition all others are founded" (Teresa de Lauretis, "Rethinking Women's Cinema: Aesthetics and Feminist Theory" in Dianne Carson, Linda Dittmar and Janice R. Welsch (eds), *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994], p. 143). See also Henrietta Moore, "The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences" in Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (eds), *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 144-5.

28 Virginia Blain, "Cross-dressing in Fiction: Literary History and the Cultural Construction of Sexuality" in Terry Threadgold and Anne Cranny-Francis (eds), *Feminine/Masculine and Representation* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990), p. 141. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines sex as a "group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species Homo sapiens who have XX and those who have XY chromosomes," and gender as the "rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors—of male and female *persons*—in a cultural system for which 'male/female' functions as a primary [binarism]" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* [Berkeley: University of

discourse"[29] has, on a concrete social and economic level, enabled "men's material assumption of power over women."[30] It has ramified into the continuum of philosophical, psychoanalytic and medico-scientific discourses, where women represent "philosophy's eternal enigma, its mysterious and inscrutable object"[31] or, as Irigaray argued, are "objects" of masculine knowledge: they are "the *target*, the *object*, the *stake*, of a masculine discourse."[32] The metaphor of the "speculum" employed by Irigaray to encapsulate the distinction between the questioning masculine subject and feminine knowledge-object describes both a gynecological instrument and a mirror;[33] it thus evokes women's status as objectified bodies to be probed with the instruments of masculine technology,[34] and simultaneously reveals the flow of the masculine-subject/feminine-object dichotomy into the field of specularity (that is, of

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California Press, 1990], pp. 27-8; original emphasis). For a fuller explication of the "sex-gender system" theorised as regulating contemporary Western society, see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward An Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975); and Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987). de Lauretis describes this "sex-gender system" as "both a sociocultural construct and a semiotic apparatus, a system of representation, which assigns meaning (identity, value, prestige, location in kinship, status in the social hierarchy, etc.) to individuals in society" (p. 5). Judith Butler dismantles the acultural concept of sex as "natural," immutable and unitary; her influential approach to gender argues that it "ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex" but must also "designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 7).

29 Jeff Hearn and David L. Collinson, "Theorizing Unities and Differences Between Men and Masculinities" in Harry Brod and Michael S. Kimmel (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p. 97. For discussions of the masculine "universal subject" see Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), p. 80; Kathy Ferguson, *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 38.

30 Susanne Kappeler, *The Will to Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995) pp. 38-9.

31 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (St.Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994), p. 4.

32 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (trans. Gillian C. Gill; 1974: reprint: Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 13; original emphasis.

33 Philippa Berry, "The Burning Glass: Paradoxes of Feminist Revelation in Speculum" in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (eds), *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 235.

34 See Linda Williams' reading of Irigaray's metaphor of the speculum in Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (London: Pandora, 1990), p. 54.

"relations of looking and seeing"[35]) which has historically been organised in terms of a "unidirectional encounter between an unimplicated masculine observing subject and a visually accessible feminine object."[36]

The historical predication of the Western scopic regime on "a hierarchized gender binary of a male viewer and a woman as object of contemplation"[37] has had crucial implications for the aesthetic representation of men and women. Critics have frequently observed that within visual media, including art, photography, and film, women typically function as objects for the masculine "gaze" to scrutinise;[38] the "gendered imbalance of ocular practice" ensures that "women do not look, they are looked at."[39] A parallel binarism circulates within literary representations of men and women where, as in other discursive contexts, the masculine-subject/feminine-object dualism maps onto a polarisation

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35 Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (1982; reprint: London: Pandora, 1986), p. 46. Earl Jackson defines "the specular" more comprehensively as referring to "the demarcation of subject positions in relation to an image or images and to the schematics of intersubjective differences (subject-object, passive-active, knower-known, self-other) established in the direction and 'command' of the look" (Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* [Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995]), p. 44.

36 Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance*, p. 126. Jackson notes that this "structuring fantasy" of an "active" masculine spectator and a "passive" feminine surveyed frequently issues forth in "the tendency to figure mastery as a visual disequilibrium between an invisible male observer and a feminine (or 'feminized') display: the scientist at his telescope or microscope, the voyeur hidden in the dark beneath a bedroom window, the man at the stripshow or in the movie theater." Through paralleling the scientific gaze with voyeuristic pleasure deriving from eroticised female forms, Jackson restates Irigaray's illumination of continuities between scientific and erotic or aesthetic specularisations of feminised subjects.

37 Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance*, p. 126.

38 This argument was initially made by Laura Mulvey in her enormously influential article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975; reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989]).

39 Chris Jencks, "Watching Your Step: The History and Practice of the Flaneur" in Chris Jencks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 150.

40 Priscilla L. Walton, "'E' is for En/Gendering Readings: Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone" in Klein (ed.), *Women Times Three*, p. 103; see also Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, p. 15; Gad Horowitz and Michael Kaufman, "Male Sexuality: Toward a Theory of Liberation" in Michael Kaufman (ed.), *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 85.

whereby agency inheres in the masculine role and women are figured as reactive or acted-upon, "passive receiver[s] rather than active performer[s]."[40] Feminist theorists have sought to dismantle the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity (and the correlative subject/object, active/passive and spectator/surveyed dichotomies) by elucidating differences *within* the category of the feminine—stemming from divergences in terms of "class, race, ethnicity, and other axes of power relations"[41]—which reveal the "multiple," "heterogeneous" nature of "femininity" and preclude it from being reified as a stable, monolithic category existing in fundamental "opposition" to masculinity.[42] As Judith Butler has argued:

> Gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, [but] intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.[43]

This focus on the contingency and variability of the "feminine" has been echoed by theorists in the emerging discipline of "men's studies," who have argued that the model of masculinity which has functioned as the "universal subject of discourse" does not encompass the diverse spectrum of "masculinities" constituting the social field, but is

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41 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 4.

42 de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p. ix, p. 2; see also Judith Lorber, *Paradoxes of Gender* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 4; Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 33.

43 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 3. Gaines notes that "by taking gender as its starting point in the analysis of oppression" and suggesting that "'gender is the sole determinant of women's fate,'" feminist theory has historically ignored differences in the ways that "women in different racial groups and social classes *experience* oppression" (Jane Gaines, "White Privilege and Looking Relations: Race and Gender in Feminist Film Theory" in Carson, Dittmar and Welsch (eds), *Multiple Voices in Feminist Film Criticism*, p. 177; original emphasis).

instead a specific formulation of the "white, male, heterosexual" subject.[44] This configuration of masculinity, labelled "hegemonic masculinity" by Connell, [45] has typically been constructed as the normative ideal against which other masculinities are assessed; its naturalisation as the "universal subject of discourse" has both resulted in, and been enabled by, the deauthorisation of modes of masculinity that Connell terms "subordinated" and that typically include homosexual men, men invested with traits deemed "effeminate," African American men and men from other ethnic backgrounds.[46]

Prompted by this interrogation of the cultural categories of femininity and masculinity and their aesthetic representations, in recent years literary critics have drawn upon the aspects of feminist and "men's studies" theory briefly delineated here to analyse hard-boiled fiction, a genre habitually categorised as amongst "the most masculine ... of literary creations."[47] Documenting the generic privileging of the "white, male,

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44 See Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell, *Men in Perspective: Practice, Power, and Identity* (London: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 7; Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, "Introduction" in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 2-3; Arthur Brittan, *Masculinity and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 1; Will Coleman, "Doing Masculinity/Doing theory" in Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (eds), *Men, Masculinities and Social Theory* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 194; Roger Horrocks, *Masculinity in Crisis: Myths, Fantasies, and Realities* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994), p. 3.

45 The term "hegemony" derives from Antonio Gramsci's theorisation of power and describes "any social construction which has sufficient currency or legitimacy to operate as a naturalized point of orientation for social discourse" (Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory and Politics in the Age of Epidemic* [New York: Routledge, 1993], p. 129n).

46 See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 77; Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 183.

47 Christopher Metress, "Living Degree Zero: Masculinity and the Threat of Desire in the *Roman Noir*" in Peter F. Murphy (ed.), *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 154. This interrogation of the masculinist hard-boiled tradition commenced in the wake of the "second wave" of feminism, a period which also saw the advent of most of the "major" female crime authors writing today (Kathleen Gregory Klein, "Women Times Women Times Women" in Klein (ed.), *Women Times Three*, pp. 4-5).

heterosexual" subject,[48] they have questioned the basis of the masculine hard-boiled protagonist's authority in an ethos of violent agency[49]—a particularly salient consideration insofar as the genre is one of such evidently intrinsic brutality that one of its well-known practitioners, Chester Himes, labelled it "'plain and simple violence in narrative form.'"[50] These critical projects have occurred concurrently with the interrogation *within* hard-boiled texts of both traditional conceptions of what masculinity is constituted by and of the code of violent "machismo" often upheld within the crime novel;[51] and by the proliferation of crime fiction authored by individuals occupying "subordinate" subject- positions and writing from explicitly feminist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic perspectives. By locating narrative agency in women, lesbians and gay

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48 See Bethany Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology" in *Critical Quarterly* (Spring 1992; vol. 34 no. 1), p. 71; Sally Munt, *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); Metress, "Living Degree Zero: Masculinity and the Threat of Desire in the *Roman Noir*"; Babener, "Uncloseting Ideology in the Novels of Barbara Wilson"; Maureen T. Reddy, *Sisters in Crime* (New York: Continuum, 1988).

49 Bird and Walker have observed that "much contemporary crime writing by women provides a critique of the naturalised conjunction of male private eye and violence, in which the PI's masculine identity is confirmed in his use of superior physical strength against his enemies, and proven as he triumphs over them" (Delys Bird and Brenda Walker, "Introduction" in Delys Bird (ed.), *Killing Women: Rewriting Detective Fiction* [Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1993], pp. 17-18). See also Sarah Dunant, "Rewriting the Detectives" in *The Guardian* (29 June 1993), p. 27; Babener, "Uncloseting Ideology in the Novels of Barbara Wilson"; and Reddy, *Sisters in Crime*, pp. 112-13. The problematisation of violence within the genre is now so routine that a recent anthology of hard-boiled literature reflexively alluded to it, its editor carefully noting that "some of the stories in *Hardboiled* contain a high level of violence—but it is never gratuitous, never there simply to titillate, to shock, or as a celebration" (Stuart Coupe, "Introduction" in Stuart Coupe and Julie Ogden (eds), *Hardboiled: Tough and Uncomprising Crime Fiction* [St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1992], p. xi).

50 Chester Himes quoted in Ralph Willett, *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 61. Himes' novels are themselves demarcated by frequent explosions of violence; for an interesting discussion of the politics of violence in his texts see Manthia Diawara, "*Noir* by *Noirs*: Toward A New Realism in Black Cinema" in Joan Copjec (ed.), *Shades of Noir: A Reader* (London: Verso, 1993).

51 Kathleen Gregory Klein notes the inauguration of this type of critique within male-authored texts in the works of Robert B. Parker, whose detective protagonist Spenser's "principal characteristic is his articulate understanding of the code which motivates his behavior" (Klein, "Women Times Women Times Women," p. 11). For examples of Parker's interrogation of this masculine behavioural paradigm, see Robert B. Parker, *Promised Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), pp. 68-72, p. 85, pp. 92-3; *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (1980; reprint: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 27-8, pp. 40-9, pp. 82-7.

men, African American men and men from other ethnic backgrounds, contemporary hard-boiled writers like Sara Paretksy, Joseph Hansen and Walter Mosley have eroded the genre's traditional basis in hegemonic masculinity.[52] This explosion of the genre's parameters to incorporate diverse voices speaking from a multiplicity of subject-positions has had ramifications for those writers inhabiting the culturally privileged position of the "white, heterosexual male." Authors like Jonathan Kellerman and Andrew Vachss routinely feature a supporting cast of non-hegemonically located characters in their texts; others, including Carl Hiaasen and Elmore Leonard, structure narratives from the perspectives of women, African American men and men from other ethnic groups.[53]

In the context of this kaleidoscope of ethnic and sexual diversity, Ellroy's novels represent a starkly monochromatic aberration. The formula Ellroy adopts to describe his

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52 For critical discussions of these authors' dramatisation of their series characters' experiences with culturally sanctioned misogyny, homophobia, racism—and the ways in which these intersect and inform one another—see Liam Kennedy, "Black *Noir*: Race and Urban Space in Walter Mosley's Detective Fiction" in Peter Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (London: Pluto, 1997); Sabine Vanacker, "V.I. Warshawski, Kinsey Millhone and Kay Scarpetta: Creating a Feminist Detective Hero" in Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings*; Scott Christianson, "Talkin' Trash and Kickin' Butt: Sue Grafton's Hard-boiled Feminism" in Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*; Theodore O. Mason, "Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins: The Detective and Afro-American Fiction" in *The Kenyon Review* (Fall 1992, vol. 14 no. 4). Littler offers a broader discussion of detective fiction written by women, noting its subversion of the trope whereby "female characters in masculinist private-eye fiction are usually victims or betrayers who remain background figures [and foils] for the male hero's superiority," and suggesting that "feminist writers of private-eye fiction consciously set out to respond to masculinist stereotypes of women by constructing tough women characters who are not victims and who retain control of their own lives" (Alison Littler, "Marele Day's 'Cold Hard Bitch': The Masculinist Imperatives of the Private-Eye Genre" in *Journal of Narrative Technique* [Winter 1991; vol. 21 no. 1], p. 123-5).

53 Either representing or presenting texts from the perspectives of "subordinate" groups does not automatically contribute to an anti-racist/homophobic or pro-feminist agenda but can quite often be an insultingly token gesture or a politically suspect co-optation of these subject-positions. There is a sense in which the insistence of much contemporary crime fiction on representing the subaltern has led to a self-congratulatory logic of eclecticism for its own sake. Arguably this reaches its nadir in the menagerie that Andrew Vachss assembles around his series character Burke and which includes a mute Mongolian martial arts specialist and his Filipina social worker wife, a Chinese matriach and a pre-operative transsexual prostitute—all of whom, reflecting a paternalism which Vachss fails to interrogate, are marshalled only in support of, and act only under the supervision of, the straight white male Burke.

texts—"bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority"—crystallises those aspects of his fiction differentiating him from his contemporaries. The reference to "men" encapsulates the fact that his novels are focalised exclusively from the perspectives of men operating within homosocially organised police and criminal cultures.[54] With the exception of two passages in the form of "diary" entries written by female characters (*The Black Dahlia* [pp. 352-3] and *L.A. Confidential* [pp. 407-8]), Ellroy makes no attempt to represent narratives from women's points of view. That he seeks to write explicitly about "white men" highlights the fact that his novels are refracted through the consciousnesses of men representing not simply "masculinity" but a particular masculine configuration: the "hegemonic" masculine subject. Ethnically homogenous (they are white men of either Anglo-Saxon or Germanic derivation), Ellroy's protagonists are all, with the important exception of *The Big Nowhere*'s Danny Upshaw, heterosexual. Their hegemonic status is reinforced by their positioning as agents of "authority"; they are all policemen, government agents, or former policemen employed as private operatives. In addition to distinguishing Ellroy from the majority of his peers, who continue to use private detectives as their primary protagonists,[55] his utilisation of state agents as major characters is consonant with his repudiation of the "noble loner" myth that he associates with Chandler. Unlike Chandler's hero Marlowe and his literary heirs, Ellroy's

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54 Sedgwick uses the term "homosocial" to describe "bonds between people of the same sex" and to designate the "'entire continuum' of 'men's relations with men'" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1985], p. 1, 2).

55 While this is a generalisation—Patricia Cornwell, Carl Hiaasen and Elmore Leonard, for example, do not adhere to this rule, and the "police procedural" (identified with authors such as Ed McBain and Joseph Wambaugh) is a sub-genre in and of itself—most contemporary crime authors, including Parker, Paretsky, Grafton, Mosley and Kellerman, all continue the persistent generic convention of employing an amateur or professional private eye as their primary narrative agent.

protagonists are not heroic monads operating independently of a corrupt "system," but professionals irrevocably embedded in structures of power and authority.

That they are "bad men doing bad things" in the name of this authority affirms Ellroy's proclivity against the grain of contemporary hard-boiled fiction, insofar as it separates his protagonists from those fictional police detectives who do exist in the contemporary hard-boiled scene. These figures, like James Lee Burke's series character, police detective Dave Robicheaux, typically reinforce the traditional image of the hard-boiled hero as an "instinctive protector of the weak, a defender of the innocent, an avenger of the wronged, the one loyal, honest, truly moral man [sic] in a corrupt and ambiguous world."[56] Explicitly described by his creator as a "'moral man living in an amoral world,'"[57] one of the primary ways that Robicheaux's "morality" is textually signposted is through his continual engagement with the ethical implications of violence. While "villains" in Burke's oeuvre are demarcated by their propensity for unreflective acts of

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56 Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, p. 151. This model of the detective informs Raymond Chandler's famous conception of the literary private investigator: "'Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this story must be such a man. He's the hero. He's everything. He must be a complete man and a common man, yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor" (Chandler quoted in Richard Slotkin, "The Hard-Boiled Detective Story: From the Open Range to the Mean Streets" in Barbara A. Rader and Howard G. Zettler (eds), *The Sleuth and the Scholar: Origins, Evolution, and Current Trends in Detective Fiction* [New York: Greenwood, 1988], p. 94). Munt describes this traditional private eye as working "outside the social order with his own moral purpose. He is tough, stoic, honest, loyal to his own values, fighting a lone battle against urban chaos, a contemporary crusader/knight. The perceived social order is inherently corrupt, 'fallen,' and the outsider represents the harbinger of truth and justice amongst hostility" (Munt, *Murder by the Book?*, p. 3).

57 Burke quoted in John Williams, *Into the Badlands: A Journey Through The American Dream* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 61. Williams adds that "Burke is deeply concerned with upholding Christian morality in a society in which such values are commonly hijacked by criminal charlatans. Robicheaux is perhaps the most explicitly moral agent in contemporary crime fiction" (p. 62). It should be noted that although the notion of "morality" perhaps inevitably arises in a genre that is by definition imbricated in questions of "crime" and "justice," "law" and "order," it is a problematic and culturally relative concept that cannot be reduced to or necessarily equated with the "Christian" model which Williams invokes.

brutality, Robicheaux continually broods over the moral ramifications of the acts of cruelty he witnesses, meditates on the appropriateness of his own recourse to violence, explores the psychic trauma stemming from dispensing violence or experiencing violation, and questions cultural representations of violence.[58]

In a critical and literary context characterised by this type of interrogation of the phenomenon of violence, Ellroy's novels, by contrast, correspond to the established hard-boiled formula identified by Littler, whereby violence functions concurrently as the "necessary starting point for the narrative" and the "site around which the narrative primarily occurs."[59] Not only are Ellroy's texts dense with incidents of often shocking savagery, but they are either structured around homicide investigations into gruesome murders or employ violent incidents as their narrative catalysts. Hence *The Black Dahlia* focuses on a (fictional) investigation into the notorious "real-life" torture-murder of aspiring actress Elizabeth Short, while *L.A. Confidential* utilises the 1951 "Bloody Christmas" incident—in which LAPD officers savagely assaulted several Mexican youths who had attacked fellow policemen—as its imaginative departure-point.[60] It should be noted that any discussion of the "violence" of Ellroy's novels is inevitably implicated in a culturally and historically specific conception of violence, as is the broader critical discourse regarding its aesthetic representation. The term "violence" is contested and

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58 See for example James Lee Burke, *Dixie City Jam* (London: Orion, 1994), p. 71, 215, 245, 302, 325.

59 Littler, "Marele Day's 'Cold Hard Bitch,'" p. 124.

60 Ellroy discusses the "Bloody Christmas" episode in Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 17; for an account of the "Black Dahlia" murder see Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon* (1975; reprint: London, Arrow, 1986).

problematic; notions of what constitutes a "violent" act vary within and across cultures,[61] and many attempts to define "violence" encode a condemnatory attitude towards it. As Kowalewski observes, "the commonplace notion of violence ... negatively constructs it as excessive and uncalled for"; violence is "popularly understood as an act of aggression that is usually destructive, antisocial, and degrading in its consequences."[62] The use of terms like "destructive" and "degrading" is, however, value-laden and culturally specific;[63] arguably any discussion of violence such as that represented by Ellroy will be unable to avoid reproducing the implicitly negative conceptualisation of the phenomenon that these terms inscribe, and that may not be appropriate within all cultural contexts.

Harvey and Gow have suggested that a "minimal, cross-culturally valid" definition of violence constructs it as the "'contestable rendering of physical hurt.'"[64] While it is important to retain an awareness of violence as a physical act—an empirical process inscribing effects on the "corporeal being" of the embodied subject[65]—it is also crucial to recognise its rhetorical and discursive dimensions. The notion of rhetorical violence,

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61 See Pamela J. Taylor (ed.), *Violence In Society* (London: Royal College of Physicians of London, 1993), p. 7; Felicity de Zulueta, *From Pain to Violence: The Traumatic Roots of Destructiveness* (London: Whurr, 1993), p. ix; Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow, "Introduction" in Harvey and Gow (eds), *Sex and Violence: Issues in Representation and Experience*, p. 12.

62 Michael Kowalewski, *Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 7.

63 Similarly, a tacit disapprobation of violence inheres in the definitions proposed by Barbara Renchkovsky Ashley and David Ashley ("the use of force as a means of physical coercion or domination, with the purpose of threatening, degrading, humiliating or injuring another") and Adam Curle ("a horrible or wilful intrusion into a person's life or body"); the charged language employed in these ostensibly "neutral" definitions—"horrible," "degrading," "humiliating"—betrays a condemnatory attitude towards violence predicated on a specific construction of the sanctity or inviolability of the individual subject. See Barbara Renchkovsky Ashley and David Ashley, "Sex as Violence: The Body Against Intimacy" in *International Journal of Women's Studies* (September–October 1984; vol. 7 no. 4), p. 353; Adam Curle, *Another Way: Positive Response to Contemporary Violence* (Oxford: Jon Carpenter, 1995), p. 95.

64 Harvey and Gow (citing Riches), "Introduction," p. 12.

which encompasses the "non-physical violence of threat and terror, of insult and humiliation, the violation of human dignity"[66] has been developed by theorists like Butler, who observes that "language can act in ways that parallel the infliction of physical pain and injury" and cites Toni Morrison's contention that "'oppressive language ... does more than represent violence; it is violence.'"[67] The discursive modality of violence manifests itself in what Derrida described as "the violence of difference, of classification, of appellation";[68] it is the violence of foreclosing possibilities for individual subjects and delegitimising alternate ideologies and modes of inhabiting the world,[69] and which therefore underlies the subordination of certain masculine subject-positions through the reification of the "hegemonic" masculine ideal (as well as broader manifestations of the oppression of different gender, ethnic and sexual minorities).

Discursive violence has been identified by psychoanalytic and feminist discourses as integral to any process of subject-formation, both individually and on a collective level, premised on the construction of a denigrated "other" against whom a "self" is defined.[70] It is a mode of violence that is not so much practised by and against individuals as it is enacted through, and mediated by, social and cultural practices, institutions and

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65 Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. ix.

66 Susanne Kappeler, *The Will to Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 2.

67 Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 4, 6.

68 Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* (trans. Alan Bass; 1967; reprint: Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 110.

69 See Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, "Introduction: Representing Violence, or How the West Was Won" in Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (eds), *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Kappeler, *The Will to Violence*, p. 50.

70 This point is elucidated by Lucia Folena in "Figures of Violence: Philologists, Witches and Stalinistas" in Armstrong and Tennenhouse (eds), *The Violence of Representation*, and de Lauretis in *Technologies of Gender*, chapter 2.

technologies, including literature. In this respect the act of representation itself can be an act of violence; as Kowalewski notes, "the act of representing the world is always, in some way, the act of creating it."[71] A work of literature deprecating or vilifying certain modes of existence or subject-positions can in this sense *commit* violence as opposed to (or as well as) represent it.[72]

Given the increasing theoretical interest in the complex intertwining of empirical or "real" and discursive or "represented" violence, and its convergence with the recent problematisation of the structural centrality of violence within the hard-boiled genre, it is somewhat surprising that Ellroy's representations of violence have not been accorded more critical attention. Of course, a measure of the ambivalence that Ellroy's fiction inspires is the fact that only one analysis of his work has been contributed to an academic book or journal to date: Josh Cohen's article "James Ellroy, Los Angeles and the Spectacular Crisis of Masculinity."[73]

Cohen's piece addresses Ellroy's representation of violence in the context of discussing the "crisis of masculinity" within *The Black Dahlia*, which Cohen contends manifests itself in explosions of brutality signalling Ellroy's protagonists' inability to psychically process

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71 Michael Kowalewski, *Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 59.

72 Delineations of this process occurring in literary works can be found in Armstrong and Tennenhouse, "Introduction: Representing Violence, or How the West Was Won" and in Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silvers, "Introduction: Rereading Rape" in Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silvers (eds), *Rape and Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

73 Josh Cohen, "James Ellroy, Los Angeles and the Spectacular Crisis of Masculinity" in Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings*.

the progressive urbanisation of their environment and its paradigm shift from modernism to post-modern spectacle. Cohen conceptualises violence as an expressive function of Ellroy's masculine agents rather than a constitutive feature of their subjectivity, which I will argue is crucial to their characterisation. Despite this, my exploration of Ellroy's work has some areas of overlap with Cohen's essay, particularly in terms of identifying the visual metaphors which dominate his fiction and contribute to an understanding of the field of power in which his characters operate as one where authority inheres in, and is symbolised by, the masculine "gaze." It is this field of power—the regime of "authority" in which Ellroy sites his "bad men"—that I will initially engage with in interrogating Ellroy's representations of masculinity, violence and their mutual implication. My analysis of these aspects of Ellroy's fiction will focus on the novels comprising the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid*, with some reference to earlier texts. Part One of my thesis will commence by outlining these novels' location in a conceptual framework deriving from Ellroy's construction of a "secret history" of the postwar era,[74] a project which sees his texts occupying a dimension between a "realistic" account of postwar America and a surreal limning of its interstitial spaces and "hidden" worlds.

Utilising the paradigm that Ellroy locates his texts in—"bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority"—as an organising principle for my discussion, I will elucidate the intersecting nodal points of "authority" which Ellroy contextualises his protagonists against. Mapping the dimensions of this complex web of power, I will suggest that it

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74 Ellroy quoted in Gary S. Kadet, "The Demon Dog Barks His Woof of Time" in *The Boston Book Review* (1 August 1995), p. 2.

forms a "matrix" whose hegemony stems from its capacity to control the "reality" of those it subjects. Its authority is enabled by its oppression of a realm of "abjected" individuals[75]—comprising both women and male subjects constructed as "feminine"—against whom this "power matrix" defines itself and through whom it produces its hegemonic masculine subjects *as* subjects. In outlining this realm of abjects, I will attend particularly to the figure of the homosexual male, which I will argue occupies a charged position both in Ellroy's textual landscape and his body of fiction. While Ellroy's narrative universe is divisible into the terrain of hegemonic male subjects and a correlative domain of abjects, the action of his novels takes place in the former realm, a homosocially organised sphere modelled along hierarchical, instrumentalising and competitive lines that replicate the internal structures of the capitalist economic system. Ellroy's characters refer to this sphere as "the loop" (*American Tabloid*, p. 204), a term encapsulating its status as a closed-circuit predicated on the exclusion of "outsiders."

Discussing the hegemonic elite whom Ellroy identifies as governing his narrative landscape, I will explicate the "techniques and tactics of domination"[76] by which it abjects particular subject-positions and solidifies its power, arguing that this process is predicated on a logic of exclusion, disavowal and negation. I will suggest that the strategy of exclusion involves effacing the despised "abject," eliding its subjectivity and capacity to

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75 On the concept of abjection, see Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980; trans. Leon S. Roudiez; reprint: New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), chapter 1; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3. I will discuss the concept of the "abject" more extensively in Part One of my thesis.

76 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 - 1977* (trans. Colin Gordon and others; New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 102.

represent itself, and prohibiting its productive and self-determined entrance into the realm of power. The practice of disavowal is enabled by the discursive privileging of the masculine "gaze" and the consignment of the feminine to the role of surveyed rather than spectator. Incorporating strategies of surveillance, specification and the interpellation of the abject in "injurious terms,"[77] the process of disavowal ramifies into the tactic of negation—the physical violation or annihilation of abjected individuals. This procedure is frequently performed by Ellroy's protagonists in their role as agents for the "power matrix" in which they are embedded. The immersion of Ellroy's textual universe in capitalist structures and ideologies results in the commodification of violence and the emergence of a class of "professional killers" employed to neutralise those who oppose this society's oligarchic elite or threaten its normative white heterosexuality. I will contend that the role of professional killer is one of the ways in which men are brought into being as subjects in this society and that the other "authorised" masculine role in this realm is that of professional detective.

The latter function derives from the privileged positioning of men within this universe's scopic regime as controllers of the "gaze" and, accordingly, "reality." The power concentrated in the masculine gaze is homologous with the power inhering in the masculine cognitive/detective function and is concretised in the detective, a repository of hegemonic authority whose epistemology is both visually oriented (observing visual evidence to obtain "clues" and information) and hermeneutic (sifting through information, classifying it to render it intelligible). I will argue that the privileging in

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77 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 123.

Ellroy's narrative landscape of the empowered masculine gaze ensures that his texts possess affinities with Foucault's conceptualisation of the "panoptic" modality of power, whereby authoritative structures ensure obedience to their system of rules (of both the legally entrenched and socially normative variety) through inducing in their subjects a "state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[78] The logic of panopticism governing Ellroy's textual universe is concentrated within the "loop" of power in which his masculine subjects are located. Part Two of my thesis will elucidate the ways in which Ellroy's masculine agents are subjectified in this domain, identifying the strategies, processes and models that bring them into being as subjects under the panoptic masculine gaze.

I will argue that these men's identities are always forged in the shadow cast by a gender phantasm, a spectral ideal formed by the conjunction of the professional killer and professional detective personae which combine to constitute the "authorised" configuration of masculinity privileged within this world. The characteristics associated with this ideal mirror the strategies of masculine subjectification which Ogdon has identified as crucial to the hard-boiled genre: "the hardening of the self, and the smashing apart of the other."[79] Examining Ellroy's protagonists' functioning within this normative matrix for the coerced enactment of a masculine ideal, I will focus on the tensions

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78 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan, 1975: reprint: New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 201.

79 Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology," p. 82. Ogdon derives these terms from her reading of Klaus Theweleit's classic study of the German Freikorps; see Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One*, and *Male Fantasies, Volume Two: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (trans. Chris Turner and Erica Carter with Stephen Conway; 1978: reprint: Cambridge: Polity, 1989).

wrought within their psyches by their coextant status in the panoptic economy as both its *subjects* (exemplars of the "universal subject" who bear the burden of furthering the authoritative elite's objectives, implementing its agendas and reifying its ideologies, and whose hegemonic status in this society is enabled by their role as agents for it) and as individuals who are *subjected* to its internal system of "rules" and punished harshly for transgressing these. I will argue that the process of panopticism requires these men to surveil and discipline both their society's designated "others" and themselves; internalising the gaze of power, detecting masculine subjects decipher themselves against the context of the mode of "authorised" masculinity that they are supposed to embody.

Ellroy metaphorises this procedure as part of masculine subjects' "performance" for the panoptic gaze. In examining this aspect of his fiction I will adopt Butler's conceptualisation of gender performativity, a theory which appears commensurate with Ellroy's thematisation of gender identities as fluid and mobile. Butler dismantles the notion of gender as proceeding from a stable or fixed essence and reconceives it as a compelled and compulsory practice constituted retroactively by the congealing of repeated acts.[80] In applying Butler's reading of gender to Ellroy's oeuvre, I will argue that within his discursive universe the primary constitutive element of "masculinity" is the recourse to violence. While the psychic strain produced by the requirement to vigilantly police themselves for signs of "inadequate" masculinity frequently results in aggressive outbursts, the conscious performance of violence is the most efficacious way for men to

80 See Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 24; Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 13.

identify themselves to the panoptic gaze *as* appropriately "masculine." Discussing Ellroy's depictions of men struggling to achieve "appropriate" masculinity, I will suggest that this process typically involves tutelage through violence, and that insofar as such practices are represented as learned rather than "innate" behaviour, Ellroy's texts reveal a slippage between "real" and "acquired" gender and offer a potentially radical reworking of gender as a fractured, unstable category.

However, this subversive prospect is negated by Ellroy's inability to imagine non-hegemonic modes of masculinity successfully navigating the terrain of power in which they operate. In Ellroy's pessimistic narrative schema, while men occasionally contest the masculine ideal and the homosocial sphere's norms they are effectively trapped within the "loop"; those who fail to capitulate to its logic escape only through forced removal and relegation to the abject domain as a corpse, or through voluntarily aligning themselves with the abject and committing suicide. Ellroy's consistent association of suicide with homosexual and "effeminate" men contributes to eroding his potentially radical revisioning of gender by revealing his denigration of those "subordinated" masculinities which might challenge the hegemonic ideal. Part Three of my thesis will expand upon the processes by which Ellroy simultaneously authorises hegemonic masculinity and deauthorises both femininity and devalued configurations of masculinity such as that embodied in the male homosexual subject-position. I will argue that Ellroy reabjects homosexuals through reinforcing stereotypes of homosexual behaviour, ritually punishing characters who transgress the heterosexual "norm," and representing homosexuals as both pathological and pathogenetic—simultaneously

"diseased" and "deviant," and capable of transmitting this disease to others. The construction of gay men as pathological functions insidiously to legitimise the homosexual panic of Ellroy's straight protagonists, and, accordingly, to implicitly endorse the punitive violence incessantly inflicted upon gay men in his fiction. Indeed, within Ellroy's "narrative economy of violence"[81]—where "authorised" violence is separated from its "unauthorised"[82] inverse by virtue of the object it is expended against, and the former modality of violence is applauded and the latter excoriated—homosexuals are actually figured as *appropriate* objects of violence.

Unravelling the implications of Ellroy's representations of violence, I will argue that his texts reiterate the strategies of abjection permitting violence against the "feminine" to proliferate in the society he depicts. I will suggest that the two constitutive elements of "authorised" masculinity within Ellroy's universe—the violent ontology and hermeneutic, specular epistemology of the normative ideal—are paralleled in Ellroy's own discursive style and textual tactics, and that these in turn reproduce the coercive structures of Ellroy's narrative universe. Stylistically, Ellroy's novels are characterised by a progressive accumulation of information and "clues" that is then frozen, suspended by the sudden spectacle of violence and its abrupt and shocking textual intrusion in the form of an "abject" corpse, a torture sequence (taking the form of a beating or interrogation), or a duel. These moments of spectacle are themselves gendered, with the corpse and the

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81 This phrase is employed by Jerry Herron in "Popular Culture/Popular Violence: Postmodernism and the Malling of Semiotic" in Ronald Bogue (ed.), *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach. Volume 2: Mimesis, Semiosis and Power* (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamin, 1991), p. 207.

82 Teresa Ebert uses these terms in "Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction," p. 17.

object of torture female or feminised, and the protagonists of the duel masculine; as such, they reproduce the strategies of specularisation and spectacularisation, and the reification of the feminine as the object of the masculine gaze and of masculine knowledge, in which the abjected status of the feminine in Ellroy's fictional universe is grounded.

Examining Ellroy's staging of violence, I will suggest that the spectacle of violence in his texts potentially contains the seeds of this society's subversion—thus the climactic "duel" that concludes the "L.A. Quartet" functions as a possible symbolic overthrow of the worst excesses of patriarchy—but actually serves to consolidate it, insofar as Ellroy's defeatist vision cannot transcend a zero-sum conflation of masculine agency and violence, and reinscribes the endless continuum of violence in his discursive universe accordingly. In concluding my thesis I will suggest that Ellroy begins by imagining a society in which power over others, power over the visual domain, and power in the form of violence, collide and coincide. While his account of this regime contains the potential for its disruption, Ellroy ultimately reinforces it by naturalising its power relations and restating the logic of the visual economy in which men's power inheres in their spectatorial capacity and women's (and other feminine subjects') subordination stems from their status as the surveyed. I will argue that Ellroy relocates the appropriate site of violence in the feminine and the appropriate agent of violence in the masculine and that by endorsing the status of homosexual men and other feminised subjects as objects of violence, Ellroy's novels themselves constitute acts of violence against these groups. The

holocaustal brutality unleashed within his texts against women and gay men is paralleled by Ellroy's discursive violation of them, whereby he situates these groups as desecrated objects for readers' gazes to survey and subdue and in doing so engages in a project of violating the feminine which ensures that he, like his protagonist Dave Klein, "reaps profit from horror."

Part One: City of Nightmares

> L.A. is the city of nightmares ... Back in the '40s and '50s, they were nightmares undercover, they were nightmares that were ignored, held surreptitiously, given other names. Up to this point in my career, my job has been to make those nightmares that were held surreptitiously and not talked about explicit.
>
> James Ellroy[1]

At the outset of *Clandestine*, James Ellroy's first literary reconstruction of what he has labelled the "nightmare" world of postwar Los Angeles, the novel's narrator Fred Underhill proclaims "the Fifties weren't a more innocent time. The dark salients that govern life now were there then, only they were harder to find."[2] Underhill's declaration prefigures and crystallises the impetus underlying Ellroy's project to rewrite L.A. history via the lens of hard-boiled fiction, an undertaking realised within his "L.A. Quartet" and extended through *American Tabloid* to incorporate the wider American postwar landscape. Two mutually implicated narrative drives that inform these texts are brought into focus by Underhill's conception of "the Fifties." His aspiration to "find" the "dark salients that govern life" reflects these novels' teleology of unearthing what Ellroy imagines as the

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1 James Ellroy quoted in *White Jazz* (documentary directed by Reinhard Jud, 1993).

2 James Ellroy, *Clandestine* (New York: Avon, 1982), p. 1. Further references will be cited parenthetically.

"secret history" of postwar America.[3] The configuration of this history as "dark" condenses Ellroy's thematic emphasis on dismantling popular conceptions of the era as a period of innocence and social cohesion, and replacing these with an alternative construction of the epoch as one of "'darkness, hidden history, perversion behind most doors waiting to creep out.'" [4]

While Ellroy has mapped the dimensions of his project to reveal the "secret history" of the postwar era in several extra-diegetical contexts, this impulse is clearly encoded within his texts; the title of *Clandestine* encapsulates this novel's preoccupation with the illicit and sub rosa, while that of *L.A. Confidential* condenses its thematic interest in the hidden vicissitudes undergirding Los Angeles' visible universe. In *L.A. Confidential* this trope is foregrounded in the revelations constituting the novel's climax: that the "Nite Owl" homicides around which the narrative is structured were masterminded by LAPD captain Dudley Smith (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 415), and that two of the novel's secondary characters—Preston Exley, a prominent real estate developer and former policeman, and his business partner Raymond Dieterling—conspired to murder Dieterling's son Paul (p. 468). Threatened by Exley's son Ed with public disclosure of their implication in

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3 Ellroy quoted in Gary S. Kadet, "The Demon Dog Barks His Woof of Time" in *The Boston Book Review* (1 August 1995), p. 2. The parameters of this narrative drive have been articulated by Ellroy on several occasions; he declared that his intention in crafting the "L.A. Quartet" was to document what he envisaged as the "'secret world of Los Angeles from the late forties to the late fifties'" (Ellroy quoted in Stephen Capen, "James Ellroy" in *Worldguide* [January 17 1997], p. 3) and grandiosely described *American Tabloid* as his creation of "'history as *noir* on an epic scale'" (Ellroy quoted in Ron Hogan, "James Ellroy" in *Beatrice* [1995 edition], p. 2].

4 Ellroy quoted in John Williams, *Into the Badlands: A Journey Through The American Dream* (London: Paladin, 1991), p. 85. The grounding of Ellroy's fictive reworking of postwar history in a revisionist impulse is clarified in *American Tabloid*'s preface, where he declares his intention to "demythologize" the era and "build a new myth" around John F. Kennedy and his administration (*American Tabloid*, p. 5).

this homicide, both men (along with Inez Soto, Dieterling's employee and Ed's former lover) commit suicide on the grounds of the amusement park, "Dream-a-Dreamland," which they collaborated in constructing. The passage announcing this triple suicide is particularly revealing; it condenses diverse aspects of Ellroy's thematic project to reconstruct America's "secret history," illuminates how he conceptualises the social and political "realities" of the postwar era, and its aftermath provides a useful point of entry into Ellroy's textual negotiation of his protagonists' location in relation to the forces and authoritative structures that Ellroy represents as shaping America's trajectory in the 1940s and 1950s.

The suicide is announced through an *L.A. Herald* "obituary" which speculates on the motives underlying Exley's and Dieterling's deaths—stating twice that "'the single word "Why?" rests on millions of lips'" (p. 476)—and concludes by noting the "'fitting eulogy'" delivered by L.A.'s mayor, Norris Poulson:

> Very simply, these two men symbolized the fulfilment of a vision—Los Angeles as a place of enchantment and high-quality everyday life. More than anyone else, Raymond Dieterling and Preston Exley personified the grand and good dreams that built this city (p. 476).

Poulson's valorisation of Exley and Dieterling as "grand and good" militates against the preceding textual revelation that they were co-conspirators in Paul Dieterling's murder. The chronology of events leading to this disclosure is elaborate: investigating the " Nite Owl" homicides, Ed Exley discovers that his father and Dieterling colluded in suppressing evidence in the unrelated "Atherton case" involving a series of horrendous

child murders (p. 46). Investigating further, he ascertains that Dieterling has an illegitimate, psychotic son, Douglas, who was an accomplice to the Atherton murders. Dieterling confesses that, to protect Douglas—partially due to his sense of guilt over having catalysed the boy's psychosis by exposing him to "erotic, horrific" cartoons Dieterling created to generate money (p. 466)—he had convinced Preston Exley, charged with solving the murders, that his legitimate son Paul was the actual killer. Motivated by his frequently cited conviction that brutal crimes require the swift resolution of "absolute justice" (p. 19), Exley had executed the youth (p. 468).

Within the Dieterling/Exley obituary, the reiterative force of the enquiries as to "why" these men committed suicide echoes the interrogative processes of the novel both on a narrative level—in respect of Ed Exley's insistence on discovering the "truth" of his father's behaviour (p. 420)—and in terms of the novel's meta-narrative of probing into the "secret truth" of L.A. history. The latter impulse is revealed and symbolised by the baroque genealogy of events surrounding the triple suicide, which negates the vision of L.A. as a "place of enchantment and high-quality everyday life" invoked by Poulson. Poulson's hagiographic account of Exley and Dieterling establishes a sense of dissonance between their "images" and the "reality" underlying these; his eulogisation of them as "grand and good" resonates ironically insofar as it uncritically affirms the public personae they have assiduously contrived to project to the external world, and that have been revealed as counterfeit. Dieterling's responsibility for his son's murder contravenes his self-representation as a father so consumed with grief at his son's death that he created an amusement park to commemorate him (p. 79). Exley's implication in the boy's murder

contradicts both his reputation as a celebrated policeman lauded for solving the Atherton case whose "truth" he obfuscated (p. 15) and his image as a man of unflinching rectitude whose self-conception as a zealous enforcer of "absolute justice" (p. 381) has, paradoxically, influenced his son so profoundly that he utilises his father's moral principles *against* him.

This distinction between these men's images and the underlying "truth" of their corruption ramifies into a correlative discrepancy between the "vision of L.A." as a "place of enchantment" which they ostensibly personify, and what Ellroy represents as its less palatable reality. The magical vision of L.A. conjured by Poulson reflects its location as the site of Hollywood, the legendary realm of spectacle and illusion that exerts a potent myth of fame, glamour and opportunity in this world. Collapsing an ethos of "utopian individualism" with "fantasies of stardom and romance,"[5] the Hollywood myth structures both the everyday aspirations of individuals in L.A. and their fantasy lives. Thus prostitutes obtain plastic surgery to enhance their resemblance to movie stars like Ava Gardner and Rita Hayworth (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 180), while men are seduced by the "enchantment" of these actresses' cinematic images to the extent that they pay to have sex with their simulacra.[6] The myth of Hollywood as a place of "enchantment" that such

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5 Josh Cohen, "James Ellroy, Los Angeles and the Spectacular Crisis of Masculinity" in Peter Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (London: Pluto, 1997), p. 174.

6 The inordinate extent to which individuals subscribe to the Hollywood mystique is demonstrated by the public reaction provoked by the titular murder in *The Black Dahlia*. Investigating the homicide, detective "Bucky" Bleichert encounters numerous people who actually *envy* the "Dahlia" the celebrity status with which her death endows her: "they actually believed [her] to be a glamorous siren headed for Hollywood stardom. It was as if they would have traded their own lives for a juicy front-page death" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 147).

star-struck behaviour subtends is precisely the "vision" which enabled the collaboration between Exley and Dieterling to construct "Dream-a-Dreamland." That Exley's and Dieterling's bond, forged in the blood of a murdered boy, was concretised via the construction of this theme park devoted to the preservation of Dieterling's image as a "respectable" citizen and promoter of "fun and goodwill" (p. 15) highlights the disparity between the "vision" of L.A. encoded in Poulson's speech and its underlying "reality."

Just as the disclosure of the hidden "nightmare" of murder and insanity informing Dieterling's superficially stable existence ruptures his masquerade of respectability, so the Hollywood myth symbolised by "Dream-a-Dreamland" is revealed as illusory. The theme park is a "self-contained universe" (p. 15) capable of maintaining its veneer of "enchantment" only by temporarily effacing its visitors' awareness of the "nightmare" beyond it.[7] As Inez Soto observes after touring the park, "'this place is like a wonderful dream, but I know that it's got to get really bad again because what happened was a thousand times more real than this'" (p. 184). "What happened" to Soto was a particularly horrific crime; in an act annihilating the myth of an "enchanted" L.A. articulated by its Mayor, she was gang-raped by several youths because one of them "'just wanted to lose [his] cherry'" (p. 129). Not only is L.A. unable to realise the "vision" of its possibilities, but it cannot sustain for its inhabitants even the relatively banal promise of a "high-quality everyday life." Instead, Ellroy's bleak adumbration of L.A. casts "everyday

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7 This reflects the hard-boiled convention in which the urban environment is represented as concealing its "fundamentally corrupt, violent and hostile" nature beneath "a gleaming and deceptive façade" (John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991], p. 141, 150).

life" here as one in which fourteen year-old prostitutes are "raped and beaten to death" (p. 187) and a theatre usher is stabbed and killed by two men "because he told them to put out their cigarettes" (p. 95). In this urban nightmare, the penetration of "evil" into the quotidian fabric of life is such that, as *The Big Nowhere*'s Mal Considine declares, it is literally "impossible" for the inhabitants of L.A. to escape from the "horror" that surrounds and threatens to engulf them (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 481).

The infiltration of the "nightmare" surrounding them into the private lives of Ellroy's characters, metaphorised by Dieterling's ornate history of intrafamilial insanity and murder, reflects Ellroy's broader narrative drive to expose the secretion of "horror" within ostensibly "normal" domestic environments. In a fictional landscape where virtually every character hides a guilty secret,[8] Ellroy repeatedly exposes the family unit as the site of hidden "sins" typically cohering into either their members' responsibility for savage murders and/or their incestuous activities or desires. The former category is exemplified by Dieterling's complicity in his son's murder and the revelations in *The Black Dahlia* that Ramona Sprague, the wife of a prominent businessman, committed the titular homicide (p. 364), while her daughter Madeleine murdered a policeman, Lee Blanchard (p. 374). Madeleine's quasi-incestuous relationship with her father is merely one manifestation of an incest leitmotif that recurs almost obsessively throughout

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8 As *L.A. Confidential*'s Sid Hudgens says to Jack Vincennes, "'And the thing about secrets, Jack, is that everybody's got them. Including you'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 106). Vincennes' "secret" is his drug-fuelled accidental murder of two innocent "civilians" (p. 38); other individuals harbouring "secrets" include Ed Exley, who fabricates a reputation as a "war hero" to camouflage the cowardice that he actually exhibited during the war (p. 18), and *American Tabloid*'s Lenny Sands, who—like *White Jazz*'s Junior Stemmons—conceals his "secret homosexual life" (*American Tabloid*, p. 74).

Ellroy's fiction, encompassing affairs between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, brothers and sisters, and fathers and sons.[9] The tropes of murder and incest are collapsed within *The Big Nowhere*, where the serial killer around whose crimes the narrative is structured is revealed to be Coleman Healy, the son of a famous actor, Reynolds Loftis. Intensifying the "horror" that a celebrity's child could be responsible for a series of barbaric murders is the fact that Healy committed these to obtain revenge on Loftis for instigating an incestuous relationship with him (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 457). That the ostensibly "normal" Loftis seduced his own son confirms that the "neon haze of Hollywood" (p. 5) is precisely that: a chimera, a glossy façade masking a secret world of deception and "horror." In *L.A. Confidential* this subterranean inverse to the Hollywood myth is manifested in the etiology of the Dieterling/Exley suicide, and in the network of prostitutes surgically adapted to resemble movie stars—a literalisation of the "underside" of Hollywood and a synecdoche for the illusion in which it is grounded.

Ellroy's disclosure of this "secret" world underlying the observable L.A. universe reverberates throughout the "L.A. Quartet." Driven by a dynamic of revelation and disclosure, these novels excavate L.A.'s submerged vice and violence and wrest it to the surface of the text. Jack Vincennes' unearthing of the illicit prostitution network echoes the discoveries made by Bucky Bleichert and Danny Upshaw of clandestine gay and lesbian subcultures in *The Black Dahlia* (p. 134) and *The Big Nowhere* (p. 165) respectively.

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[9] Examples of actual or fantasised father/daughter incest occur between the Spragues and also in *White Jazz* between Lucille Kafesjian and Phillip Herrick (p. 322). Brother/sister incest features in *White Jazz* (between Dave and Meg Klein [p. 27] and Lucille and Tommy Kafesjian [p. 322]) and mother/son incest is alluded to in *L.A. Confidential* (between Christine Bergeron and her son [p. 107]).

The motif of "'worlds within worlds"[10] exemplified here is expanded in *American Tabloid* to a national scale. The various "worlds" coexisting in this novel include the criminal "underworld" of the Mafia, the covert realm of CIA and FBI operatives and Cuban exiles who conspire to assassinate John F. Kennedy, and the illicit universe of celebrity scandal monitored by Lenny Sands (*American Tabloid*, p. 200, 446). They also include what Ellroy represents as the "secret" world of the Kennedy clan, the "truth" underlying received notions of the President and his family which—as the novel's preface clarifies—Ellroy consciously sets out to debunk.[11] Ellroy's Kennedys are a very public example of the private corruption inhering in the outwardly "respectable" family unit; their "sins" include John F. Kennedy's chronic sexual insatiability and concomitant "'paternity buyouts'" (p. 265, 215) but are primarily localised within Kennedy's father Joseph.[12]

Through incorporating historical figures like the Kennedys as actual agents within its narrative who assist in driving its momentum, *American Tabloid* embodies what is described in its preface as a "reckless verisimilitude" (p. 5). This phrase encapsulates

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10 Ellroy uses this phrase to describe his novels in Paul Duncan, "Call Me Dog" in Duncan, Paul. *The Third Degree: Crime Writers in Conversation* (Harpenden: No Exit, 1997), p. 26

11 Ellroy declares in this preface that "the real Trinity of Camelot was Look Good, Kick Ass, Get Laid. Jack Kennedy was the mythological front man for a particularly juicy slice of our history. He called a slick line and wore a world-class haircut. He was Bill Clinton minus pervasive media scrutiny and a few rolls of flab. Jack got whacked at the optimum time to assure his sainthood. Lies continue to swirl around his eternal flame. It's time to dislodge his urn … to demythologize an era and build a new myth from the gutter to the stars" (*American Tabloid*, p. 5).

12 Described by his own child as "'evil and grasping and ruthless'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 152), Kennedy's vices encompass his alleged patrimony of an illegitimate daughter by Gloria Swanson (p. 150), his sexual and financial exploitation of Mexican immigrants (pp. 198-9), his close friendship with notorious gangsters, and what is described as his "staggering secret history of financial collusion" with members of the Mafia and the Teamster's Union (p. 421) to misuse funds from the Teamsters' Pension Fund in order to administer a 'loan-shark scheme wherein gangsters and crooked entrepreneurs [borrowed] large sums at usurious interest rates, with nonpayment penalties up to and including torture and death" (p. 25; see also p. 311, 332, pp. 421-2).

Ellroy's coextant attempt to record the "reality" of the postwar era and to unearth its "secret history." Representing what he imagines as the "reality" of 1950s America, Ellroy negotiates a textual tightrope between a "realistic," quasi-documentary evocation of the period—an impression deriving from such "authenticating" strategies as the accretion of "genuine" period detail and vernacular, the textual assimilation of historical figures and "real life" crimes such as the "Black Dahlia" murder, and the splicing of "newspaper" articles (like the Exley/Dieterling obituary) into the novels—and a surreal invocation of a liminal world contiguous with the "official reality"[13] of this universe. The latter world consists of the "secret" aspects of the past that Ellroy extracts from the realms of "unofficial" history to which they have been consigned and makes "explicit." This project is exemplified by his speculation into the "secret" life of the Kennedys and his allegations regarding "real-life" Hollywood icons, typically made via "reports" in the fictional *Hush-Hush* magazine, which constitute the unofficial obverse to official Hollywood reality by disclosing what is ostensibly the "truth" of movie stars' lives.[14] Decoding postwar America's secret "reality," Ellroy assumes *Hush-Hush*'s oppositional function by contesting "official" Hollywood and postwar narratives. The phrases with which he describes his interrogation of American history—"nightmares undercover," "the city of nightmares"—accurately capture the hallucinatory flavour of his textual

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13 The term "official reality" is used by Thomas Pynchon in *Vineland* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1990; p. 205), a novel that, like Ellroy's texts, focuses on an imagined subterranean realm underlying urban California—albeit to radically different effect.

14 Thus *American Tabloid* hypothesises Bing Crosby as a "'drunk wife-beater'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 147), "reveals" the homosexuality of matinee idols from Montgomery Clift to Laurence Olivier (p. 200), and represents Ava Gardner as one of John F. Kennedy's many lovers while contending that his purported liaison with Marilyn Monroe is a myth (p. 217, 308).

limning of a universe of secrets, a phantasmagoria of neon-washed streets and smoky jazz clubs in which dark fantasies unfold.

Yet the term "nightmare" is also the inverse of the "dream" of L.A.'s possibilities (and, insofar as L.A. functions as a microcosm of 1950s America, those of the wider postwar American milieu) invoked by its Mayor. Through mapping the "nightmarish" dimensions of the city's "hidden" history—its endemic violence, its public figures' depravity—Ellroy's novels deconstruct the myth of L.A. as a "place of enchantment" which Poulson's eulogy evokes, substituting in its place the grim "reality" of an environment scarred with atrocity and subterranean "horror." Ellroy has proclaimed that his novels are predicated on the assumption that, contrary to prevalent perceptions of the postwar period, "'violence was always around in Los Angeles. There were real sex killings back in the '40s and '50s. There was police corruption on a large scale. It was all hidden.'"[15] His foregrounding of "police corruption" as a constitutive element of the postwar "nightmare" dovetails with the "reality" of L.A. revealed by the Dieterling/Exley suicide. If Dieterling's lurid past is symptomatic of the surreal excesses of this society's private domain, then what Exley symbolises is the sedimentation of corruption within its *public* sphere—the location of its " hidden" vice in those men sworn to uphold its laws.

The dissonance between Exley's media image as a respected policeman, and the less savoury reality he embodies, recurs in the characterisation of Jack Vincennes, the celebrity narcotics detective lionised by the media (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 21), whose "carefully

constructed nice-guy Big V" image (p. 194) cloaks his status as a "bagman" for District Attorney Ellis Loew who conspires with Dudley Smith to force Loew's opponent in an election to withdraw his candidature (pp. 99-100). This discrepancy between Vincennes' image and "reality" reflects a thematic drive to expose the deficit between the LAPD ideal and its actuality which has informed Ellroy's fiction since its inception. This ideal—which constructs policemen as functioning as "moral exemplars" in society, forming an elite corps that "impartially asserts its authority in the name of a stern and unbiased justice"' (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 273, 287)—obtains considerable currency in this society, informing both Danny Upshaw's disapprobation of police corruption[16] and a coroner's shocked reaction upon discerning that policeman Junior Stemmons is a heroin addict: "'My God, a Los Angeles police officer"' (*White Jazz*, p. 191).[17]

Yet Stemmons, the crazed, closeted maverick cop who aspires to take over gangster Mickey Cohen's criminal "kingdom" (p. 177), is merely one of innumerable policemen within Ellroy's fiction who function as the antithesis of the LAPD ideal. Occasionally these officers—like Dudley Smith, whose orchestration of a "dense series of criminal conspiracies" in *L.A. Confidential* (p. 329) and perpetration of countless murders throughout the "L.A. Quartet" signals him as virtually the apotheosis of police corruption—are posited as "villains" by the texts' inner logic. Yet they are equally likely

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15 Ellroy quoted in *White Jazz* (directed by Reinhard Jud, 1993).

16 Upshaw views a scandal involving "Vice cops taking bribes" and exploiting prostitutes for sex as "Ugly. Stupid. Greedy. *Wrong*" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 44; original emphasis).

17 It is also suggested within *White Jazz* by the refusal of the mainstream press and the State Attorney General's Office to attach any credence to reports of LAPD "'felony malfeasance on a spectacular scale;"' "'the monstrous facts,"' they feel, are simply "'too ugly to believe"' (*White Jazz*, p. 341).

to operate as Ellroy's protagonists and (anti-) heroes. From Fritz Brown, the narrator of Ellroy's first novel, *Brown's Requiem*, who admits to taking drugs and extorting prostitutes for sexual favours,[18] to *White Jazz*'s Dave Klein—a self-confessed "bad cop" and hired assassin whose incestuous fixation on his sister configures him as condensing the violence of both private and public spheres—Ellroy's oeuvre features a gallery of policemen of whom it could virtually all be said, as Lee Blanchard declares of two fellow officers, "'if they weren't cops they'd be in Atascadero [Prison]" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 69). Blanchard's self-postulation as arbiter of, and moral superior to, these men, implies that there are glimmerings of non-corruption in the LAPD; that "'legitimate policemen'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 242) do exist is implied by Upshaw's self-distancing from his colleagues' corruption and Ed Exley's grimly Pyrrhic determination to exact "justice" regarding his father's infringement of the law. Yet Blanchard's comments are hypocritical insofar as he is personally responsible for numerous criminal transgressions that lead his partner, Bucky Bleichert, to label him the "most audacious rogue cop in history" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 276).

Conceptualising Blanchard as a "rogue cop" is deceptive insofar as neither he, nor any of Ellroy's male leads, is an isolated monad of criminality in a system of unimpeachable virtue; rather, these men are individual incarnations of the LAPD's institutionalised corruption. Ellroy's LAPD is riddled with venality, its individual officers accepting "kickbacks" from gangsters (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 44) while the upper echelon of its

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18 James Ellroy, *Brown's Requiem* (New York: Avon, 1981), p. 207. Further references will be cited parenthetically.

hierarchy permit the Mafia's illegal gambling networks to flourish (p. 71, 220) and sanction the illegal activities of ruthless drug dealers (*White Jazz*, p. 29, 37). The LAPD's internal structure is predicated on a corrupt "'system of promotion through patronage and enforcement through intimidation'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 287), with the latter frequently ensuing in a program of systematic violence against ethnic minorities that is endorsed by members of the department's hierarchy (see eg *L.A. Confidential*, p. 113; *White Jazz*, p. 52, 86). Moreover, the LAPD's institutionalised venality is merely one facet of a systemic corruption obtaining throughout the entire apparatus of law enforcement and public policy which oversees Ellroy's narrative universe.[19] Not only are public institutions imaged as corrupt on a molecular level,[20] but their individuated misconduct crystallises into a *network* of corruption, with their members habitually conspiring to contravene the law and expedite their interests via a series of unethical, self-serving covenants. This symbiotic venality is symbolised by the alliance between Vincennes, Loew and Smith to politically disable Loew's election opponent (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 99-100) and by a parallel scenario in *White Jazz*, where Dave Klein sabotages a

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19 In Ellroy's texts this comprises the entire apparatus of the police and jurisprudence system (including the District Attorney, the L.A. County Board of Supervisors, and the State Attorney General's and federal Justice departments) and the political and legislative framework within which these operate, as well as government agencies such as the FBI and CIA.

20 Thus the L.A. County Board of Supervisors enables Terence Lux to process heroin on the grounds of his sanitarium on the proviso that "LA politicos in need of the place could boil out for free" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 189); Ellis Loew, in his capacity as District Attorney, quashes evidence incriminating men who have contributed to funding his campaign (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 467); and FBI agent Kemper Boyd, who works as an "interstate car theft infiltrator," admits to having "rigged auto-job evidence and skimmed money off of it for years" (*American Tabloid*, p. 22). Another public institution imaged as endemically corrupt is the Teamster's Union, whose leader, Jimmy Hoffa, is described as suborning "extortion, wholesale bribery, beatings, bombings, management side deals and epic abuse of union funds" (*American Tabloid*, p. 25).

prospective city councilman's election campaign as a "favor" for his colleague, Deputy D.A. Bob Gallaudet (*White Jazz*, p. 20).

Klein and Vincennes refer to the elaborate system of reciprocity and patronage which constitutes the internal dynamic of the law enforcement universe as "'the game'" (*White Jazz*, p. 39; *L.A. Confidential*, p. 54). The synergic venality within this realm is so entrenched that, as Kihn observed, "the system isn't corrupt; corruption *is* the system."[21] Emphasising the structural nature of its corruption, this "system" extends beyond the continuum of police and state agencies to encompass the milieux these are supposed to regulate. The "favours" performed by Klein are not restricted to his law enforcement colleagues but include committing murders for the Mafia (*White Jazz*, p. 13), thereby revealing the incorporation of the criminal "underworld" within the precincts of the "game." The ramification of the public realm's web of corruption into the sphere of capitalist enterprise (or vice versa) is exemplified by Dieterling's and Exley's conspiracy to camouflage their murder of Dieterling's son, while the fusion of the law enforcement, business and criminal sectors to advance a mutually beneficial goal is evinced by Dudley Smith's scheme to "control the L.A. rackets" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 398, pp. 422-6). In contriving to cement this plan with the assistance of gangsters, businessmen, and fellow policemen, Smith synthesises the discrete spheres which Ellroy repeatedly represents converging to promote their interests. While the corrupt machinations depicted here occur on a localised scale, in *American Tabloid* they obtain a more systemic

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21 Martin Kihn, "Doctor Noir" in *New York* (August 24 1992), p. 114; original emphasis.

dimension when a cabal of men comprising members of the FBI, CIA and the Mafia conspires—with the financial assistance of entrepreneur Howard Hughes and the tacit approval of FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover—to assassinate John F. Kennedy.

These government agencies' facilitation of Kennedy's assassination encapsulates the sense of the pervasiveness of corruption in the public domain—the "'private nightmare of public policy,'" as Ellroy has labelled it[22]—reverberating throughout Ellroy's fiction. By actualising Kennedy's murder, this group defines the "continuing narrative line" of American history (*American Tabloid*, p. 5); their collusion reflects Ellroy's thematisation of postwar American society as shaped by a network of empowered men with compatible economic agendas and ideologies, who "cut deals" in private[23] to preserve their interests and who determine what constitutes both "public policy" and the social fabric of this landscape. This trope is condensed in the narrative surrounding the illegal activities of capitalist entrepreneur Emmett Sprague. A friend and colleague of men ranging across a spectrum of influence from L.A.'s Mayor through film producer Mack Sennett to Mickey Cohen, Sprague constructs his fortune and reputation as a "legitimate" businessman on a façade, both literally and metaphorically. Obtaining his wealth by converting "'abandoned movie façades'" acquired from Sennett into houses, he consolidates it by paying "'kickbacks'" to Cohen (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 166). When Sprague's shabbily manufactured dwellings collapse, killing their occupants, he evades penalisation by

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22 Ellroy quoted in Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 21.

23 Discussing this world of intramale privilege that he associates with 1950s L.A., Ellroy told John Williams that "'I remember L.A. back then as a time when men cut deals, travelled in packs and cut deals, talked about women openly and blatantly, and ate steak a lot and went to the fights a lot'" (Ellroy quoted in Williams, *Into the Badlands*, p. 90).

bribing public officials to avoid an inquiry into the incident and exploiting his friendship with the Mayor to have his name "'expunged from the contractor's records'" (pp. 166-7).

Sprague's concealment of the synergic corruption enabling his "image" as a respectable businessman recalls the Dieterling/Exley obituary in which Mayor Poulson designates them as "grand and good men" whose "dreams" have "built" L.A.. The assumption that these men's "dreams" were benevolent is ironised by the revelation that they were in fact "ruthless" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 465) and corrupt. Yet Poulson's contention that L.A. was "built" by Dieterling and Exley is accurate in both a topographical and a symbolic sense. While Exley's development of a freeway system linking disparate segments of L.A. concretely sculpted the city's geography, Dieterling's "dreams"—comprising both his saccharine cartoon confections and their dark underside, the pornographic animations which entrenched his son's psychosis[24]—assisted in shaping the period's collective imaginary. Poulson's assumption that collaborations between men like these "built" L.A. is congruent with Ellroy's vision of American history as having been forged by precisely such a confluence of powerful, corrupt men drawn from disparate spheres of authority.[25]

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24 This echoes Cohen's observation that in Ellroy's oeuvre "shadowing the commodified images of Hollywood, Disneyland, the Dodgers Stadium, and other emblems of the hegemony of spectacle are their violent inversions" (Cohen, "James Ellroy, Los Angeles and the Spectacular Crisis of Masculinity," p. 170). Cohen argues that the "grotesque animations" of Dieterling, a "barely concealed fictionalisation of Walt Disney," function as "distorted reinventions of Disney's 'official' cartoon aesthetic" and serve as "a discomfitingly literal enactment of Benjamin's famous dictum: 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism'" (p. 170).

25 These include the political system and law enforcement realm, the sphere of capital and "big business," the organised crime "underworld" and the media and entertainment industries, including Hollywood. Ellroy simultaneously figures these sectors as institutions and as personified by discrete individuals, so that "big business" is epitomised by Sprague and Exley and the Mafia is represented by Sam Giancana and Mickey Cohen. As Cohen's forays into filmmaking in *White Jazz* suggest, there are overlaps and coalescences between the realms identified here; thus Joseph Kennedy meshes "politics" and "big business" (and collapses both into "crime"), while numerous policemen conflate their sphere with that of the criminal milieu.

Converging to promote their complementary agendas and ideologies, these men are the "'civilized white men'" described by Dave Klein as the "'ruling-class'" of this society (*White Jazz*, p. 19), the "right-wing establishment" or "powers that be" which govern Ellroy's textual universe (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 337, 419; *American Tabloid*, p. 538).

As the latter phrase reveals, in delimiting the parameters of authority in this universe Ellroy explicitly defines specific men's influence in terms of the (nebulous and totalising) concept of "power," a point augmented by Pete Bondurant's confession that he "always sucked up to men with REAL power" (*American Tabloid*, p. 496; original emphasis). While Ellroy fails to define "power," in sketching its co-ordinates he represents it as simultaneously inhering in discrete individuals and institutions, and as congealing in a matrix whose authority is infinitely greater than that of the variables comprising it. Individuals within this web of connective networks possess degrees of influence ranging upward to Mafia boss Carlos Marcello's power to decree John F. Kennedy's assassination, instructing Ward Littell to "'do it. Make it happen'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 538). Marcello's dictum reveals Ellroy's destabilisation of the notion of a sole or sovereign locus of authority within this society that is invested in an identifiable position or person. The power ostensibly concentrated in Kennedy's role as President is limited by other men's capacity to dictate his death and by the fact that—as J. Edgar Hoover confidently declares—while Kennedy's reign will be transient, Hoover will "'remain in office until the Millennium'" (p. 302). Condensing the public sphere's privilege of legal immunity and a private citizen's network of contacts, Hoover is as close to a "sovereign" authority as exists in this universe. Yet even he is not invulnerable but is subject to the dictates of the

Attorney-General (*American Tabloid*, pp. 371-2; p. 529); he therefore does not constitute "the" site of authority in this landscape, but rather its apex or limit point.

In dismantling the idea of a sole nucleus of authority, Ellroy's narratives appear congruent with Foucault's theorisation of power as a "multiplicity of force relations" or a "network,"[26] as opposed to a "phenomenon of one individual's consolidated and homogenous domination over others."[27] Yet while Foucault advocates eschewing "the model of Leviathan" in conceptualising power, Ellroy reinstates this paradigm: instead of reconceiving "power" in the social field along lines of diverse nodes of pressure and resistance, he relocates it in a constellation of interlocking vectors that functions as the so-called "ruling-class" within this society, and that is emblematised by the configuration of men who conspire to assassinate Kennedy. That these men retract their initial approbation of Kennedy and "decree" his death reveals the ebb and flow of power within the arena occupied by this oligarchic elite: "lines come and go," "cliques constellate and dissolve" (*American Tabloid*, p. 439, 113), and alliances are always fluid and contingent. Yet individual power struggles within this concatenation of interests do not negate the effects it achieves as a monolithic forcefield whose authority is so deeply entrenched and densely pervasive that it extends beyond the specific coefficients that constitute it—so far beyond these, indeed, that its web entraps even the President.

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26 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley; 1978: reprint Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 96, 92. See also p. 119, where Foucault suggests that power "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression."

27 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, p. 98.

Dave Klein's categorisation of this matrix as the society's "ruling *class*" emphasises its status as a consolidated entity created by the cross-pollination of diverse spheres of influence: a "closed circle" (*American Tabloid*, p. 196) euphemistically described by the "insiders" embedded within it as "the loop" (p. 204)[28] or—in an ominous phrase encapsulating the breadth of its penetration into individual's everyday existences—"the Life" (p. 452).[29] The axes of this grid of power vary between Ellroy's novels, but it incorporates both those men who, like Hoover, function at its zenith, and the policemen and private operatives who constitute Ellroy's protagonists—the "'lowest level implementors of public policy'" and "'toadies of right wing regimes,'" as Ellroy has described them[30]—from whose perspectives his novels are forwarded. Pete Bondurant's subordinate (self-) location to "men with real power" confirms that this matrix enfolds Ellroy's protagonists both as agents of "authority"[31] who obtain all the privileges attendant upon their access to the "insider" world, and as "'officially sanctioned lackeys'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 427) subject to other men's dictates.[32] Intramale

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28 The term "insider" is used throughout the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* to designate those men operating within this universe's network of power—thus Dave Klein refers to his $500 "hit fee" as "common insider knowledge" (*White Jazz*, p. 220) and Kemper Boyd refers to Lenny Sands as an "'insider'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 137). I will use the phrase "the loop" throughout my thesis as shorthand for the matrix of individuals and organisations that accumulates and monopolises power in this world.

29 Lenny Sands' explanation that he knows who Barb Jahelka is because "'Barb's in the Life, and everybody in the Life knows everybody else in the Life'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 452) underscores the foundation of the insider world in an intricate web of connections and reciprocal exchanges of "favours." Interestingly, the insular, interconnected nature of this realm is echoed within the netherworld of "Communist" or "left-wing" organisations investigated in *The Big Nowhere*, as one anti-Communist agitator comments, these organisations are "'all connected up—everyone on the far left knows everyone else to one degree or another'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 64).

30 Ellroy quoted in Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 22.

31 Ellroy's characters often see themselves as avatars of "authority," so that Danny Upshaw figures himself as such when interrogating a man named Cy Vandrich: "Vandrich did a little number, crossing his legs, making mincy hand motions. Danny saw it as the fuck going nance in order to knuckle to authority" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 264).

32 Hence while Dave Klein's empowered status as a policeman ensures that he possesses the power to *authorise* murder (he instructs the policemen he supervises to shoot the Kafesjians if necessary [*White Jazz*,

relationships in this realm are stratified both in an organisational sense—as evidenced by the LAPD's and Mafia's rigidly maintained hierarchies—and according to informal structures predicated on uneven distributions of power. Even the "fearsome" Bondurant is an "acolyte" of Kemper Boyd (*American Tabloid*, p. 27, 493), while Boyd is constrained by the Mafia's proportionately superior power—a point vividly illustrated by the fact that when he double-crosses them he is summarily murdered (p. 581).

The Mafia's capacity to ordain Boyd's death mirrors the ability of the broader authoritative elite to effect Kennedy's assassination. The *literal* power that this network obtains over life and death is merely one example of the influence it obtains in Ellroy's textual landscape. Klein's description of this conglomeration of diverse embodiments of authority as a "*ruling* class" highlights both the nature and extent of its power, which is attested to by its ability to construct the "everyday lives" of citizens beyond the immediate insider realm—to "contain" these by determining the parameters within which individuals' existences unfurl, in the same way that Preston Exley's freeway project metaphorically "contains" L.A.[33] or that Dudley Smith schemes to "contain" African American "criminal elements" through "sedating" them with heroin (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 400). Smith's outrageous project reflects the routine, often violent disruption of the lives of those whom policemen patronisingly construct as "civilians" (*The Black Dahlia*,

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p. 286] and is able to "decree" the death of his partner Junior Stemmons (p. 41)], Klein himself is literally compelled to conduct murders for Sam Giancana, thereby affirming his dual role as both an embodiment of "authority" and a relatively disempowered functionary (p. 14, pp. 27-8).

33 Observing a papier-mache model of this freeway project, "Preston Exley's greatest triumph," Ed Exley sees it as a means by which his father is able to "contain" the city: "Ed looked at the model. Hypnotic: L.A. grown huge, Exley Construction containing it" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 347). By "containing" L.A. Preston Exley enacts a particular fantasy of masculine power in which power is stamped on "chaos."

p. 104) by members of the oligarchic elite or its proxies. In Ellroy's lavishly violent "city of nightmares," civilians' rights are systematically infringed by precisely those agents of the state apparatus intended to "protect" them. Jack Vincennes, for example, nonchalantly breaks a suspect's arms to coerce information from him (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 240), his violent incursion into this individual's life revealing that neither the public or private realms inhabited by citizens can be preserved from the encroachments of the authoritative structures which policemen represent. The hegemonic matrix's power is residual in and exemplified by its ability to infiltrate the lives of its subjects. Policemen's privileged social position endows them with access to the most intimate details of "civilians'" lives, including their personal histories and criminal records, their morphologies[34] and even their most private thoughts and "secrets," whose involuntary emission can be compelled through the deployment of mechanisms like the polygraph tests and sodium pentothal which policemen administer to suspects (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 367-8; see also *L.A. Confidential*, p. 229, 334).

While the "ruling class" denies privacy to "civilians" through using these technological devices, another measure of its power is its ability to preclude its own "secrets" (including its symbiotic corruption) from becoming public knowledge. This is illustrated by the Dieterling/Exley eulogy reifying these men as "grand and good"; that their valorisation is

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34 This type of data is gained from the "DMV stats" and "rap sheets" which detectives frequently have recourse to (see eg *White Jazz*, p. 68) and from coroner's and medical records. The intensity with which individuals in this world are surveilled is suggested by the fact that one particular corpse's identity is determined by "dental plate *fragments*" cross-checked against his prison record (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 280; my emphasis). It is precisely policemen's privileged status *as* agents of the "ruling-class" that enables them to gain such information, as evidenced by the fact that Pete Bondurant obtains information by impersonating a policeman (*American Tabloid*, p. 44).

conducted by Poulson, an avatar of "authority," suggests that his account of them will be privileged and incorporated as the "official" narrative of their lives (indeed, the fact that Poulson's speech constitutes the final, or authoritative, words in their obituary suggests that the process of normalising his version of their "reality" has already commenced). This obfuscation of the current of corruption underlying the surface of "power" that is symbolised by the nefarious activities of Dieterling and Exley is a crucial means by which this universe's oligarchic elite consolidates its hegemony. By preventing the public revelation of its private corruption, the "loop" of power is able to elude punitive retribution for any crimes it perpetrates and, accordingly, to secure its endlessly circulating continuation *as* a "loop." While Dieterling and Exley experience a qualified form of "punishment"—insofar as they feel compelled to commit suicide when threatened with disclosure of their crimes—their venality remains secreted beneath a façade of unassailable virtue; as this suggests, the power of the "ruling-class" is vested in its capacity to control the public reception of its image. The LAPD strives continually to convey an image of its competence and efficacy in enforcing the law, or engages in a process of damage control when this image is challenged.[35] Just as the preservation of Dieterling's and Exley's respective images occurs in the context of a newspaper article—which, by broadcasting Poulson's eulogy and describing it as "fitting," solidifies the "official" narrative it encodes—the LAPD and other hegemonic institutions typically

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35 Thus Ellis Loew views the "Black Dahlia" murder as a potential "'showcase'" to demonstrate the LAPD's efficiency (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 92), while the "Bloody Christmas" incident in *L.A. Confidential* gains urgency for the LAPD only in terms of how its officers' savage beating of helpless prisoners will impact on the department's "'reputation'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 63).

marshal media technologies to pre-empt disclosure of their hidden corruption and cement particular images of themselves as "official reality."

The importance of maintaining control over information sources like the media stems from the universal equation of information (particularly that enabling insight into clandestine or consciously obscured activities or practices) with "power" in this world, where it operates as a bargaining lever, a blackmail tool, and is even literally employed as currency.[36] The successful monopolisation of information by members of the insider world—which, revealingly, is also internally appellated "the cognoscenti," literally "those who know" (*White Jazz*, p. 58; *American Tabloid*, p. 253)—guarantees its synchronous capacity to restrict public access to information, and to dictate the nature of the information to which the public has access. The former ability derives from a practice of either exclusionary tactics (no one in this realm "'talks to people outside the life'" [*American Tabloid*, p. 188]), or actively propagandising ones, so that Howard Hughes acquires *Hush-Hush* magazine as an instrument with which to "'smear politicians'" to whom he is ideologically opposed (*American Tabloid*, p. 11). That it is *Hush-Hush* which Hughes acquires is crucial insofar as this magazine is one of the very few media outlets to

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36 Hence Ward Littell, seeking to enlist Lenny Sands as an informant against his Mafia associates, considers proof of Lenny Sands "secret homosexual life" a potential "recruitment wedge" (*American Tabloid*, p. 74), while Kemper Boyd protects himself from Robert Kennedy's threatened acts of retribution for his perceived role in a "shakedown" of John F. Kennedy by vowing to "'go public'" with "'everything I know about your filthy family'" (p. 515). Johnny Stompanato and Sid Hudgens blackmail businessman-pimp Pierce Patchett's clients with information about their sexual indiscretions (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 391, 447) and Stompanato also prepares a "'dossier'" to "'bleed Raymond [Dieterling] dry'" (p. 447). Finally, Terence Lux says that he "'sold'" information on Reynolds Loftis' incestuous affair with his son (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 426), while Pete Bondurant plans to sell evidence he obtains of "'[Richard] Nixon-initiated policy directly beneficial to [Howard] Hughes" (*American Tabloid*, p. 46), and drug dealer J.C. Kafesjian trades "snitch information" to the LAPD in exchange for immunity from prosecution (*White Jazz*, p. 282).

critique "official" reality, both by counterpointing the "official" images of movie stars with their less salubrious private lives, and by contesting the LAPD's "official" image and chronicling its double standard in solving crimes.[37] As Hughes' desire to "smear politicians" confirms, the drive to control information is an ideological manouevre enabling the "loop" to proliferate its vision throughout society; the self-construction of this cabal of empowered men as "*the* cognoscenti," a single unit, confirms that this group conceives of itself as having access to a comparably monological "knowledge" or "truth," a version of how the "reality" of its society is—or, more cogently, should be—organised.

Just as the media version of Dieterling's and Exley's deaths configures them as having fulfilled their "vision" of L.A., so the "cognoscenti," through its influence over media sources and, by extension, the wider socio-cultural imaginary, is able to sediment its normative vision of society as the "dominant fiction"[38] of this culture. Its success in accomplishing this is signified by the fact that Dieterling's and Exley's "dreams" have simultaneously mobilised the Mayor's "official" narrative of L.A. as a "land of enchantment" and have structured the dimensions along which its perceived "enchantment" is founded: that is, in terms of the intersections of capitalist and individualist aggrandisation of self-interest and personal gain on which the Hollywood

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37 See *White Jazz*, p. 7, *L.A. Confidential*, p. 253. The eventual privatisation of this oppositional text, which becomes a receptacle of "private skank" for Hughes and J. Edgar Hoover alone to access (*American Tabloid*, pp. 417-8), confirms the insider sphere's power to control information flows by regulating the intelligence available to individuals beyond its parameters.

38 The concept of a "dominant fiction" is developed by Kaja Silverman in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992) and describes the "ideological reality through which we 'ideally' live both the symbolic order and the mode of production" (p. 2). The notion is a useful one that connects psychoanalytic and Marxist discourses to describe both the "representational system by means of which the subject typically assumes a sexual identity, and takes on the desires commensurate with that identity" and the "stable core around which a nation's and a period's 'reality' coheres" (p. 41).

myth is predicated. Dieterling's fame is attributable to his status as a "moviemaking colossus" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 476), while Exley's "triumph" is indexed to his endeavours as a real-estate mogul. The coding of their "success" in these terms reflects the imbrication of Ellroy's narrative landscape in the structures and tenets of a capitalist economy. A "money jungle" (*White Jazz*, p. 247) in which sanctioning capitalism's antithetical ideology, Communism, is considered "'a bigger crime'" than "'robbery or murder'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 299), in this universe wealth provides the enabling condition for "power." Thus Howard Hughes "buys" political influence with Richard Nixon (p. 124), his declaration that he "owns" Nixon (p. 311) reflecting the capitalist dialectic of use-value and commodification of individuals which ensures that members of the "ruling-class" can retain others to function as its "slaves" (p. 380).

The correlation of wealth and "power" permits men like Hughes to actualise their goals with impunity because of the perceived authority their affluence endows them with. Perhaps due to the latter phenomenon, the "loop"'s intrinsic corruption is substantially financially derived, with a "profit motive" providing the main incentive for the venal activities of men like Dudley Smith (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 395) and the Mafia. Indeed, the Mafia is represented less as a "criminal" organisation than as a *business* entity, whose members even own "legitimate" interests in diverse companies,[39] and whose participation

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39 See *American Tabloid*, pp. 54-5. The Mafia's affiliation with capitalism perhaps explains why J. Edgar Hoover deems domestic Communists "'more dangerous'" than the "Mob" (p. 34). Ernest Mandel has suggested that "profit is the common link between capitalism as a system, business activity and organized crime. ... Organized crime is capitalism freed from the bonds of penal law, but accepting most of the civil and certainly the commercial code" (Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], p. 47).

in Kennedy's assassination is grounded in its conviction that "'Kennedy's worse for business than [Castro] ever was'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 523). The all-embracing phrase "business" employed here recurs repeatedly in Ellroy's fiction; it summarises the nature of the insider realm's economic concerns and its broader program of safeguarding these economic interests (and other agendas) via the "game" of reciprocal favour-trading and collusion.[40] The use of the term "business" to describe this intricate system of pacts signals its structuring along capitalist behavioural norms of opportunistic self-interest and the instrumentalisation of others. Yet while connections between men in the "game" are pragmatic, they are also ideologically freighted, and function to naturalise the apparent "inevitability" of capitalism as the only viable means of conducting "everyday life." This process of normalisation is exemplified by individual's incorporation of capitalism's underlying ideology; while the lexicon of capitalist enterprise structures people's vocabularies,[41] its ethos of rapacious accumulation determines their aspirations, gearing Kemper Boyd's goals towards "'monetary advancement'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 302) and ensuring that accumulating capital is (ludicrously) an operative concern even for the psychotic Coleman Healy, who requires money to "finance his killing spree" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 458).

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40 Thus the illegal activities of prostitution, loan-sharking and drug-dealing perpetrated by Mickey Cohen are described by one of his offsiders as Cohen's "business": "'Men got to gamble and borrow money and schtup women. The shvartzes got to fly to cloud nine on white powder airplanes. Business is good'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 33). Men frequently refer to their activities in the corrupt "loop" in terms of "business"; the LAPD's "sanctioned dope kingpin," J.C. Kafesjian (*White Jazz*, p. 37), reminds Dave Klein that "'we do business, your people and mine'" (p. 40), while Pete Bondurant and Ward Littell view their project to obtain incriminating evidence of John F. Kennedy's sexual dalliances as "business" (*American Tabloid*, p. 511).

41 Hence Mal Considine thinks that a man "got what he paid for in spades" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 70), and Dave Klein tells Glenda Bledsoe that "'you bought it, and now you're paying for it'" (*White Jazz*, p. 199).

That the impetus to accrue wealth drives even psychopaths seems to legitimate the myth that money functions as "'the great equalizer and common denominator'" in this society (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 182). While its accretion motivates men as disparate as Boyd and Healy, the illusion that capital is the "great equalizer" is negated by the division of wealth between the power elite and its "laborers," which concentrates money in the hands of men like Exley and Dieterling, both of whom are archetypal "self-made" men and exemplars of capitalist "success."[42] Exley's wealth testifies to the economic basis of "power" in this universe insofar as inheriting his father's fortune metaphorically provides Ed Exley with "the world" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 480). Exley's actualisation of a transgenerational, intrafamilial transference of privilege reveals the patrilineal basis of authority in this society and the other constitutive element of its "dominant fiction": its naturalisation of a patriarchal social structure configured around the supremacy of masculine subjects and correlative devaluation of women and other feminised agents. The term "patriarchy" describes those "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women.'"[43] While applying the notion of "patriarchy" to Ellroy's texts is appropriate—characters like Emmett Sprague are even

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42 A newspaper article on Exley, announcing that he "'took an engineering degree at USC, studying by night while he pounded a dangerous downtown beat by day'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 78), implies that he is even something of a Horatio Algeresque "rags to riches" hero.

43 Heidi Hartmann quoted in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 3. Teresa Ebert argues that reifying a distinction between "capitalism" and "patriarchy" is fallacious insofar as "patriarchy," which she defines as "a regime of exploitation that produces gender difference in order to construct asymmetrical, unequal divisions of labor, accumulation, and access to social resources that guarantee not only the privilege of one gender (male) over the other (female) but, more important, the subjugation and exploitation of the 'other' gender as the very grounds of wealth and accumulation," is the "necessary basis of capitalist accumulation" (Teresa Ebert, "Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction" in *Rethinking Marxism* [Fall 1992; vol. 5 no. 3]), pp. 8-9.

designated "patriarchs" in his novels (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 156)—it should be noted that this concept has been problematised as an awkward, prohibitively totalising means of theorising men's "dominance" over women. As Butler observes, "the notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent years for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists."[44]

Butler's concept of the "heterosexual matrix" as the basic structure in which gender relations are embedded offers a more nuanced theorisation of these relations than the monolithic conception of "patriarchy," and additionally enables insight into the homologous basis of power disymmetries between men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals. As Butler conceptualises it, the "heterosexual matrix" is a "hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility" which "assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality."[45] That Ellroy's postwar society is predicated on hierarchical, inequitable gender relations and proceeds according to patriarchal "rule" is evident. Dieterling's and Exley's "power" stems from their roles as repositories of patriarchal authority—the "father" of animation (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 464) and a construction "king" (p. 87) respectively—and the oligarchic matrix they personify is structured along strictly homosocial lines, with all

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44 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 3

45 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 151n.

positions of authority occupied by men.[46] The phallocentric logic mandating women's exclusion from the public realm of power—a marginalisation underscored by Inez Soto's relegation, within the Dieterling/Exley obituary, to a footnote in the lives of two "great men"—results in their confinement to the private sphere of existence, where they are restricted to a supportive function as men's spouses, or are configured as receptacles for men's sexual urges.[47] Women are assimilable into this society's erotic economy primarily in terms of their "use-value" for men as sexual objects, as the fact that the overwhelming majority of women within Ellroy's texts are prostitutes and strippers confirms.[48]

The patriarchal foundations of authority in Ellroy's narrative universe ensure that even when John F. Kennedy ascends to the position of President his father "'lays down the law'" for him to adhere to (*American Tabloid*, p. 294). Demonstrating the literal inherence of power in this society in actual familial "patriarchs," this affirms the dynastic transference of masculine authority from fathers to sons, a point augmented by the fact that Ed Exley's trajectory from policeman to Republican gubernatorial candidate replicates his father's career path (*White Jazz*, p. 358). Yet Exley does not so

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46 While it could be argued that *The Big Nowhere*'s Claire De Haven has obtained some degree of "power" in her function as a member of the United Actors, Extras and Stagehands (UAES) hierarchy, her status as a "Communist" potentially indictable on counts of treason severely circumscribes any limited authority that she has obtained (moreover, whatever "power" De Haven possesses stems from her deployment of her sexuality to encourage men to join the union [*The Big Nowhere*, p. 237]).

47 In *L.A. Confidential*, for example, women are either wives, like Karen Morrow, or prostitutes, like Lynn Bracken, Kathy Janeway, and the women comprising the illicit "Fleur-de-Lis" prostitution network. This reflects Robert Vorlicky's observation, made in regard to American all-male-cast drama but clearly applicable to Ellroy's oeuvre, that women in these texts are represented primarily in terms of their "culturally sanctioned relationship to a man, as his relative (generally his mother or wife) or as the object of his erotic desires (usually his wife, lover, or sexual fantasy)" (Robert Vorlicky, *Act Like A Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* [Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995], p. 57.

48 This includes *The Big Nowhere*'s Audrey Anders, *White Jazz*'s Glenda Bledsoe and Lucille Kajesjian and Celeste Considine, who "whored" herself to a Nazi death camp commandant (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 74).

much succeed as *supplant* his father; he constructs his father as both his ego-ideal[49] and his rival, and ultimately occasions his death by threatening to publicly disclose his corruption, thereby bestowing a distinctly Oedipal flavour upon this society's narrative of patriarchal succession. Congruent with this, the allusion to "the law" transmitted by Joseph Kennedy evokes (consciously or otherwise) the "Law of the Father prohibiting incest and establishing the Oedipal boundaries of desire and identification"[50] that Lacan theorised as the primary means by which the "masculine subject" is initiated into the "Symbolic order of culture" grounded in masculine power and privilege.[51] Hyper-conscious of his status as a "policeman/patrician from a long line of Scotland Yard detectives" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 402), Exley actively desires to usurp his father's authority, suggesting his interiorisation of the "Law of the Father" and, by extension, the force that the Oedipal narrative obtains as a symbolic structuring principle in this society's collective imaginary.

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49 Earl Jackson defines the "ego-ideal" as "the agency of conscience and the intrapsychic representative of the Law [of the Father], an internalized paternal authority that is fully installed by the dissolution of the Oedipus complex in the heterosexual male subject" (Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* [Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995], p. 25).

50 Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance*, p. 25. Krutnik summarises the Oedipal narrative as the process by which "the patriarchal cultural order replicates and regenerates itself within the subject" by facilitating men's alignment with this cultural order and acceptance of "the obligations of masculine identity" as the price attendant upon their ultimate accession to "the position of the father in the lineage of patriarchal succession" (Frank Krutnik, *In A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* [London: Routledge, 1991], pp. 76-9). While I will refer to the Oedipal narrative throughout my thesis, I am aware of its conceptual problems and limitations, not the least of which is the fact that, as Sedgwick observes, it "tacitly installs the procreative monogamous heterosexual couple as the origin, telos, and norm of sexuality as a whole" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* [London: Routledge, 1994], p. 74).

51 Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 141.

It is Exley's aspiration to patriarchal power—the "'ruthless personal ambition'" which drives him (p. 308)—that precludes him from counteracting the "official" hagiography of his father and exposing his "true" corruption. On one level Exley's silent complicity reflects the "ruling class"'s power to circumscribe the behaviour of those incorporated within it; his failure to disrupt its monological version of reality is arguably premised on a recognition of the impossibility of successfully challenging the "loop" of authority. This matrix's imperviousness to destruction is confirmed by the fact that Exley is unable to exact vengeance upon Dudley Smith for the latter's involvement in the "Nite Owl" murders (p. 471) because Smith is "too well placed to fall" (p. 419). While in *White Jazz* Exley finally achieves a partial, limited "justice" by instigating (at several removes, and via Dave Klein) Smith's permanent immobilisation, the corrupt "system" that he symbolises remains intact.[52] Yet Exley's desire to destroy Smith is essentially a personal vendetta—as Klein clarifies when he accuses Exley of being little better than Smith's "double" (*White Jazz*, p. 280: "'I *know* it must get you to look in the mirror and see Dudley'" [original emphasis])—and his determination to prosecute his father is as much an Oedipal attempt to "dethrone" him as an attempt to secure "justice." Indeed, Exley's successful overthrow of his father arguably induces his silence regarding the latter's crimes; having executed his primary goal, he subsequently has no need to tarnish his father's reputation, particularly as this might prove counterproductive to realising his own career objectives.

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52 This pessimistic insight into the pervasiveness of corruption is, according to Tomc, a staple of the hard-boiled genre, which typically pits its protagonists against "criminal forces that are essentially pervasive and uncontrollable [and] which the detective must confront but which [they] can never really defeat" (Sandra Tomc, "Questing Women: The Feminist Mystery After Feminism" in Glenwood Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995], pp. 51-2).

Exley's determination to expose his father is hypocritical insofar as his own image as "'L.A.'s Greatest Hero'" (p. 247) is illusory, with the glory he obtained for murdering the "Nite Owl" suspects concealing the fact that they were innocent men who were unarmed when he shot them. Yet Exley fosters his personal mythologisation to secure his father's approval and facilitate his ascent through the police hierarchy. His "thirst for advancement" (p. 78) and instrumentalisation of Klein to actualise Smith's downfall confirms Exley's adherence to the dynamic of competitive individualism intrinsic to the "game," where men's "value" derives from their utility to other men and the bottom line is always "quid pro quo" (*White Jazz*, p. 197). The extent to which the behavioural norms and ideological tenets of the "system" are embedded in Exley's psyche is clarified by his readiness to sacrifice personal fulfilment and obey his father's edict to refrain from marrying Inez Soto because "'being with a Mexican woman could seriously stall your career'" (p. 197). His ultimate accession to the summit of the "ruling-class" as "Chief of Detectives, Chief of Police" then "Congressman, Lieutenant Governor, current gubernatorial candidate" (*White Jazz*, p. 358) underscores the fact that Exley—like all of Ellroy's protagonists—is irrevocably implicated within the "system"; it determines his aspirations, guides his motivations, and structures his very subjectivity. Indeed, Ellroy continually foregrounds the extent to which his protagonists are subjectified through their inculcation into the ideology and value-system of the authoritative matrix they serve. Their goals are shaped by its capitalist norms: Buzz Meeks' introjection of the logic of ownership and use-value results in his self-conceptualisation as a capitalist subject, a "cop

again, bought and paid for" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 181), while the corrupt manoeuvrings of men like Kemper Boyd and Dave Klein are impelled by economic concerns.[53]

In addition to recirculating the "dominant fiction" normalising a capitalist value-system, Ellroy's protagonists reify what they call the "White Man's Rule of Order" (*American Tabloid*, p. 125) by reproducing the racist ideology which ensures that "'being with a Mexican woman could seriously stall'" a policeman's career. While Exley conducts a liaison with Soto, the bigotry trembling beneath his veneer of tolerance erupts when he discovers that she has been unfaithful to him; labelling her a "'fucking whore,'" he sneers that she would "'be pounding tortillas on a rock if it wasn't for me'" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 274-5). Jack Vincennes, who gets his "'jollies shakin' down niggers'" (p. 56), does not make even a nominal attempt to conceal his racism like Exley, but habitually uses vile nomenclature to describe ethnically diverse groups, homosexuals and women—a linguistic vililfication of these groups that is echoed by virtually all of Ellroy's protagonists.[54] The bigotry Ellroy's men exhibit is merely one element of a broader xenophobic ideological program perpetrated by the "power matrix" whose authority stems from its naturalisation of the "White Man's Rule of Order." The fact that it is the *white* male whose "rule" obtains in this landscape confirms that this "universal subject" in

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53 Boyd "skims" money during his tenure as an FBI-sanctioned car thief (*American Tabloid*, p. 22, 28) and murders a man for his assets (p. 193); Klein funnels his "clip fees" for "mob hits" into buying real estate—"slum dives" that he obtains cheaply by bribing public officials (*White Jazz*, p. 233).

54 Thus Vincennes calls African Americans "spooks" (p. 134); Bud White labels homosexuals "queers" (p. 430); Buzz Meeks calls African Americans "'coons'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 258) and refers to Claire De Haven as a "cooze" (p. 257); and Dave Klein refers to African Americans as "jigs" and "niggers" (*White Jazz*, p. 11, p. 151), also viewing them in terms of racist stereotypes of "voodoo" and barbarism (p. 11, 151).

this discursive universe is actually a historically specific configuration: the "white, male, heterosexual" described by Connell as the embodiment of "hegemonic masculinity."[55] Individually, the majority of men occupying the upper echelons of this society's power structure are all exemplars of this hegemonic male subject; on a systemic level, the "white, male, heterosexual" is the constitutive element of this oligarchy, whose power is predicated on the marginalisation of non-hegemonic subject-positions.

The racism manifested by Ellroy's protagonists is consonant with the racism evinced by members of the "loop" both individually and structurally,[56] a xenophobia emphasising this realm's status as a closed-circuit inaccessible to "outsiders." This hegemonic nexus' power is concentrated in its concretisation of its personal prejudices to ensure that these function as the co-ordinates of oppression structuring the society it governs, a symbiotic process insofar as its xenophobia simultaneously reflects and guarantees that of the broader social domain. The power matrix's status as a disciplinary regime predicated on structures of control and domination, and on the deauthorisation of particular subject-positions, is clarified by Dudley Smith's project to "contain" African Americans or, as he labels them, "'nigger filth'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 400). The virulent language Smith employs symbolises the hegemonic elite's creation of a sense of group cohesion by differentiating itself from other subject-positions through the rationale of "othering" and exclusion which theorists analysing processes of subject-formation—particularly those

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55 R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), p. 77.

56 On an individual level, this racism is exemplified by Dudley Smith's murder of his niece's Mexican lover (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 452) and Howard Hughes' expressed belief that African Americans "cause cancer" (*American Tabloid*, p. 284). The ramification of such molecular racism into bigotry of a more systemic nature is evidenced by the FBI's sanctioning of the Ku Klux Klan's hostile activities (p. 240).

drawing upon the Lacanian concept of the "mirror phase"[57]—have identified as integral to the process of "coming into being" as a subject.[58] Extrapolating from Kristeva's theorisation of "the abject" as establishing "the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject," [59] Butler has argued that "the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection" and that

> the exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed ... requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet "subjects," but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those "unlivable" and "uninhabitable" zones of social life which are nonetheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the "unlivable" is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject.[60]

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57 Lacan conceptualised the "mirror phase" or "mirror stage" as a phase in human development in which "the infant anticipates on an imaginary plane the apprehension and mastery of its bodily unity. This imaginary unification comes about by means of identification with the image of the counterpart as total *Gestalt*; it is exemplified concretely by the experience in which the child perceives its own reflection in a mirror. The mirror phase is said to constitute the matrix and first outline of what is to become the ego" (J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis* [trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. 1967; reprint: London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973], pp. 250-1). The infant's gaze into the mirror is "a crucial moment in subject formation" because "in looking at an object in the world outside its own body, the subject begins to establish that body as separate from and autonomous of the world outside. ... The infant's reflection in the mirror establishes the contours of its own body as separate from, say, that of its mother" (Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* [1982; reprint: London: Pandora, 1986], p. 45).

58 Kappeler suggests that "the subject can only be posed in being opposed—he affirms himself *by* posing 'the other' as inessential and as object" (Susanne Kappeler, *The Will to Violence: The Politics of Personal Behaviour* [Cambridge: Polity, 1995], pp. 38-9; original emphasis). The dynamic of "othering" that is instrumental in naturalising the role of, the "white, heterosexual, male" as "universal subject," has been discussed by Kobena Mercer in "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary" in Bad Object-Choices (eds), *How Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991). Mercer describes the process by which "the centered subject of Western philosophy posited itself as the universalized subject—'Man'—in relation to whom others were not simply different but somehow less than human, dehumanized objects of oppression. Women, children, savages, slaves, and criminals were all alike insofar as their otherness affirmed 'his' identity as the subject at the center of logocentrism and indeed all the other centrisms—ethnocentrism and phallocentrism—in which 'he' constructed his representations of reality" (p. 206). See also Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" and Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin, "The Male Body and Literary Metaphors for Masculinity" in Harry Brod and Michael S. Kimmel (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

59 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 133. Kristeva's theory of abjection is outlined in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (trans. Leon S. Roudiez; New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 1-31.

60 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

Butler suggests that "social regulation and control" is achieved through the constitution of a realm of "viable subjects" against whom these "abject beings" are counterposed.[61] The hegemony of Ellroy's power matrix is predicated on its construction of precisely such a structural binarism distinguishing itself from a realm of "abjects"—invisible, marginalised groups who fail even to obtain the status of "subjects" in this society.

In the concentric logic underpinning Ellroy's narrative landscape, the social field is divisible into these mutually exclusive domains wherein "viable" subjectivity inheres in the subject-position of the "white, male, heterosexual," whose privileged status is manifested in diverse ways.[62] Correlatively, groups deemed non-viable (not fully "human") include women and homosexuals from all ethnic backgrounds, African American men and men from other ethnic backgrounds (including Jews, Cubans and Mexicans), and Communists—or, insofar as the reactionary "ruling-class" catachrestically codifies all "left-wing" political activity as "Communist," any individuals espousing "radical" political views. While positing an uncomplicated mimetic equivalence between this textual universe and any preconceived "real world" beyond it would be problematic, Ellroy's imaginative reconstruction of postwar America configures its socio-political "realities" in accordance with conventional wisdom regarding the era. It is characterised

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61 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 133; Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 20.

62 Hence the phrase "white man" is frequently employed as a term of approbation and a synonym for "good guy" (see eg *L.A. Confidential*, p. 10; *White Jazz*, p. 222; *American Tabloid*, p. 339); Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa "'prefers white men in supervisory positions'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 200); "'wholesome white boxers'" are a bigger "'drawcard'" for the public than the African Americans and Mexicans who typically feature as boxers in Ellroy's fiction (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 28). The latter include *White Jazz*'s Mexican Reuben Ruiz and Sanderline Johnson (whom Dave Klein kills as a "favor" for Sam Giancana) (p. 15); and *L.A. Confidential*'s African American Leonard Bidwell (p. 115).

by the McCarthyist demonisation of Communists and homosexuals,[63] the persecution of African Americans[64] and other ethnic minorities, the hierarchical binarisation of gender relations and relegation of women to the domestic sphere[65]—in short, the entire spectrum of xenophobia which contributes to the critical and popular understanding of the era as one grounded in the hegemony of "white, male, heterosexuals" and organised along the model of capitalist patriarchy.[66] The construction of these specific groups as "non-viable" is evinced by the depiction of their oppression in this society as ranging from the exclusion of women from the public sphere to the incarceration of Communists for "sedition" (*American Tabloid*, p. 344).

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63 Lee Edelman's article "Tearooms and Sympathy or, the Epistemology of the Water Closet" (in Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* [New York: Routledge, 1994]) documents Cold War attitudes to both homosexuality and Communism, two bisecting axes of phobia in the era that were analogously constructed as threats to "national security."

64 On the structural racism that infused postwar L.A., see Woody Haut, *Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), p. 36; and Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990). In this fascinating study of L.A. history Davis observes that "since the days of the legendary Chief William Parker in the early 1950s, the LAPD has been regarded by L.A.'s Black community as a redneck army of occupation" (p. 271). Ellroy also cites Parker's racism—albeit in terms that virtually validate it—in *My Dark Places*, claiming that he "hated Negroes [sic] and sent goons down to Darktown [sic] to lean on club owners who admitted white women" (p. 63).

65 For a discussion of gender relations in postwar America see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight From Commitment* (London: Pluto, 1983).

66 With the possible exception of Communism, it scarcely needs to be iterated that the co-ordinates of hatred and paranoia outlined here continue to resonate today. Ellroy himself has highlighted continuities between the 1950s LAPD that his novels represent, and the 1990s LAPD excoriated, in the wake of the infamous Rodney King beating and OJ Simpson trial, for its institutionalised racism (see his comments in Hobson, "Author D.O.W.N. on the L.A.P.D.," p. 1). This systemic racism has also been mapped by Mike Davis in *City of Quartz*, in a harrowing chronicle of contemporary LAPD bigotry which reveals that the Rodney King beating (which actually postdated Davis' book) was only one incident in a series of atrocities perpetrated by the LAPD against African American, a regime of terror that was apparently spearheaded by LAPD Chief Daryl Gates (p. 8, pp. 271-7, pp. 294-7). Numerous theorists have also documented the prevalence of homophobia in contemporary Western society; see for example Sedgwick, *Between Men*; Gregory Herek, "On Heterosexual Masculinity: Some Psychological Consequences of the Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality" in *American Behavioural Scientist* (1986; no. 29).

As the latter example suggests, the persecution of subordinate groups often has a legal or juridical basis; African Americans are denied the vote (and hence status as "citizens" [*American Tabloid*, p. 385]), while homosexuals are constructed as embodiments of a "deviant" sexuality metonymically enfolded into a broader spectrum of illegal "perversions," and the practice of same-sex desire is outlawed, with policemen enforcing this law by propositioning and entrapping homosexual "offenders" (*White Jazz*, p. 65). Perhaps the most vivid indication of the "abject" status of groups like women and homosexual men is the frequency with which they are assaulted and murdered, their negligible status in this universe ensuring that their deaths remain uninvestigated and unavenged.[67] That women in this realm are literally treated as refuse—both Elizabeth Short (the "Black Dahlia") and Lee Blanchard's sister are slain and "dumped somewhere like garbage" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 43)—confirms that the concept of abjection formulated by Kristeva and developed by Butler is a particularly appropriate theoretical prism through which to explore Ellroy's narratives. Kristeva argued that the process of abjection founds the subject through a forceful and literal extrusion that inscribes boundaries of self and other; individuals affirm their internal parameters through expelling (abjecting) that which disgusts or offends them. On a literal level, this includes the "body fluids" and bodily waste[68] which Kristeva associated with abjection and which resonate throughout the metaphors used by hegemonic males in Ellroy's fiction to

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67 Thus Danny Upshaw and Bud White are literally the only policemen who care about solving, respectively, a series of homosexual and prostitute murders (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 84; L.A. Confidential, p. 279). That the murders of liminal groups like women and African Americans attract are considered "low priority, no priority" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 16) testifies simultaneously to the subordinate status of these classes in this society, and to the contingency with which "justice" is viewed by the very officials supposed to pursue it as an end.

68 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3.

conceptualise and appellate subject-positions designated as non-viable. Men within the "loop" categorise homosexual men as "slime," "trash" and "garbage" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 84, 154, 262, 265) and describe African Americans, Mexicans and Communists as "filth."[69] Echoing Kristeva's somatic model of abjection, which emphasises its presence as a "structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer,"[70] Communists and African Americans are viewed as "cancerous" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 61, 342; *American Tabloid*, p. 284), while exposure to homosexual men induces physical nausea (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 87, 281).[71]

The construction of these groups as diseased and contaminating is compounded by their objectification through a range of "injurious terms"[72] and "loathsome sexual or racial epithets"[73] whose sheer quantity is a barometer of particular social classes' abjection. Listing these permutations of racial and sexual invective arguably reproduces the politics of hate disfiguring Ellroy's narrative landscape; nonetheless, it is important to note that the overwhelming critical mass of abhorrence towards these groups manifests itself in an

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69 Hence African Americans are described as "'nigger filth'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 400), Mexicans as "'spic filth'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 452) and Communists as "'the Red filth'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 14).

70 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 11.

71 This reflects the way in which, as Watney has observed, "the very notion of 'the homosexual' as a distinct type of person, defined primarily in relation to particular sexual acts, emerged in the last century at the interstices of a host of overlapping discourses concerning sickness, contamination and genetic throwbacks, and was regarded as the most concrete evidence of the results of indecency, depravity and uncleanliness. The category of 'the homosexual' personified such concerns, revealing an unhealthy sexual appetite in an unhealthy body" and was constructed as an agent of "filth and degradation" by these discourses (Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* [London: Methuen, 1987], p. 49).

72 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 123.

73 Vorlicky, *Act Like A Man*, p. 19.

astounding array of insulting terms with which they are described.[74] Women, for example, are constructed as "cooze" and "cunts" (*White Jazz*, p. 71)—phrases which configure them not just as objects but as objectified *bodies* that only "cohere and make sense"[75] in terms of their genital aspect and capacity to satiate male sexual desire. That certain groups are "abject" in the sense that they do not obtain the status of fully realised "subjects" in this society is clarified by their denigration in terms emphasising their less than human status in the eyes of their descriptor; hence African Americans are labelled "spooks"—spectral doubles in a landscape of normative whiteness (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 134)—and Dudley Smith not only denominates African Americans as ""jungle bunnies"" but confirms their dehumanisation by coldly declaring that ""jungle bunnies account for the seven men I have killed in the line of duty, stretching a point to allow for them as human"" (*White Jazz*, p. 155).

That such demeaning phrases are employed by exemplars of power suggests that the hegemonic elite's authority is constituted by its capacity to assume a classificatory

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74 Mexicans and Cubans are labelled "taco benders" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 17), "spics" and "greasers" (*American Tabloid*, p. 189); African Americans are "niggers," "jigaboos" or "jigs, "shvartzes," "coons," "darkies" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 309, 258, 436, 78), "boogies" (p. 282) and "shines" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 57). Danny Upshaw litanises several of the vilificatory appellations for homosexual men: "QUEER, FAGGOT, FRUIT, HOMO, PEDERAST, BRUNSER, PUNK, COCKSUCKER" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 265; original emphasis). The latter terms reflect what Guy Hocquenghem has referred to as "the exceptional richness of the vocabulary indicating the male homosexual ... queer, fag, fairy, queen [etc.], as if language were exhausting itself in trying to define, to name the unnamable" (Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* [trans. Danielle Dangoor, 1972; reprint: London: Allison and Busby, 1978], p. 39).

75 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 151n.

role and interpellate particular social groups in degrading terms.[76] This privileged discursive operation clarifies that the insider world requires these "others" to delimit the parameters of acceptable subjectivity and thereby inversely define itself. Smith shores up his own "humanity" by denying a comparable subjectivity to African Americans, while members of the Mafia, invariably of Italian origin, construct themselves as viable by prohibiting others from occupying this subject-position. A Mafioso proclaim that "'the Jewish race has a higher percentage of homos than regular white people'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 517), while another declares that what he "hates" about Cubans is that "'they think they're as white as Italians'" (p. 520). Ironically, Italian-derived gangsters are described as "'greaseballs'" by the Anglo-Saxon policemen situated above them in the racial hierarchy, if not necessarily the actual hierarchy of power and entitlement (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 11). That Mafia members denigrate other subject-positions despite—or as a result of—the racist vilification that they endure confirms that their subjectivities are structured according to a dialectic of "othering"; their self-perception is constituted and consolidated by constructing others as "inferior" on the basis of their perceived "difference" from that self—as embodying a lesser degree of "whiteness" or displaying a higher "proclivity" towards homosexuality, and so on.

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76 The concept of "interpellation" describes the ideological function whereby subjects are called into being through others "hailing" or *naming* them; see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)" (1969; reprinted in Slavoj Zizek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* [London: Verso, 1994]), pp. 130-1. de Lauretis defines "interpellation" as "the process whereby a social representation is accepted or absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation, and so becomes, for that individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary" (Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film and Fiction* [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987], p. 12).

The integrity and coherence of this insider realm is predicated on its capacity to prohibit its designated "others" from entering its closed economy. Its grounding in a "symbolic order based on a logic of limits, margins, borders, and boundaries"[77] is suggested by Hoover's construction of Communists as threats to "'the internal security of our nation'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 302). Reflecting Kristeva's conceptualisation of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order," and "does not respect borders, positions, rules,"[78] the metaphors used to describe marginal groups reveal that their subjugated status is predicated on the danger they are construed as representing to the self-contained boundaries of the "loop": they are "filth," "garbage," undisciplined, amorphous effluvia whose heterogeneity imperils the rigidly defined ego-boundaries of the normativised "white, male, heterosexual" subject and ensures their unassimilability into the "ruling-class" constituted by this subject. The imaging of clandestine Communist organisations as "spider's webs" proliferating into a series of "colonies" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 15), or as "the Red Menace" seeking to spread its "'cancerous tentacles'" throughout society (*American Tabloid*, p. 427; *The Big Nowhere*, p. 61) suggests that the virulent abhorrence of Communism is based on the dread that it will spiral out of control and preclude "containment" by the sphere of power whose ideological precepts it opposes.

In this sense it is ironic that a Mafia boss declares that "'the two things I hate most are Communists and chaos'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 187); chaos is precisely what Communists

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77 Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out" in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 1. Fuss utilises this phrase in the context of a discussion of the philosophical opposition between the categories of "heterosexual" and "homosexual".

78 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 17.

and other liminal groups symbolise to the "ruling-class" of which this man is a member.[79] The potential disruptiveness of the abject necessitates a process of what could be called "boundary maintenance"[80] whereby members of the "loop" rigorously preclude the abject from making incursions into the terrain of power. The phrase "boundary maintenance" derives from Patton's account of epidemiological models which seek to eradicate diseases by scrutinising infected subjects and cordoning off "vectoral" from "healthy bodies."[81] It is clearly applicable to Ellroy's textual universe, in which groups like Communists are viewed both as diseased and pathogenetic, capable of spreading their "cancerous tentacles" throughout society. To "contain" Communism, its advocates are prevented from obtaining a platform for their beliefs or are violently suppressed when attempting to publicise these (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 77). As this suggests, Communists, along with other subordinated groups, are not merely conveniently "absent" from the sphere of power but are *absented* from it—prohibited from obtaining its privileges, "denied the possibility of cultural articulation,"[82] their presence obscured and effaced. Their enforced absention from the "loop" provides insight into the fact that those internal to the domain of power consolidate their hegemony partially by means of a program of *exclusion*.[83] Dollimore has noted the convergence of psychoanalytic and

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79 "Chaos" is also associated with the type of criminal behaviour that policemen are required to "contain"; Bucky Bleichert describes the "Zoot Suit Riots" in terms of the "chaos" they inspire (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 11), while Preston Exley refuses to hit suspects because this creates "disorder" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 96).

80 Cindy Patton, "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology" in Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds), *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p.176.

81 Patton, "Performativity and Spatial Distinction," pp. 187-8.

82 Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 8.

83 Kristeva theorises abjection as inevitably entailing "the *exclusion* of a substance" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 4). Butler notes that for Kristeva the abject "designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered 'Other.' This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion," as is the self (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 133).

materialist theory in positing that the formation of "identity," on both an individual and a cultural level, occurs via a process of both "exclusion" and what he terms "disavowal" and "negation."[84] The "tactics and techniques of domination"[85] utilised by the insider realm to abject those subject-positions it deems non-viable—and cement its unquestioned oligopoly and sense of its own "viability" accordingly—correspond to precisely the typology of subject-formation identified by Dollimore.

These intersecting mechanisms of oppression constitute the program of "boundary maintenance" which is invariably enacted by those exemplars of hegemonic masculinity who constitute Ellroy's primary protagonists. The process whereby power regimes of heterosexism, racism and phallocentrism shore up their "ontological boundaries" by "protecting" themselves from "contaminated" others has been documented by numerous theorists;[86] in Ellroy's fiction it is literalised in a Mafia associate described as embodying "'the role of "protector"—i.e., protecting Italian-Americans against Negro criminal elements'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 99). A concrete example of the hegemonic masculine subject anxiously striving to preserve his "boundaries" against the abject occurs when Ward Littell follows Lenny Sands, whom he is surveilling, into a gay bar, and is rendered so acutely uncomfortable by the gazes of homosexual men which he feels "strafe" him that he escapes into the privacy of an "enclosed and safe" telephone booth from which to

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84 Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 244.

85 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, p. 102.

86 Diana Fuss, "Introduction" in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (New York: Routledge, 1991); p. 2; see also Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence*, p. 245; Patton, "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology," pp. 187-8; Mark Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

observe Sands (*American Tabloid*, p. 104). Littell's action conveys the current of homophobia with which the social fabric of this universe is charged and which manifests itself in the forced (and self-enforced) exclusion of homosexuals from public space, their consignment to "ghettos, to privacy, to unconsciousness."[87]

As a rare instance of a hegemonic male in retreat, Littell's conduct inversely testifies to the success of the insider realm's project to "exclude" others. Its execution of this agenda is also evinced by the segregation of public space in this world. Homosexuals are relegated to the interstices of clandestine bars like the one Littell enters (whose title, "Hernando's Hideaway," encodes the mandatory self-exile occasioning its existence) or forced to endure policemen monitoring their entrance into such public arenas as the parks where they surreptitiously congregate to seek sex (*White Jazz*, p. 65).[88] African Americans are similarly "cordoned off" from hegemonic subjects; police are unable to locate "'one single white man known to frequent Negro [sic] areas'" (*White Jazz*, p. 257) and the ghettoisation of African Americans in areas like Watts is reflected in the continuous, racist references to this locale as "Niggertown" or "darktown" by policemen patrolling this precinct (*White Jazz*, p. 11; *The Big Nowhere*, p. 432). Subaltern citizens are effectively quarantined from the public domain of masculine power and privilege, a systematic marginalisation ensuring that they do not occupy positions of authority or

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87 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 186.

88 This reflects the fact that "public space is presumptively heterosexual" (Jonathan Goldberg, *Renaissance Texts, Modern Sexualities* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992], p. 11; see also Nancy Duncan, "Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spaces" in Nancy Duncan (ed.), *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality* [London: Routledge, 1996], p. 137; and Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, p. 10).

influence in this world; for example, there are no female or African American politicians, businesspersons, or police officers in Ellroy's texts. Any African Americans glimpsed in the public sphere are either criminals whose appearance only reinforces their subjugated status, or jazz musicians and other entertainers whose purpose is to entertain the power elite (see eg *The Big Nowhere*, p. 258, 309). Women, meanwhile, are confined either to the "underworld" of prostitution or to the domestic sphere, where, as one man declaims, they are kept "at home, where a woman belongs" (*American Tabloid*, p. 15).[89]

Precluding persecuted subjects from entering the public domain extends to placing interdictions on their access to the "confidential" information which typically accrues to powerful men in this universe.[90] The potential for marginalised groups to marshal information and use it against their oppressors is severely circumscribed[91] and as such reveals the asymmetries inhering in the cognitive dimensions of power in this landscape. The hegemonic project to restrict abjected civilians' access to information reflects the status of these delegitimised groups not as subjects to *know*—to possess potentially

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89 Within *American Tabloid*, for example, the majority of women are either prostitutes, actresses or dancers (like Barb Jahelka) whose primary function in this economy derives from the use-value of their bodies; or, like Laura Hughes, who is barely glimpsed beyond the parameters of her apartment, they are almost *literally* confined to the domestic realm. The restriction of women to this sphere reflects what Myslik has described as the "patriarchal organization of space in Western culture," in which "all space has a gender identity and ... most spaces, public and private, are masculine dominated" (Wayne D. Myslik, "Renegotiating the Social/Sexual Identities of Places: Gay Communities as Safe Havens or Sites of Resistance?" in Duncan (ed.), *Bodyspace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 158-9.

90 Ed Exley curses himself for providing information on his father "to a woman" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 420), and Buzz Meeks expresses surprise that Mickey Cohen confides "business" secrets to his lover Audrey Anders: "'I'm just surprised he plays it that close with a woman is all'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 105).

91 For example, while Ramona Sprague "passively" opposes her husband Emmett Sprague—who routinely beats and humiliates her—by "gathering information" about his past financial misconduct and his fraudulent self-mythologisation as a war hero, this data obtains no forum beyond the baroque "pageants" that she forces her children to act in, staged tableaux operating as a visual reminder of his "greed and cowardice" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 367-8).

empowering knowledge—but as objects to *be known.* This power differential reflects the imbrication of Ellroy's textual universe in the logic of the "speculum" that Irigaray identified as the primary investigatory apparatus and knowledge-mechanism through which masculine discourse has traditionally rendered women "intelligible."[92] Irigaray's speculum performs a dual function: on one level it is a "mirror" ensuring that women are perceived by men according to the "lack" they represent (particularly in a sexual and symbolic sense, insofar as female genitalia is interpreted as the "lack" of a penis and therefore of the signifier of masculine power, the phallus). While Irigaray's metaphor of the "mirror" accounts for the power imbalance in the specular field of vision, whereby women and other feminised subjects are rendered intelligible through being subjected to an inspecting masculine gaze, the speculum is also a gynecological or "scientific instrument" with which "the man's analytic eye tries to penetrate the woman's body—'to see,' as Irigaray notes, 'with speculative intent.'"[93]

This implicit construction of the "feminine" as a "mystery" to be explored is echoed within Ellroy's texts, where women are figured as "human riddles" to decode, "enigmas" to be explored by men seeking to "fill in the blanks" of their pasts (see *The Black Dahlia*, p. 9, 308, 313; *American Tabloid*, p. 473). The positioning of the feminine as a specular object to be both optically and corporeally probed is exemplified by the treatment of Elizabeth Short's corpse. Visually dismembered by Bucky Bleichert's disinterested masculine gaze (*The Black Dahlia* p. 87), Short's cadaver is *literally* dissected

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92 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (trans. Gillian C. Gill; 1974: reprint: Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).

93 Linda Williams, Hard *Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"* (London: Pandora, 1990), p. 54..

by the coroner who conducts her autopsy with a clinical insensitivity which consolidates her status as a dehumanised object to be explored by a masculine scientific apparatus: he "grabbed his scalpel and started poking around inside the bottom half of the corpse" (p. 100). The dual process of specularisation enables the power matrix to expel those subaltern groups it constructs as knowledge-objects from its orbit. Just as Patton argues that epidemiology necessitates the "scrutiny" of the diseased body, so the process of "boundary maintenance" requires that the activities of the abject be surveilled to ensure their exclusion from public discourse. While the loathing of abjected groups frequently translates into attempts to elide or ignore their existence, the phobia undergirding such reactions also results in a paranoid need to actively seek out and spy upon these contaminated groups in order to effect their expulsion from the domain of power. Both points are revealed by Danny Upshaw's discovery of several "sex offender files" in the course of his investigation into a series of homosexual murders. Contravening the habitual police insistence on "order" and logic, these files are randomly and haphazardly organised:

> The filing was not alphabetical, and there was no logic to the penal code placements—homosexual occurrences were lumped with straight exhibitionism and child molestation; misdemeanants and felons brushed against each other. Danny scanned the first two files in the top cabinet and snapped why the system was so sloppy: the men on the squad wanted this wretched data out of sight and out of mind. Knowing he *had* to look, he dug in (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 213; original emphasis).

The obscuring of this "wretched data" summarises the hegemonic drive to secure a particular vision of "reality" by effacing the validity of alternate modes of being, and confirms that the forcible elision of non-viable subject-positions is a means of excluding these from the "loop." Yet the fact that such data is actually compiled reflects both the configuration of homosexuals (and other abjects) as knowledge-objects, and the perceived need for their activities to be surveilled to protect the insider sphere's boundaries against their incursion. The declaration that a movie studio executive makes to Upshaw—"'I would never let a known homo work at my shop under any conditions. *Ever.* Is that clear?'" (p. 163; original emphasis)—confirms that any subaltern citizens who infiltrate the public sphere will be zealously expelled from it. The executive's comment is premised on a distinction between "known" (or publicly identified) and "unknown" homosexuals which reveals that in order to be excluded from the realm of power these individuals must first be unveiled and acknowledged as non-viable subjects.

In the case of marginalised social groups like women and African Americans, the latter procedure is relatively unproblematic; the abject status of these groups is usually visibly demarcated or imprinted on them, somatically self-evident.[94] Yet Communism and homosexuality, whose convergence as intersecting sites of phobia in the postwar era is tracked throughout *The Big Nowhere*, are analogous in the sense of not being immediately "detectable" or visible. As Dyer notes, "a major fact about being gay is that it doesn't

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94 It should be noted that individuals with racially diverse heritages represent a "problem" to hegemonic individuals seeking to classify them; hence Bud White cannot determine if Dwight Gilette, who is "listed" in an "R&I check" as a "male Caucasian" is actually part-African American; locating the man's house, he observes that "if he was a shine he was passing with style" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 191).

show. There is nothing about gay people's physiognomy that declares them gay, no equivalents to the biological markers of sex and race."[95] Communists are comparably "invisible," and their perceived "threat" occurs in direct proportion to their capacity to camouflage themselves beneath "'a million banners, a million different flags'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 60). These groups' resistance to scrutiny on the basis of a corporeally encoded difference ensures that they must be observed and decoded by members of the power matrix to be rendered "knowable" and defined as non-viable.[96] Monitoring of the abject is typically undertaken by the policemen and private eyes who constitute Ellroy's primary characters and who in this sphere operate as "professional detectives," a modality of masculine subjectivity whereby men function as surveillers—observers and collaters of intelligence on the abject—and decoders who sort this information in order to classify individuals as "abject" and thus render the abject intelligible.

The role of professional detective is enabled by this universe's predication on the dichotomous relationship between an active-masculine spectator and a passive-feminine surveyed, and by the capitalist commodification of individuals as objects to be literally "owned" by others. Within this paradigm of use-value, the gendering of the specular

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95 Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 19.

96 Interestingly, the process of "detecting" homosexuality within Ellroy's fiction mirrors what appears to have been its historical occurrence during the postwar period; see for example Lee Edelman's discussion of a 1964 *Life* article on "what it called the 'secret world' of 'Homosexuality in America'" that focused on the "'signs'" by which homosexuality could be "'detected'" (Edelman, *Homographesis*, pp. 151-3). In mapping the surveillance of homosexuals in the postwar era, Ellroy recreates what Edelman described as the "massive intensification of political efforts to demonize homosexual behavior" in the postwar era that was partially effected by a program of "surveillance" (p. 158).

function translates to a division of labour whereby women function as professional objects to be gazed upon (dancers, strippers, actors) and men are correlatively figured as embodiments of the specular masculine gaze, or professional surveillers. The detective's role is to secure the boundaries of the "loop" from abjects threatening to pollute it, which he accomplishes by accumulating knowledge about, and conducting investigations into, the feminised abject domain. This practice is enabled by the detective's status as a technical "expert" skilled in forensic science and called upon to examine the morphology of the abject to reveal its non-viability. On the one hand Ellroy's protagonists are paid to enact the role of professional detective; reflecting the pragmatic, capitalist ethos of exchange- value structuring the insider realm, the surveilling function is commodified and men adopt the vocation of policeman or are retained in a private capacity by members of the power "elite" to surveil abject groups. These possibilities are condensed in Dave Klein, a policeman who is also hired by Howard Hughes to spy on the woman who jilted him, Glenda Bledsoe (*White Jazz*, p. 57). In a different sense, Ellroy's protagonists also choose to become professional detectives to comprehend "why" criminals behave in certain ways (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 38) and to satisfy their drives to structure, classify and, as Ed Exley states, "'create order out of chaotic situations'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 80).

This impetus reflects the traditional role of fictional detectives as "rational observers"[97] and implicitly posits Ellroy's primary characters in opposition to those abjected groups who are "contained" by the professionalisation of the "observatory" role which Ellroy's

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97 Haut, *Pulp Culture*, p. 71. It also reflects the traditional delineation of the detective's "investigatory hermeneutic" as a drive to "reveal, disclose, to *know*" (Sally Munt, *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel* [London: Routledge, 1994], p. 173) and to impose "order on disruption" (p. 126).

protagonists occupy. The program of surveillance undertaken by professional detectives which enables the insider sphere to sediment its authority and secure itself against "infiltration" by subaltern groups is conducted in both an "authoritative" and an unauthorised capacity. The data accumulated on abject groups often takes the form of "official," government-collated information, such as the "sex-offender files" found by Upshaw.[98] This official function of amassing information frequently overlaps with an unofficial, scopophilic scrutiny of abjected civilians. Danny Upshaw, observing gay men at an escort service for the purposes of his homicide case, and Dave Klein—contracted to surveil Glenda Bledsoe and also charged with visually monitoring Lucille Kafesjian's activities in the course of an investigation—derive "private," voyeuristic sexual pleasure from their roles as "public" functionaries (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 166; *White Jazz*, p. 46, 64, 90, 182).[99] As the fact that Upshaw and Klein literally *spy* on these individuals suggests, the process of surveillance accents the importance of vision in documenting subaltern activities. The drive to unveil the activities of abjects is played out in the field of specular relations and proceeds through the accumulation of visual data, highlighting the unfolding of Ellroy's narratives in a context which privileges the optical sense above all

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98 See also *The Big Nowhere*, p. 327, where the intelligence-gathering project conducted in the course of the grand jury investigation into Communist influence in Hollywood results in the collection of what Buzz Meeks views as a "brain-frying, mind-boggling, super-stupendous and absolutely amazing glut of information" (p. 327)— graphs, charts, photographs, "cross-referenced names, dates, political organizations and documented admissions: Commies, pinkers and fellow travelers embracing Mother Russia and calling for the end of the U.S.A.," admissions which are "impossible to disprove" and which has been amassed to prove that these individuals have committed "treason." If the sheer volume of information overwhelms Meeks, the fact that he notes that it is "impossible to disprove" confirms the one-sided nature of information-gathering in this universe—the Communists have no comparable means of gathering data on their political opponents, and are rendered powerless by the accumulation of data about them that they cannot refute or disprove, ensuring that the authoritative elite gathering this information retains the capacity to naturalise their version of events as "the truth."

99 Similarly, J. Edgar Hoover, who ostensibly maintains files on groups and individuals whom he considers "'subversive'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 39), actually "'loves to accrue *titillating* information'" on the "deviant" groups whom his agents scrutinise (p. 16; my emphasis).

others. The "ocularcentrism"[100] of this society is revealed by the fact that it is the potential *invisibility* of homosexuals and Communists—their capacity to evade instant identification as abject—which mandates a paranoid program of explicitly visual surveillance to discern (and subsequently punish, through imprisonment or other disciplinary measures) these transgressors of the norm.

This surveilling process also reflects the prevailing tendency within crime fiction to institute a hermeneutic of investigation whereby detectives sift data that they have accumulated through visual means. Ebert has chronicled the "primacy of observation and surveillance in detecting" within the genre, arguing that the prevalence of this trope in terms of detectives observing criminal behaviour "foregrounds the *gaze* as a means of power constituting reality and constraining subjectivities: the gaze makes visible—and thus renders intelligible and controllable—acts of unauthorized power and noncompliance."[101] The centrality of the "gaze" in Ellroy's textual economy of power ensures that the abject status of individuals must be affirmed on an explicitly visual level; hence Hoover's construction of a photograph of a "prodigiously endowed Negro" man (whose description images him in terms of stereotypes of sexual predation and threat) as a weapon "forearming" him against the "enemy" (*American Tabloid*, p. 168) suggests that to see the "enemy" is a crucial conduit to establishing dominance over them. In the case of homosexuals, the "enemy" is identified through a semiotic system in

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100 Chris Jencks, "The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction" in Chris Jencks (ed.), Visual *Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

101 Ebert, "Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction," p. 18; original emphasis.

which specific optical signifiers enable individuals to be labelled gay. This is clarified by the "sex offender files" discovered by Upshaw, which claim that "if you parked on a Griffith Park roadway with a blue handkerchief tied to your radio aerial, you were a queer," and that the "inscription on the Pall Mall cigarette pack—'In Hoc Signo Vinces'—translated as 'With this sign we shall conquer'—was a tentative means of homo identification—a sure thing when coupled with wearing a green shirt on a Thursday" (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 213-4).

While Ellroy's suggestion that wearing a "green shirt on a Thursday" could function as an indicator of homosexuality is risible, the phrase "with this sign we shall conquer" associated here with gay men encapsulates the sense of "homosexual panic"[102] that pervades this society—the fear that the amorphous mass of invisible homosexuals will overwhelm and overtake "non-deviant" masculine society. It is this dread which partially mandates their "containment" via a program of detection and surveillance. In Ellroy's fiction, the surveilling "gaze" functions both as a means by which, to reiterate Ebert's terms, detectives "constrain" such "noncompliant" subjects as homosexuals and (often as a corollary of this) constitute their own subjectivities. Ontologically, the primacy of the masculine gaze is reflected in the constitution of the optical plane as the field in which Ellroy's protagonists primarily experience the world they inhabit, ensuring that they are constructed first and foremost as "seeing" subjects.[103] In epistemological terms, sight is

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102 Sedgwick uses this phrase to describe "the modern, intra-psychic, potentially almost universal extension of the universal extension of the secularization of homosexual anathema" (*Between Men*, p. 162).

103 Maggie Humm has observed that "the question of who sees what is at the heart of detective fiction ... The detective is traditionally an 'eye' in a fiction about seeing" ("Feminist Detective Fiction" in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Suspense: The Thriller Comes of Age* [Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1990], p. 248).

the primary mechanism by which they apprehend the external universe and render it intelligible. There are innumerable references within Ellroy's texts to men interacting initially with their immediate environments by "eyeballing" them,[104] and his characters mentally process the scenes that they observe in a highly visual, almost cinematic way.[105] Dave Klein's recording of his impressions in an imagistic, cinematic manner is evidenced by his laconic description of the process of surveilling Glenda Bledsoe: "Doors open, flashbulbs popping: Rock Rockwell—tuxedo, bouquet. A jog to the courtyard, back with Glenda—nice—tight sweater dress ... Zoom—all three cars U-turned southbound" and so on (*White Jazz*, p. 64).

Bledsoe's uncognisance of her visual objectification confirms the importance of the gaze in this world's scopic economy by inversely revealing the position of the surveyed as a disempowered one. Lacking "visual control"[106] is equated with vulnerability and the loss

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104 Bucky Bleichert continually refers to "eyeballing" the diverse scenes he shifts through (see *The Black Dahlia*, p. 169: "'I eyeballed for Lee and didn't see him;'" "I eyeballed the street") while within *L.A. Confidential* "White eyeballed Vachss" (p. 452), "Bud eyeball-prowled, click/click/click" (p. 159).

105 Arguably this reflects the power of Hollywood to structure people's consciousnesses and ways of inhabiting the world; not only does its lexicon shape individual's vocabularies, so that Danny Upshaw gets a "mid-shot of hell" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 141), but his memories function in what he terms a series of "short takes": "Cy Vandrich vamping him. Breuning going strange over the zoot sticks, like one of them things was slashing at him. Niles and his two parolees" and so on (p. 287).

106 Peter Messent, "Introduction: From Private Eye to Police Procedural—The Logic of Contemporary Crime Fiction" in Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings*, p. 19n. Messent observes that "perceptual and verbal control run together in such American crime fictions to assert both individualism and autonomy" and cites Rosemary Jackson's argument that the "idea of the stable self" relates to the "seeing eye. Implicit in the ability to see clearly, and the sense of command that comes with the dominance of the eye over a perceptual field, is that sense of authority and comprehension associated with the sovereign subject. From such a perspective, "'I see" ... [is] synonymous with "I understand." Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the *look*, through the "*eye* " and the "*I* " of the human subject.' Accordingly, so Jackson suggests, a loss of the sense of visual control introduces a deep uncertainty concerning identity, the authority of the self, and the relation between self and world" (p. 5; original emphasis).

of autonomy on both a literal and a symbolic level,[107] being surveyed constitutes a shocking, dislocating experience for men accustomed to maintaining the privileged role of spectator. This is verified by the sequence where Ward Littell feels the eyes of men in a gay bar "strafe" him, suggesting the traumatic effect occasioned by the inversion of the customary alignment of the inspecting gaze with the hegemonic masculine subject. The position of surveyed is not only powerless but feminised, a conjunction symbolised by a sequence in which the LAPD hierarchy gathers expectantly to watch a pornographic film featuring the Elizabeth Short, the "Black Dahlia" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 179). The inherent power imbalance between the onscreen feminine presence and the men viewing it is compounded by the excruciating and embarrassing discomfort evinced by Short and her female co-star throughout their "performance."[108] This episode testifies to the voyeuristic delight that men derive from watching women, as does the fact that Dave Klein continues to surreptitiously surveil Glenda Bledsoe even after they become lovers and his contractual obligation to Howard Hughes dissolves (*White Jazz*, p. 266). Bledsoe's specularisation as an object for Klein's covert gaze reflects the dichotomous relationship of masculine spectator and feminine surveyed in this phallocentric society's scopic regime, where the "gaze" is polarised according to the "gendered division of masculine subject and feminine object"[109] which numerous critics have suggested

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107 Thus when Ward Littell is assaulted by fellow FBI agents, his "glasses fell off. Everything went claustrophobic and blurry" (*American Tabloid*, p. 344), a visual emasculation compounding the humiliation of his physical subjugation.

108 *The Black Dahlia*, p. 180: the screen "dissolved into Betty Short, wearing only stockings, doing an inept hoochie-coochie dance … Lorna buckled and rotated her hips, the screen went out of focus, then blipped to a close-up—Lorna writhing in phony ecstasy. Even a two-year-old could tell that she was contorting her face to hold back screams." That Lorna and Short performed in the film solely for monetary gain (p. 175) emphasises women's status as *literal* sexual commodities in this universe.

109 Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance* , p. 20.

characterises the field of specular relations both culturally and in terms of aesthetic representation.

Just as Mulvey noted that scopophilia, or "pleasure in looking,"[110] is traditionally "split between active/male and passive/female," with the masculine gaze positioned as voyeuristic, controlling and objectifying—and hence empowered[111]—so women, within Ellroy's textual landscape, are located as objects to be gazed upon, while men function as "controllers" of the visual realm.[112] The power differential in this society's "field of visibility" which associates "masculinity with the activity of looking and femininity with the subordinate, passive role of being looked at"[113] is exemplified at its most extreme by,

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110 Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the History of Sexuality* (trans. James Strachey; New York: Basic, 1962), p. 23.

111 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975; reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [Bloomington and Indianopolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989]), p. 25, 18, 19. It should be noted that many critics have challenged Mulvey's assumption that "the male spectator is almost always situated in an active, sadistic position and the female spectator in a passive, masochistic one" (Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* [London: Routledge, 1993], p. 7). Mulvey herself reformulated her original argument in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*" (1981; reprinted in Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*). For a synopsis of various theorists' critiques of Mulvey's argument, which combine to suggest that "there is often a more complex 'play' of gender roles in films and fantasies than can be accounted for by appealing either to a sadistic 'male gaze' or to a pre-oedipal masochistic merger," see Williams, *Hard Core: Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* pp. 204–7.

112 Some of the numerous examples within Ellroy's fiction of women being posited as receptacles for the male gaze include the sequence in which Buzz Meeks constructs his lover Audrey Anders as an object to be displayed and viewed ("Buzz figured that if he spent his gambling output on threads he wanted to see her in, he'd never be bored staying inside with her: he could take the clothes off, make love to her, watch her dress again" [*The Big Nowhere*, p. 261]); the episode where Bud White watches "his very own stag show. A Veronica Lake dead ringer, nude on her tiptoes: slender, full-breasted. Blond—hair in a perfect pageboy cut. A man moving inside her, straining, crouching for fit. Bud watched; street sounds faded. He blotted out the man, studied the woman: every inch of her body in every shade of light. He drove home tunnel-vision—nothing but her" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 204-6); and the introduction of Barb Jahelka into the narrative of *American Tabloid* in a sequence where she is shown dancing erotically and being "scoped" by a "horny geek" (*American Tabloid*, p. 455). The figuring of women as objects for the male gaze is also reflected in the occupations of the majority of female characters in Ellroy's texts—actresses, strippers, dancers, prostitutes—which in turn reveals their status as bodies that only "cohere and make sense" in sexualised terms within this economy.

113 Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," pp. 174-5.

again, the sequence in which Bucky Bleichert views Elizabeth Short's corpse (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 87). Bleichert's clinical, speculative assessment of her inert form strips her of meaningful subjectivity by emphasising her status as an object, and constitutes a visual dissection which reiterates her original vivisection at the hands of her murderer. The power imbalance subtending the specular field extends to incorporate homosexuals who, in accordance with their equation by the power structure with the feminine (suggested by their appellation as ""queens," "sissies," "twists" and so on) are similarly constructed as receptacles for the masculine gaze.[114]

The figuring of women and homosexuals as objects for the hegemonic gaze simultaneously symbolises their disenfranchisement and is the means by which this is actualised. Superimposing the motif of the "controlling male gaze"[115] over that of masculine "power," Ellroy's fiction clarifies how each trope informs, enables, and mutually sustains the other.[116] The power of the masculine gaze to "control" is suggested by its imaging within Ellroy's texts as an agonistic operative; competition between men is metaphorised as occurring on a visual plane, with men attempting to "evil eye" others in order to daunt them, "staring hot pokers" at their colleagues or conducting "eyeball

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114 Thus Upshaw spies on homosexuals at a gay escort agency (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 166); Jack Vincennes spies on gay lovers Billy Dieterling and Timmy Valburn—whose alignment with the "feminine" is encoded by his "prancing" demeanour (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 142)—and *White Jazz*'s Lester Lake describes visually scrutinising homosexual actor Rock Rockwell in order to copy his "'queer mannerisms'" (amusingly, so that he can delude his "ladyfriends'" into thinking he has "'queer tendencies, then they works that much harder to set me straight'") (*White Jazz*, p. 53).

115 Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 22.

116 The privileging of the masculine gaze and its status as a repository of and synecdoche for masculine power is suggested by the frequency of incidents in which men are immobilised or murdered by being stabbed or shot in the eyes (see eg *The Black Dahlia*, p. 354; *American Tabloid*, p. 105) and by Dave Klein's fear that he will be blinded during his beating at the hands of Pete Bondurant (*White Jazz*, p. 349).

duels" with other men.[117] It is also illustrated by analogous sequences in which Jack Vincennes and Dave Klein are represented as being intimidated by Ed Exley's "brutal" gaze (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 299, 301; *White Jazz*, p. 186). The implication that Exley is consciously attempting to establish authority over Vincennes and Klein on a visual level reveals the gaze as simultaneously a symbol of masculine power, and as the modality via which this power is deployed. In the sequence where Exley cows Klein, reference is made to Exley's "X-ray eyes" (p. 186), and he reproves Klein for attempting to camouflage his "'self-serving motives in respect for the Department. Given what you are, it's pitifully transparent'" (p. 186). The figurative rendering of Exley's power in metaphors of "transparency" and "X-ray" vision[118] locates him as capable of piercing oblique or opaque signifiers to decode an implicit "truth," and suggests another dimension to the specular function of the controlling masculine gaze: its probing or investigatory role.

Detectives like Exley "probe evidence" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 359) or—in an example revealing the continuity between the violence directed towards women and the violence inherent in prospecting the feminine "mystery"—describe themselves as "raping" crime scenes for data (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 339). They prospect the bodies of subaltern citizens through a range of technological instruments, including polygraphs and autopsy

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117 See *The Big Nowhere*, p. 284, 125, 206, and the sequence in *American Tabloid* in which Ward Littell and Robert Kennedy engage in a "silly staring contest" (p. 572).

118 Similarly, surveilling Lenny sands and ascertaining that he is gay, Pete Bondurant crows jubilantly: "Big Pete's got X-ray eyes. Big Pete's like Superman and the Green Hornet" (*American Tabloid*, p. 208), a tongue-in-cheek but nonetheless clear correlation of the masculine gaze with a "power" symbolised here by omnipotent cartoon heroes.

instruments, and conduct "research" into abjected groups to render them intelligible and comprehensible, in the same way that Mal Considine "researches" Claire De Haven by scanning microfilm, "bringing the woman into focus" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 148). Reflecting the fact that "the visual is epistemologically privileged in Western knowledge,"[119] the gaze also enables *insight* into the abject realm in the sense that "seeing" these liminal groups also translates into "knowing" them. This continuum between sight and knowledge is foregrounded in an exchange between Ward Littell and Lenny Sands, in which Littell declares, ""I *saw* you kill Iannone. I *know* why you were at Perry's Little Log Cabin, and *why* you frequent Hernando's Hideaway. I *know* you've got two lives and two voices and two sets of God knows what else"" (*American Tabloid*, p. 121; original emphasis). Littell's tacit construction of Sands as a "mystery" to be "decoded" implicit in the phrase "two sets of God knows what else" is premised on the reification of abject citizens as objects of knowledge in this universe. The importance of "knowing" or rendering them intelligible stems from the connection between knowledge and power in this realm, a condition neatly condensed in the dictum "'*les gens que l'on comprend—ce sont eux que l'on domine*'"—"'those we understand are those we control'"—recited by Kemper Boyd (*American Tabloid*, p. 277) and additionally illustrated by Hoover's comment that

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119 Maggie Humm, *Feminism and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 3. In Western culture, as Chris Jencks has observed, "looking, seeing and knowing" are intertwined; "the manner in which we have come to understand the concept of an 'idea' is deeply bound up with the issues of 'appearance', of picture, and of image ... we begin from visual forms and talk and theorise and achieve understanding of those forms through mental constructs" (Jencks, "The Centrality of the Eye in Western Culture: An Introduction," p. 2). See also Philippa Berry, "The Burning Glass: Paradoxes of Feminist Revelation in Speculum" in Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor and Margaret Whitford (eds), *Engaging With Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 231, on the "association between a privileged model of knowledge and notions of clear vision which subtends Western thought."

"'forewarned is forearmed: you have to know your enemy before you can combat him'" (p. 168).

The continuum of sight, knowledge and power in this universe is most evident in the characterisations of Hoover and Dudley Smith, men who constitute the acme of authority in their respective worlds. Smith's influence derives from and is indicated by his "diplomatic immunity" from prosecution for the numerous crimes, including murder, he commits, and by the fear that he inspires in others.[120] Hoover's omnipotence is such that he is described as "God" by Kemper Boyd (*American Tabloid*, p. 163). While Boyd uses the term flippantly, his appreciation of the authenticity of Hoover's "power" is revealed by his conception of the events surrounding Kennedy's assassination as the FBI director's personal "'chess game'" (p. 563). This metaphor emphasises a manipulative ability further textually designated by the capacity of Hoover and Smith to manouevre other men to do their bidding. Typically involving their mobilisation of others to collect information for them or to violate people on their behalf (see eg *L.A. Confidential*, p. 83; *American Tabloid*, p. 298, 317), this process stems from what is represented as their almost clairvoyant *insight* into these men, their ability to "see into" others, to comprehend and predict their behaviour. Both Hoover and Smith are represented as omniscient in the sense of being not merely "all-seeing" but also "all-knowing." Smith's claim that, as he tells Bud White, "'there is precious little I don't know'" (p. 400), is validated by White's

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120 Smith's "rank, juice and reputation" provide him with "diplomatic immunity" from the innumerable crimes he commits in the course of the "L.A. Quartet' (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 419). Buzz Meeks declares that being "'afraid of Dudley Smith means two things: that you're smart and you're sane'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 295); Lynn Bracken suggests that even the ferocious policeman Bud White is "'afraid'" of Smith (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 360).

belief that Smith's "insider juice" renders him almost "psychic" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 400). As White extrapolates:

> when Dudley Smith brought you along you belonged to him—and he was so much smarter than everyone else that you were never sure what he wanted from you or how he was using you ... it scared you to see how Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle gave the man their souls. Dudley could bend you, shape you, twist you, turn you, point you—and never make you feel like you were some dumb lump of clay. But he always let you know one thing: he knew you better than you knew yourself (p. 152).

Simultaneously confirming Smith's omniscience and encapsulating the hierarchical basis of intramale interaction enabling his Mephistophelean manipulation of other men, this passage is echoed in Ward Littell's declaration that "Mr. Hoover knew him—as no one else ever had or ever would" (*American Tabloid*, p. 551). The implication that both Smith and Hoover have access to, or the capacity to *penetrate* to, a "deeper" truth, to decode men's secrets, is reinforced by Smith's insight into Danny Upshaw, whom he certainly "knows better" than Upshaw knows himself—as his revelation of Upshaw's homosexuality, presaging Upshaw's admission of this, confirms (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 347).

Both Hoover and Smith are figured as omniscient in terms of being literally able to "see all," whether this is refracted through the men who literally function as their "eyes" within the society they police,[121] or whether through their own ability to survey—the

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121 See *White Jazz*, pp. 155-6, where Smith tells Klein that he knows that Welles Noonan spat in Klein's face and the latter says "'You've got good eyes out there, Dudley;'" "'Twenty-twenty vision, all my boys,'" responds Smith.

empowering capacity to scrutinise underscored by Hoover's virtual invisibility within *American Tabloid*, his status as a disembodied voice heard on the end of a telephone line or projected in "transcripts" of recorded conversations.[122] This is not the disempowered invisibility of the abject deliberately rendered "unseen" by the power matrix in an attempt to efface its existence; rather, it is a privileged capacity to evade the questioning gaze of other men which reflects the "narcissistic scenario of a phallocentric fantasy in which the omnipotent male gaze sees but is never seen."[123] It functions as a measure of both Hoover's power and the overarching power of the authoritative masculine gaze in this environment.[124]

The textual foregrounding of both Hoover's and Smith's omniscience ensures that these men are represented as embodying what could be called, following Foucault, the *panoptic gaze*.[125] Foucault's theory of panopticism derived from his reading of the "Panopticon" proposed by Jeremy Bentham as a mode of imprisonment characterised by the creation of a sense of omnipresent potential surveillance, in which an inmate would "never know whether he is being looked at any one moment" but would "be sure that he may always

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122 As Kirn notes, "Hoover is an omniscient *Übercreep*; all roads and phone lines lead back to his dark lair. Like most pulp Mr. Bigs, he seldom appears" (Walter Kirn, "Worst and Darkest" [review of *American Tabloid*] in *New York* [March 13, 1995], p. 64).

123 Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary," p. 174.

124 The correlation between "power" and the masculine gaze is confirmed by the fact that Smith's criminal activities are curtailed and he is effectively "contained"—as Ed Exley states, with a presumably conscious sense of irony—by being literally blinded (*White Jazz*, p. 344). It is not coincidental that both Smith and Hoover are explicitly labelled "voyeurs" (*White Jazz*, p. 307; *American Tabloid*, p. 444); rather, the association of both men with voyeurism is merely the logical extension of their positioning as personifications of the empowered masculine "gaze."

125 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan, 1975: reprint: New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 201.

be so."[126] Bentham contended that inmates' awareness that their activities within the parameters of the Panopticon might at any time be viewed by the authorities responsible for their imprisonment would create a disciplinary system in which there would be "no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself."[127] Extrapolating Bentham's vision of the "Panopticon" to describe the operation of disciplinary power in a post-nineteenth century context, Foucault described the function of the "panoptic modality of power" as increasing both "the docility and the utility of all the elements of the system."[128] Through creating the illusion of omnipresent surveillance the panoptic gaze marshalled by or embodied in empowered individuals and institutions fosters the construction of a domain of "docile" subjects who no longer need to be actively disciplined because merely the *potential* threat or possibility of discipline is enough to secure their compliance to existing systems of "law." In Ellroy's texts, the investment of authority in "docilising" its subjects is evidenced by the fact that Smith's scheme to "contain" African Americans is also described by him as an attempt to keep "'the nigger filth sedated,'" the latter term revealing Smith's project as an endeavour to constrain African Americans and render them quiescent, passive, incapable or undesirous of challenging the power structures in which they subsist or the authority of the police to "contain" their activities.

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126 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 201.

127 Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, p. 155.

Insofar as what Foucault labelled "panopticism" is both a preventative, proactive mechanism and a punitive measure, its additional affinities with Ellroy's model of how power is achieved and maintained in his postwar society are clear. J. Edgar Hoover embodies the panoptic gaze summarised by Taylor as the "disciplinary look scanning out to read and control the surfaces of the social order without itself appearing at the surface."[129] Like the projected overseers of the Panopticon, in subjecting both his subordinates and the broader social domain to a "field of visibility,"[130] Hoover possesses the capacity to order others' behaviour by instilling within them the sensation that they are always under surveillance. Ward Littell behaves as though Hoover is "'looking over [his] shoulder every second'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 100)—an impression legitimated by the fact that Hoover *is* actually engaged in surveilling Littell (p. 244). Littell's consciousness of Hoover's scrutiny reveals the efficacy of the panoptic gaze in constraining individual's behaviour. Its success in "docilising" abjected citizens and dictating the conduct of marginalised groups like Communists and homosexuals ensures that, although they are not passified to the extent of ceasing their "subversive" activities, these groups anticipate surveillance and incorporate the need to pre-empt invigilation into their modus operandi. The legally invalid, culturally vilified status of homosexuality prompts Lenny Sands to conceal his "secret homosexual life" (*American Tabloid*, p. 74) and precludes gay men from meeting openly. On one level these men's congregation in clandestine escort services and "beats" like Fern Dell Park (*White Jazz*, p. 65) could arguably be read as connoting

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128 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 218, 221.

129 Barry Taylor, "Criminal Suits: Style and Surveillance, Strategy and Tactics in Elmore Leonard" in Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings*), p. 29.

130 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 202.

defiance, a glimmering of resistance to their social abnegation. However, the paranoia evinced by a gay man who resists another man's attempts to pick him up—observing that "'you're big and brusque, but the last big brusque guy I said yes to turned out to be a Deputy Sheriff ... besides, I heard Administrative Vice has been operating Fern Dell'" (p. 65)—implies an *inurement* to harassment rather than a lamentation of this. It suggests that any "resistance" undertaken by homosexuals is compromised and limited and that, rather than challenging their oppression on a structural level, gay men simply factor their cognisance of being monitored into their behaviour and modify it accordingly.

That the Vice policeman "operating" Fern Dell Park is Junior Stemmons, himself a closeted homosexual, reveals the efficacy of the power matrix's program of docilisation; it is so successful in surveilling its abjects that it ensures that even those belonging to liminal subject-positions police their own "type." The troping of homosexuality in terms of typology reflects the positioning of the authoritative masculine gaze as a penetrative one that does not merely skim the surface of the observable world but seeks to actively *probe* it. The purpose of the detective's investigatory function is to enable the classification of abject subjects *as* "abject"; thus Mal Considine's research into Claire De Haven and other members of the pro-Communist United Actors, Extras and Stagehands (UAES) union is a means of obtaining "insight" into them, and he obtains a sense of them as "Deluded. Traitorous. Perverse" and dehumanisingly appellates them as "locusts" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 97). Considine's assumption of the capacity to classify the UAES reveals that one element of the detective's role is to label or categorise the

"noncompliant subjects" whom he has scrutinised. In this respect the "sex offender files" discovered by Upshaw are not merely mechanisms to decode whether or not men are straight (exemplars of authorised masculinity) or gay (deviants to be contained and policed), but also constitutes a means of classifying certain behaviours *as* homosexual ("if you parked on a Griffith Park roadway with a blue handkerchief tied to your radio aerial, you were a queer").[131] Echoing Foucault's famous formulation, the homosexual is constructed as a "species";[132] its codification in a "taxonomy of sexual types"[133] is exemplified by the way in which gay characters refer to themselves as constituting a "type" or a "kind."[134]

The requirement to classify marginal groups like homosexuals, to bring their "hidden" abjection into the sphere of visibility and make them "known," occasions the function of men like Felix Gordean, who is described as a "queer expert" and whose "expertise" is invested in identifying men as homosexuals (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 462, 265). It is Gordean's "'eye for weakness,'" as Dudley Smith describes it (p. 367) which enables him to identify

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131 This reflects Ebert's observation that within crime fiction "the detective's gaze is a powerful interpellating force, classifying, judging, and fixing subjects in place" (Ebert, *Detecting the Phallus*, p. 19).

132 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, p. 43.

133 Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p. 19. Ellroy's fiction also contains a taxonomy of racial types, with African Americans being designated "mulattos" and "High Yellows" in a reproduction of their classification during the era of slavery in accordance with the degree of "whiteness" inhering within them (*White Jazz*, p. 72, 75).

134 Hence the gay gangster Touch Vecchio says to Dave Klein, "'you know what I am, David ... It's the way our kind of people have to be to get along'" (*White Jazz*, p. 101). This also reveals the efficacy of the power regime's interpellative project; as Silverman has noted, "successful interpellation means taking as the reality of the self what is in fact a discursive construction ... claiming as an ontology what is only a point of address" (Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, p. 21). Individuals such as Vecchio have clearly interiorised homophobia and the logic of "othering" by which the male homosexual is configured in this society to the extent that they reproduce the classificatory terms deployed to effect their subjugation.

Danny Upshaw as gay, a metaphor reiterating the logic whereby sight and knowledge ramify into a continuum providing the conditions of possibility for Gordean's "expertise." The fear of the "world" knowing the "truth" of his sexuality, the prospect of his most intimate secrets and private "nightmares" (p. 203) being made public, catalyses Upshaw's suicide; the role played by Smith in effecting this reveals that the detective figure is not only responsible for the "specification"[135] of subordinate groups but for enforcing the process of disavowal that recognition of their abject status mandates. After the surveillance and classification of an abject individual has been accomplished, the project of disavowing or expelling them from the sphere of power occurs, either through blackmailing them with visual data, through threatening them with exposure via the detective's technological repertoire,[136] or through linguistically expelling them.

On the extremely infrequent occasions that they manage to secure entry into authoritative institutions, subaltern subjects are verbally denigrated on the basis of their heterogeneity;[137] the casualness with which hegemonic males debasingly appellate others highlights the acceptability of bigotry within this society and reveals the success of the process of naturalisation through which the insider sphere reifies its reactionary ideology

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135 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, p. 41 (original emphasis omitted).

136 Hence Ed Exley forces Ellis Loew to resign from office by threatening to make '"public"' a photograph of him '"sucking a male prostitute's dick"' (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 465), while it is Danny Upshaw's fear of the "machines that know. Drugs that don't let you lie. Polygraph needles fluttering off the paper every time they asked him why he cared so much about a string of queer fag homo fruit snuffs" which prompts his suicide (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 368).

137 Ellis Loew and Mickey Cohen are both labelled "kikes" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 68; *The Big Nowhere*, p. 60), a Jewish-derived Mafia associate, Sal Kabikoff, is called a '"bagel bender"' by a colleague (*American Tabloid*, p. 204), while Lenny Sands' friendship with Mafia leaders does not preclude them from denominating him as "Jewboy Lenny" (*American Tabloid*, p. 55).

as social practice. This normalisation of its prejudicial worldview is not restricted to the interpellation of "others" in injurious terms which dehumanise them and reduce them to the status of "objects." In a corollary confirming that interpellation itself is an act of violence, it also ramifies into a bigotry that expresses itself not simply through naming others hurtfully but through actually hurting those that are named. Incidences of annihilating violence against marginalised subjects occur with dizzying frequency in Ellroy's novels. While exhaustively cataloguing these would be redundant, representative examples include the serial rape-murders of women that occur in *L.A. Confidential* (p. 187, 261, 317) and *American Tabloid* (p. 539, 579), Bud White's devastating attack upon the homosexual pimp Dwight Gilette (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 192), the countless Cuban casualties in *American Tabloid* (p. 107, 396) and Bucky Bleichert's assaults upon African American men in *The Black Dahlia* (p. 301). The sheer volume of atrocities enacted upon subjects occupying the spectrum of subordination simultaneously testifies to their abject status in this society and is a means by which this status is reinforced and consolidated. Their treatment as "garbage" to be defiled and discarded reflects these groups' symbolisation of waste, effluvia, all that is excessive and hence must be "contained" by the members of the insider realm. It also reflects the fact that, just as Kristeva argued that the corpse is the "utmost of abjection" and that "the abject is the equivalent of death,"[138] so the ultimate *preferred* state for abjects in this universe is that of the corpse.

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138 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 3, 26. The corpse, says Kristeva, is "cesspool and death ... refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything" (p. 3; original emphasis).

The continuum whereby the investment of the oligarchic network in abjecting subordinated groups issues forth in the ultimate "docile" object, the corpse, is revealed in Ed Exley's almost incidental meditation upon Raymond Dieterling's "losses—once divorced, once widowered, his son Paul dead in an avalanche, his son Billy a homosexual" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 271-2). That Billy is gay is evidently a tragedy on a par with the fact that his brother is dead; and indeed the fact that Billy himself dies in the course of the novel (p. 440) simply extends this dynamic to its logical conclusion.

To consolidate and ensure its integrity the power matrix engages in a genocidal project to violently negate abjects from the public realm. Occasionally this is enacted by men like Dudley Smith who emblematise "power" in this sphere; as Buzz Meeks recounts, Smith was responsible for "brass-knuckling a nigger hophead half to death for drooling on a cashmere overcoat that Ben Siegel greased him with" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 183). This example literalises men's securing of the privileges attending their position as members of the power matrix (symbolised here by a gift bestowed upon a policeman by a gangster) through a methodology of violent oppression. While the oppressive strategy of the "ruling class" is occasionally conducted by men at its apex, it is more often actualised by agents of the elite like Klein and the other "unsung legbreakers of history" and "storm troopers" of the LAPD (*American Tabloid*, p. 5; *L.A. Confidential*, p. 434) who constitute Ellroy's primary characters. Violence is part of the job description for policemen required to consummate the racist agenda of their superiors; while LAPD Chief Parker tells his squadron to "'use all necessary force'" in apprehending the "'Negroes'" suspected of committing the "Nite Owl" murders, his "real message," as Bud White is aware, is to

"kill the niggers clean" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 113). Mirroring the commodification of the "detective" function, violence against the abject is also perpetrated by a class of "professional killers" whom the oligarchic "establishment" employs to enact its programmatic violence against those who threaten its internal cohesion. Men like Pete Bondurant and the "underbosses" of the Mafia[139] are employed as "hired thugs" who utilise violence to preserve the public reputations of men like Howard Hughes when these are endangered,[140] to enforce the "White Man's Rule of Order,"[141] and to vanquish challenges to the capitalist ideology which underpins and provides the conditions of possibility for the "ruling-class"'s power.[142]

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139 These are men like "Anthony 'Icepick Tony' Iannone, [who] is strongly believed to be responsible for the mutilation murders of no less than nine heavily indebted loanshark customers" (*American Tabloid*, p. 56), and Mickey Cohen's "goons armed with icepicks and saps and garottes and silencered heaters that could leave you dead in a crowd" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 418). Ernest Mandel has observed that the basis of organized crime in a capitalist ethos "leads to murder for business, to the business of murder as a pure source of profit, to, as it were, disembodied murder, to the doubly alienated murderer, the murderer without personal involvement or passion, the murderer for pure profit. ... The killer is a professional, an expert, a technician of crime" (Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 103). The literary and historical lineage of the professional killer would presumably include both individuals operating beyond the parameters of state-based "authority"—gangsters, bounty-hunters and other hired mercenaries—as well as those functioning within its jurisdiction (policemen, soldiers, "spies" of the 007 variety, and so on).

140 Thus Pete Bondurant brutally beats Sol Maltzmann, a political radical who obtains information about Hughes and Nixon's illegal financial activities (and who sees the dissemination of this information as recompense for his "soul-debilitating work" at *Hush-Hush* magazine), to prevent him from publicising his knowledge (*American Tabloid*, pp. 45-6).

141 Pete Bondurant beats a Cuban man who challenges what he explicitly calls "the White Man's Rule of Order" "half-dead" (*American Tabloid*, p. 125).

142 Both the glaringly inequitable power differential obtaining between the "ruling-class" and those it deauthorises, and its facilitation of this imbalance through a program of violent negation, is revealed by the subjugation of the Communist-affiliated UAES picketers by the "Teamster line" assembled to suppress their challenge to the capitalist power structure (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 77). The former comprises "old leftie types, stagehands past their prime, skinny Mexicans and a woman" (pp. 77-8); the latter features "Mickey Cohen goons, union muscle and hard boys hired out of the day labor joints downtown" (p. 77). These men's ability to subdue the UAES is taken for granted by Buzz Meeks, who thinks that "if push came to shove, no cameras around, the Teamsters would use their two-by-four's as battering rams and charge—brass knuckle work in close, blood, teeth and nose cartilage on the sidewalk, maybe a few ears ripped off of heads. Then vamoose before the lackluster LAPD Riot Squad made the scene. *Easy*" (p. 77; original emphasis). The reference to "cameras" restates the importance of maintaining control over a public "image"; the invocation of a "lackluster LAPD" reluctant to support left-wing political activity confirms the conservative ideology of this institution.

Violence against subaltern groups is also enacted by individuals outside the immediate "loop," and is either tacitly sanctioned by those within it[143] or explicitly approbated, as when Bondurant articulates his approval of a Cuban who killed a "*maricon*" (homosexual) who tried to "corrupt" him (*American Tabloid*, p. 19). One of the most horrific episodes of violence in Ellroy's oeuvre occurs at the expense of the union members (who are, perhaps inevitably, codified as "Communists") picketing Mickey Cohen's movie set. Cohen's "strongarm" man Chick Vecchio asks Dave Klein to recommend some strikebreakers who "'won't cost us an arm and a leg'" (*White Jazz*, p. 59). This somatic metaphor is an unfortunate one, as Klein discovers when he sees the men he recommends in action: "Goons hit the [picketers'] truck swinging—nail-studded Louisville Sluggers. ... The driver ran—a nail shot took his nose off. ... goons went in close—ribcage work. Fats Medina dragged a guy by the hair—his scalp came off" (pp. 65-6).

A violence out of all proportion to the "offence" committed, this brutality is neither random nor aberrant, but is merely one manifestation of the systematic program undertaken by the oligarchic power network to forestall any criticisms of this society's capitalist norms. The savagery with which this goal is realised reflects the fact that the loathing of subaltern groups is so intense that the project to negate the "other" ensues in an attempt to obliterate all traces of it. Hence Pete Bondurant "strafes" the bodies of some anonymous Cuban "spics" into "pulp" (*American Tabloid*, p. 190) and saws other

143 Hence Hoover ignores evidence of FBI-affiliated Ku Klux Klan members "castrating and lynching" African Americans and focuses instead on "KKK mail fraud minutiae" (*American Tabloid*, p. 240).

Cubans' bodies to pieces, reducing them to "bone fragments" (p. 488). This action constitutes Bondurant's attempt to preclude these bodies from being identified; his pragmatic approach to violating these men echoes the banality of Klein's exchange with Vecchio—the absurdity of the latter angling for a "discount" on violence—and reinforces both the utilitarian attitude towards violence which enables these men to become professional killers, and the widespread acceptability of violence towards abjected groups in this realm. The latter point is further attested to by the sequence in which Bud White, having located a serial killer responsible for murdering several prostitutes—Deuce Perkins, a member of a Mafia gang—realises that the other gangsters "didn't know [Perkins] beat hookers to death—they'd consider it amateur shit, wouldn't tolerate it" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 418). White's response—predicated on the assumption that the gangsters would find this violence problematic only insofar as it is *unprofessional*, rather than abhorrent—suggests that male violence towards women is so widespread as to be accepted as the norm.[144]

This in turn confirms that, irrespective of whether it is undertaken by officials operating in the name of authority, or by private citizens, the cumulative effect of violence against abjected groups is to "docilise" them by brutally reinstating their subordinate status and literalising their degradation in a concretely physical, harmful way. The efficacy of this

144 This point is consolidated by men's callous descriptions of the violence inflicted upon women, such as Dudley Smith's comment that a gangster "found a quail of his was distributing her favors elsewhere and stuck a .12 gauge up her love canal. It must have been messy, albeit quick'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 153); and the tasteless account of violence in a "transcription" of a *Hush-Hush* article detailing musician Spade Cooley's practice of beating his wife: '"Does Ella Mae Cooley have "Everlast" stamped across her chest? She should, because Spade's been bopping bluegrass ballads on her already dangerously dented decolletage!"' (*American Tabloid*, p. 142).

methodology is emblematised by the docilisation of men like African American singer Lester Lake, who is punished by movie producer Harry Cohn for seducing the latter's white girlfriend by having his vocal cords severed (*White Jazz*, p. 50) and who quiescently accepts his subordinate status by not only terminating the relationship but by subsequently restricting himself to liaisons with non-white women. It is also suggested by the fact that subordinate subjects in this realm interiorise their predefined function as passive recipients of violence. If the routinisation of male violence directed towards women is implied by the fact that J.C. Kafesjian beats up his wife and daughter "'like batting practice" (*White Jazz*, p. 137), then the fact that these women view their bruises and "black eyes" as "standard issue" signals their quiescent resignation to their fate. The atrocities perpetrated against women and other denizens of the abject realm again reinforce Ellroy's textual delineation of American postwar society as a landscape of "horror."

A crystallisation of Ellroy's representation of power relationships within his universe of "nightmares" occurs in the narrative in *White Jazz* surrounding the redevelopment of Chavez Ravine, a slum neighbourhood populated by Mexicans, to enable the construction of a new L.A. Dodgers ballpark. The textual introduction of this scenario coincides with Dave Klein's construction of this society's oligarchy as a "ruling-class" comprising "civilised white men" (*White Jazz*, p. 19). Symbolising the system of reciprocal (and unethical) favours buttressing this elite's hegemony, Klein is asked to sabotage the election campaign of Bob Gallaudet's opponent Morton Diskant, whose perceived political subversiveness (he is a "'civil liberties lawyer'" and Democrat) is intensified by

his opposition to the ballpark's construction.[145] Klein agrees to thwart Diskant's political aspirations on the grounds that "'we're all civilized white men who know the Dodgers are good for business'" (p. 19). Reinforcing the location of oppressed classes like Mexicans beyond the parameters of the insider sphere, Klein's use of the phrase "civilised white men" reasserts the dynamic of "othering" that provides the rationale for their exclusion from this realm. Emphasising their racial heterogeneity in a landscape of normative whiteness, his reification of Mexicans as "uncivilised" exemplifies the constitution of the "ruling class"'s collective identity through denigratingly interpellating alternate subject-positions. To safeguard the "business" of exploiting the urban underclass and to negate Diskant's challenge to the "right-wing establishment," Klein attempts to entrap Diskant with an underage prostitute and secure visual evidence with which to blackmail him (pp. 33-5). When this scheme goes mildly awry, Klein resorts to punitive violence to coerce Diskant into withdrawing from the election, exemplifying the tactical deployment of brutality to subdue intransigent subaltern groups (p. 36).

After Diskant is removed from public discourse, the sole protesters against the Chavez Ravine redevelopment are ineffectual "Commie types" (p. 131) and *Hush-Hush* magazine (p. 82), confirming that only marginal sources question the misinformation and propaganda disseminated by the "official" media and political establishment. In an

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145 Diskant believes that "'Gallaudet's stand on the Chavez Ravine issue is unconscionable. He wants to evict impoverished Latin Americans from their homes to procure space for an L.A. Dodgers ballpark, a frivolity I deem criminal'" (*White Jazz*, p. 4). As Klein summarises Diskant's argument in his inimitably cynical way, he is "riling the spooks up with Chavez Ravine, something like 'Vote for me so your Mexican brothers won't get evicted from their shantytown shacks to make room for a ruling-class ballpark'" (p. 19).

outcome both inscribing and textually revealing the power of the "ruling-class," the Mexicans are evicted despite the feeble protests mounted against this dispossession. The current of corruption underlying the surface of power in this universe is revealed when it transpires that Dudley Smith intends to relocate these Mexicans to apartments that he owns, covertly film them engaging in sex, and sell this as pornography.[146] The tropes of surveillance and boundary maintenance coalesce in his project to disenfranchise an ethnic minority: Smith's agenda is designed to garner him scopophilic pleasure and enable him to monitor the activities of abjected groups as part of what he calls his "'grand work of containment'" (p. 312). While Smith is unable to actualise his goals, the corruption he embodies is obfuscated by the media who, following Smith's blinding in an altercation with the psychopathic Wylie Bullock, publish an article mourning his loss to public duty and reinscribing his image as a "beloved" and "legendary policeman" (p. 344).

The whitewashing of Smith's image occurs concurrently with a glossing over of the racist ideology fostering the exploitation of the Mexican Chavez Ravine residents. Gallaudet declares that "'a home for the L.A. Dodgers will serve as a point of pride for Angelenos of all races, creeds and color'" (p. 33), his rhetoric of "equality" camouflaging the "reality" that these Mexicans are being dispossessed to protect the interests of a privileged cadre of "civilised white men." Gallaudet's blatant dissembling exemplifies

146 As Chick Vecchio tells Klein, "'And feature Dudley Liam Smith does not get his rocks off on girls, boys or Airedale terriers. Feature he likes to watch. ... Feature he's got this idea to film these on-the-sly smut movies where the fuckers and fuckees don't even know they're being watched. Feature he's got bids in with the Bureau of Land and Way to house the spics evicted from Chavez Ravine in [apartments that he owns]. Feature Dudley's going to film all these taco benders fucking and sell the movies to geeks like himself who dig all that voyeuristic horseshit'" (*White Jazz*, p. 307).

this "ruling class"'s maintenance of its hegemony through its ability to mobilise a particular myth of its society which—like the "vision of L.A. as a place of enchantment" promulgated by Dieterling and Exley—conceals the fact that the majority of individuals within this world are prohibited from accessing it.[147] Gallaudet's effacement of the grim reality of these Mexican's "everyday lives," and superimposition over this of the myth of "equality," confirms that the oligarchic elite's hegemony derives from its capacity to mystify its own role in the oppression of abjected groups, as well as its power to normalise this oppression and encourage its acceptance as "inevitable." The "official" narrative of American postwar history becomes one in which all Americans have access to a potentially "high-quality everyday life" and the corruption of those who obtain positions of power in this society is substituted by narratives in which they, like Dudley Smith, figure as heroic.

Just as Ed Exley has access to information that would challenge the "official" account of his father, Klein has access to the "reality" underlying the "official" narrative of Chavez Ravine, but fails to utilise this to challenge the injustice of these Mexicans' dispossession. Instead, Klein denigrates this group as " uncivilised," his terminology confirming that he is produced as a viable subject (a "civilised white man") through the discourse of abjection sustaining this society, and that through reproducing its self/other dichotomies he is also an agent in its perpetuation. In this respect, the narrative surrounding Chavez

147 This is mirrored in *The Big Nowhere* when an anti-Communist zealot (and "expert") makes the audacious assertion that African Americans are capable of participating in this ostensibly "democratic" society as fully realised subjects—a contention negated by the fact that they are not entitled even to vote—by describing as "'seditious'" portrayals of "'this democracy as a land of lynched Negroes and limited opportunities for coloreds'" (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 61-2).

Ravine provides an entry point into the second element of Ellroy's texts that I wish to discuss: the way in which Ellroy's protagonists articulate their own agency, construct themselves as viable subjects in the context of the authoritative structures in which they are embedded, and negotiate the perilous terrain of the insider "game."

Part Two: Staging Masculinity: Ellroy's Theatre of Cruelty

> The unresolved question that underlies the soldier male's impotent attempts to gain mastery over objects by tearing them apart, and thus rendering them knowable, seems to be that of the construction of his own self—a question which acquires tremendous explosive force in a body never rendered capable of experiencing itself in relation to other bodies.
>
> Klaus Theweleit[1]

> For a man to feel in his fists his will to self-affirmation is enough to reassure him of his sovereignty.
>
> Simone de Beauvoir[2]

When Dave Klein, categorising himself as a member of a cadre of "'civilized white men,'" agrees to disrupt liberal politician Morton Diskant's election campaign (*White Jazz*, p. 19), he simultaneously asserts his status as a viable subject in the realm of power and embraces his function as a nodal point in whom various vectors of corruption in this sphere, for which he performs specific "favours" like this, collide. Klein views the "favours" he enacts for Mafia leaders and representatives of police and juridical authority as an intrinsic component of what he labels the "game" (p. 39); his co-operation in

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1 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume Two: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (trans. Chris Turner and Erica Carter with Stephen Conway; 1978: reprint: Cambridge: Polity, 1989), pp. 23-4.

2 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (trans. H.M. Parshley; 1949; reprint: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 354.

performing them signals his self-positioning as a "player" in the "game" and, by extension, his endorsement of its constitutive behavioural codes and ideologies. While Klein's construction of the services he renders for authoritative figures in the context of this "game" as "favours" implies that he voluntarily executes these, they are not conducted volitionally but are *coerced*; Klein's acquiescence to other men's edicts is catalysed by their references (oblique or overt) to the disastrous repercussions that would ensue if he disobeyed their commands.[3] An exemplar of authority and an "authorised" subject in the dialectic of abjection and viability structuring this world, Klein's capacity to obtain meaningful subjectivity is circumscribed by his subjection to authority. His work as an operative for this society's "power matrix"—an "Enforcer" of its dictates, as his insider sobriquet confirms (p. 26)—requires him to neutralise men like Diskant who threaten its hegemony; yet Klein is constrained by precisely those laws of abjection enabling his "viability." When he is subpoenaed as a witness for an investigation into organised crime, his Mafia associates swiftly deem him expendable and issue a "contract" on him (p. 336). The dissipation of his privileged status as a sanctioned subject is forcibly illustrated by the excruciating beating he endures at the behest of Howard Hughes as retribution for Klein's seduction of Hughes' ex-lover, Glenda Bledsoe. Bledsoe (pp. 348-9).

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3 While Exley secures Klein's compliance with his wishes by indirectly threatening to expose Klein's criminal connections (*White Jazz*, p. 21), Mafia boss Jack Dragna is more brazenly coercive, ordering Klein to cut singer Lester Lake's vocal cords "'or I'll nail you for [murdering] Trombino and Brancato. I'll drag your whore sister's name through the mud'" (p. 50).

This devastating assault is perpetrated by Klein's erstwhile colleague, Pete Bondurant, whose acceptance of Hughes' commands to beat Klein indicates his resignation to the logic of "the game" and clarifies that his behaviour is also compelled by the desires of men to whom he is subordinated. Bondurant conceptualises himself not as a free agent but as "owned" by Hughes;[4] his consciousness of the web of hierarchically organised relationships in which he is enmeshed, and by which his conduct is shaped and curtailed, leads him to declare "he always sucked up to men with REAL power" and "never broke the rules they set" (*American Tabloid*, p. 496; original emphasis). Reflecting this capitalist society's instrumentalising ethos, men's viability in the insider sphere is contingent on their utility to empowered men. Underlings lacking "real" power, Ellroy's protagonists strive for the proximity to authority which will render them—like Ward Littell after he "hitched his star" to "powerful" Mafia leaders (*American Tabloid*, p. 420, 417)—"untouchable," subjects who cannot be violated without fear of reprisal.[5] The rapidity with which the privilege of inviolability accorded to Klein is revoked underscores the constraints that Ellroy's agents operate under and the transience of "power" in their world. While a Mafia affiliate declares that "'once you're in the loop you're in the

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4 In an early exchange in *American Tabloid*, Hughes says to Bondurant, "'you're a very cruel man,'" to which he responds, "'No, I'm *your* very cruel man'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 11; original emphasis).

5 This inviolability—or "diplomatic immunity" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 419)—is both a measure and a condition of the "power" of men like Dudley Smith; when Ed Exley proposes killing Smith to avenge his role in the "Nite Owl" murders, Bob Gallaudet responds, "kill yourself instead, that's what you'd be doing" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 463). Similarly, the associations of *White Jazz*'s Chick Vecchio and *American Tabloid*'s Lenny Sands with the Mafia provide them—at least in theory—with "immunity." When Klein and Bondurant abduct Vecchio and torture him for information, he reminds them of the penalties that their conduct will incur because of his status as a "'made guy'"—"'you are both dead for this'" (*White Jazz*, p. 270). W hen Sands offends Frank Sinatra, he is protected from reprisal because, as Bondurant notes, "Lenny's with the Outfit. Lenny's not a guy you rough up for sport" (*American Tabloid*, p. 145).

loop'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 238), Klein's fate reveals otherwise.[6] Even when men ascend to positions of evident invulnerability in the "loop," their actions continue to be determined by the mandates of men with authentic, rather than conditional, authority. Littell receives an object-lesson in the ephemerality of power when the Mafia discovers his theft of documents incriminating politicians, businessmen and gangsters in the abuse of the Teamster's Pension Fund, and utilises its resources of violence to punish him by co-opting him (literally at gun-point) into their scheme to "'sell [Howard Hughes] Las Vegas and keester him for most of his profits'" (p. 567).

The Mafia's awareness of Littell's theft reinforces its status as an omniscient authority capable of detecting all breaches of its "rules" and reveals that the panoptic modality of power embodied by the organisation is channeled within the insider world of Ellroy's texts. The authoritative gaze which typically functions to ensure the docility of abjected citizens, also enables scrutiny of subjects within the "loop," permitting men at its acme to identify those contravening its internal laws or threatening to disrupt the flow of "business." Once located as disturbing this sphere's internal "security," transgressors are disavowed: consigned to the realm of the "abject," delegitimised and exiled or reduced to the ultimate abjected state of a corpse. Occasionally effected in a merely humiliating fashion,[7] the procedure of abjection is often conducted with spectacular brutality, with

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6 The fate of the man who made this utterance, Sid Kabikoff, itself underscores the provisional nature of membership of "the loop"; he is brutally tortured and killed by his Mob colleagues for breaching their "code of silence" and attempting to entrap them into divulging information about the Teamster's Pension Fund: "They left Sid in an overflowing bathtub. They tossed a plugged-in TV set on top of him. The water was still bubbling. Electric shock had burned Kabikoff bald" (*American Tabloid*, p. 239).

7 Thus when Hoover fires Littell from the FBI he compounds this mortification by literally depositing him in a gutter in a slum neighbourhood (*American Tabloid*, p. 344).

the corrosive violence unleashed upon those abjects who threaten the normative white heterosexuality of the "loop" also inflicted upon individuals within its inner circles.[8] Kemper Boyd discovers this after he and Bondurant steal heroin from their Mafia associates and he is abducted and apprised of the fate of those whom the Mafia suspects of complicity in the crime:

> A hand held up Polaroid snapshots glued to cardboard. [Kemper] saw Teo Paez, gutted and quartered. He saw Fulo Machado, shivved through the eyes. ... The hand swiveled his neck. ... He saw Nestor Chasco—nailed to the far wall with icepicks through his palms and ankles. Kemper shut his eyes. A hand slapped him. ... Kemper opened his eyes. Hands slid his chair around 360. They had Pete chained down. They had him double-cuffed and shackled to a chair (*American Tabloid*, p. 541).

Reflecting Boyd's status as a "subject' in this milieu, he retains the empowered position of a spectator viewing the aftermath of catastrophic harm inflicted on others—men who, as Cubans, are *literally* "others" in this society's discourse of abjection—from which he is personally exempt. It is worth noting that when Boyd's death is dictated by the Mafia, they do not require the enactment of these baroque tortures upon a fellow "civilised white man," but allow him to be merely shot (p. 581). Yet Boyd's vulnerability, his helpless subordination to men with "real" power—emphasised by the construction of the

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8 Jimmy Hoffa is depicted viciously murdering a man who dispensed information on Hoffa's illegal financial activities to Robert Kennedy's Teamster inquiry (*American Tabloid*, p. 67), while Mickey Cohen inflicts savage penalties upon other gangsters who "cross" him. As Buzz Meeks recounts, Cohen "found the trigger who bumped Hooky Rothman, gave him two hollow points in the kneecaps, an evening of agony with a Fritz Kupferman coup de grace: an icepick in the ear" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 257).

sequence in the passive tense and the aura of dread created by the invocation of a monolithic, sinister "They"[9]—is dramatically demonstrated by his enforced occupation of the disempowered role of object of one mode of violence (being slapped) and potential object of even more horrific savagery.

The threat underlying the Mafia's positioning of Boyd as witness to the extraordinary carnage it can inflict reflects the dual function of panopticism in this realm. Inescapable reminders of the power matrix's ability to detect and extirpate those failing to adhere to its system of "rules" segue into, and necessitate, its second dimensionality, whereby individuals subject to its authority interiorise the threat of prospective discipline and conduct themselves within parameters defined by this potentiality. The ease with which affirmations of hegemonic identity are abrogated—exemplified by the swiftness of Boyd's and Klein's falls from grace—reveals the precariousness of the terrain in which Ellroy's protagonists negotiate issues of subjectivity and identity. Given the gruesome consequences of defying men with "real" authority, it is unsurprising that these men accept their location as functionaries and either construct themselves as "owned" by empowered men[10] or voluntarily operate as their lackeys.[11] The phantasm of a potential,

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9 Boyd's allusion to this anonymous "They" is reminiscent of the sequence in which Dave Klein is kidnapped, drugged, tortured with dry ice and goaded into murdering another policeman, Johnny Duhamel (*White Jazz*, p. 204). Klein dissociates himself from the act, claiming that he "didn't like" killing Duhamel and attributing his "coerced" performance of the murder to the machinations of an unnknown, ominous "They" (p. 221). It transpires that Dudley Smith orchestrated the incident—a point reiterating the extent to which Klein's behaviour is *literally* compelled by men with greater "power" than himself.

10 Pete Bondurant not only sees himself as Howard Hughes' "man" but also describes Ward Littell as "Carlos Marcello's boy" (*American Tabloid*, p. 417)—an interesting choice of words with possible homoerotic undertones reflecting this worlds' foundation in what I will argue is a subtextual sexualisation of interactions between men. Like Bondurant, Buzz Meeks and Bucky Bleichert see themselves as "owned" by other men or organisations; Meeks is "a cop again, bought and paid for" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 181) and Bleichert refers to "the bureaucracy that owned me" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 237).

violent discipline enacted by "powerful men," the omnipresent possibility of abjection from the insider sphere, induces Ellroy's protagonists either to adhere to the tacit "rules" of the "game" or fatalistically accept the outcome of any failure to do so as consonant with their world's prevailing "'live by the sword, die by the sword'" ethos (*White Jazz*, p. 45).

Their capitulation to this logic is exemplified by their frequent iteration of the pragmatic imperative governing Ellroy's textual universe, the dictum that "business is business"[12] which Dave Klein recirculates after discovering that his associate Reuben Ruiz has been retained to encourage fellow Mexicans to evacuate Chavez Ravine (p. 83). Remarking (approvingly) that "'I always figured you knew how to play ... business is business, so you fuck your own people to get [ahead]'" (p. 140), Klein's ascription of cynically self-interested behaviour to Ruiz reflects the fact that the extraordinarily high stakes of the "game," and the difficulty of surviving within its crudely Darwinian parameters, result in the insider sphere's configuration as a realm of relentless competition and self-aggrandising "one-upmanship." That Klein conceptualises this process in aggressively sexual terms, accusing Ruiz of "fucking" fellow Mexicans, dovetails with

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11 This typically occurs in respect of the complex system of reciprocal favours constituting the "game." Examples include Jack Vincennes surveilling Bud White as a "favor" for Dudley Smith (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 195), and Kemper Boyd "pimping" for his hero John F. Kennedy (*American Tabloid*, p. 215). Dudley Smith's power is exemplified by his capacity to accrue minions like the robotic Mike Breuning and Dick Carlisle, whose philosophy is "'Dud says we do it, we do it'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 159).

12 Bondurant and Littell agree to extort Lenny Sands despite the fact that they "like" him because "'business is business'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 443), while Boyd, contemplating the possibility that Bondurant has "double-crossed" him, thinks "Pete would do it. Pete wouldn't do it. Pete was his longtime partner, which constituted proof of—Nothing. Business was business" (p. 506).

Kirn's description of Ellroy's narrative universe as a "rape-ocracy":

> instead of good guys and bad guys, there are the violated and the violators. Business screws labor screws government screws the mob, and the only action that really counts is male on male. ... Vicious reamings make the world go round, be they financial, sexual, or political, and every man gets his turn on the bottom.[13]

Failing to question the homophobic logic informing this textual vision (and underpinning his synopsis of it), Klein's conceptualisation of the "game" in sexual/homoerotic metaphors nonetheless summarises its operative dynamic, in which men compulsively endeavour to "keester" others in the way that the Mafia plans to extort Hughes. The latter term, a slang phrase for anal rape, encapsulates the ruthlessly agonistic nature of the insider world, which is structured along axes of intramale contention and in which conflict between men occurs on both organisational and interpersonal levels; hence Dudley Smith and Ed Exley endure a bitter personal rivalry while simultaneously

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13 Walter Kirn, "Worst and Darkest" (review of *American Tabloid*) in *New York* (March 13, 1995), p. 64. Kirn's implicit, homophobic reinscription of clichéd conceptions of intramale sex as divisible into stereotyped roles of "tops" and "bottoms" is compounded by his tacit denigration of the latter role, a devaluation of imputed homosexual receptivity mirrored in Ellroy's texts. A vivid, pictorial rendition of Kirn's "rape-ocracy" in action occurs in *The Big Nowhere* via the depiction of a cartoon that symbolises the interimplicated corruption of Mickey Cohen and the L.A. Sheriff's Department and shows "Cohen, fangs, skullcap and a giant hard-on, pouring it up the ass of a guy in LASD uniform. The deputy's pockets were spilling greenbacks; Cohen's speech balloon said, 'Smile, sweetie! Mickey C. gives it kosher!'" (p. 301). Kirn's view of Ellroy's textual world has consonances with Guy Hocquenghem' conceptualisation of contemporary society as characterised by the intense "competition between males, between phallus bearers. ... individuals created by the rule of the bourgeoisie believe that everything revolves around the possession of the phallus, the seizure of other people's phalluses or the fear of losing one's own." In the "pitiless rule of the competitive hierarchy," Hocquenghem contends, "you build better by castrating others; you can only ascend to genitality by trampling over other phallus bearers on the way. You are a phallus bearer only if you are recognised as such by others" (Guy Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire* [trans. Danielle Dangoor; 1972; reprint: London: Allison and Busby, 1978], p. 89).

competing professionally over the position of LAPD Chief of Detectives (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 272-3). Reflecting Reynaud's suggestion that "relations between men centre around the struggle for power ... it does not generally occur to man that he can establish non-competitive relationships; he constantly needs to measure himself and place himself on a hierarchical ladder,"[14] competition between men is an inescapable element of everyday existence in Ellroy's textual landscape. It manifests itself both subconsciously—as when Jack Vincennes reflexively assesses another man's handshake (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 373)—and overtly, so that an Italian American Mafioso childishly declares that "'the Irish ain't hung for shit'" and one of his colleagues responds by asserting that "'Italian men have the biggest'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 481).[15]

The latter example encodes a rivalry between men within the sexual arena that extends to a rhetorical sexualisation of the competition *between* men. In the violently anti-erotic yet heavily sexual lexicon of the insider realm, the term "hard-on" denotes a determination to extract revenge on an adversary (*White Jazz*, p. 304) while the use of "'keester'" as a

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14 Emmanuel Reynaud, *Holy Virility: The Social Construction of Masculinity* (trans. Ros Schwartz; 1981; reprint: London: Pluto, 1983), p. 38.

15 In other instances of intramale competition, Bucky Bleichert—conscious of departmental speculation as to who would emerge victorious from a boxing match between himself and the LAPD's other former professional fighter, Lee Blanchard—continually "measures" and appraises Blanchard (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 10), while Mal Considine and Buzz Meeks share a historical enmity precipitated by the latter's affair with Considine's ex-wife (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 28). The interaction between Considine and Meeks sees them exchanging barbed wisecracks—"Considine said, 'Nice tie, Meeks. Who'd you roll for it?' Buzz laughed. 'How's the ex, Lieutenant? She still wearin' crotchless panties?'" (p. 108)—which imply a tongue-in-cheek dimension to the ongoing male competition in this world, a sense of the ridiculous aspects of men's continual efforts to prove their "toughness." This impression is also conveyed by an altercation between Dave Klein and one of Howard Hughes' henchmen, Harold Miciak, who asks Klein, "'where'd you get that scar, hotshot?' 'A Jap sword.' 'What happened to the Jap?' 'I stuck the sword up his ass'" (*White Jazz*, p. 100). Klein's provocative response to Miciak simultaneously reinforces and undermines "macho" behaviour, suggesting that for some men, at least, the omnipresent male one-upmanship in this world is not to be taken entirely seriously.

euphemism figuring a symbolic as opposed to actual "rape" is merely one of the innumerable, colourful colloquialisms employed to describe the competitive process and other exchanges of power between men. To be hurt or humiliated by a rival is to be "fucked,"[16] while exploitation by others is imaged in terms of painful, nonvolitional anal penetration.[17] This troping of masculine antagonism in terms of intramale sexual interaction recurs throughout the discourse of power, informing Jimmy Hoffa's claim that Robert Kennedy "'thinks I'm gonna bend over and take it in the keester like some goddamn homosexual queer'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 17). Reinscribing stereotypes of homosexual submissiveness, Hoffa's invective is premised on a codified horror of the possibility of anal penetration which surfaces repeatedly throughout the vernacular of authority.[18] That power relations within the insider sphere are figuratively centred upon an anal region described via negative, homophobic terminology signifies a fear of male anal eroticism revealing this universe's status as a regime of "compulsory heterosexuality"[19] in which the only meaning available for anal sexuality is derogatory. Homosexuality is acknowledged only to be ironised or disavowed; when Carlos Marcello

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16 Thus Ward Littell's Mafia informant, "Mad" Sal D'Onofrio rails to Littell that "'you're fucking me so hard it hurts'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 177), while Littell reminds himself that "J. Edgar Hoover fucked you—you fucked him and he fucked you back" (p. 358), and another Mafia member refers to the Kennedys as continually "'fucking us and fucking us and fucking us'" (p. 517).

17 Hence Sal D'Onofrio says that he has "'taken it up the dirt road'" from Ward Littell (*American Tabloid*, p. 177), while Jimmy Hoffa accuses "'every shithead prosecutor in creation'" of wanting to "'go the rump route'" with him (p. 225) and a Mafia leader proclaims that Fidel Castro "'took our money and fucked us up the brown trail until we bled'" (p. 188).

18 This fear manifests itself in a Mafia leader's assertion, after Fidel Castro nationalises all Cuban "Outfit"-owned casinos, that "'it's like Castro just shoved an atom bomb up the ass of every made guy in America'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 144).

19 The phrase "compulsory heterosexuality," originated by Adrienne Rich, was first used in her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (reprinted in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* [1983; reprint: London: Virago, 1984]).

asks Bondurant and Littell (albeit with conscious sarcasm) if they are "'faggots'" (p. 383)[20] his use of an injurious term to label homosexuals assumes the a priori unacceptability of this sexuality and precludes any affirmative response. Bondurant's flippant enunciation of his approbation of John F. Kennedy in homoerotic terms—"I've got a big hard-on just thinking about his hair" (p. 339)—is so implicitly absurd as to negate the possibility of actualised homosexual desire as firmly as more overt cultural proscriptions on "faggots."

The chronic denigration of homosexuality by hegemonic masculine subjects reflects the homosexual male's occupation of the pinnacle of this society's gradation of marginality. Stringently displaced by men both within and outside the "loop," homosexuality is seen as synonymous with pathology and insanity,[21] a "perversion" abhorred to the extent that Lenny Sands kills another man to prevent the public revelation of his homosexuality (*American Tabloid*, p. 105), while the adolescents indicted for the "Nite Owl" slayings would prefer to be prosecuted as rapists than branded "sissies" or

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20 The context in which this remark occurs reinforces Ellroy's representation of the subliminal sexual tension informing male rivalry. Bondurant and Littell are long-standing enemies who have been brought together by Marcello to facilitate a "business" transaction, and Marcello's comment is provoked by Bondurant's attempt to assert authority over Littell: "Pete winked. Littell winked back. His whole face contorted. Pete cracked his knuckles—his old intimidation trademark. Marcello said, 'What are you, faggots, winking at each other?'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 383).

21 Thus after Junior Stemmons, whom Dave Klein has discovered is gay, is murdered, Ed Exley refers to Stemmons as a "'pervert'" (*White Jazz*, p. 193), while the "gist" of the "Bible readings" for Stemmons' funeral is that of "mercy for the sick and insane" (p. 244), thus consolidating the conflation of homosexuality and insanity previously implicit in Klein's references to Stemmons as a "psycho" (p. 118). Interestingly, while male homosexuality is actively denounced in this world, lesbian subjectivity is largely effaced and ignored. When it surfaces within Ellroy's texts it is either accepted by hegemonic males because it is effectively a surrogate masculinity—as exemplified by *L.A. Confidential*'s "bull dyke" Dot Rothstein (p. 37), who actively participates in beating police interrogees (p. 325)—or viewed indulgently as a form of sexual exoticism capable of arousing men (so that *The Black Dahlia*'s Bucky Bleichert tolerates his lover Madeleine Sprague's bisexuality because it fuels his sexual fantasies, enabling him to obtain erotic gratification by picturing her making love with Elizabeth Short, the "Black Dahlia," on whom he is sexually fixated [*The Black Dahlia*, p. 168]).

"queers."[22] This linguistic deprecation of homosexuals delimits and conditions heterosexual identities by recycling and rearticulating homosexual phantasms, erecting and sustaining a heterosexual hegemony[23] through the compulsive invocation of its "other," the "deviance" to its "norm." The homosexual male's overdetermined role as a scapegoat for masculine anxiety is engendered by the configuration of Ellroy's narrative universe into the dichotomous domains of the hegemonic matrix in which his protagonists operate, and the sphere of devalued individuals upon whose rigorously enforced abjection the former realm's privilege is predicated. In mapping these mutually exclusive, yet mutually sustaining and enabling, spheres, Ellroy represents the insider sphere as a solely masculine realm—the world of "male on male action" identified by Kim—and its abject inverse as "feminine." Inhabitants of the latter domain are either women, male subjects deemed "effeminate" (including homosexuals), or groups that—like African Americans, who are routinely infantilised and imaged as resigned to their subordinate status in this society[24]—are constructed as "passive" and hence consigned to

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22 See Ed Exley's interrogation of the "Nite Owl" suspects (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 120-132). The vehemently expressed reluctance of these African American youths to be identified as homosexuals, the hatred and disdain they manifest for homosexuals, reiterates the logic of "othering" in this world and confirms that even within the realm of the subaltern hierarchies of abjection exist.

23 It should be noted that reifying a monolithic and totalised interpretation of "heterosexuality" underestimates the multiple avenues through which privilege may be asserted and maintained; the "heterosexuality" discussed here is thus only the very specific version produced and represented in Ellroy's narrative universe.

24 For example, African American singer Lester Lake passively accepts the racism of police officers like Dudley Smith and the fact that he cannot "'change the world'" that permits such bigotry (*White Jazz*, p. 137). Indeed, Lake relies on Klein to extricate him from situations in which the prejudice he endures as an African American is manifested in a physically brutal way (p. 158). Similarly, in *American Tabloid* African Americans are represented as incapable of defending themselves against the racist aggressors who firebomb their churches and "Freedom Rider" buses (*American Tabloid*, p. 432, p. 530) but appeal to Kemper Boyd for "'protection'" from these elements (p. 433). Boyd's condescending interest in these subjugated people stems, as Pete Bondurant observes, from his self-conceptualisation as their "'Big White Bwana'" or "'southern aristocrat savior'" (p. 427), a role that implicitly constructs them as "children" who require the guardianship of a patriarchal protector (see footnote 10, Introduction)..

a "feminine" role.[25]

The masculinisation of the world of male entitlement comprising the "ruling-class" and its adjutants is evidenced by its exclusively homosocial nature: its basis in intramale interaction and the structural absence of all women and "feminised" men from the public institutions. The power matrix's predication on the physical "elimination" of women[26] is entrenched by their absence from the private existences of men at its acme; that avatars of "authority" like Hoover and Dudley Smith are associated with celibacy[27] suggests that freedom from libidinal involvement with women (or in the case of the closeted Hoover, "feminised" men) is a necessary condition of power in this universe. The function of celibacy as a route to "power" provokes Mal Considine to abjure sexual entanglements

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25 To summarise points made in Part One of my thesis, the equation of femininity with passivity in this universe is evinced through the construction of the specular field in these terms (so that women and other denizens of the abject realm are "passive" receptacles of a masculine gaze), the reification of a binarism whereby men perpetrate violence and feminised subjects function as objects of aggressive male urges, and the gendered alignment of "masculinity" with the active role of prospecting and probing a feminine "mystery."

26 This phrase is used by Susan Jeffords in *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989b), p. xiii. The *literal* physical elimination of women from the homosocial sphere is a recurrent motif in Ellroy's texts, in which the love interests of his protagonists invariably die—as when Ed Exley's lover Inez Soto commits suicide (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 475)—or are consciously, albeit reluctantly, repudiated by these men, as when Kemper Boyd "chooses" John F. Kennedy over Laura Hughes (*American Tabloid*, p. 348) or when both Buzz Meeks and Dave Klein, fleeing L.A., deliberately abandon their lovers (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 470-1 and *White Jazz*, p. 354). Arguably this reflects what Dennis Porter has identified as a convention wherein hard-boiled texts typically end with "'the rejection of the woman and the retreat from intimate personal relations'" (Dennis Porter quoted in Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Chandler Comes to Harlem: Racial Politics in the Thrillers of Chester Himes" in Barbara A. Rader and Howard G. Zettler (eds), *The Sleuth and the Scholar: Origins, Evolution, and Current Trends in Detective Fiction* [New York: Greenwood, 1988], p. 26).

27 Smith, despite the active heterosexual credentials that a wife and five daughters (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 230) evidently impart to him, is coded as celibate by virtue of the fact that he "'does not get his rocks off on girls, boys or Airedale terriers'" but is aroused only scopophilically (*White Jazz*, p. 307); while Hoover's homosexuality is "sublimated" (as Kemper Boyd declares, Hoover "'only fucked power'" [*American Tabloid*, p. 27]) and similarly transferred into an erotic practice of voyeurism. Walter Kirn suggests that Hoover's example reveals that "the best way to dominate the rape game is by settling into sicko-celibacy" (Kirn, "Worst and Darkest," p. 64).

with women because these might prevent him obtaining custody of his adoptive son (and thereby jeopardise his securing of patriarchal privilege) (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 226). Considine's declaration that he loves his son "more than he could ever love" his estranged wife (p. 71) confirms that men's primary emotional connections are forged with other men, not women, thereby consolidating the latter's extraneousness in the world of "male action."[28] Given the enforced absence of women from this realm, it is entirely comprehensible that bonds between men, whether obtaining a negative or positive valence, are substantially responsible for dictating male behaviour—that Ed Exley's existence is structured around his rivalry with Dudley Smith, while Exley himself is the "raison d'etre" of his enemy Bud White (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 353). These men's fixations on their nemeses are charged with an intensity typically reserved, it is implied, for romantic or sexual interactions between men and women. White's lover testifies that "'Bud hates [Exley] more than he loves me or anyone else'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 361), while Exley creates what is virtually a shrine to his enemy, a bizarre montage of photographs of Smith which Dave Klein discovers in Exley's house (*White Jazz*, p. 315) and whose existence recalls the photograph of himself that Klein finds in Junior Stemmons' apartment—visual evidence of Stemmons' attraction to Klein that positions the bemused Klein, as he marvels, as a "queer pinup" (p. 116, 118).[29]

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28 As a literary trope, the centrality of the intramale bonding relationship to the American novel was initially noted by Fiedler, who exclaimed that "there is at the sentimental center of our novels, where we are accustomed to find in their European counterparts 'platonic' love or adultery, seduction, rape, or long-drawn-out flirtation, nothing but the love of males!" (Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, New York: Stein and Day, 1966 [revised edition], p. 368).

29 Klein's adverse reaction upon seeing this photograph—he shoots it in an act of violent disavowal intended to discharge any trace elements of homosexuality adhering to himself and to "punish" Stemmons for his temerity in being attracted to him—reveals a homosexual panic played out on an explicitly visual level and suggests that the acute discomfort that hegemonic males feel when located as objects of other men's gazes is exacerbated when this position is eroticised.

That Smith is effectively Exley's "pinup" as well as his rival compounds the impression, initially mobilised by references to Exley's "hard-on" for Smith (p. 304), of an erotic undercurrent to his obsession. This subtextual sexualisation of their conflict is echoed in White's invocation of his impassioned hatred of Exley: his "old football wounds throbbed—like his hard-on for Exley" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 69). For White to almost explicitly eroticise his interaction with another man reveals the cathected, ambivalent relationship between the homosocial and the homosexual in Ellroy's texts, where male interaction is simultaneously organised around a horror of the possibility of homosexual attraction, and an erotic fascination with other men. This is not to posit that relations between men, whether intimate or vexed, are inevitably forged because of "repressed" or "latent" homosexuality—the notion of which is deeply problematic[30]—but to observe that Ellroy reifies a conception of some intramale interaction as premised on subliminal sexual undercurrents flowing between men.[31] He graphs the relationships between Kemper Boyd and John F. Kennedy, and Ward Littell and Robert Kennedy in sexual metaphors: Littell is "magnetized" by the "passionate Bobby" (*American Tabloid*, p. 60),

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30 Jonathon Dollimore has noted the reductiveness of constructing relationships between "heterosexually identified men, be they complicated or simple, conflicted or supportive, brutally vindictive or discerningly tender, [as] *really* rooted in repressed homosexuality" (Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991]; pp. 242-3). He suggests that viewing homophobia as stemming from "latent" or "repressed" desire is problematic in that it simultaneously encourages "a way of thinking whereby the aggressor in homophobic violence is somehow identified with his or her victim: both are homosexual, the one repressed, the other overt ... [or] the victim is somehow the same as the aggressor and hence in some vague sense complicit with the aggression" (p. 243); while homophobia "may sometimes originate in and, as it circulates socially, reconnect with repressed desire, the latter cannot be homophobia's necessary condition since it often circulates without it ... we might better regard socially proscribed homosexuality as one of homophobia's several interconnected and enabling conditions, none of which is independently either necessary or sufficient" (p. 246).

31 Intriguingly, Ellroy himself has actually validated the notion that some male behaviour stems from "latent" homosexuality by arguing that "'there has always been a proportionately larger number of frustrated homosexuals [in the LAPD] than in any other police force. There's this incredible twisted male sexuality that simmers just below the surface of so much of what they do'" (Ellroy quoted in Louis B. Hobson, "Author D.O.W.N. on the L.A.P.D." in *Calgary Sun*. October 7 1997), p. 1.

who is more his "'type'" than John (p. 92),[32] while Boyd's aspirations to friendship with the latter are described by Mafia associate Heshie Ryskind as a desire to "'suck the big Kennedy cock'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 482). Intended to convey Boyd's sycophantic demeanour, Ryskind's phrase reflects the saturation of the insider argot in homoerotic metaphors and confirms that, as Sedgwick has suggested, there are congruences and continuities between "the most sanctioned forms of male-homosocial bonding" and "the most reprobated expressions of male homosexuality. ... For a man to be a man's man is separated only by an invisible, carefully blurred, always-already-crossed line from being 'interested in men.'"[33]

Ryskind does not seriously believe that Boyd is erotically "interested" in Kennedy; and Boyd himself adamantly heterosexualises their interaction, declaring their compatibility to derive from their mutual "'interest in sophisticated, provocative women'" (p. 38). Yet Ellroy evokes the prospect of a sexual flavour to Boyd's "interest" in Kennedy; Boyd claims that "'nobody ever loved [Kennedy] more'" than himself (p. 515) and the intimate or sexual inflection flooding his feelings is actualised in a fantasy of fusion after Kennedy

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32 Littell's fascination with Kennedy is charged with a distinctly physical dimension—"Littell hugged the glass for one last look at Bobby" (*American Tabloid*, p. 61)—and when Kennedy repudiates Littell, refusing to employ him after he is fired from the FBI, he is said to have "broken" Littell's heart (p. 551).

33 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 89. As Sedgwick adds: "To put it in twentieth-century American terms, the fact that what goes on at football games, in fraternities, at the Bohemian Grove, and at climactic moments in war novels can look, with only a slight shift of optic, quite startlingly 'homosexual', is ... the coming to visibility of the normally implicit terms of a coercive double bind that subtends all intramale interaction." In light of Sedgwick's comments, the statements that Dudley Smith, known for his interest in cultivating young male protegees, "likes tough boys'" (*White Jazz*, p. 280) and "'drools for tough boys'" (p. 305), obtain an intriguing dimension.

is elected President:

> Jack's ascent became his. That simple truth felt spellbindingly articulate. The time and place were beholden to one Kemper Cathcart Boyd. In that sense, he and Jack were indistinguishable. He picked up one of Jack's old flames and made love to her at the Willard (p. 387).

Reinforcing the fragility of the line between homosociality and homosexuality, this episode reveals that women in this arena are intelligible primarily as conduits between men, mediating vectors enabling an erotic merging prohibited by this society's regulatory discourse that compulsively reinscribes heteronormativity and occults homosexuality.[34] While Boyd's relationship with Kennedy is endowed with a positive resonance, the enactment of the male rivalry that dominates this world through the bodies of women is also a structuring thematic within Ellroy's fiction, which features the recurrent motif of an "erotic triangle" in which women function as objects of "exchange" between male competitors.[35] The dynamic whereby competition between men is played out through

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34 Confirming this, Hoover observes that Boyd "'would fuck all the acknowledged Kennedy sisters and old Rose Kennedy herself if you thought it would ingratiate you with Jack'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 198), a comment again underscoring the valuation of intramale relationships above male-female ones. Boyd actually goes so far as to terminate his engagement with Laura Hughes to, as Kennedy says, "'curry favor'" with Kennedy (p. 471). Without wishing to labour the point, there are several instances within Ellroy's fiction of male bonds taking precedence over male-female connections, including Bucky Bleichert's refusal to sexually consummate his relationship with Kay Lake—despite his abundant attraction to her—for fear of displeasing his police partner, Lee Blanchard (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 189, p. 209), and Buzz Meeks' conduct in "returning" his mistress, Audrey Anders, to her previous lover and Meeks' longtime friend, Mickey Cohen (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 471).

35 Following her reading of Rene Girard's *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), Sedgwick develops the concept of the "erotic triangle" in *Between Men* (p. 21). Examples of the "erotic triangle" in Ellroy's fiction include the relationship between Kay Lake, Bucky Bleichert and Lee Blanchard in *The Black Dahlia*; the Dave Klein/Glenda Bledsoe/Howard Hughes nexus in *White Jazz*; and the complicated, interwoven triangular relationships within *The Big Nowhere* between Mal Considine, Danny Upshaw and Claire De Haven; Considine, his ex-wife Laura and Buzz Meeks; and Meeks, Audrey Anders and Mickey Cohen.

the "traffic in women"[36] is exemplified by the intersecting libidinal triangles within *L.A. Confidential*, where Lynn Bracken and Inez Soto are transactional chattel literally "trade[d]" between Ed Exley and Bud White (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 405), who seduce each other's lovers in order to damage and mortify their competitor.

L.A. Confidential's structure—commencing with the genesis of White's and Exley's rivalry and concluding with an almost grotesquely sentimental celebratory image of "male bonding"[37]—confirms that its primary theme is the process whereby these men reconcile their enmity and emerge as friends. This progressive "bonding" locates Bracken's and Soto's textual function as constituting the "conventional heterosexual(izing) narrative device of using a woman to mediate and diffuse male-male erotics."[38] While women are required to guarantee the smooth functioning of the "loop," insofar as their presence "protects [men] from suspicions of homosexuality,"[39] they are extraneous to the real "business" of this sphere: the conflicts and power exchanges between men. Ironically, it is precisely this marginalisation of women which creates the conditions of possibility for

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36 This phrase stems from Gayle Rubin's article "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex" in Rayna R. Reiter (ed.), *Toward An Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

37 See *L.A. Confidential*, p. 480: "Lynn stood a few feet away. White tried to smile, grimaced. Ed said, 'I swear to you I'll get Dudley. I swear to you I'll do it.' White grabbed his hands, squeezed until they both winced. Ed said, 'Thanks for the push.' A smile, a laugh ... Ed touched his face. 'You were my redemption' ... Lynn got in the car, rolled up the windows. Bud pressed his hands to the glass. Ed touched his side, palms half the man's size. The car moved—Ed ran with it, hands against hands. A turn into traffic, a goodbye toot on the horn." It is worth noting that gestures of physical intimacy between the two men are only possible and permissible in the mediating presence of a woman, or via the literal mediation of a car window.

38 Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 11.

39 Tania Modleski identifies this as a common trope within literature and film in *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a "Postfeminist" Age* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 63.

the already supercharged relationships between men, whether congenial or adversarial, to spill over into the sexual realm. Yet it is also the resolutely masculine nature of Ellroy's world, with its rigorous normalisation of heterosexuality, which requires men to pre-empt misinterpretations of the intramale relationships which reverberate with such intensity in this universe. To avoid misconstrual of their " interest" in other men, and avert classification and abjection as homosexuals, men forcibly distance themselves from those males who permit their desires to flow in excess of socially mandated sexuality. As the insistently homophobic rhetoric of the insider sphere reveals, this distancing process is achieved through the discursive vilification of homosexual men, a manouevre exemplified by Lenny Sands' efforts to fortify his heterosexual façade by aggressively mocking and displaying raw hostility towards homosexuals.[40]

The incessant invocation of homosexuality by hegemonic males, even in situations where references to it seem inappropriate, indicates that derogation and exclusion work to sustain the presence of the "abject," keeping it viable and operational. Its obsessive recurrence in the discourse of power reveals its paradoxical centrality within this realm; "every effort to isolate, to explain, to reduce the contaminated homosexual simply helps to place him at the centre of waking dreams."[41] Just as Danny Upshaw is besieged by memories of the mutilation markings on the homosexual victims whose deaths he

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[40] See Sands' comedy routines on pages 102, 145 and 206 of *American Tabloid*. After Sands is blackmailed by Bondurant and Littell, both of whom utilise his "secret" sexuality as a bargaining lever, his '"skits"' become '"increasingly obscene and violently anti-homosexual"' (p. 202). Sands' behaviour fails to deceive Pete Bondurant, who, conscious of Sands' "sexual bent," observes that he should not wear his "hate so outré and naked" (p. 208). As this suggests, Sands' disparagement of homosexuality is both a ruse designed to mask his sexuality and a reflection of the self-loathing generated by his tortured location as a subject deemed "perverse" in this world

investigates (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 5, 94, 109), so the psychic landscape of the insider realm is haunted by the spectre of the male homosexual; the sheer volume of derogatory names for this subaltern group confirms the psychological overinvestment in homosexuals by those who abhor them. The homosexual's power simultaneously to "attract" and "repel"[42] fosters an ambivalence towards this figure of the type manifested by Upshaw, who stares with enraptured fascination at photographs of men in "sex offender" files while his stomach "queased to the point where he thought his bowels would go" (p. 215). The latter response suggests a drive to *literally* abject and expel the contaminating others to whom he has been exposed, and indeed Upshaw attempts to cleanse himself by showering after reading this file, ritually exorcising any residual taint of the abject from himself.

This ambivalence towards homosexuals conduces to a practice of voyeurism, albeit one which men striving to consolidate an appropriately heterosexual image rationalise as ideologically or professionally motivated. Upshaw sublimates the scopophilic pleasure he derives from the "sex offender" files by claiming to survey these solely "'for the investigation'" he is engaged in (p. 216). Hoover justifies his avid perusal of photographs of a "'prodigiously endowed'" African American (*American Tabloid*, p. 168) by contending that "'forewarned is forearmed: you have to know your enemy before you can combat him'" (p. 168). It is precisely this perceived need to "combat" the "enemy" of the homosexual, and other abject groups, which catalyses a second level on which the

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41 Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 38.

42 These phrases are used by Reuben Ruiz, who declares, in relation to Junior Stemmons, "'he was both, you know, attracted to, and what you call it, repelled by homos'" (*White Jazz*, p. 262).

panoptic gaze personified by Hoover directs itself inward to focus on the insider realm of power. To preserve its cohesion, this domain must secure itself from external threat and vigilantly police itself for any signs of its "enemy"'s intrusion. The compulsive invocation of anal sexuality throughout the vernacular of power and the dread of penetration it signifies is congruent with the insider sphere's project to protect its boundaries from the threat of the encroaching abject. Indeed, this realm's endemic homophobia arguably stems from men's desire to preserve their *literal* bodily parameters from its contaminating "other," insofar as homosexual men's corporeal penetrability is antithetical to the logic of containment and boundary maintenance around which the "loop" is structured.[43] In highlighting the permeability and fragility of the insider domain's margins, the project to insulate these against abjected figures reinforces precisely why their stringent safeguarding is required.

Maintaining this sphere's internal "security" obtains two dimensions; in addition to surveilling abjects to preclude their ingress into the domain of power, the gaze of masculine authority must appraise men in its orbit for their capacity to conform to its homogenising definition of what viable subjectivity comprises. The phallocentric conflation of viable subjectivity with viable masculinity is suggested by the fact that

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43 In some respects this echoes Judith Butler's discussion of Simon Watney's reading of AIDS in *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987) in *Gender Trouble* (p. 132; original emphasis): "throughout the media's hysterical and homophobic response to the illness there is a tactical construction of a continuity between the polluted status of the homosexual by virtue of the boundary-trespass that *is* homosexuality and the disease as a specific modality of homosexual pollution ... if the body is synechdocal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment. Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS."

repositories of hegemonic authority gauge other men in terms emphasising their status as *masculine* subjects. Dudley Smith declares that "'as a man [Ed Exley is] less than negligible'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 353) and Emmett Sprague condemns Bucky Bleichert as "'a piss-poor excuse for a man'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 342). Their evaluations confirming the invigilatory role of patriarchal authority, the diminishing phrases used by Smith and Sprague to deauthorise Exley and Bleichert signify the estimation of men's "value" along co-ordinates of adequacy and inadequacy in measuring up to a predefined register of "appropriate" masculine behaviour. While a generalised valorisation of "masculinity" as a cultural ideal proliferates throughout Ellroy's discursive universe—manifesting itself in such comments as Dick Stensland's expressed intention to "'take my punishment like a man'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 277)—the authoritative codification of men's "adequacy" as masculine subjects reveals that they are actually required to aspire to a particular, normative model of what "manhood" should consist of. The specific dimensions of this ideal are glimpsed in fragments throughout Ellroy's texts; Stensland's words, occurring prior to his execution for murder, clarify that "appropriate" masculinity entails evincing emotionless stoicism when confronted with hardship. Stensland's association of acting "like a man" with advancing a "brave" demeanour in the face of suffering reifies "courage" as a constitutive element of masculinity and is consonant with a broader fetishisation of fortitude in Ellroy's universe, in which the "'highest measure of honor'" that the LAPD can bestow upon its members is its "'Medal of Valor'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 248).

This privileging of "valour," and concomitant devaluation of conduct construed as "cowardly," underpins Smith's evaluation of Exley—whom he christens "'Coward Exley'" (p. 400)—as a deficient masculine subject. Smith's classification of Exley echoes the police "fitness report" documenting Exley's excoriation as a "coward" by his peers (p. 87); that the LAPD hierarchy prepares "fitness" (a term connoting adequacy and appropriateness) reports on its members reveals the continual, panoptic evaluation of men in the "loop" by those charged with preserving viable subjectivity. The concretisation of "cowardice" as the negative pole against which masculinity is judged is entrenched by its postulation along a continuum of feminine-homosexual abjection, so that men like Exley who are reviled as "cowardly" are also inimically appellated by the gendered insults "weak sister" and "sob sister" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 67, 245; see also *American Tabloid*, p. 111, 426; *The Black Dahlia*, p. 235) or the feminising slur "'sissy,'" which specifically denotes a homosexual male enacting a sexually "passive" role.[44] To reverse his reputation as a "weak sister" Exley murders the "Nite Owl" suspects, an act he hesitates to perform and is able to conduct only after one of these youths tauntingly calls him a "'sissy'" (p. 245). The desperate measures that Exley employs to resist categorisation as a homosexually-identified subject, in conjunction with the excessively demarcated use of assaultively homophobic language by exemplars of hegemonic masculinity, confirms that viable masculine subjectivity in the insider realm is

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44 This is clarified in the sequence featuring the interrogation of the "Nite Owl" suspects by Ed Exley, in which he says to one, "Sugar" Ray Coates: "'Sugar, Tyrone told me you went sissy up at Casitas. You couldn't do the time so you found a big white boy to look after you. He said they call you 'Sugar' because you give it out so sweet'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 122). Homosexuality is explicitly associated with "weakness" in *The Big Nowhere*, where it is Felix Gordean's "'eye for weakness,'" as Dudley Smith describes it (p. 367) that enables him to detect and identify men as homosexuals.

constructed substantially in response to gay phantasms, spectral possibilities of intramale desire which are fiercely repressed and yet circulate endlessly within individual and collective consciousnesses.[45]

This reflects the fact that the homosexual male is himself a "phantasm" in this world, a figure whose "otherness" is not always corporeally self-evident and who is therefore potentially able to evade the surveilling male gaze by dissembling and representing himself as embodying "non-deviant" (heterosexual) masculinity.[46] Its invisibility renders homosexuality permanently immanent, submerged just beneath the surface of the homosocial, ready to spill out. It also ensures that, despite the elaborate semiotics of homosexuality devised by hegemonic figures, it is impossible—as Ward Littell realises after discovering that a Mafia member, Tony Iannone, is gay—to determine "who's QUEER" and who is not (*American Tabloid*, p. 105; original emphasis). The severity of Littell's reaction on determining Iannone's sexuality— "Littell went dizzy. Littell went dry-mouthed. Littell felt his pulse go crazy" (p. 105)—reveals the homosexual panic in which this universe is saturated and which engenders the paranoid drive to force this

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45 The siting of the homosexual as the primary locus against whom men in this landscape are defined as "appropriately" or inappropriately "masculine" reflects Jeffrey Weeks's observation that the normative or hegemonic masculine ideal is "achieved by the constant process of warding off threats to it ... by the rejection of femininity and of homosexuality" (Jeffrey Weeks, *Sexuality and Its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985], p. 190); and Michael Kimmel's argument that homophobia is a central "organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood" (Michael Kimmel, "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" in Harry Brod and Michael S. Kimmel (eds), *Theorizing Masculinities* [Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1994], p. 131). See also Gregory Herek, "On Heterosexual Masculinity: Some Psychological Consequences of the Social Construction of Gender and Sexuality" in *American Behavioural Scientist* (1986; no. 29), p. 568.

46 Edelman suggests that "the ability of most homosexuals to 'pass' [as heterosexuals] produces an extraordinary degree of interpretive anxiety for heterosexuals" who feel threatened by a sexuality capable of obfuscating itself and existing as a "'secret' or unarticulated condition" (Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* [New York: Routledge, 1994], p. 152).

"hidden" sexuality into the realm of visibility. Danny Upshaw attempts to bring homosexuality "into the open" and simultaneously assert his own viability, which is cast into doubt by his ambiguous sexuality, in a conversation with the openly gay Cy Vandrich. Vandrich euphemises homosexuals as "'really sensitive creative types'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 265) and falters before labelling them:

> "and ... well ... they're prone to being like ..." Danny wanted to scream QUEER, FAGGOT, FRUIT, HOMO, PEDERAST, BRUNSER, PUNK, COCKSUCKER, and ram slime from the Hollywood Squad reports down Vandrich's throat, making him spit it out in the open where *he* could spit on it. ... [Upshaw] said, "He gets his thrills getting guys to admit that they're homosexuals, right?" (p. 265; original emphasis).

Upshaw assumes the interrelated authoritative functions of detecting homosexuality (wresting it "out in the open"), classifying it (interpellating homosexuals in malignant terms) and disavowing and eradicating ("spitting on") it.[47] The vitriol he marshals bespeaks a psychological anguish galvanised by his emerging awareness of his own homosexuality. Upshaw's anxious repression of this sexuality stems from his hazardous situation as both an agent of "authority"—as he explicitly describes himself in his encounter with Vandrich[48]—and a man whose "fitness" to be incorporated within the

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47 Similarly, Ward Littell feels compelled to negate Lenny Sands' active adoption of a heterosexual persona by reminding Sands that he "'*knows*'" who and what Sands "'really'" is despite Sands' attempts to obscure this (*American Tabloid*, p. 121; original emphasis). Littell is adamant that Sands occupy his interpellated position as a homosexual, ordering him to "'admit what you are'" (p. 122), his use of the phrase "*what* you are" (rather than "*who* you are") dehumanising Sands and evoking the status of homosexuality as both a subaltern condition and a medico-scientific or clinical category in this world.

48 As noted in footnote 34, Part One, prior to his interrogation of Vandrich Upshaw observes the latter enact what he terms "a little number, crossing his legs, making mincy hand motions" and views this as "the fuck going nance in order to knuckle to authority (ie Upshaw)" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 264).

realm of power is tenuous, open to scrutiny and able to be rescinded. That Upshaw, unable to deny his sexuality, ultimately commits suicide reveals that men's attempts to obtain viable subjectivity are compelled by the panoptic economy's harsh logic of abjection. Noncompliance with the prescriptive definition of "authorised masculinity" dictates the expulsion of the transgressor to the domain of alterity either as an identified abject figure—in Upshaw's case, a "known" homosexual, a prospect he finds insupportable (p. 368)—or as a corpse.

If identification as a homosexual effectively mandates suicide, it is unsurprising that Upshaw actively seeks to distance himself from this subject-position by linguistically reviling homosexuals. Yet his litany of vilificatory terms reveals that Upshaw is irrevocably embedded in the matrix of abjection through which he is discursively constituted as a subject; his homophobia is a conscious attempt to avert his own classification as gay and to consolidate his status as an "insider." Even prior to his awareness of his sexual predilection Upshaw instinctively reinscribed his society's relations of domination and subjugation by engaging in flagrantly homophobic, racist and misogynistic behaviour on both a verbal and a physically punitive level.[49] His conduct in this regard is paradigmatic of Ellroy's protagonists, who all reaffirm the reactionary ideology of the authoritative matrix within which they are constructed (or construct

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49 Upshaw refers to homosexuals as "fags" and "deviants" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 84), African Americans as "niggers" (p. 96), and calls the pro-Communist Claire De Haven "the Red Bitch" (p. 343). In regard to De Haven, he suppresses an urge to "slap the bitch silly" (p. 300), while his commingled dread and revulsion of homosexuals is crystallised in a sequence in which, without provocation, he physically lashes out at Felix Gordean's gay houseboy (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 283). He also reflects on all the "niggers he'd pushed around" (p. 310) and is shown using excessive force to obtain information from African American criminals (pp. 57-60), ceasing his physical abuse of one only when other police officers arrive at the scene and tell him to "'Get the fuck back to County and beat up your own niggers'" (p. 60).

themselves) as subjects by reproducing the interpellating violence that secures their empowered status,[50] and by facilitating their personal agendas through the exploitation and brutal oppression of subaltern groups, so that Jack Vincennes' hunger for celebrity is played out on the bodies of African American drug dealers and users[51] while Bucky Bleichert solicits the approval of LAPD colleagues by savagely beating African American criminals.[52] After an incident in which Bleichert murders two African American suspects while defending his partner (*The Black Dahlia*, pp. 78-9), Kay Lake remarks on Bleichert's "'calm'" demeanour and he responds, "'it was them or us'" (p. 80)—an exclusionary mentality confirming that Ellroy's protagonists' subjective identities are wrought by the subject/object, affirmation/abjection dynamic around which the insider sphere is organised. Their perpetuation and entrenchment of this is a means of self-constitution reflecting the fact that they are both agents *of* authority and agents *for* it; their empowered status as inheritors of hegemonic privilege is premised on their capacity to further the objectives and actualise the agendas of the power matrix they

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50 To select several examples at random: Ed Exley labels the homosexual Junior Stemmons a "pervert" (*White Jazz*, p. 193); Buzz Meeks calls an African American a "jungle bunny" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 78) and conceptualises African Americans in terms of stereotyping images of "voodoo" that tacitly construct them as animalistic and "barbaric" (p. 43). See also footnote 63, Part One.

51 Vincennes is said to get his " 'jollies shakin' down niggers'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 56; see also p. 38, 54). The prominence he obtains as "the Big V," celebrity narcotics policeman, derives from escapades such as that which earned him his LAPD nickname of "Trashcan Jack," in which he supposedly "popped Charlie 'Yardbird' Parker and tossed him into a garbage bin outside the Klub Zamboanga" (p. 25). Ellroy's representation of this incident reduces Parker to the status of abjected refuse and, by focusing on his heroin addiction rather than his musical ability, confirms that Ellroy is unable to imagine African American subjectivity beyond a prism of criminality and inferiority (see also footnote 22, Conclusion).

52 Assigned to a new police division after causing the dismissal of a corrupt colleague, Bleichert is introduced to his new workmates, who greet him with "no applause and a wide assortment of fisheyes, evil eyes and averted eyes" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 300; the reference to their "eyes" highlights Bleichert's awareness of being subjected to the masculine gaze). Deciding to "kosherize" himself with these men, Bleichert's tactics to ingratiate himself with his co-workers—and the fact that these are successful—forcibly illustrate the LAPD's ingrained racism; he brutally assaults several African American felons in front of an "audience" of policemen, and afterwards "an old sergeant rumored to hate my guts yelled back, 'Bleichert, you're an honorary white man!' and I knew I was kosherized" (p. 302).

serve, and whose interests also serve them by enabling whatever localised authority they obtain.

Indeed, these men actively embrace their roles as repositories of "authority," as signified by Upshaw's denigration of homosexuality and acquisition of self-definition through acting as an agent of panopticism who spies upon subaltern "others."[53] While the detective's enactment of a clandestine, investigatory function is integral to crime fiction,[54] Upshaw's status as a panoptic agent is grounded in a specific desire to embody the ideal of "professional detective" which (along with the "professional killer") constitutes one of the two prescribed roles that men in this universe voluntarily fulfil or are conscripted to perform. Driven by a teleological impulse to unearth and decode clues in order to solve crimes, Upshaw's consuming interest in establishing "WHY" criminals act in particular ways provides the impetus for his enlistment as a detective (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 38, 227; original emphasis). Upshaw's association of the detective function with an investigative heuristic reflects this vocation's basis in the delimitation and regulation of knowledge and the categorisation of information leading to a specialised or technical "expertise." Grounded in the "Western male epistemological ideal [of] unemotional, objective,

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53 These "others" include both the homosexual subculture that Upshaw encounters while investigating the murders perpetrated by Coleman Healy, and the clique of political radicals comprising Claire De Haven and her associates whom Upshaw surveils as part of an inquiry into Communist influence in Hollywood.

54 As Taylor has noted, "from the beginnings of detective fiction ... the detective as undercover agent has figured as the image of an invisible panoptical look trained secretly upon the citizen" (Barry Taylor, "Criminal Suits: Style and Surveillance, Strategy and Tactics in Elmore Leonard" in Peter Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* [London: Pluto, 1997], p. 29); see also Teresa L. Ebert, "Detecting the Phallus: Authority, Ideology, and the Production of Patriarchal Agents in Detective Fiction" in *Rethinking Marxism* (Fall 1992; vol. 5 no. 3).

distanced knowledge,"[55] the detective model necessitates the repudiation of emotion in the pursuit of forensic knowledge: "'I'm a professional,'" as Upshaw says, "'and I can't be shocked'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 221). While Upshaw does not actually obtain the "professional," clinical detachment he strives for—confronted with a mutilated corpse, he feels faint and nauseous (p. 3)—the emotional induration associated with the detective function is embodied by the jaded Dave Klein, who is able to calmly survey grisly crime scenes while other policemen "ooze shock" and vomit (*White Jazz*, p. 227). [56] Like Upshaw, Klein's behaviour is grounded in the heuristic drive to know "why," to locate the "links" and "missing/hidden/obscured" information that will permit the cases he is investigating to cohere, make sense, and be solved (pp. 263, 278).

This impulse catalyses Klein's obsessive desire to excavate the "secrets" of the Kafesjian family (p. 266), an imperative so intense that he imperils his life by remaining in L.A. to unearth these despite the "'Syndicate death sentence'" overshadowing him (p. 255).[57] Ironically, this "death sentence" stems from Klein's work as a "professional killer," a role

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55 Sabine Vanacker, "V.I. Warshawski, Kinsey Millhone and Kay Scarpetta: Creating a Feminist Detective Hero" in Peter Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (London: Pluto, 1997), p. 80. Congruent with the logic of "boundary maintenance" subtending Ellroy's narrative landscape, this idealisation of rationality, Benjamin has argued, accentuates "difference over sameness, boundaries over continuity, polarity and opposition over mutuality and interdependence" (Jessica Benjamin, "Master and Slave: The Fantasy of Erotic Domination" in Snitow, Stansell and Thompson (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, p. 306.

56 The almost cinematic way in which this scene is depicted reasserts the nature of the surveilling masculine gaze as "rational" and technologised. Klein methodically categorises "Details: Their eyes shot out— powder-black cheeks, exit spatter. Ripped cushions on a chair—bullet mufflers. Shears, chainsaw, axe—bloody, propped in a corner. The rug—soaked bubbling. His pants down. Castrated—his penis in an ashtray. The women: Cut/ sawed/ snipped—limbs dangling by skin shreds. Bloody walls, windows sprayed—kids looking in. Artery gout red: the floor, the ceiling, the walls" (*White Jazz*, p. 227).

57 Klein explicitly tells Ed Exley that the "'Kajesjian-Herrick job'" is preventing him from leaving L.A.; Exley cynically asks if Klein is "'expecting some kind of payoff,'" to which Klein replies, "'No, I just want to know why'" (p. 282).

also enabled by the instrumentalising dynamic of this capitalist society, in which every life has a price tag and men's capacity to render harm (both in the sense of being bodily able to inflict it and psychically able to absorb any trauma attendant upon their violation of others) is commodified and put to the use of the power matrix. As a "'thug with a law degree'" (p. 55), a hired assassin who is also a professional surveillance operative and a detective who "aced forensics" as a student (p. 192)—Klein fuses the configurations of professional detective and professional killer which constitute the two licensed roles available to men in the insider universe. While conceptualising the corrupt, cynical Klein as representing any type of "ideal" may seem ludicrous, in many respects he is the personification of "authorised" masculinity in Ellroy's narrative universe, the prototypical "bad white man doing bad things in the name of authority"—or, as he envisions himself, a "professional" (p. 160). That both Klein and Upshaw describe themselves as "professionals" is revealing insofar as throughout Ellroy's fiction the concept of the "professional"—or, in the LAPD-centred context of the "L.A. Quartet," the "policeman"—operates as a phantasmatic ideal which men strive to embody, are explicitly instructed by their superiors to enact, or are castigated for failing to measure up to. Thus Buzz Meeks, Bud White and Ed Exley exhort themselves to behave like "policemen,"[58] Mal Considine adjures Upshaw to "'knuckle down and be a professional.

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58 Specifically, Meeks exhorts himself to "be a policeman" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 328), while White encourages himself to "BE A DETECTIVE" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 163; original emphasis) and Exley adjures himself to "*be a captain*" (p. 421; original emphasis). Similarly, Bucky Bleichert aims to be a "good detective" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 234) and chides himself for being a "bumfuck detective" (p. 277; the homophobia subtly encoded within his chosen adjective perhaps serves to reiterate the incompatibility of homosexuality and viable behaviour). In *The Big Nowhere* Mal Considine actively seeks to think 'like a policeman" (p. 147); that he does so as part of his attempt to gain custody of his adoptive son suggests a link between the roles of policeman and father (or father figure) that restates the patriarchal authority of the former function.

Be a policeman'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 315; original emphasis), and Ward Littell is derided by Lenny Sands as a "'sad excuse for a policeman'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 290).

Sands' comment tacitly valorises the role of "policeman" and assumes that official operatives should display particular attributes which Littell conspicuously fails to embody. The qualities associated with "professionalism" stress capability and efficiency as desirable elements of masculine behaviour; it is only when Littell starts "'acting half-ass competent,'" as Pete Bondurant begrudgingly concedes (p. 426), that he begins to command respect from other men within the "loop." Carlos Marcello grounds his approval of Kemper Boyd in the fact that he "'always gets the job done'" (p. 379), revealing the constitution of the professional in terms of expertise and specialised knowledge ("the job") and competence and efficacy ("getting the job done"). The charting of "professionalism" along axes of adequacy and proficiency—criteria analogous to those with which "authoritative" males gauge other men's relative "masculinity"—recurs in the explication made by Preston Exley, an incarnation of both LAPD and broader hegemonic "authority," of the conduct that "'*effective* policemen" must be prepared to manifest (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 20; my emphasis).[59] Highlighting the coalescence of ratiocination and brutality, the "police ideal" outlined by Exley collapses the hermeneutic epistemology of the professional detective—the interrogation of material evidence and semiotic systems to acquire information—and the "objective"

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59 Exley conceptualises the "effective" officer as one who, in addition to detecting and solving crimes, must be willing to "plant corroborative evidence'" on guilty suspects, to "'shoot hardened armed robbers in the back to offset the chance that they might utilize flaws in the legal system and go free,'" to "'beat confessions out of suspects'" known to be guilty and to "'rig crime scene evidence to support a prosecuting attorney's working hypothesis'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 20).

unemotionality of the technical expert, with the violent ontology of the "professional killer," whose grim lack of affect enables his retention by others as an agent of physical destruction. That the professional ideal is an *amalgam* of these individuated functions (rather than merely one or the other) is confirmed by the fact that men who obtain one facet of this configuration typically strive to embody it in its entirety. Bud White, the "toughest man in the LAPD" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 27) endeavours to be a "real" detective, "NOT JUST A HEADBASHER" (p. 277, 163; original emphasis) while his rival Ed Exley feels compelled to adopt a violent praxis although his proficiency as a "detective" is acknowledged even by Dudley Smith: "'as a man he's less than negligible, but as a detective he far exceeds even myself'" (p. 353).

Exley's deficiency as a "man" is indexed to his inability to embody all facets of the professional role, implying a correlation between the latter archetype and the modality of masculinity hypostasised as an ideal in this world. Indeed, the concept of the professional is arguably synonymous with that of "viable masculinity." Professionalism is counterposed to, and seen as incompatible with, the abject realm, so that when Upshaw is confronted with abjection—the chaos symbolised by the rupture and spillage of Marty Goines' shattered corpse—he immediately seeks to recuperate external "order" by "making like a criminologist" and solving the crime (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 3). Upshaw approaches this task by invoking a "maxim" iterated by one of his fictive criminological ego-ideals: "'in murders of extreme passion, the killer will always betray his pathology. If the detective is willing to sort physical evidence objectively and then *think* subjectively from the killer's viewpoint, he will often solve crimes that are baffling in their

randomness'" (p. 5). Detective work is here opposed to "randomness," "passion," flux and excess of the type literally embodied in Goines' devastated flesh; the detective is envisaged as sifting evidence "objectively," imposing order on chaos, achieving resolution through a telos of logic and rationality. While the requirement to process details "from the killer's viewpoint" seems antithetical to the clinical "objectivity" that is a prerequisite of the professional ideal, Upshaw endeavours to view Goines' murder from its perpetrator's perspective by materialising himself as the embodiment of a technological, specular instrument: literally, a "Man Camera."[60] His simulation of a camera lens reflects the privileging of a technological/rational masculine gaze capable of processing gruesome crime scenes without registering any psychological disturbance, and also posits emotional impassivity (coded here as "objectivity") as a constitutive element of the professional ideal.[61]

The latter point is confirmed when D.A. Ellis Loew censures Lee Blanchard for becoming "emotionally involved" in the "Black Dahlia" case, an "'unprofessionalism'" which prompts Loew's comment that "'in my police department, a man checks his emotional baggage when he pins on his badge, or he checks out'" (*The Black Dahlia*,

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60 The "Man Camera" is a fictional investigatory mechanism developed by another of Upshaw's criminologist role models, Hans Maslick, ostensibly while the latter was "undergoing analysis with Sigmund Freud" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 94). The "Man Camera" technique, as Upshaw explains, involves "screening details from the perpetrator's viewpoint. Actual camera angles and tricks were employed; the investigator's eyes became a lens capable of zooming in and out, freezing close-ups, selecting background motifs to interpret crime-scene evidence in an aesthetic light" (p. 94).

61 This drive towards "objectivity" informs Upshaw's reaction to Marty Goines' corpse. While the distress that the sight of this ravaged cadaver engenders in Upshaw reveals that he is not as desensitised as he contends, in this situation he "made like a criminologist so he wouldn't vomit" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 3), thereby signalling his determination to maintain a veneer of detached imperturbability appropriate to a detective and confirming the affiliation of "professionalism" with a lack of emotional affect.

p. 182, 190). Loew's insistence that Blanchard eschew emotion reveals the specification of the professional ideal in structures of order, mastery and self-control. This point is further encoded in LAPD Chief Parker's proclamation that "policemen were subject to the same temptations as civilians, but needed to keep their baser urges in check" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 273).[62] In differentiating between "policemen" and "civilians" Parker's injunction affirms the existence of behavioural norms specific to the insider sphere which regulate masculine identities within this realm. These norms are revealed through the disclosure of men's internalisation of edicts emphasising the conduct expected of insider males; the masculine "ideal," like the "game" itself, is organised around a system of "rules" that are both explicitly elucidated and implicitly "known." Hence Lenny Sands "knew that tough Jewboys don't cringe on the floor" (*American Tabloid*, p. 121), while Ward Littell obtains his " manhood" (p. 341) by adhering to a list of instructions transmitted to him by his former FBI partner Kemper Boyd. Clarifying the type of masculine conduct approbated in the "loop," Boyd's orders compel Littell to sublimate emotion and advance a "courageous," stoic

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62 Dudley Smith similarly notes that "'police officers who cannot control their impulses have no business being police officers'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 59). Metress has suggested that a privileging of self-control and an emphasis on the "mastery of desire" is "fundamental to the masculine heroics of the hardboiled detective novel," in which the protagonist "must learn, and can learn, to gain control of his passions, to fashion an honorable hierarchy of desire" (Christopher Metress, "Living Degree Zero: Masculinity and the Threat of Desire in the Roman Noir" in Peter F. Murphy (ed.), *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities* [New York: New York University Press, 1994], p. 158). Humm additionally contends that the traditional fictional detective's "masculinity lies in self-mastery and the ability to define himself as a free agent" ("Feminist Detective Fiction" in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Suspense: The Thriller Comes of Age* [Houndsmills: Macmillan, 1990], p. 248).

demeanour, to embrace this realm's reckless "live by the sword" ethos and to engage in physically or verbally intimidating behaviour to achieve his agenda.[63]

The techniques that Boyd encourages Littell to adopt display numerous parallels with a paradigm that Ogdon has identified as fundamental to the construction of masculine identity in the hard-boiled genre: the "hardening of the self, and the smashing apart of the other."[64] Ogdon derived these terms from her reading of *Male Fantasies*, Theweleit's influential study of "the Freikorps, the volunteer armies that fought ... the revolutionary German working class in the years immediately after World War I."[65] Examining Ellroy's fiction in light of Ogdon's reworking of Theweleit is apt insofar as Ellroy has argued that the LAPD is merely another annex of the military that was initially "'set up as an occupying force. It was meant to be a military presence. These were soldiers, not policemen.'"[66] *The Black Dahlia*—located in the immediate postwar period—foregrounds continuities between police and military experience; [67] Bucky Bleichert's declaration that

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63 Hence "Kemper Boyd always said DON'T FALTER"(*American Tabloid*, p. 180; original emphasis), "Kemper Boyd always said NEVER SHOW FEAR OR DISGUST" (p. 157), "Kemper Boyd always said DON'T LOOK BACK" (p. 239), "Kemper Boyd always said COW YOUR INFORMANTS" (p. 121).

64 Bethany Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology" in *Critical Quarterly* (Spring 1992; vol. 34 no. 1), p. 82.

65 Barbara Ehrenreich, "Foreword" in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One: Women Floods Bodies History*. (trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner; 1977: reprint: Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. ix.

66 Ellroy quoted in Hobson, "Author D.O.W.N. on the L.A.P.D.," p. 1. Ellroy's observation echoes Mike Davis' comment that African Americans have, since LAPD Chief Parker's days, viewed the LAPD as an "army of occupation" intent upon genocidally destroying them (Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* [London: Verso, 1990], p. 271).

67 Bucky Bleichert outlines the "military regulations and maneuvers" that LAPD officers were "subjected to"—"air raid drills, blackout drills and fire evacuation drills" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 9)—and refers to the police division he patrols as a "war zone" (p. 300). There is a distinct overtone of racism to the latter description; the area in question is substantially populated by African Americans—or, as Bleichert phrases it, it is "95 percent slums, 95 percent Negroes [sic], all trouble" (p. 299)—and is portrayed in terms of an array of offensive stereotypes, with "bottle gangs" and "hair-straightening parlors" on every block and prostitutes on every corner.

"cops were also soldiers" (p. 9) reflects the inculcation of militaristic values within Ellroy's police protagonists, many of whom are World War II veterans occasionally called upon to resuscitate this experience in their capacities as policemen or operatives of the "power matrix."[68] Pete Bondurant puts his military prowess to use as the leader of a paramilitary anti-Castro cadre, and is actually described as a "'soldier type'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 294). This appellation reinforces the appropriateness of comparing Ellroy's protagonists to the Freikorps whom Theweleit referred to as "soldier males,"[69] a congruence further consolidated by the manifold consonances between the worlds of Ellroy's and Theweleit's texts as experienced by the men inhabiting them. In Ellroy's "nightmare" landscape the commingled fear and hatred of the abject translates into a project by viable subjects to obliterate this; Theweleit's "soldier males" similarly construe their (feminised) enemies in terms emphasising their abject status[70] and seek to render these loathed figures literally into "pulp," the effluvia they symbolise.[71] The strategies used by Theweleit's "soldier males" to develop their subjectivities—again,

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68 Dave Klein, a former soldier, is drafted into a police unit described as an "ex-Marine goon squad" (*White Jazz*, p. 26), and when Dudley Smith coerces Klein into murdering Johnny Duhamel, he does so partially through drugging Klein and stimulating a sense-memory revival of his wartime experience of killing Japanese soldiers, exploiting his primal, hostile response to the latter to induce him to slay a fellow policeman (p. 204).

69 Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One*, p. 23.

70 Thus the Freikorpsmen envisage their opponents as a "nameless force that seeks to engulf ... [a] 'flood,' a 'tide,' a threat that comes in 'waves'" (Ehrenreich, "Foreword," p. xv); the "fear of the feminine" is manifested in a "seemingly endless series of liquid images in which women is associated with all that might threaten to deluge or flood the boundaries of the male ego" (Jessica Benjamin and Anson Rabinbach, "Foreword" in Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume Two*, p. xviii.). See Theweleit, "Chapter Two: Floods, Bodies, History" in *Male Fantasies Volume One* for a more extensive explication of this.

71 Ehrenreich summarises the desire of Theweleit's "soldier males" to render their victims into "what the Freikorpsmen describe over and over as a 'bloody mass': heads with half their faces blown off, bodies soaked red with their own blood, rivers clogged with bodies" (Ehrenreich, "Foreword," p. xi). This is also consonant with Ellroy's insistent representations of the bloodied, devastated bodies of abject figures (see footnotes 9, 116 and 125, Part Three).

summarised by Ogdon as "the hardening of the self, and the smashing apart of the other"—were an attempt to guard against this external threat.

The process of "hardening the self" was a literal, physical one that stemmed from the Freikorps' perceived need to ward off the implacable, interimplicated threats of "erotic femininity" and the "Red flood of revolution," the Bolshevik forces whom the Freikorps combated.[72] Reflecting the basis of the "corporeal metaphysics at the heart of fascist perception" in a dichotomisation of the "hard, organized, phallic body" and the "soft, fluid and ultimately liquid female body,"[73] the mandate to "harden the self" resulted in the Freikorpsmen's self-construction in terms of an erect, impermeable "'armoured body,'" characterised by "hardness and invulnerability," whose function was "the annihilation of all forms of otherness."[74] The "soldier males'" alignment of somatic "hardness" with masculinity and its inverse with femininity recurs within Ellroy's texts, where morphological softness and permeability is associated with women and feminised men,[75] while "hardness" is a quality specifically attributed to authorised males. Mickey Cohen laments the fact that one of his hired hoodlums has grown too physically "'soft'" to "'work muscle'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 376). Cohen's valorisation of corporeal

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72 Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One*, p. 244: "soldier males freeze up in the fact [sic] of erotic femininity. ... the man holds himself together as an entity, a body with fixed boundaries. Contact with erotic women would make him cease to exist in that form"; to keep the "threat of the Red flood of revolution away from his body, we find the same movement of stiffening, of closing himself off to form a 'discrete entity.' He defends himself with a kind of sustained erection of his whole body, of whole cities, of whole troop units."

73 Benjamin and Rabinbach, "Foreword," p. xix.

74 Justin J. Lorentzen, "Reich Dreams: Ritual Horror and Armoured Bodies" in Chris Jencks (ed.), *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 166.

75 Hence *The Black Dahlia*'s Ramona Sprague is "fat" and "flaccid" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 157) while the Communist-affiliated male Morton Diskant is "flabby" (*White Jazz*, p. 36).

"hardness" reflects this society's privileging of a "male sexual morphology" constituted by a "sealed-up, impermeable body"[76]—a concretisation of the symbol of masculine power and entitlement, the phallus—which also underpins the devaluation of anal eroticism in this world.[77] The logic of boundary maintenance grounding the insider sphere is literalised in the bodies of its masculine subjects, whose somatic integrity must be hardened and upheld as self-sufficient and impervious to the feminine "other." When the inflexible rigidity of Bucky Bleichert's corporeality, all "fists and cop muscle," is in danger of being relaxed by the "soft" caresses of Kay Lake, he determines to prevent their lovemaking from becoming "too involved in affection" and steels himself against her physical and emotional encroachment by fantasising that he is having sex with the "Black Dahlia" instead (*The Black Dahlia*, pp. 233-4, 236).

Bleichert's physical induration, the unyielding muscle that acts as a barrier between himself and Lake—or "armour" against her—is accompanied by an emotional vitrification, a reluctance to experience or express feelings that he associates with feminine "softness." When Lake, recognising this, accuses Bleichert of being "'frightened of anything that doesn't involve fighting and cops and guns and all that'" (p. 189), she

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76 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1994), p. 201.

77 That is, the dread of anal penetration evinced throughout the homophobic lexicon of power is partially attributable to this sexual mode's undermining of a man's prized "*im*penetrability, the exclusive designation of his body by its seamless, phallic mastery." (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 272; original emphasis). Grosz hypothesises that homophobic violence, "and homophobia in general, might also be ways of adjudicating the anxiety aroused in heterosexual men by their own penetrability. If a potential for passive anal pleasure is denied, its denial can be acted out as violence against, or contempt for, those who are interpreted as wishing to either experience such pleasure themselves, or to 'impose' it upon another" (p. 272). For examinations of the widespread cultural denigration of the anus as an inferior substitute for the phallus, see eg Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 91; Leo Bersani, "Is The Rectum A Grave?" (reprinted in Jonathan Goldberg (ed.), *Reclaiming Sodom* [New York: Routledge, 1994]); Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 31.

invokes the same cultural imperative for men to align themselves with traditionally "masculine" qualities—and, concomitantly, to distance themselves from behaviour deemed "feminine"—which also underlies the demonisation of "cowardly" men. Bleichert's resistance to manifest emotion, like his determination to overcome his reputation as a "sob sister" (p. 235), confirms that masculine subjects striving for viability are impelled not only to expel all traces of the feminine and homosexual from the "loop" in which they operate but also to strip themselves of all attributes associated with these figures. Like Theweleit's "soldier males," Ellroy's protagonists desire to be "freed from all that can be identified with the female body: with liquidity, with warmth, and above all with a sensuality that is responsive to other human beings."[78] This project to extirpate the "feminine" undergirds the positive valuation of self-mastery in this world, the privileging of self-discipline which sees asceticism and celibacy rewarded with the type of "power" accrued by Smith and Hoover, and which ensures that men who exhibit control over their emotions by "sacrificing" their love for women to what they see as the more pressing need to "protect" them are able to construct their actions as honourable. Both Buzz Meeks and Dave Klein perform this ritual expulsion of the women they "love" when they forsake them, ostensibly to safeguard them from a potentially hazardous future, but in reality to preserve the homosocial purity of the "loop."[79] These instances of desertion are cast as acts of nobility, with an elegiac (even maudlin) undercurrent informing the departure sequences and Klein farewelling Glenda Bledsoe in a notably and

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78 Benjamin and Rabinbach, "Foreword," p. xix.

79 This is confirmed by the fact that, in another example of male bonds surpassing male-female ones, Meeks "returns" Audrey Anders to his good friend and her former lover Mickey Cohen (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 470).

atypically sentimental fashion: "Her face—eyes closed—dreams she'd never tell me ... I walked out the door bracing back sobs" (*White Jazz*, p. 354).

Klein's refusal to cry even in this emotionally resonant situation confirms the mandated unemotionalism of the insider sphere, whose pragmatic ethos translates into a disregard for others and a premium placed on the sublimation of emotion.[80] This positive valuation of a lack of affect leads Danny Upshaw and Dave Klein to instruct themselves to remain "chilled" or exhibit "frost" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 95, 268; *White Jazz*, p. 55), terms which signal the incompatibility of excessive emotion with the professional conduct they wish to display. The incorporation of emotional "coolness" within the professional ideal dovetails with the detached demeanour required of detectives, the fetishisation of "objectivity" and scientific "rationality" enabling the dispassionate, analytical gaze of power. The status of the latter as a prerequisite to obtaining authority is highlighted by its critical role in facilitating Ed Exley's ascension through the police ranks. While Exley ultimately becomes an established member of the police hierarchy described as "iceberg cold" (*White Jazz*, p. 23), initially his "softness" and sensitivity towards others' suffering is seen as indicative of his inadequacy as a policeman (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 233). Viewing the carnage wreaked by fellow officers on the victims of the "Bloody Christmas"

80 Their resignation to the imperatives of "business" ensures that Pete Bondurant and Ward Littell are prepared to suppress their personal affection for Lenny Sands and use force to co-opt him into their plan to "shake down" John F. Kennedy; as Littell says, "'I like Lenny, but business is business'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 443).

incident, Exley's gaze is sympathetic rather than incisionary and probing:

> Juan Carbijal on his bunk, a shirt under his head soaked red. Clinton Valupeyk washing blood off his face with toilet water. Reyes Chasco one giant contusion; Dennis Rice working his fingers—swollen, blue, broken. Dinardo Sanchez and Ezekiel Garcia curled up together by the drunk cage. Ed called for ambulances. The words "Prison Ward, County General" almost made him retch (p. 32).

While his methodical cataloguing of these men's injuries is covalent with the "professional" objectivity marshalled in autopsies and at crime scenes, Exley's use of these men's names reinforces their subjectivity and dignity, and the physical trauma that their brutalisation induces in him indicates his attunement with their pain. Yet to succeed as a policeman Exley is required to emotionally and psychologically harden himself. This gradual process is initially signalled in his visual and cognitive registering of the "Nite Owl' crime scene, which recalls the "Man Camera" materialisation of the detective as a rational observer devoid of emotional investment in the carnage he views: "Bodies—a blood-soaked pile on the floor. Brains, blood and buckshot on the walls. Blood two feet deep collecting in a drainage trough. Dozens of shotgun shells floating in blood" (p. 109).

Exley's progressive sloughing of emotion and involvement with others' pain reveals that the emotional "detachment" occasioned by the detective function resolves into policemen's desensitisation—the type of inurement which enables Dave Klein to process viscerally disturbing crime scenes in a highly clinical way and to casually label a

particularly gruesome homicide a "187" (*White Jazz*, p. 285).[81] Given that such emotional deadening is either euphemised as "objectivity" or prized as symbolising "professionalism," it is unsurprising that the register of *sanctioned* emotions available to men aspiring to viable subjectivity is highly limited. Licensed emotion is concentrated into either a hyperaggressive acting out—typically manifested in the innumerable incidents in Ellroy's fiction in which his emotionally impoverished male characters are able to express feelings only through the infantile destruction of material objects[82]—or a comparably hysterical overstatement of affect. The histrionics substituting for male "emotion" are exemplified by Buzz Meeks' reaction to the sight of his former adversary and subsequent "best friend" Mal Considine (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 431) being shot and killed in the line of duty: "he was still screaming when [the] cops stormed in and tried to take Mal Considine away from him" (p. 439).[83] Like the relationships between

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81 Displaying a comparable insensitivity, Lee Blanchard refers to a vicious, recidivist pedophile as a "'baby raper'" and a "'rape-o'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 60), and Dudley Smith describes a murder with a supremely callous disregard for the victim: "'ah, Vinnie the guinea. I heard that lad found out a quail of his was distributing her favors elsewhere and stuck a .12 gauge up her love canal. It must have been messy, albeit quick'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 174). A lack of compassion for the victims of violence is one way in which Dave Klein's desensitisation also manifests itself, as exemplified by his cold observation of the human wreckage he sees in the aftermath of the LAPD's botched attempt to "take down a bookie mill" (*White Jazz*, p. 11): "a nigger coughing glass. A pachuco minus some fingers" (p. 12).

82 Examples of such occurrences proliferate throughout the "L.A. Quartet" novels and *American Tabloid*. In *The Black Dahlia* Bleichert responds to Kay Lake's announcement that she is leaving him by destroying furniture (p. 309). *The Big Nowhere* sees Mal Considine shooting clumps of sagebrush to let off steam (p. 253), while in *L.A. Confidential* Ed Exley reacts to Inez Soto's taunt that he is a "coward" by throwing his army medals across the room and hitting curtains (p. 238). When Dave Klein discovers that a warrant has been issued for his arrest he destroys furniture (*White Jazz*, p. 310), while Pete Bondurant punches a wall after finding out that another "Kennedy hit" might supplant his conspiracy to assassinate the President (*American Tabloid*, p. 561). Violent self-expression is also associated with members of this society's oligarchy; Mickey Cohen explodes with wrath, shattering a glass that he is holding hands (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 35), and Jimmy Hoffa rampages with a "nail-studded" baseball bat after being told that a Teamster intends to testify against him to Robert Kennedy's grand jury (*American Tabloid*, pp. 64-5).

83 To cite the incident in full: "One, two, three, shots—Mal lifted clean off his feet and spun around with his face blown away. The body collapsed in front of him; Buzz walked to Coleman; Coleman leered behind bloody fangs and raised his gun. Buzz shot first, emptying his piece at the wolverine toothwork, screaming when he finally got an empty chamber. He kept screaming, and he was still screaming when a shitload of cops stormed in and tried to take Mal Considine away from him" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 439).

The Black Dahlia's Bleichert and Blanchard, and *L.A. Confidential*'s Exley and White, the connection between Meeks and Considine was originally forged in enmity and progressed to friendship only after the imperatives of "professionalism" demanded they work together. The severing in each of these instances of an increasingly close intramale bond by an act of physical annihilation is arguably an attempt on Ellroy's part to foreclose any possible further intimacy between these men, to ritually exorcise the spectre of potential homoerotic attraction and pre-empt these men being construed as *too* "interested" in one another. That Meeks' bond with Considine could be physically cemented only in a moment of extreme, violent negation is the outcome of an interdiction on intramale physical intimacy within Ellroy's textual world which—in addition to recalling the taboo on homosexuality and horror of penetration subtending this culture—suggests that if sex is the currency between men and women, violence is the medium through which male bodies function as objects of exchange.[84]

The dread of "feminine" intimacy, the refusal to acknowledge the sublimated erotic structures underpinning men's interactions, ensures that the only context in which male bodies are authorised to interact is when these bodies are in the process of being damaged and devastated. Thus boxing—the only forum in Ellroy's texts in which the specularised display of the male physique as an item of erotic gratification is permissible[85]—and physical fights or mock-sparring between men comprise the only

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84 This is succinctly summarised by the implicit parallel drawn between Glenda Bledsoe and Dave Klein when they compare "biographies": "she bypassed whoring. I never said I kill people" (*White Jazz*, p. 128).

85 Arguably this reflects the fact that the majority of boxers in Ellroy's fiction are African Americans or Mexicans (see footnote 71, Part One) who, as already-abjected males, are exempted from the privileges associated with the masculine gaze and are constructed as objects for this rather than progenitors of it.

available avenues for men to access other men's bodies.[86] The lionisation of boxers both within the LAPD, where they are guaranteed automatic promotion, and the public psyche,[87] reveals the ramification of the regulatory maintenance of emotional and physical calcification into a privileging of the stoic capacity both to endure violence and inflict it. Bleichert and Blanchard's "boxing reputations" cause criminals to treat them with "respect" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 72), a deference that Bleichert forfeits when, in a later assignment, he refuses to employ "force" with suspects (p. 235). Like Bleichert, Ed Exley is vilified as a "weak sister" by his peers because of his reluctance to tactically deploy physical violence (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 8).[88] While failing to adopt a brutal methodology is read as "cowardice" and negatively associated with "femininity," the positive identification of "courage"— the barometer of "acceptable" masculinity in this world—with acts of violence ensures that Exley's murder of the "Nite Owl" suspects earns him the LAPD "Medal of Valor" (p. 248). The mapping of "courage" onto "violence" and the approbation of the latter by embodiments of "authority" leads Exley's father to afford him a "wary respect" for his ostensible feat of wartime valour—the single-handed murder of a platoon of Japanese infantry (p. 49).

However, in one sequence in *The Black Dahlia* Lee Blanchard's status as a boxer renders him a sexualised object rather than a subject of the "gaze"; Bleichert and Kay Lake observe a semi-clad Blanchard training and Lake smirks, "'at least he looks good with his shirt off'" (p. 37).

86 Lee Blanchard and Bucky Bleichert's relationship illustrates this; Blanchard can only approximate physical intimacy with Bleichert by taking a "playful jab" at him (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 14), while the most emotionally resonant moments between these "best friends" occur when Bleichert assists Blanchard in "controlling" himself after an emotional outburst by wrestling him to the ground—"Lee wasn't resisting—he was just lying there, muttering 'Partner' over and over" (p. 182)—and when Bleichert physically attacks Blanchard for lying to him (p. 188).

87 This is symbolised by the success of the boxing match between Bucky Bleichert and Lee Blanchard as a means of attracting public support for the LAPD (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 52).

88 The characterisation of any inability to utilise violence, or to use it effectively, as a sign of "weakness" and effeminacy also informs Pete Bondurant's derisive construction of Ward Littell's feeble attack upon him: "the slap was weak. Most women slapped harder" (*American Tabloid*, p. 89).

This endeavour was actually fabricated by Exley to camouflage the "cowardice" he manifested in combat (p. 49); ironically, it causes Chief Parker to construct Exley as "'worth a dozen'" of Bud White because although White "'killed three men in the line of duty, that's nothing compared to what [Exley] did in the war'" (p. 146). Parker's expressed admiration reveals that men's "worth" in this capitalist system is calculated by their death-dealing prowess occasioned by their function as professional killers. This valorisation of aggression, coupled with the feminisation of non-violent behaviour, again reflects the cultural privileging of a masculine body configured as "phallic and impenetrable, as a war-body simultaneously armed and armoured."[89] Masculine subjects are expected to be "armoured" in the sense of being fortified against emotion and in terms of being physically prepared for, and capable of, "battle"; there is thus a clear continuum between the procedure of "hardening" the self and the second modality by which Theweleit's "soldier males" sought to construct their subjective identities: the "smashing apart of the other." The continuity between these aspects of masculine subjectification is encoded in the appellation of professional killers as "hard boys" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 54), a term emphasising both their physical toughness and capacity to unflinchingly render harm, and the emotional insensibility which facilitates their enactment of their murderous function by enabling their devaluation of human life—so that murders are reduced to "187s" and killing someone becomes, for

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89 Catherine Waldby, "Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body" in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (eds), *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 268. Waldby theorises that these "boundary differences" between masculine and feminine bodily imagoes stem from "(imaginary) genital differences. The fantasy of the always hard and ready penis/ phallus characterizes the entire surface of the male body, while the fantasy of the soft accommodating and rather indeterminate vagina is synechdocal for the entire feminine body. In this way the genital markers of sexual difference, the penis and the vagina, seem to render the kinds of power relations attendant upon them as natural and inevitable" (p. 268).

Pete Bondurant, "clipping" them (*American Tabloid*, p. 426). The "smashing apart" of other humans, their physical disintegration, by men like Bondurant (p. 190, 488), is analogous to the actions of the Freikorpsmen who created and upheld their personal "boundaries only as [killers] wading in blood."[90] Just as the parameters of the "soldier males'" selves were arranged and maintained through obliterating the despised, feminine "other," so Ellroy's men aggressively dominate others to reify and shore up their subjective identities in precisely the same way that Ward Littell admits to having "gained his selfhood at great cost to other people" (*American Tabloid*, p. 183).

Hence Ed Exley's desperate desire to assert his embattled masculinity—challenged by his ascription as a coward and a "weak sister" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 87, 238, 343)—provokes his murder of the "Nite Owl" suspects. When these criminals escape from prison, Exley takes his father's shotgun (symbolising his arrogation of patriarchal power) and pursues them:

> "You're under arrest" strangling out. ... Sugar Ray said, "Cat got your goddamn tongue, sissy?" Ed jerked the trigger: once, twice—buckshot took off Coates' legs. ... Fontaine and Navarette stood up screaming; Ed SQUEEZED the trigger, blew them up in one spread. ... He saw Jones make the elevator. ... Jones was pushing buttons, screaming prayers—inches from the glass, "Please Jesus." Ed aimed point-blank, squeezed twice. Glass and buckshot took his head. Strong legs now (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 245-6; original emphasis).

90 Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One*, p. 279, 39.

The episode's adrenaline-charged pace, the orgasmic repetition of the word "squeezed," the sudden "strengthening" of Exley's legs, all signal that this is a moment of intense self-realisation for Exley—a "writing of the self in action"[91]—while the gratuitous cruelty of shooting (at "point-blank" range) an unarmed man begging for his life reveals that his construction of his "self" occurs through brutally negating others. This urge to "smash apart" the "other" is on one level an attempt to secure the boundaries of the individual ego. Like Theweleit's "soldier males," who were unable to "feel the integrity of the self and sustain a sense of bodily boundaries without inflicting violence," and for whom violating others was a way to "remain whole,"[92] Ellroy's men cannot retain a stable sense of their own identity without engaging in a concomitant project to "smash apart" those who challenge this. Men respond to perceived affronts to their self-conception with immediate physical ferocity; merely being struck by Littell is enough, in Bondurant's eyes, to decree Littell's "death sentence" (*American Tabloid*, p. 111), and when Bud White's sense of identity is violated by the revelation that Lynn Bracken betrayed him by sleeping with Ed Exley, he automatically seeks to "break" her by striking her repeatedly (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 386).[93]

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91 Rollo May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), p. 187. May also cites Jean-Paul Sartre's theory that "violence is creating the self. It is an organizing of one's powers to prove one's power, to establish the worth of the self" (p. 187)—a concept reified throughout Ellroy's fiction.

92 Benjamin and Rabinbach, "Foreword," p. xx, p. xxi.

93 Instances of self-actualisation through the physical violation of another person abound in Ellroy's texts. When a younger policeman says to Jack Vincennes, "'you used to be some kind of hotshot, didn't you?'"—thereby affronting Vincennes' sense of self-worth, which is irrevocably implicated in his status as a celebrity—"Jack cold-cocked him—a knee to the nuts" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 284). An example of violence against the abject is a means of constituting one's identity occurs in the "Bloody Christmas" incident in *L.A. Confidential*, in which a group of policemen beat six Mexicans arrested for assaulting other police officers. Bud White witnesses this but does not participate in the attack until he is challenged by one of the Mexican men; "the Mex gave him the finger. Bud kicked him prone, picked him up by the neck. Cheers, attaboys, holy fucks. Bud banged the punk's head on the ceiling" (p. 28).

In addition to delimiting men's personal boundaries, the violation of abjected "others" enables the power matrix to preserve its internal parameters.[94] Jimmy Hoffa enlists Pete Bondurant to "restore order" in Hoffa's taxi company, which is staffed by Cuban men whose political disputes have disrupted "business" (*American Tabloid*, p. 125). Determining that these Cubans must be "broken into the White Man's Rule of Order," Bondurant lays down "laws" for them to adhere to[95] and when one man challenges these, Bondurant beats him "half-dead" (p. 125). Signalling the importance of violently subduing the "other" to ensure the " loop"'s stability, Bondurant's actions reinforce the zero-sum logic of this universe, where the only possible assertion of individual or collective authority occurs through viciously negating any affronts to the power regime or the flow of "business."

Echoing this, the LAPD project to "contain" criminals and subaltern groups manifests itself in a routinisation of brutality as a quintessential element of police "work."[96] The

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94 This reflects the fact that, as several theorists have maintained, "hegemonic" masculinity is often secured through the violent repudiation of those subject-positions against which it defines itself (that is, women and feminised men). See Michael Kaufman, "The Construction of Masculinity and the Triad of Men's Violence" in Michael Kaufman (ed.), *Beyond Patriarchy: Essays by Men on Pleasure, Power and Change* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 21; and Jonathan Rutherford, "Who's That Man?" in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford (eds), *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 29.

95 Bondurant's terminology encapsulates both the Cubans' abjected status—they are counterposed to the "universal subject" (the "White Man") and designated as "outsiders" subject to this figure's "law"—and the hegemonic use of violent techniques to induct (or "break") them into their subordinate status. The phrase used by Bondurant—"broken into"—has connotations of sexual deflowering (reinforcing the abjected Cuban's occupancy of a feminised/"passive" role in the world of "male on male action") and of processes used to train animals (entrenching the perception of these Cubans as "less than human").

96 Typically police violence is euphemised as "working strong-arm" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 235), evincing precisely the casual attitude towards its instrumentalisation that enables Buzz Meeks to view physically assaulting a homosexual man as simply part of his "cop work" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 196). While Dudley Smith calls violence a "'necessary adjunct to the job'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 79), implying that it is as an

LAPD hierarchy advocates the use of "'all necessary force'" in apprehending felons (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 113), while for Dudley Smith the capacity to assert himself by physically obliterating others is an attribute to be not merely externalised but actually *publicised*. Habitually affecting neckties emblazoned with numerals designating the quantity of people he has killed in the line of duty, he urges his protégés to adopt this practice (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 13). Smith's conduct confirms the reification (indeed, the theatricalisation) of violence as a constitutive element of authorised masculinity in this world.[97] Police brutality in the course of interrogations is commonplace,[98] with tactics of eliciting information ranging from the gaudy—as when Art De Spain tortures two recalcitrant interrogees to death with "corrosive chemicals" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 379)—to the functional, emblematised by Bud White's mechanical beating of a hoodlum, where the repetitive cadences with which the act is described confirm precisely how automatic and

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ancillary component of the police function, that violence is actually *integral* to police work is suggested by the fact that it is Buzz Meeks' prowess with a "billy club" that makes him "a born policeman" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 27). Bucky Bleichert offers an explicit endorsement of the necessity of violence to the police function when he approvingly classifies a fellow officer as an "adept" interrogator because he "knew when to punch for information, hitting fast and hard, fueled by personal rancor but capable of putting it out of his mind when the interrogee coughed up what we wanted" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 208).

97 This construction of violence as a crucial component of "masculinity" resonates with the perception, frequently articulated in current gender theory, that violence is "part of what actually shapes the contours of masculinity" (Tony Eardley, "Violence and Sexuality" in Andy Metcalf and Martin Humphries (eds), *The Sexuality of Men* [London: Pluto, 1985], p. 97). Numerous theorists have suggested that social technologies and practices inculcate within men the belief that violence is not just an acceptable mode of behaviour for them to uphold but is actually integral to the forging and maintenance of a sense of "masculine identity." See Lynn Segal, *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (London: Virago, 1990), p. 269; Rosalind Miles, *The Rites of Man: Love, Sex and Death in the Making of the Male* (London: Grafton, 1991), p. 8; Anne Campbell, *Men, Women and Aggression* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 26; Doug Robinson, *No Less a Man: Masculist Art in a Feminist Age* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), pp. 79-80; and Warren Steinberg, *Masculinity: Identity, Conflict, and Transformation.*(Boston and London: Shambhala, 1993), p. 51.

98 There are countless episodes in Ellroy's fiction in which police officers obtain information from suspects or interrogees through actual or threatened violence; see eg *The Black Dahlia* (p. 63, 196); *The Big Nowhere* (p. 57, 195, 425); *L.A. Confidential* (p. 117, 240, 409); *White Jazz* (p. 70).

instinctive White's brutality is: "Bud threw backhands—eyes on the wall so that he wouldn't have to see. Left/right/ left/right/left/right" (p. 324).[99]

While White's averted gaze suggests a distaste for the devastation he is wreaking, the fact that he continues to perpetrate it so methodically signals his acceptance of violence as a crucial component of his "job" as a policeman, a task which he, as an agent of the state, is (or feels) compelled to perform.[100] White's resignation to the inevitability of instrumentalising violence is reiterated by Ed Exley when he responds to Dave Klein's query as to whether he enjoyed shooting the "Nite Owl" suspects by declaring that "'the public has no idea what justice costs the men who perform it'" (*White Jazz*, p. 36). Exley implies that the utilitarian deployment of violence is part of a policeman's responsibility to the public, a "duty" that must be enacted irrespective of men's personal moral outlook on it, or any psychological "costs" that accrue from this practice. As this suggests, in

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99 White's use of the quasi-technical term "backhands" to describe the violence he imparts is arguably both an attempt to impart a veneer of professionalism and expertise to his brutality and a means of detaching himself from the carnage he is inflicting. A similar emphasis on the "technical" aspects of violence informs an altercation between Bucky Bleichert and Lee Blanchard—"I grabbed Lee from behind in a full nelson and spun him" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 182)—and Danny Upshaw's duel with Gene Niles: "Danny launched a hook to the gut; Niles feinted and came in with a hard uppercut, slamming Danny into the wall. … Niles telegraphed a huge right hand at his midsection" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 302).

100 It should be noted that as soon as White's victim, the small-time hoodlum Lamar Hinton, challenges White by yelling "'fuck your mother,'" and then insulting White's lover Lynn Bracken by calling her a "'cunt,'" White's displeasure in inflicting violence rapidly dissolves. In an act of startling ferocity that reiterates the fact that the only licensed expression of emotion for men in this world involves aggressive acting out, he lifts Hinton's chair and throws it across the room, then punches him until other police officers drag him away (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 326-7). The somewhat hapless Hinton is also subjected to excruciating brutality perpetrated by Jack Vincennes, who literally breaks both of Hinton's arms in the course of an interrogation (p. 240). Vincennes' assault upon Hinton confirms that he, like White, employs violence to subdue suspects with an impassivity signifying his acceptance of its tactical necessity. Attempting to resist an African American suspect, "the kid tried to run; Jack nailed him: gun-butt shots to the head. No more resistance—Denton cuffed his hands behind his back. Jack slipped on brass knucks and made fists. 'Leroy, Tyrone. *Where?*' The kid dribbled teeth—'One-two-one' came out bloody" (p. 117; original emphasis).

addition to blithely perpetrating acts of brutality, men are expected to withstand any psychic disturbance that such actions might engender within them, and to ignore any ethical dilemmas arising from their role as "professional killers."[101] That their use of violence possesses potentially psychologically distressing consequences is confirmed by the fact that when Ellroy's protagonists attack others they often preface this by conceptualising them in abstract, dehumanising terms, objectifying their victims to achieve sufficient distance from them to enable their annihilation.[102] In this respect it is particularly intriguing that Dave Klein executes Johnny Duhamel, a fellow policeman and " white, male, heterosexual" subject, only because his drug-distorted mental state leads him to believe that Duhamel is a "Jap" (*White Jazz*, p. 204). The implication here is either that if Klein was not under this illusion he would be incapable of killing a peer, or that constructing Duhamel as an "other" fosters the ease with which Klein consummates his murder.

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101 Several theorists have noted the innate human resistance to killing, typically discussed in relation to individuals being encouraged or forced to overcome this resistance in periods such as war when the "need" to kill is posited. Scarry observes that in wartime periods the conscript or soldier, "in consenting to kill," agrees to "perform (for the country) the act that would in peacetime expose his unpoliticalness and place him outside the moral space of the nation. What in killing he does is wrench around his most fundamental sanctions about how within civilization (and this particular civilization, his country) another embodied person can be touched; he divests himself of civilization, decivilizes himself, reverses not just an 'idea' or 'belief' but a learned and deeply embodied set of physical impulses and gestures regarding his relation to any other person's body. He undoes the learning in his body" (Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], p. 122. For a particularly fascinating analysis of the inbuilt human resistance to killing, and an account of the conditioning methods that institutions such as armies, which are predicated on violence, utilise to overcome this resistance, see Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

102 Consonant with De Zulueta's observation that "it is the dehumanisation of the other that is at the root of all human violence" (Felicity de Zulueta, *From Pain to Violence: The Traumatic Roots of Destructiveness* [London: Whurr, 1993], p. xiii), Buzz Meeks, preparing to shoot Coleman Healy, constructs him as an inhuman "other," calling him "the rat man" and "the thing" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 438). Similarly, when Bud White tortures the homosexual Dwight Gilette he labels him a "queer" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 192).

The latter prospect seems more likely insofar as Klein is the consummate cold-blooded professional—the ultimate incarnation of the interimplicated processes of "hardening the self" and "smashing apart the other," a man so inured to violence that he describes acts of murder as dispassionately as he performs them: "I banged his head against the wall, threw him out of the window screaming" (p. 17). Yet after the latter murder Klein develops what he terms "my standard postmurder shakes" (p. 23); while the phrase "standard" reiterates the ritualised nature of violence and the pattern of repetition it forms in his life, his "shakes" reveal the psychic scarring that his role of "hired assassin" provokes. Throughout *White Jazz*, the guilt that Klein manifests here accumulates throughout his psyche, accelerating and reaching critical mass after he slays Duhamel. Haunted by recollections of his colleague pleading for his life (p. 210, 217, 246), Klein grows progressively overwhelmed with remorse and, in a quite extraordinary sequence, recalls all of the violent or unethical episodes in his life before breaking down sobbing:

> Killings, beatings, bribes, payoffs, kickbacks, shakedowns. ... Lies, intimidation, vows trashed, oaths broken, duties scorned. Thievery, duplicity, greed, lies, killings, beatings, bribes, payoffs ... Sobs then—choking back tears, sobs racking through me so hard the trailer shook. EVERYTHING (p. 331; original emphasis).

Sickened by the corruption infecting his life, Klein externalises his self-loathing onto the figure of J.C. Kafesjian, the LAPD Narcotic Division's officially "sanctioned" drug dealer who personifies for Klein the venality and evil that he is mired in and has been guilty of perpetuating (p. 37). The contrition Klein feels leads him to seek absolution by

murdering Kafesjian (p. 356).[103] Revealingly, Klein's incessant, racist references to the Armenian-derived Kafesjian as "greasy"[104] stress the latter's alterity and signal that Klein's attainment of self-realisation occurs through his "smashing apart" of a *literal* "other," a man whose ethnic heritage marks him, despite his hegemonically "sanctioned" status, as an "outsider" in this society.

An obvious irony obtains from the fact that in his quest for redemption Klein has recourse to precisely the same violent methodology which prompted his initial feelings of guilt and *desire* for atonement. As this implies, Klein has internalised the violent praxis associated with the professional ideal to the extent that it functions as a core element of his psyche. While he displays remorse regarding the pain that his actions cause to others, even when he reaches a limit point beyond which further brutality seems intolerable Klein continues to act in accordance with his programming as a "professional killer." In

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103 Ellroy has discussed the "ethical" dimensions of *White Jazz* in several articles, telling one interviewer that the "'moral'" of the novel is that "'Dave Klein crumbles under the weight of his own evil,'" and flails at "'acts of decency like a man dying of thirst reaching for a glass of water'" (Ellroy quoted in Ron Hogan, "James Ellroy" in *Beatrice* [1996 edition], pp. 8-9). See also Ellroy's comments in Gary S. Kadet, "The Demon Dog Barks His Woof of Time" in *The Boston Book Review* (1 August 1995), p. 2: "'[My protagonists] learn about self sacrifice, but at a terrible price. They do it—and they do it with the reflexology of a hungry person who needs a drink of water. They're choking to death on their own inner corruption, outer corruption and history of misconduct, and they become quite often obsessed with women and look for redemption there, but something in their nature prevents the ultimate capitulation to the woman which is what all great love thrives on. I think Dave Klein wanted to learn to give himself up and look outside himself at a terrible price in *White Jazz*.'"

104 His first two encounters with Kafesjian see Klein using the word "greasy" to label him and his family no less than four times. Kafesjian is described as "a greasy fat man getting old" (*White Jazz*, p. 3); "this fat greasy fuck" (p. 32); "greasy and ugly" (p. 40), and Klein resists Kafesjian's attempts to bribe him by saying "'Fuck you. Fuck your whole greasy family'" (p. 42). Ogdon has noted that the customary abjection of men from diverse ethnic backgrounds, women, and "homosexual or impotent white men" in hard-boiled texts is typically accomplished through descriptions of these individuals' "perverted psychologies and diseased physiognomies, and later their destroyed bodies. The perversion, disease and amorality are relayed in descriptive passages often focusing with great relish on body fluids (tears, saliva, vomit, sweat, urine, etc)"—or, in this case, grease (Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology," p. 84).

this regard his behaviour is again analogous to Theweleit's "soldier males," who fought not only because "they were paid to" but "most of all, because that was what they did."[105] Like Ellroy's other anti-heroes Klein is both a member of a corps of hired thugs paid to disseminate violence and a man in whom the naturalisation of violence as a constitutive element of male "selfhood" has been inculcated with such success that it is the paramount aspect of his subjectivity.[106] For Klein violence is functional, an efficacious way for him to advance his own agenda, resolve problems that confront him and order his world.[107] Yet it is also his instinctive response to any situation; violence floods his thought-processes[108] and trembles permanently at the edges of his consciousness, ensuring that his very psyche brims over with brutality. At the instant that his mutinous partner Junior Stemmons disavows Klein's authority and threatens to expose his corruption, Klein automatically and unreflectively retaliates by attempting to murder him: "I grabbed his neck and dug in to kill him" (*White Jazz*, p. 115).

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105 Ehrenreich, "Foreword," p. ix.

106 This is not to suggest that Ellroy attributes any "innate" violence to Klein; indeed, allusions are made within *White Jazz* to the environmental factors that determined or at least fostered Klein's capacity for brutality, so that any reader searching for a psychologically "valid" explanation for this would find it in the references to the beatings he routinely endured at the hands of his father and to his experience as a Marine during World War II (*White Jazz*, p. 26, 147, 220).

107 Klein reacts to Ed Exley's reminder that he works for the LAPD, not Mickey Cohen, by thinking "someday I'll shove a bribe list down his throat" (*White Jazz*, p. 11); he contemplates using "brass knucks" on Tommy Kafesjian to make the latter divulge information to him (p. 151); he assaults two fellow police officers who are harassing his informant Lester Lake (p. 158), tortures Chick Vecchio for information (p. 271), and claims to have murdered the gangster Jack Dragna as a means of releasing himself from his obligation to the Mafia (p. 28: "I choked him dead with a pillow")—a manouevre that backfired insofar as it led only to a transference of this debt to Sam Giancana.

108 Hence he refers to Ed Exley as having verbally "shivved" and visually "nailed" him (*White Jazz*, p. 22, 91); attempting to convince Bob Gallaudet of the need to "'strongarm'" the latter's political rival, he says "I hit hard" to persuade him (p. 20); and he speaks of his intentions to "ream" Junior Stemmons (p. 63) and one of Howard Hughes' offsiders (p. 104). The verbs used by Klein are suffused with violence; he does not "give" Stemmons a "lead" but "shoves" it at him (p. 45), he does not say that he "ate" food but that he "wolfed" it (p. 49), he "killed" his headlights rather than dimmed them (p. 65), and so on.

The ease with which Klein resorts to annihilatory violence—he sits in Stemmons' apartment holding a gun and thinking "kill him/don't kill him. Pendulum: if he walks in on the wrong swing he's dead" (p. 118)—is echoed by Ellroy's other protagonists, whose introjection of the hegemonic approbation of aggression ensures its embedding as a central feature of their subjective consciousnesses. Like Klein, these men's ways of inhabiting the world are shaped by the brutality in which they are immersed and which they perpetuate; it shapes their behaviour, infuses their vocabulary,[109] and provides their only form of emotional release.[110] The fabric of these mens' psyches is so intensely imbued with violence that hostility becomes their instinctive reaction to virtually any circumstance—an urge ever present to them, an impulse so immediate as to be almost atavistic,[111] and an indication of how deeply they have internalised the dominant behavioural code of brutality associated with authorised masculinity.[112] For these men accustomed to utilising violence in their professional capacity, the impulse towards cruelty becomes so ingrained that they habitually use it to cancel out any perceived "threats" to their self-esteem and self-image. Their acts of destruction are often attempts to

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109 Hence Mal Considine "killed" his coffee (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 99), Bucky Bleichert and Danny Upshaw speak of "raping," respectively "a crime scene for evidence" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 339) and a "neighborhood for witnesses" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 144), while Bleichert notes that "the Blanchard rumours hit me like little feint-jabs" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 10).

110 For example, Bucky Bleichert's anger with Lee Blanchard over the latter's obsession with the "Black Dahlia"—a fixation that, in Bleichert's eyes, has caused Blanchard to neglect his police "duties"—has its outlet in a vicious assault on his partner: "I let the crimson loose all the way, smashing my best friend until my own hands were ruined and he was senseless at my feet" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 188).

111 See for example *The Big Nowhere*, p. 49: "the sax man smiled up at him ... Danny resisted an urge to kick the horn down his throat"; and Ed Exley's reaction to Lynn Bracken: "her smile came on like a target—he thought for a second that he'd hit her. She laughed before he could; he leaned in and kissed her instead" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 362). The latter incident additionally suggests the implication of aggressive sexuality in the constitution of "masculine" identity (see also footnote 5, Part Three).

112 From Ward Littell, who obtains "manhood" through brutalising Mafia informants, to Dave Klein, for whom violence is so instinctive that he wakes up "aiming—trigger happy" (*White Jazz*, p. 286), violence is so integral to the psyches of Ellroy's protagonists, and is re-enacted by them so frequently, that it obtains

consolidate their hegemonic status; the frequently castratory nature of their aggressive outbursts[113] signals a desire to appropriate phallic authority, while the violence that these men vent is often catalysed by the need to uphold a "masculine" image. Danny Upshaw explodes at a fellow officer's accusation that he is "'queer'" with instantaneous ferocity,[114] his heightened sensitivity to the impugning of his heterosexual viability reflecting his crisis of sexual definition and increasing awareness that he might be gay. The corrosive frustration and overpowering sense of anxiety this generates in Upshaw spills over into a desire to violate precisely those whose category of "otherness" he suspects he might fall within—homosexuals like the openly gay youth whom he slaps in a vicious and unprovoked assault (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 283).

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the status of a ritual (as Klein's practice of buying his sister a dress whenever he kills a man [p. 18] confirms).

113 In attacking men of comparable "power" or hierarchical "rank" to themselves, Ellroy's men use knives, swords or blades—which can be construed as "phallic" emblems or symbols—rather than their fists or guns. Hence Dave Klein kills Johnny Duhamel with a sword (*White Jazz*, p. 204), Jack Vincennes nails business entrepreneur Pierce Patchett's hand to a table (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 404), while Buzz Meeks similarly nails plastic surgeon Terence Lux's hand to a wall with a scalpel—an act that occurs after Lux challenges Meeks' sense of his own identity, calling him an "'Okie baboon'" and a "'lackey'" and accusing him of never acting without a financial incentive underlying his behaviour (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 424-8). In other examples of brutally phallicised violence, Bud White, Lenny Sands and Coleman Healy are all shown biting off the noses of their opponents before killing them; that Healy's adversary is his biological father merely underscores the point that this type of violence is an attempt to wield patriarchal authority (see *L.A. Confidential*, p. 457; *American Tabloid*, p. 105; and *The Big Nowhere*, p. 438).

114 *The Big Nowhere*, p. 302: "Danny lashed out, quick lefts and rights, short speed punches that caught Niles flush, ripped his face but didn't move his body back one inch." Other sequences which foreground the use of violence as a means of shoring up a fragile sense of masculine identity are two interrogation scenes occurring in *The Black Dahlia* and *L.A. Confidential*. In the former episode, a policeman tries to extract a confession from a Black Dahlia murder suspect by suggesting that the man (a historically real figure whose name, ironically, was "Red Manley") lashed out at her in an explosion of male impotence—"'you started thinking about all the girls who laughed at that tiny little dick of yours'" and so on [*The Black Dahlia*, pp. 143-4]). The second instance is that of the "Nite Owl" inquisition, where Ed Exley goads the three Nite Owl suspects by accusing them of being "sissies"—inadequately male—and depicts to one of them a scenario in which he resorted to murder as a consequence of being incapable of proving his masculinity (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 122-8).

Upshaw's predicament as a man striving to entrench his viability while developing a recognition of his homosexuality (and hence unintelligibility within the hegemonic domain) is unique amongst Ellroy's protagonists. However, Upshaw's use of violence to establish dominance over abjected groups and sculpt an appropriately "masculine" identity is also foregrounded in a sequence in which Kemper Boyd encounters the Cubans employed in Hoffa's cab company. Memorably described by Kim as "the model G-man playboy, a Best and Brightest killer-elite type with a chilled-martini conscience,"[115] Boyd clearly has no need to prove his professionalism or masculinity in the way that Upshaw does. Yet when he visits the cabstand, one of the Cuban men, in a stagy, territorial manouevre, tacitly challenges Boyd by producing a knife. Boyd responds in a startlingly sadistic manner, judo-chopping the man and slamming his knife through his hand before exiting with a "tight little bow" (*American Tabloid*, p. 69). The emasculating gesture of stabbing the man's hand inscribes Boyd's conduct as an assertion of phallic authority, while his "bow" confirms that his violence is an act of self-dramatisation, a conscious display performed for the benefit of other men. This is underscored by Boyd's colleague John Stanton's description of the incident to Pete Bondurant: "'one of the men pulled a knife, and Boyd disarmed him in rather spectacular fashion'" (p. 112). Bondurant's rejoinder, "'Boyd's a stylish guy,'" resonates with the connection frequently drawn by Ellroy between violence and the stylisation of masculine personae. This correlation frequently occurs on an explicitly physical level, so that Dudley Smith attempts to promote a visible image of "toughness" and aggression, augmenting the

115 Kim, "Worst and Darkest," p. 64

neckties he wears to commemorate the murders he has committed with other accoutrements of terror (including guns and brass knuckles) that he pointedly displays.[116]

The concept of violence as a stylisation of the self also incorporates the fact that aggression is, for Ellroy's men, a crucial part of their projects of self-actualisation. Violence is integral to the self-image of professional killers like Pete Bondurant, who revels in his capacity to instil fear through threatening or engaging in brutality. Virtually his only means of self-expression, violence is also a source of intense gratification for Bondurant.[117] Yet he also perceives it as a useful service that he provides in the capitalist economy and an instrumental process, a means of coercing individuals to impart information to him and thereby a conduit to power, privilege, and the type of "insider knowledge" which he craves to acquire (*American Tabloid*, p. 46; pp. 442-3). Bondurant's ardent pursuit of privileged information reflects the fact that men within the insider sphere do not simply possess hegemonic authority but actively *court* this: "'everybody wants to think they're connected,'" as one Mafia colleague declares, "'everybody wants to be in the loop'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 204). The urgent desire to be incorporated in the

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116 Thus Smith allows his suitcoat to open and reveal to Dave Klein the "ordnance" he carries ("magnum, sap, switchblade" [*White Jazz*, p. 91]), while Mal Considine notes, as he is presumably intended to, the "brass knuckles sticking out of" Smith's pocket (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 14).

117 Bondurant's behavioural "trademark" involves ostentatiously cracking his knuckles to intimidate others (*American Tabloid*, p. 12, p. 442) and he takes an obvious delight in his physical power and strength. Thus in *White Jazz*, a "gleeful" Bondurant taunts Chick Vecchio, whom he is about to torture for information, with what Dave Klein calls his "canned shtick" regarding his "giant fists": "the left one's the hospital, the right one's death. The right one steals your life while the left one steals your breath. These hands are bad juju and the bad boogaloo, they're the teeth of the demon as he slides down the flue'" (*White Jazz*, p. 270). In *American Tabloid* Bondurant admires his own physical strength—he "hoists a man up by the neck and "his arm fluttered from the lift: two hundred pounds plus, not bad" (*American Tabloid*, p. 16) and smiles because "his hands put the fear out every time" (p. 64).During the "Bay of Pigs" incident Bondurant is so enthusiastic about participating in destruction that he shoots "palm fronds off of trees just to shoot *something*" (p. 398; original emphasis), while on another occasion he literally "fantasizes" about how he will murder Ward Littell (p. 380).

"loop" leads Ellroy's protagonists to promote themselves as "insiders" (*American Tabloid*, p. 46), to boast of being "'well-connected'" (p. 151), and to respond to challenges to their empowered status with harsh, immediate violence.[118] It mobilises their self-contrasting with the "squarejohn" citizens and "civilians" over whom they maintain authority (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 36; *White Jazz*, p. 265; *The Black Dahlia*, p. 104), and induces them to consolidate their differentiation from the latter by perpetuating an insider vernacular—the insular police lexicon of phrases like " 187" and "Code 2" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 344)—and an exclusionary semiotic system. The latter is exemplified by the elaborate series of signs employed by Dudley Smith and Mal Considine when they interview a man suspected of "Communist" affiliations: "Mal held his temper by looking at Dudley; Mr. Bad Guy returned him the cut-off sign" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 238) and so on.

Considine's reference to a "cut-off sign" evokes the use of complex patterns of hand signals within baseball, reaffirming the concept of the insider realm as a "game" predicated on the monopolisation of specialised knowledge by those who know its "rules." The discrepancy in this situation between the authoritative position of interrogator and the disempowered interrogee uncognisant of the signals determining their fate sharply illustrates the power differential between "civilians" and "insiders."

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118 Jack Vincennes brutally assaults Lamar Hinton—"Jack stood up, kicked, pistol-whipped—the balls, left/right/left to the face. Hinton went down, dropping paper; Jack broke his arms—knees to the elbows, jerks at the wrists" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 240)—because Hinton has access to information documenting Vincennes' drug-induced murder of two innocent bystanders that threatens his reputation as the legendary "Big V," celebrity anti-drug "'crusader'" (p. 21). Vincennes' ferocious attack is a means of defending up his selfhood by violating another, and an attempt to pre-empt any dissolution of the power that his celebrity status accords to him. Similarly, when Chuck Rogers challenges the French-Canadian's status as a viable subject by asking him "'Aren't you some kind of frog?'", Bondurant "popped his thumbs" to daunt the man, adding "'You just make like I'm a 100% American who knows what's good for business'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 109).

This imbalance cements men's determination to be incorporated within the "loop" of authority because, as Bud White observes, there is "safety in a badge" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 415). Authoritative agents are "safe" in the sense of often being exempted from the laws that "civilians" are forced to comply with[119] and from exposure to the intrusive, legally authorised inquisitions they endure. The "safety" inhering in the "badge" of authority additionally enables men possessing the imprimatur of power to enact their own agendas without fear of legal or other reprisal. White takes advantage of his role as an implementor of a destructive regime to harass and injure men who beat their wives, and thereby exorcise the trauma he experienced after witnessing his father murder his mother (p. 27). While manipulating his police duties to restage his own Oedipal conflict causes "excessive-force complaints" to be filed against him (pp. 27-8), White evades retribution for his behaviour. Insofar as insider status is a guarantor (or at least facilitator) of such "immunity," it is unsurprising that Ellroy's protagonists strive to entrench themselves within the "loop," to harvest the benefits attendant upon their location as agents of authority, and to accrue the type of "juice"—a term condensing the "prestige," power and influence which men in the insider sphere aspire to obtain[120]—which will enable their privileged status.

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119 In a narrative landscape where "criminality" is associated with confusion and randomness (see footnote 89, Part One) it is also possible that "safety in a badge" represents "safety" from these chaotic elements. White's conception of the police function in terms of "safety" also arguably represents an attempt to safeguard himself from the abject realm in precisely the same way that Ward Littell, surveilling Lenny Sands in what he considers the hostile environment of a gay bar, escapes into an "enclosed and safe" telephone booth to "protect" himself and accomplish his mission (*American Tabloid*, p. 104).

120 The use of the term "juice" within *The Big Nowhere* connotes several of the attributes deemed desirable in the insider sphere. Mal Considine initially uses the term as a synonym for prestige and rank (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 73) and later equates it with courage (p. 430). Buzz Meeks refers to Dudley Smith's "juice" in contexts that suggest its association with the authority and capacity to dominate others that Smith possesses. When Considine declares, "'I'm taking Dudley down,'" Meeks responds by pointing out that to do this to "'a cop with Dudley's juice'" would be impossible (p. 406; see also p. 419).

Motivated by the drive to prosper within the "game," Ed Exley both solicits patriarchal approval and tries to maximise his own "power" by supplanting his father.[121] For Exley, being a "policeman" is a way to obtain authority over other men; confronted by his nemesis Bud White, a "scared" Exley thinks to himself "*be a captain*" (p. 421; original emphasis). His attempts to embody this role involve ordering White to "'get my interest before I ream you'" (p. 421), an aggressive reiteration of the homophobic vernacular of power which permits Exley to simultaneously assert his authority and undermine White's by positioning him in the "passive" role of being "reamed." In its revelation of Exley's replication of both the competitive and homophobic ideologies of the power matrix, this episode affirms his interiorisation of the "rules" and underlying ideology of the "game" in which he is enmeshed. Exley's ascension to the pinnacle of authority is fostered by his introjection of its instrumentalist ethos, ensuring that he effectively "buys" Johnny Duhamel to assist him in displacing his rival Dudley Smith (*White Jazz*, p. 261). Duhamel's meek acceptance of Exley's power over him—his compliance with Exley's command to work for Smith's "Mobster Squad" despite his revulsion for the job (p. 280, 305)—reinforces Ellroy's representation of men's behaviour as inevitably constrained by others, entrenching the status of the "loop" as an endlessly circulating continuum. The

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121 Exley's pursuit of patriarchal authority is mirrored by Mal Considine, who actively seeks to ascend the police hierarchy and enlists in the anti-Communist grand jury investigation to reap "glory" and a reputation as a "hero" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 77, 250)—advantages that he envisages will assist him in maintaining his patriarchal prerogative by gaining custody of his adoptive son. Considine's ambition is continually textually foregrounded; his primary incentive is to become a police captain and "Chief DA's Investigator" (p. 13; see also p. 15 and 102). Bucky Bleichert likewise aspires to scale the LAPD ranks, articulating this desire in terms of the tangible benefits and augmented "power" this would bestow upon him: "Warrants was local celebrity as a cop. Warrants was plainclothes without a coat and tie, romance and a mileage per diem on your civilian car. Warrants was working in the DA's office with one foot in the Detective Bureau, and late dinners with Mayor Bowron when he was waxing effusive and wanted to hear war stories" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 23).

regeneration of the "loop" is enabled by the allure of succeeding within it, which ensures that even those men who initially resist inclusion within it are eventually—and voluntarily—assimilated into it. Even Ward Littell, who tries unsuccessfully to function outside the "loop" as an independent operative working in opposition to organised crime, ultimately becomes absorbed into it and is retained as a Mafia lawyer.

This turn of events prompts J. Edgar Hoover's comment (endorsed by Littell) that Littell has been "'hungry all [his] life'" for the privileges he eventually acquires (*American Tabloid*, p. 485). This "hunger" to succeed in the insider realm is substantially responsible for motivating men's attempts to embody the predefined masculine/professional ideal. Yet their pursuit of this ideal is also attributable to the penalties associated with failing to embody "acceptable" subjectivity—graphically illustrated by Danny Upshaw's suicide after his closeted homosexuality is threatened with exposure—and to the pressure that receptacles of hegemonic authority place upon men to adhere to normativised conceptions of appropriate masculine conduct. Explicitly exhorted to strive towards the masculine ideal by their hierarchical superiors,[122] men are also compared unfavourably to

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122 This is one example of a recurring dynamic in Ellroy's fiction whereby men are instructed to adhere to prescribed codes of masculine conduct by men who have obtained positions of comparative authority. Kemper Boyd provides Ward Littell with a virtual manual in how to behave like a "professional," while policeman Fritz Vogel tells his son, also a policeman, not to behave like a '"nancy boy"' (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 169). Ed Exley is "coached" by his father and the latter's former police partner, Art De Spain, in how to represent himself to members of the LAPD hierarchy as a "hero, not a weak sister" during their investigation into the "Bloody Christmas" incident (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 66-7) and on how to conduct himself appropriately during interrogations—instructions which accentuate both ruthlessness and rationality (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 96). De Spain also advises Exley on how to scale the LAPD hierarchy in terms which emphasise that Exley's reluctance to use violence or "strongarm" tactics again militates against his acceptance as a viable male: '"You have to realize that a transfer to the Bureau will take years and lots of ass kissing. ... You're not one of the guys. You're not a strongarm type ... So be a sycophant and suck up to the right men. Kiss William H. Parker's ass and pray to be in the right place at the right time"' (pp. 17- 18).

peers who have acceded to a higher degree of authorised masculinity than themselves.[123] Men at the apex of the power matrix selectively forward specific aspects of the masculine role as desirable behaviour for their subordinates to manifest. While Hoover stresses the "detective" side of the professional equation by promoting the capacity for guile and "'subterfuge'" as important components of the ideal FBI agent (*American Tabloid*, p. 198), the other avatar of hegemonic power in this world, Dudley Smith, favours the brutal ontology of the professional killer. Offering his patronage to Bud White on the basis of the latter's aggressive disposition (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 70), Smith glamorises violence by encouraging his subordinates to adopt his practice of wearing neckties imprinted with the number of people they have slain.[124]

Not only does Bud White voluntarily don one of these neckties (signalling his self-affiliation with Smith's brand of violent masculinity), but he actually scrutinises those worn by his colleagues to ascertain their prowess as professional killers (p. 154). As an attempt to prove his relative "toughness," White's appraisal emblematises the ongoing ritual of male competition; insofar as he gauges these men in against their ability to approximate the professional/masculine ideal, it also reflects the continual evaluation of men by hegemonic authorities to determine their "adequacy" as masculine subjects. Theorists exploring the construction of hegemonic masculinity have observed that men

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123 Pete Bondurant describes Ward Littell as "Joe Scaredy Cat to Boyd's Cool Cat" (p. 47), devaluing Littell as an incarnation of that most despised entity, the "coward," while approbating Boyd's capacity to evince the emotional "coolness" and insouciance valorised in this realm.

124 Affirming the insularity of the insider domain, Smith contrived this idea to provide his unit with "*esprit de corps*"—a sense of group cohesion and a reminder of its empowered status as an elite cadre (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 151).

striving to embody the "desired masculine ethos"[125] can never be secure that they have accomplished this; their masculine identity is constantly "tested" by other men and must be compulsively reaffirmed and "validated" in the homosocial sphere of male relations.[126] The antagonistic male interaction that so frequently occurs in Ellroy's texts is both a means for men to establish their dominance and a mechanism to "test" other men's capacity to perform as viable subjects.[127] Reflecting the power inhering in the controlling masculine gaze, men "test" one another by engaging in "staring contests" like that conducted between Ward Littell and his FBI superior Chick Leahy. After a visual stand-off where the two exchange hostile glares, Littell "broke it off—Leahy would stand there all day if he didn't" (*American Tabloid*, p. 34). Littell's inability to withstand Leahy's confronting gaze is a measure of his "deficiency" as a masculine subject, his readiness to yield a withdrawal from the process of masculine competition. Leahy's aggressive demeanour, by contrast, emblematises the way that men within the insider sphere—

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125 Robert Vorlicky, *Act Like A Man: Challenging Masculinities in American Drama* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1995), p. 29.

126 Lionel Tiger, *Men In Groups* (1969; reprint: London: Panther, 1971) p. 183. See also Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. ix; Gregory Rochlin, *The Masculine Dilemma: A Psychology of Masculinity* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 4; and Victor Seidler, *Unreasonable Men: Masculinity and Social Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 17.

127 Neale has noted that the trope of "masculinity" as a condition to be "tested" is commonplace in cinematic and literary texts: "where women are investigated, men are tested. Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery" (Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema" in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* [London: Routledge, 1993], p. 19). The applicability of the latter observation to Ellroy's narratives, where women are seen as "human riddles" to be decoded (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 308), is evident; the pertinence of the first part of Neale's equation to Ellroy's oeuvre derives from the prevalence within this of masculine rituals of evaluation and examination, in which men are "tested" against the predefined masculine ideal—and indeed construct this as part of a process of evaluation, so that Bucky Bleichert notes that he could not ascertain if Lee Blanchard was "testing me or taunting me or pumping me for information" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 16). The need to "prove" one's viability before other men again reinforces Hocquenghem's point that "you are a phallus bearer only if you are recognised as such by others" (Hocquenghem, *Homosexual Desire*, p. 89).

where masculinity is always fraught, insecure, open to question—endeavour to shore up a sense of their own validity as subjects by affecting a hyperbolically "macho" demeanour.

This behavioural mode of "machismo" is adhered to by Junior Stemmons, who seeks to inhabit a "tough guy"[128] persona in order to, as he explicitly states, "prove" himself to his partner Dave Klein (*White Jazz*, p. 40). The phrases used by Stemmons to demonstrate to Klein his ability to "rate" the LAPD—"I'll show you," "you'll see" (p. 33, 40)—disclose his consciousness of being continually submitted to Klein's *gaze* for approval or disapprobation. This reflects the fact that the process of evaluating men often occurs on an optical level, as when Mickey Cohen gives Buzz Meeks a "shrewd once over" and notes his shabby appearance—the "frayed shirt cuffs" and "home manicure" that betray Meeks' inability to function sufficiently in the "business" arena (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 33). This incident reveals that the monitoring of viable subjectivity in Ellroy's discursive universe is realised through the "policing and the shaming of gender."[129] The coerced enactment of a masculine ideal is achieved through the appraising, analytical gaze of hegemonic authority personified by Cohen, which "polices" men's capacity to adequately embody prescribed masculine traits and induces "shame," or a hyper-awareness of their perceived inadequacy, in those who fail to measure up to this ideal. The "policing" of

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128 See *White Jazz*, p. 65, 69, 70, 72, in which Stemmons' attempts to behave like a "tough guy" are outlined by Dave Klein with varying degrees of skepticism—including his mocking description of Stemmons as "gung-ho Junior, Vice cowboy" (*White Jazz*, p. 65)—and p. 161, where Jack Woods informs Klein that he saw Stemmons with "his badge pinned to his coat, like he's a fucking Wild West sheriff, [and] buying gas with two big automatics shoved down his pants.'" This type of "macho" behaviour also surfaces in Danny Upshaw's violent deflection of slurs against his heterosexuality, and is additionally manifested—albeit in a humorous fashion—by Dave Klein in his exchange with one of Howard Hughes' henchmen (see footnote 15 above).

129 Judith Butler suggests that gender is formulated according to this paradigm in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 238.

masculinity regulates the "loop" of authority from within by ensuring that men who display behaviour "inappropriate" to their gender or who fail to meet the normative masculine ideal are detected and expelled from the insider sphere—like Upshaw, whose suicide pre-empts his certain removal from the LAPD (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 367), and Littell, who is expunged from the FBI because he is an ineffectual agent, a "weak sister," and a "'Communist sympathizer'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 344). Upshaw's suicide is precipitated by his consciousness of the public opprobrium that would attend the revelation of his closeted sexuality, thereby clarifying that masculine identity is secured through a politics of shaming—of articulating the parameters of acceptability and intolerability, that which can be "stomached" (literally, insofar as exposure to homosexuality makes Upshaw physically ill [*The Big Nowhere*, p. 281]) and that which cannot be borne.

While Upshaw's displacement from the "loop" is irrevocable, Littell reverses his banishment when he demonstrates "adequate" professionalism—a process adjudicated by Hoover, whose acknowledgement that he "'misjudged'" Littell reinstates him in the fold of viability while confirming Hoover's self-appointed status as an arbiter of masculinity (*American Tabloid*, p. 458). Littell's capitulation to Hoover's authority is evinced by his resignation to the fact that "Mr. Hoover knew him—as no one else ever had or ever would" (p. 551), a comment assuming Hoover's omniscience and confirming that it is impossible for men to evade the merciless scrutiny of the panoptic gaze which Hoover

symbolises. Littell's consciousness of being evaluated by Hoover,[130] like Junior Stemmons' desire to "rate" (measure up to the standards of) the LAPD, implies mens' *anticipation* of being judged according to a predefined register of appropriate behaviour. Klein actualises the latter expectation by routinely assessing Stemmons' actions as he performs them;[131] his ongoing evaluation of Stemmons reveals that even when men are not overtly adjured to adhere to the masculine/professional ideal, the panoptic gaze is channeled onto them to ensure their compliance with its normative precepts. The omnipresence of this gaze that tests men and then interpellates them as either viable or inadequate subjects is foregrounded throughout Ellroy's fiction, appearing in incidents such as the episode where Dudley Smith and Mal Considine scrutinise an oblivious Danny Upshaw to determine whether he is suitable to function as a "'decoy" to infiltrate the "pro-Communist" UAES (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 178).[132] While Upshaw is

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130 As noted in Part One, Littell acts as though "'Mr. Hoover's looking over [his] shoulder every second'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 100). Similarly, while the fact that Kemper Boyd does not "judge" Littell's "fearful side" earns him the latter's gratitude (p. 35), Littell's consciousness of the possibility that Boyd might devalue him because of this signals not only his expectation that he will be "judged" by his peers, but also his awareness that this will occur according to an index of "acceptable" behaviour in which demonstrating "fear" is viewed with contempt.

131 Thus when Stemmons punches a suspect Klein thinks "Junior dropped Ainge—a kidney shot—not bad" (*White Jazz*, p. 70), and when he gives Klein an "X-ray stare," Klein judges it "not bad for a punk" (p. 72).

132 The positioning of Smith and Considine in the empowered role of spectators reflects their embodiment of panoptic and patriarchal authority; that Upshaw remains unconscious of their presence both in this instance and in a subsequent scene where Considine observes him enacting his "decoy" role (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 287) again suggests correlations between "authority" and voyeurism and underscores the extent to which the omnipotent masculine gaze derives its power from its capacity to remain unseen and undetected. In yet another example of the valorisation of violence by hegemonic males, it is Upshaw's strategic recourse to brutality that convinces Considine of his aptness to take on the role of decoy. When Smith and Considine first see Upshaw he is interrogating a suspect, Scoppettone: "Upshaw laughed. Mal caught the phoniness, that Scoppettone didn't interest him—that it was just a job. But it was a Class A phony laugh—and the kid knew how to squeeze his own tension into it. ... [Mal] thought: pull out the stops, bluff him down, hit him once, don't get carried away and you're my boy ... He elbowed Dudley and said, 'Our's'; Dudley gave him the thumbs-up. Vinnie Scoppettone tried to jerk his chair off the floor; Danny Upshaw grabbed a handful of his hair and slapped his face—forehand, backhand, forehand, backhand—until he went limp and blubbered, 'Deal. Deal. Deal.'" (p. 177).

unaware that he is being surveyed, in a parallel sequence Ed Exley is not only watched by members of the LAPD hierarchy during his interrogation of the "Nite Owl" suspects, but is informed beforehand that he will be observed (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 120)—a measure which tacitly frames the visual examination of Exley as a "test" of his prowess as a policeman and challenges him to "prove" his adequate professionalism.

Exley's abrasive reaction when he is told that he is to be observed—he vows instantly and dramatically to "'break'" the criminals (p. 120)—confirms his consciousness of being subjected to the panoptic gaze of authority and determination to manifest aggressive behaviour consonant with the masculine/professional ideal against which he knows he will be evaluated. Exley is assessed both by his LAPD superiors and his father, who constantly compares him to his deceased brother and instructs him in behaviour appropriate to policemen (p. 20, 96). His perennial consciousness of his father's potential disapprobation constrains Exley's behaviour and shapes his decisions, including his opportunistic construction of a false image as a "war hero," which, insofar as it is motivated by his wish to pre-empt being construed by his father as a "coward" (p. 48), confirms that men are induced to occupy particular subject-positions by virtue of negative incentives of potential "shame," ignominy and vilification.[133] Exley's self-consciousness, his awareness of at all times being subjected to other men's scrutiny, reflect the fact that, as Leverenz has observed, "ideologies of manhood" function

133 This is further illustrated by the fact that when Exley is attacked by Bud White and Dick Stensland (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 96), his impulse to "break" them is checked by their insurance of his silence in the form of a photograph of him bleeding and appearing "terrified" (p. 108); Exley feels unable to reveal details of the incident to LAPD Chief Parker or Internal Affairs because of the "*ignominy*" this would entail (p. 108; my emphasis).

"primarily in relation to the gaze of male peers and male authority."[134] Silent reminders of the omnipresent panoptic authority proliferate throughout Ellroy's narrative universe, forcing men to remain permanently mindful of the behaviour they are expected, as viable subjects, to exhibit. Exley is unable to escape reminders of his father's authority, conveyed to him both on an interpersonal level and through its circulation in media images celebrating his successes in real estate construction (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 439), while Bucky Bleichert is aware of a senior officer "'constantly sizing [him] up'" to assess his adequacy as a potential partner (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 208).

Not only does the panoptic economy require its agents to surveil and discipline others, it also mandates that they, as detecting subjects, channel the interrogative gaze of external authority internally and police themselves. Exley's refraction of the panoptic gaze into *self*-surveillance is revealed when he forces himself to strike a suspect and thinks, "look, Dad, no fear," offering his actions for the approval of the absent patriarchal figure (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 392).[135] Just as Foucault's conception of panopticism emphasised that "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility

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134 David Leverenz, "The Last Real Man in America: From Natty Bumppo to Batman" in Peter F. Murphy (ed.). *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 40.

135 This reference to an invisible panoptic authority also subtends Danny Upshaw's attempts to embody the role of the professional detective by measuring up to his ego-ideal of the "objective man of science"—a model epitomised for him by two (fictional) authors of textbooks on criminology, Vollmer and Maslick, the latter of whom Upshaw overtly constructs as a paternal figure (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 2). Upshaw conducts his investigation of Coleman Healy's murders in accordance with criminological precepts ordained by these men (particularly through his use of the "Man Camera" technique) and as though he is actually being supervised or surveyed by them; in one instance he abruptly curtails his ablutions at a crime scene because "a sopping wet cop couldn't forensic a crime scene that Vollmer and Maslick would have killed for" (p. 133). When he is on the cusp of solving the Healy homicides, Upshaw conveys his sense of personal achievement and belief that he has "proved" himself by thinking that he had "finally made detective in the *eyes* of Maslick and Vollmer" (p. 364; my emphasis).

for the constraints of power [and] becomes the principle of his own subjection,"[136] so Ellroy's masculine subjects interiorise the panoptic gaze of power and reproduce its logic by manifesting the behaviour it requires of them. This process is repeatedly enacted by men striving to achieve viable subjectivity, whose adoption of behaviour associated with the masculine/professional ideal is both freely chosen and coerced by their consciousness of the weight of panoptic authority bearing eternally down upon them. Bleichert feels compelled to keep himself "razor sharp"—a loaded image crystallising phallic rectitude, undercurrents of violence, and the capacity of specularising instruments to scythe through objects and reveal hidden "truths"—during his police work because he know he is being assessed by a man hierarchically situated above him (*The Black Dahlia*, pp. 208-9). Yet he also *volitionally* attempts to impress this officer to foster his own progress through the police ranks, even claiming to find the "appraisal process" to which he is subjected "flattering" (p. 209). This reaction militates against the typical dynamic in Ellroy's fiction, where the experience of being subjected to the masculine gaze of power usually provokes anxiety, dissonance and self-flagellation within men like Mal Considine, who recalls rumours of his cowardice with an agitated, almost masochistic frequency[137] and who repeatedly "coaches" himself in the appropriate conduct to evince before men whom he believes suspect him of this quality (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 17, 294).

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136 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans. Alan Sheridan, 1975: reprint New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 199, pp. 202-3.

137 Considine is dogged by "the old rumors: Patrolman/Sergeant/Lieutenant Mal Considine, LAPD/DA's comer, didn't like to get his hands dirty. Ran scared as a rookie working 79th Street Division" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 19) and haunted by memories of "walking a beat in LA niggertown, whispers and catcalls from the okie cops who dominated the nightwatch there: college boy chickenshit, nigger scared, coward" (p. 74).

Considine's "self-tutelage" recurs in sequences where men discipline themselves when confronted by the hegemonic gaze; even the urbane Kemper Boyd instructs himself in how to act in J. Edgar Hoover's company (*American Tabloid*, p. 23), and it is surely a measure of Dudley Smith's "power" that Dave Klein prompts himself not to "flinch" before him (*White Jazz*, p. 157). Klein's self-instruction ramifies into a tutelage of his partner Junior Stemmons. In his capacity as Stemmons' departmental "mentor" Klein endeavours to instill within his protégé the necessity of adhering to the precepts around which the "game" is organised, to "'*learn the fucking rules*'" (p. 69; original emphasis). Tutelage enables the seamless operation of this "game" by indoctrinating men into unquestioningly accepting its internal structures—to the extent that, as in Klein's case, they inculcate these norms in others. It also enables the " loop" to preserve its hegemony by defusing potential threats to its inner dynamic, a point illustrated in *American Tabloid* by the narrative surrounding Ward Littell's possession of privileged information on Mafia and business leaders' misuse of the Teamster's Pension Fund.[138] While Littell's readiness to use this information to overthrow the Mafia endangers the continuum of power, his potential "threat" is negated after he internalises and reproduces instructions imparted to him by Kemper Boyd and becomes absorbed into the "game" as a lawyer and, ultimately, the type of Mafia assassin whom he formerly inveighed against.[139] Structured around Littell's transition from anti-Mafia zealot to Mafia underling, *American Tabloid* is also a *bildungsroman* charting Littell's metamorphosis from a non-viable subject to a

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138 See footnote 13, Part One.

139 See *American Tabloid*, p. 269, where Littell articulates his preference for "Communists" over the Mafia: "'Communist don't castrate innocent men. Communists don't hook up car batteries to people's genitals and electrocute them. Communists don't drop TV sets into bathtubs.'"

"professional," a process neatly encapsulated in Pete Bondurant's reluctant acknowledgement that "'[Boyd's] sissy kid brother [Littell] finally started acting half-ass competent'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 426).

Littell's progress from a man vilified as a "weak sister" and a "coward" (p. 111, 249) to an exemplar of the type of authorised masculinity with which "competence" is associated is explicitly described by Littell as his passage to "manhood" (p. 341).[140] Kemper Boyd voluntarily assumes the role of Littell's guide during this voyage (p. 160), his self-incarnation as an authoritative figure charged with initiating another into the "game" reflecting his own desire to obtain power within this arena.[141] One measure of Boyd's authority is his collection of "acolytes" like Bondurant (p. 493) and Littell, whose name encodes his status as literally Boyd's "ward" or charge, the pupil whom he views both filially (p. 153) and paternally (or paternalistically), habitually referring to him as "'son'" (p. 91). This appellation emphasises Littell's subordinate status and also enables Boyd to be seen as a patriarchal figure transmitting the "Law of the Father" from one generation to the next[142]—an impression compounded by the fact that Littell ultimately

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140 Littell announces this in the context of thanking Boyd for the "lessons" in professional conduct that he imparted, which provided Littell with the "gifts" enabling him to obtain viability in the regime of power (*American Tabloid*, p. 341), thereby confirming the importance of intramale tutelage in facilitating the achievement of appropriate masculinity.

141 The intensity of this drive is attested to by the extraordinary lengths to which Boyd goes in order to accrue "power." Not only does he commit the supremely dangerous act of stealing heroin from the Mafia, but he also murders a man for his fortune (*American Tabloid*, p. 193), in both instances because he seeks money in order to uphold a certain lifestyle and image and thereby demonstrate to Joseph Kennedy's illegitimate daughter Laura Hughes his "suitability" to court a member of her powerful family (p. 160, 213).

142 This is underscored by the fact that just prior to being shot by Littell, Boyd addresses him as "'son'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 581). The reversal of the relationship between Boyd and Littell closely parallels the Oedipal narrative enacted in *L.A. Confidential*, where Ed Exley deposes his father and subsequently assumes his empowered status as a receptacle of hegemonic authority.

usurps Boyd's patriarchal privilege and "overthrows" him by murdering him (p. 581). Littell's apostasy represents his ascension to viable subjectivity, a point consolidated when Bondurant describes Littell as "'the smartest and the strongest now'" (p. 562). This approbatory proclamation condenses the two aspects of the masculine/professional ideal—"smartest" connotes the cerebral rationality and investigative hermeneutic of the detective, while "strongest" invokes the physical prowess associated with "professional killers." For Littell's "professionalism" to be affirmed by the man who once scorned him as a "sissy" clarifies that he has achieved viability as a masculine subject within the "loop" of authority.

Navigating his journey towards viability, Littell relies on Boyd's tutelage, which he experiences both as an ongoing activity whereby Boyd encourages him to adopt particular behaviours and as a retroactive process or *fait accompli* whereby he utilises advice previously dispensed by Boyd. Boyd's edicts highlight codes of behaviour appropriate to an authoritative agent; they are both prescriptive—"COW YOUR INFORMANTS" (p. 180; original emphasis)—and proscriptive, delimiting unacceptable behaviours and practices—"NEVER SHOW FEAR OR DISGUST" (p. 157). Reinscribing the pervasive sense of the omniscient gaze as unswervingly channelled towards observing members of the insider realm, Littell structures his conduct in accordance with his memory of the orders imparted by Boyd, whose presence he repeatedly invokes: "[Littell] replayed every judo move Kemper taught him. Lenny Sands walked in. Littell grabbed him from behind and cupped his mouth shut. Remember—'Jam one thumb to the suspect's carotid and take him down supine.' He did

it Kemper-pure" (p. 120). Littell's self-instruction here suggests that he relies upon Boyd's instructions in contexts where he feels compelled to exhibit behaviour (specifically, violent conduct) that does not come instinctively to him but that he recognises is "appropriate" to this situation. Littell's displacement of the "source" of his violence onto Boyd is arguably intended to absolve himself of responsibility for the pain he inflicts on others; it permits him to insulate himself against the suffering his actions result in and reveals that violence is an alien or objectionable mode of self-expression for him. Littell's distaste for violence is foregrounded in another episode involving his endeavours to enlist Sands as an informant. In this sequence Boyd is an active rather than absent authoritative presence, and his instructional strategies focus on operational mimesis and enactment of his edicts: he commands Littell to hit Sands and when Littell refuses, pleading an inability to render harm, Boyd slaps him until he acquiesces and strikes Sands (p. 135).

Affirming the *compelled* nature of men's attempts to achieve viable subjectivity, Littell is literally forced by Boyd to enact behaviour deemed "professional." Boyd's insistence on the functional necessity of violence reinforces its routinisation as a form of self-definition and a measure of appropriate subjectivity, while his coercion of Littell indicates that men are indoctrinated into accepting the inevitability of utilising violence through a procedure of intramale tutelage and mandated performance. Littell's subjugation is accentuated by the passive tense used to outline the incident ("Kemper handed him brass knuckles. Kemper made him lace his fingers in" [p. 135]). This emphasis on his "helplessness" is again a way for Littell to avoid culpability for his actions. Yet the guilt, ambivalence and

dissonance he feels at violating another—a sense of unease echoed by even the most jaded of Ellroy's protagonists—also confirms that fulfilling the prescribed masculine role involves overcoming a resistance towards perpetrating violence, a "hardening" of the self as a conduit to "smashing apart" others. To obtain viability Littell is required to desensitise himself and vitiate the empathetic sensibility which initially differentiates him from Boyd. While Boyd is an opportunist capable of killing without conscience, Littell is introduced into *American Tabloid* as an "idealist" so highly sensitive to others' pain—hearing "'gruesomely detailed'" accounts of murders gives him nightmares (p. 169)—that he relies upon alcohol to leave him "anesthetized" in the world of harrowing violence he inhabits (p. 239).

By the novel's conclusion, however, Littell has relinquished the tranquilising effects of alcohol and sobriety "taught him this: You're capable of anything" (p. 422). This increased capacity for ruthlessness enables Littell to prosper in the "loop," to obtain the "untouchable" status that Bondurant ascribes to him (p. 417), and to murder his former mentor Boyd without compunction. Yet Littell's acquisition of viable subjectivity occurs only after he has been subjected to numerous humiliating and disillusioning rites of passage, including a ferocious beating he endures at Bondurant's hands (p. 296), his unceremonious firing from the FBI (p. 344), and his repudiation by his idol Robert F. Kennedy (p. 345). Littell's attainment of appropriate masculinity is thus implicated in the need to "harden" himself physically—through acquiring a capacity to stoically endure violence—and emotionally, by divesting himself of his (almost explicitly) eroticised fervor

for Kennedy and shedding his previous revulsion at dispensing violence.[143] Littell's psychological induration is accompanied by a corporeal re-stylisation. Initially the "frail, unkempt" Littell's "weakness" is wrought physically, so that he is unable to withstand the assaultive, interrogative gaze of power symbolised by Chick Leahy (p. 71, 34). After he is savagely beaten by Bondurant, Littell acquires a new somatic identity that he believes distinguishes him from his "weak" former self.[144] In a self-fulfilling manner, this "bold new" morphology (p. 312) forged in the crucible of violence ramifies into a "tough" new persona which ultimately enables Littell to defeat an avatar of authority, Robert Kennedy, in a "staring contest" (p. 572).

Littell also develops a new sense of sartorial style that leads Boyd—who had hitherto castigated him for his "disdain" for "appearances" (p. 280)—to praise him.[145] Boyd's critical evaluation of Littell's appearance stems from the requirement for men to present

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143 Littell himself believes that he has achieved his "selfhood" through physically damaging or mortifying other men in instances such as his assault upon Jack Ruby where, recalling that Ruby is "strongly suspected of sexually molesting dogs," he forces him to eat dog biscuits (*American Tabloid*, p. 179) before threatening him with the prospect of even more horrendous violence at the hands of his informant Sal D'Onofrio. As Littell informs Ruby, D'Onofrio "'burned a man to death with a blowtorch. The man's wife came home unexpectedly. Sal shoved a gasoline-soaked rag in her mouth and ignited it. He said she died shooting flames like a dragon'" (p. 179). By clinically recounting the type of incident that had previously given him "nightmares," and using it as a bargaining lever over another man, Littell reveals that his acquisition of viable subjectivity is connected to his emotional inurement, which in turn is directly related to his tutelage by Boyd—as revealed by the fact that in the course of harassing Ruby he recalls one of Boyd's injunctions ("don't falter" [p. 180]).

144 *American Tabloid*, p. 312: " His weak jawline was rebuilt with pins and bone chips. His weak chin was smashed into a cleft. The nose he always hated was flattened and ridged. Helen said he looked dangerous. ... Littell stepped back from the mirror. Shifting light gave him new angles to savor. He limped now. His jaw clicked. He put on twenty pounds in the hospital. Pete Bondurant was a cosmetic surgeon. He had a bold new face. His old pre-Phantom psyche couldn't live up to it."

145 Littell's ultimate incarnation as a professional sees him bedecked in designer suits that occasion the approval of Boyd, who observes that Littell "looked commanding—that gabardine suit gave him some bulk" (*American Tabloid*, p. 541), and who, immediately prior to his death at Littell's hands, comments "'I like your suit, son. It's good to see you dressing so nicely'" (p. 581).

themselves to the masculine gaze as viable in a literal, physical sense. Reflecting the primacy of the visual sense in this world, it is as important for men to "look" appropriately masculine, to convey an *image* of this, as it is to embody this elusive state.[146] Hegemonic masculinity is written on and read through men's corporeality, ensuring that in Dave Klein's eyes it is Junior Stemmons' insufficiently "'forceful" presence which makes him an inadequate policeman (*White Jazz*, p. 24).[147] That appropriate subjectivity is visually demarcated enables men's bodies to be reconfigured and worn as signs of violent subjectivity, markers of their progression within the "loop" and concrete indicators of their viability. Yet if Littell's somatic metamorphosis suggests that the male body is the construction site of "masculinity," then this capacity for appropriate gender identity to be physically stylised also ensures that initially non-viable men are able to dissemble and present themselves as embodying authorised subjectivity. Lenny Sands, for example, remodulates his verbal and behavioural mannerisms to concretise a ("heterosexual") image appropriate to his insider status (*American Tabloid*, p. 74). While Sands' and Littell's identities are revamped on a physical plane, in other instances the assumption of an appropriately "masculine" image is less materially literal. Plagued by rumours of his cowardice, Mal Considine actively fosters an *image* as a killer to counteract this

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146 This presumably explains why a Cuban man who was castrated as a punishment for raping women sports "a big testicle bulge—handkerchiefs or wadded-up tissue filled the space where his nuts used to reside" (*American Tabloid*, p. 435).

147 Dovetailing with this logic, thin, slight men like Ward Littell are coded as "weak" and effeminate, and hence inadequately masculine and "professional"; the physically "frail" Littell likewise does not "look like anyone's notion of a G-man" (*American Tabloid*, p. 280) and is described as "'candy-ass looking'" (p. 157), a metaphor that subtly feminises or homosexualises him by associating him with culturally maligned anality. Similarly, other men opine that Mal Considine does not "'look like a cop'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 107, 415) and Buzz Meeks says that there is "'something nervous and raggedy-assed" about Considine (p. 107). Both Littell and Ed Exley are even advised not to wear glasses, in the latter case because no other LAPD officers do—the implication being that spectacles are neither suitably "manly" nor appropriate to a policeman (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 18; see also *American Tabloid*, p. 93).

reputation,[148] and assumes what he calls the "new persona" of a "policeman" in order to intimidate his brother, with whom he has a fraught relationship (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 256).

Reflecting the fact that Ellroy's men often consciously perform violent acts because this is the most efficacious way to "prove" themselves and cement their adequate professionalism and masculinity, Considine murders the Nazi death camp commandant who sexually exploited his wife Celeste because, as Celeste says to him, "'you wanted to prove yourself not a coward. You wanted to be like a real policeman and you were willing to destroy yourself in order to do so'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 128, 76). That Celeste suggests that Considine wanted to be "*like*" a real policeman, and that Considine explicitly describes his "policeman" identity as a "*persona*," implies a schism between his "real" identity and the police ideal he strives to enact. By indicating that Considine simulates rather than embodies conduct appropriate to a "policeman," Ellroy represents his forging of a specific identity as a *performance*, a role conceived of and staged in accordance with Considine's awareness of the type of behavior that he, as a viable subject, is expected to manifest. Ellroy's troping of Considine's conduct in terms of its status as a performance is merely one manifestation of a thematic focus on concepts of mimesis, role-playing, and the adoption of alternate identities that pervades his fiction. Imaging masculine

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148 See footnote 145 above. To scotch the impression of his cowardice and advance an appropriately tough, "masculine" image, Considine encourages the circulation of a rumour that he was responsible for an aborted attempt to murder Buzz Meeks, who had an affair with Considine's wife: "Meeks thought that Mal was behind the shooting—revenge for the affair with Laura. Mal let the talk simmer: it played a good counterpoint to the coward innuendo he'd inspired in Watts" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 76).

identity as fluid and mobile, Ellroy represents men as "performing" particular roles,[149] self-consciously refashioning themselves physically and constructing alternate personae.[150] Celeste Considine's implication that her husband is a counterfeit policeman invokes a dialectic of authenticity and inauthenticity subtending the construction of masculine identity which reverberates throughout Ellroy's texts. The fissure between men's "real" and projected identities exemplified by Considine is frequently limned by Ellroy in metaphors predicated on role-playing and acting.[151]

A grammar of performance structures men's attempts to demonstrate or obtain viability in the insider sphere; men assured of insider status adopt a theatrical approach to their gender presentation,[152] while the testing of professional adequacy in contexts such as

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149 Thus while Considine adopts the "persona" of a policeman, Danny Upshaw masquerades as a political agitator, "Ted Krugman," in order to infiltrate the pro-Communist UAES organisation (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 224), and Jack Vincennes crafts what he refers to as a "carefully constructed nice-guy Big V" image to impress his future wife Karen Morrow (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 194). Vincennes maintains a typically cynical distance from the role he adopts, describing it as "his hero bit" and musing that "he knew why his hero role worked: Karen was the audience he'd always wanted to impress. He knew what she could take, what she couldn't; her love had shaped his performance so that all he had to do was act natural—and keep certain secrets hidden" (pp. 100-1)

150 Littell's self-devised identity as the "Phantom" is linked to his endeavours to assist Robert Kennedy in destroying the Mafia (*American Tabloid*, p. 127). The tropes of physical reinvention and the assumption of different identities are taken to the point of psychosis by *The Big Nowhere*'s Coleman Healy, who not only pays plastic surgeon Terence Lux to break every bone in his face and restructure it (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 427), but who assumes the "alter ego" of a wolverine while murdering people (p. 330).

151 Johnny Duhamel, for example, is said to loathe his violent work for Dudley Smith because "'all that Mobster Squad stuff wasn't really Johnny's style, it was just this role Exley had him playing'" (*White Jazz*, p. 305).

152 Kemper Boyd viciously knifes one of Jimmy Hoffa's Cuban employees and exits "with a tight little bow" (*American Tabloid*, p. 69), while Pete Bondurant acknowledges the extent to which his violence is a performance for other men's benefit, when he snaps his handcuff chain to impress the policemen who have arrested him and notes that "two cops whistled. One cop applauded. They'd *double*-manacled his ankles—he couldn't give them an encore" (p. 110; original emphasis). In another incident in which the tropes of masculine performance and the hegemonic conflation of "masculinity" with the capacity to distribute and endure violence collide, Bondurant "auditions" a man who wishes to assist the anti-Castro cause, slapping him before literally grading his response: "Nerves: A-plus. Sense of caution: B-minus. ... Pete kicked him in the balls. He went down—but didn't yell or whimper. He cocked his gun—but didn't

Exley's interrogation of the "Nite Owl" suspects is represented as a performance for the empowered masculine gaze: "[Exley's] stage: a corridor off the Homicide pen. ... A deep breath to quell stage fright, then in the #1 door" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 120). Extending this metaphorisation of masculine examination as a theatrical endeavour, Exley's deposition to the LAPD hierarchy in respect of the "Bloody Christmas" incident is described by Jack Vincennes as a "performance" (p. 67). Equal parts cynicism and admiration—"whoever coached him did a fucking-A bang-up job ... What a fucking performance" (pp. 66-7)—Vincennes' reaction to Exley's testimony it is grounded in an assumption of a slippage between Exley's "core" identity (identified by Vincennes as that of a "weak sister" [p. 67]) and the aura of "authority" that he conveys (p. 66). Ellroy's characters frequently "act" or dissimulate like Exley to promote particular images of themselves and facilitate their agendas;[153] Danny Upshaw assumes what he calls "his sugar voice" to coax professional favours from his "errand girl" Karen Hiltscher (p. 42) and a "textbook voice" in order to convey authority (p. 4). The allusion to his "textbook voice" confirms the influence of Upshaw's criminological role models as behavioural determinants; from Hiltscher's emulation of Hollywood icons[154] to Junior Stemmons'

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fire. The man got passing marks overall" (p. 245). Dudley Smith similarly "auditions" gangsters to participate in one of his illegal schemes; as Chick Vecchio tells Dave Klein, "'Dudley told the out-of-town guys they had to earn the right to work for him. He said that meant enduring pain. He paid them money to let Johnny hurt them while he watched and talked this philosophical shit to them. Dick Carlisle said Dud broke their spirits and made them goddamn slaves'" (*White Jazz*, p. 306).

153 Hence Lenny Sands performs a heterosexual charade (*American Tabloid*, p. 148) while Ellis Loew has a "courtroom persona" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 14), and Danny Upshaw deliberately tries "to look sheepish—a little trick he'd taught himself" in order to deflect his supervisor's anger (p. 83).

154 Hiltscher is a somewhat discordant amalgam of divergent Hollywood influences; she wears a "Veronica Lake hairdo" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 87) and lights a cigarette "á lá Veronica Lake" (p. 88), but also adopts a "Bette Davis bitch pout" (p. 154) and responds to Upshaw with a "sigh, her version of Katharine Hepburn exhausted" (p. 133). Her imitation of these actresses is taken to a bizarre level in *L.A. Confidential*, where the "Fleur de Lis" prostitutes obtain plastic surgery to look like movie stars (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 180).

"Wild West sheriff" impersonation (*White Jazz*, p. 161), Ellroy insistently foregrounds the imitative structures of identity and portrays processes of subjectification as involving the conscious absorption of external influences into the stylisation of the self.

When Upshaw "rehearses" his conduct prior to meeting UAES member Claire De Haven, he models his performance on culturally received and personally observed models of masculinity, including within his act dialogue from a movie musical, "dirty joke sheets" and pulp novels, and "aw-shucks laughter—á lá a pussy hound deputy he knew" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 211). In Upshaw's embedding of these trace elements of culturally authorised heterosexual masculinity into his performance, there is a suggestion that gender identity is a type of bricolage, a constellation of influences and practices sampled, reworked and incorporated into a persona. Consistent with this imaging of masculinity as the product of various social and interpersonal determinants, masculine subjectivity is hypothesised by Ellroy as "formed" or created by other men;[155] Boyd's tutelage of the malleable Littell is a deliberate attempt to mold the latter's personality, as the episode in which he choreographs Littell's behaviour and forces him to strike Lenny Sands suggests. The *mise-en-scène* staged by Boyd reveals the status of violence enacted under the assessing masculine gaze as part of an elaborate, ritualised performance required to concretise the viability of the subject under instruction in the eyes of his

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155 Ed Exley describes his father as having "'made'" him (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 471), while Dave Klein pays a curious homage to the crucial part that Exley and Dudley Smith have played in shaping his identity when, needing to develop a new persona in order to escape L.A., he renames himself "Edmund L. Smith" (*White Jazz*, p. 355). Similarly, Exley acknowledges Bud White's influence on himself when he uses the name "Walton White" to open a bank account (p. 252). In these instances men are seen as virtually the sole progenitors of other men, thereby refuting the need for maternal figures and enabling a fantasy of a "pure" homosocial realm uninflected with (or infected by) a feminine presence.

appraiser, and to validate the classificatory power invested in the latter function to assess, approbate or refute the "appropriateness" of other men's behaviour. Littell's acceptance of Boyd's authority leads him not merely to obey his orders but to assimilate his influence into the construction of his own identity, imitating both his judo moves and "sartorial flair"(*American Tabloid*, p. 23) and in doing so revealing mimesis as a means by which men seek to fulfil the professional ideal.[156] While Littell patterns himself after a man with whom he affinitises, other men engaging in projects of identity-construction model themselves on negative identificatory figures. Both Considine and Exley imitate their adversary Dudley Smith, mimicking his "trademark" wink—a signifier of his power which evokes the controlling power of the panoptic gaze and, in conveying a certain quality of "knowingness," implies Smith's privileged access to "secret" information—and his often-used phrase "lad" with which he appellates his colleagues and which condenses his usurpation of patriarchal privilege (see eg *The Big Nowhere*, p. 16, 406, 413; *L.A. Confidential*, p. 472).

The process of imitation is thus a selective one calculated to maximise the veneer of viability it lends to those performing the act of mimesis. In an episode crystallising several elements of Ellroy's representation of the constitution of masculine subjectivity in the panoptic economy, Exley assimilates fragments of Bud White's identity into his own

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156 Frequently this entails adopting the violent praxis of men who have obtained unquestioned status *as* "men," so that Littell replicates Boyd's brutal methods of "cowing" informants, and Bucky Bleichert emulates Lee Blanchard's boxing manouevres in the course of assaulting a suspect (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 301).

when he attacks an interrogee, Chet Yorkin. Yorkin mocks Exley's initial attempts at cordiality and informs him that:

> "I never snitch 'cause cops are all cocksuckers who get their cookies off making guys talk." "You through?"—Bud White's stock line. ... Ed got behind [Yorkin], cuffed him, shoved him to the floor. Scared, but steady hands: look, Dad, no fear. Yorkin backed into a corner. Scared, another Bad Bud move: a chair, a roundhouse swing, the chair smashed to the wall just above the suspect's head. Yorkin tried to squirm away; Ed kicked him back to his corner. Slow now: don't let your voice break, don't let your eyes go soft behind your glasses (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 392).

Exley's savage response to Yorkin's homophobic invective confirms the construction of appropriate masculinity in the shadow cast by its gay inverse and the reiterative practice of violence as a means of consolidating viable subjectivity. His self-coaching suggests a gap between his "soft," "scared" core identity and the façade of "toughness" that he projects in order to secure patriarchal approval. Exley's explosion of violence enables him to assert his own patriarchally-derived authority over Yorkin, whom he dehumanises and casts in the disempowered role of the "suspect." Exley's use of this phrase reveals that his behaviour is the self-conscious performance of a particular archetype of "professionalism" with which White is associated—the interrogative "bad cop" whose primary function is to prise information from suspects by means of a violent methodology.

Echoing Scarry's observation that regimes whose power is invested in the torture of intransigent subjects frequently stage their terroristic programs as a "grotesque piece of

compensatory drama,"[157] the inquisition of suspects in Ellroy's texts frequently assumes the form of an ornately realised tableau figured upon predefined relations of sadism and submission, and the adoption of prescribed roles by the interrogators. This established "good cop-bad cop" model is enacted by Ward Littell and Pete Bondurant when they interrogate Lenny Sands (*American Tabloid*, p. 451). Sands' reaction to their strategy—"'I've been double-teamed before. This routine is nothing new to me'" (p. 451)—confirms that it is a performance scripted and executed according to a pre-established set of guidelines known both to the interrogator and interviewee. However, the disobedient Sands refuses to accept his subordinate position and when Littell slaps him he reciprocates the gesture, causing Bondurant to step "between them. They looked ridiculous—two bloody-nosed pseudo tough guys" (p. 452). By labelling Littell a "pseudo tough guy" Bondurant postulates a gap between his "performance" and a "real" (non-"tough") identity perceived as underlying this. Yet in this sequence Littell voluntarily (even instinctively) utilises a violent praxis, revealing a pragmatic acceptance of its functionality in sharp contrast to the guilt which deploying it hitherto provoked within him. As such he seems to be in transition from one mode of subjectivity to another, a chrysalid on the cusp of achieving the different, "tougher" identity that he has not entirely mastered it at this point but that he later seems to actualise in the act of murdering Kemper Boyd. Ellroy's mapping of Littell's trajectory from one form of subjectivity to another suggests that he conceptualises masculinity as a work in progress;

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157 Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, p. 28: "It is not accidental that in the torturers' idiom the room in which the brutality occurs was called 'the production room' in the Philippines, the 'cinema room' in South Vietnam, and the 'blue lit stage' in Chile: built on these repeated acts of display and having as its purpose the production of a fantastic illusion of power, torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama."

the "manhood" that Littell aspires to is not innate but a condition that must be *acquired*, something that Littell strives to construct for himself (albeit in accordance with pre-existing gender ideals).

The fluidity and mobility of Littell's gradually unfurling identity implies that Ellroy conceives of gender identity as a *process* or a practice, rather than a static, pre-given condition. In this respect Ellroy's work has evident affinities with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which seeks to dismantle the fiction that gender is "a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow" and to reconceptualise gender as a "doing" or "activity," a "term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end."[158] Butler's theory derives from her perception of contemporary Western society as regulated by what she terms a "heterosexual matrix"[159] which constructs heterosexual gender identities as the "real" or original from which others (specifically, gay and lesbian identities) stem. Contending that gender-parodic practices such as drag performances confirm the "utterly constructed status of

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158 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 140, 112, 141.

159 This term describes a "hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility" which "assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality' (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 151n). Within this matrix through which subjects are constructed, "certain cultural configurations of gender" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 32)—specifically, those embodying "compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically encoded phantasms of 'man' and 'woman'"—are naturalised as the "normative measure of the real," the "originals" from which all other subject-positions stem and against which they are defined as defective or "false" (Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* [New York: Routledge, 1991], p. 121). Butler suggests that the postulation of "stable" gender identities underpins and enables the oppressive normalisation of heterosexuality by ensuring that non-heterosexually identified subjects are demarcated as "copies" or inadequate approximations of a heterosexual "original."

the so-called heterosexual original,"[160] Butler argues that "there is no gender that is 'expressed' by actions, gestures, speech," but that the "performance of gender" produces retroactively the illusion of "an inner gender core."[161] In describing gender as a "performance" Butler does not suggest that it is a mode of self-presentation or a role that a subject can choose to adopt or discard;[162] rather, she theorises gender as *performative*, a discursive practice that "constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express."[163] The fabrication of stable gender identities is produced precisely by individual subjects' "ritualized repetition" of those "cultural conventions" which are already culturally identified with "masculinity" and "femininity."[164] Butler stresses that this reiteration of conventions is both involuntary and prescribed; gender is a "*compulsory* performance in the sense that acting out of line with heterosexual norms brings with it ostracism, punishment, violence."[165]

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160 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 31, 137; original emphasis omitted.

161 Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification" in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 31.

162 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 140. Butler contends that gender is not a pregiven "psychic reality" that a subject "expresses," but is rather the "matrix" through which the subject itself is constructed and emerges, the "enabling cultural condition" that produces individual agents. As such, gender identity cannot be the "product of a choice," but is, instead, "the forcible citation of a norm ... there is no 'one' who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a 'one,' to become viable as a 'one,' where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 232, 7).

163 Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," p. 24. Butler argues that it is crucial to realise that gender is performative rather than "expressive" because "if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction" (Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 141). Her use of the term "performativity" derives from speech-act theory, where the phrase is used to describe "that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 13).

164 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 141; Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," p. 31.

165 Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," p. 24; original emphasis. This concept of compulsory gender performance is clearly applicable to Ellroy's narrative universe, in which the failure to act in an appropriately "masculine" way results in men's forced expulsion from the realm of power, often in the form of a corpse.

The fact that the heterosexual matrix needs to verify its insistence on the illusion of "stable" genders by forcibly requiring subjects to reiterate particular culturally sanctioned behaviours and to attempt to embody "certain ideals of femininity and masculinity"[166] reveals the fragility and contingency of socially legitimated gender categories. It also ensures that ostensibly "stable" gender identities can never be achieved but inevitably remain elusive and "phantasmatic" ideals that are "impossible to embody."[167] If gender is, as Butler conceptualises it, a constellation of practices that retroactively congeal to form a collective gender phantasm, in Ellroy's texts masculine gender identity is constituted by the repetition of violent acts. The cultural reification of masculinity and violence as synonymous is suggested by Inez Soto's conviction that Bud White is more of a "man" than Ed Exley because he murdered one of her rapists.[168] Exley's subsequent slaughter of the remaining rapists is both a means of consolidating his "masculinity" and an act enabling him to discover agency and purpose. His conduct highlights the fact that it is through the enactment (and re-enactment) of aggressive practices that Ellroy's men primarily negotiate the external world and the construction of their own subjectivities. Whether a by-product of their self-actualisation through aggression, a means of proving their viability to panoptic overseers, or a consequence of the psychic strain induced by the

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166 Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," pp. 231-2.

167 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 141.

168 Scornfully telling Exley that "'Officer White's ten times the man you are, with half the brains and no big-shot daddy'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 206), Soto explicitly sites her admiration of White as deriving from the fact that he "'killed a man for me'" (p. 169), or "'killed a man who hurt me'" (p. 184). That Soto becomes Exley's lover after he murders her remaining rapists clarifies the estimation with which the ability to dispense violence is held in this world.

requirement to embody the prescribed masculine ideal,[169] violence is the primary constitutive element of individual men's personae.

In revealing men's use of violence to embody the masculine ideal, in which "real" manhood is equated with the capacity to disseminate (and endure) brutality, Ellroy seems to expose the constructed nature of this ideal. Through portraying men like Ed Exley and Ward Littell as self-consciously enacting the violent conduct associated in his textual world with "masculinity" Ellroy appears to reveal this category *as* an ideal rather than an "innate" or pregiven quality. Littell's initial discomfort in manifesting the aggression that men in this society are required to express ensures that he is reluctant to violate Lenny Sands. While Littell eventually adopts the violent methodology deemed appropriate to his gender and profession, Bondurant's description of him as a "pseudo tough guy" confirms the discrepancy between the hegemonic persona he performs and his underlying fragile, embattled subjectivity. Insofar as "what is performed—what is, in a sense, fluid and temporal rather than socially fixed and static—can be reevaluated and even changed,"[170] in Ellroy's depiction of Littell lies a discursive space wherein the normative

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169 The exhausting requirement to endlessly "prove" their masculinity conduces to an exacerbated sensitivity to insult which frequently has its outlet in violence. Mal Considine explodes in impotent rage when his wife questions his masculinity by calling him a coward, hitting her with an extraordinary viciousness suggesting the commensurate intensity of the pressure to "perform" as an "appropriately" masculine subject (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 128: "Celeste broadened her smile. Mal saw it as a target and ran to her. He grabbed her neck, held her to the doorway and aimed hard right hands at her mouth, teeth splintering up through her lips, cutting his knuckles. He hit her and hit her and hit her"). Considine's use of violence is not functional but uncontrolled; in this sense, Dudley Smith's declaration that "'violence is often the province of weak men'" (p. 345)—a comment which, given Smith's propensity towards brutality, seems to obtain an immediate and cheap irony—actually summarises the fact that violence is often resorted to by men who fail to meet the masculine/professional ideal because they have no other way to demonstrate their "adequacy" as masculine subjects.

170 Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson, "Introduction" in Berger, Wallis and Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity*, p. 5.

masculine ideal—with its glamorisation of violence, cruelty, and emotional desensitisation—could be dismantled and resignified, and alternate masculine identities like that embodied by Littell could be allowed to proliferate. Yet Ellroy undermines this prospect by representing non-hegemonic masculine subjects as unable to successfully negotiate the insider sphere in which they function. While Littell at first defies the requirement to adhere to the professional ideal, he is ritually punished until he capitulates and strives to obtain it—and given the degree of humiliation he endures,[171] it is hardly surprising that he surrenders to the seeming inevitability of adopting prescribed masculine conduct and living by the "rules" of the "game." However, the fact that Littell is subsequently revealed to have secretly yearned for the privileges accompanying insider status—to have been "'hungry" for these "'all his life"'—betrays the disturbing pessimism of Ellroy's vision, its incapacity to imagine men transcending the "game" in which they operate.

Shrouded with an overwhelming sense of dread, Ellroy's narratives figure his protagonists' lives as structured along axes of compulsion and oppression. Hyper-conscious of their subjection to men with more "power" than themselves, Ellroy's men exhibit a paranoid sense of persecution exemplified by Dave Klein's conceptualisation of his behaviour as constrained and "coerced" by an invisible, amorphous "*they*" (*White Jazz*, p. 245; original emphasis). Ellroy sediments this fatalistic view of men's inability to

171 Littell is attacked and vilified by FBI colleagues (*American Tabloid*, p. 78), his lover Helen Agee (who assaults him with his own gun, emphasising his "inadequacy" as a masculine subject [p. 320]), and Lenny Sands (p. 249, 290), as well as assaulted and debased in front of Lenny Sands by his "best friend" Kemper Boyd (p. 135), mercilessly beaten by Pete Bondurant (p. 296), unceremoniously fired and mortified by Hoover (p. 344), and finally rejected by his idol Robert F. Kennedy (p. 345).

function independently by representing them as effectively trapped within the "loop," an eternally recirculating sphere whose perpetuity is assured through its absorption of all challenges to its by violently negating or subtly co-opting these. In Ellroy's grim dystopia, individuals and organisations who threaten to destabilise the functioning of the "game" are brutally eliminated, while all attempts to confront the prevailing political paradigm are expedient[172] and doomed to fail.[173] Despite Littell's idealistic endeavours to combat the Mafia, he ultimately submits to their superior "power" to the extent of accepting their orders to murder his former mentor Boyd. That Littell's accession to viable subjectivity can only occur at Boyd's expense reinforces the zero-sum logic of this universe, where the only avenues of escape from the "loop" are through being forcibly relegated to the abject domain or through resigning oneself to this world's uncompromising "live by the sword, die by the sword" ethos and "hardening" oneself accordingly. There is no space in Ellroy's discursive universe for men unable to obtain those attributes required to successfully navigate the fraught terrain of power—which is precisely why men like Littell feel compelled to perform a particular persona or to reconstruct their identity.

Yet while Littell's evident permutation from "weak sister" to authorised male suggests

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172 This is exemplified by the sequence in which Ward Littell's acquaintance Mal Chamales—the Communist cell-leader whom Littell is required to surveil in his capacity as an FBI agent—asks Littell to obfuscate his involvement in Communist organisations to facilitate his attainment of a job, his co-optation taking the form of succumbing to the lures of capitalism (*American Tabloid*, p. 319).

173 Hence Buzz Meeks views the relative distribution of power between the Teamsters and their pro-"Communist" rivals as commensurate to "a cat about to pounce on a mouse nibbling cheese on the edge of a cliff" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 397). Meeks takes the Teamsters' power for granted, observing a potential confrontation between the two groups and thinking that "the Teamsters were sharks and the UAES were minnows … if push came to shove, no cameras around, the Teamsters would use their two-by-four's as battering rams and charge—brass knuckle work in close, blood, teeth and nose cartilage on the sidewalk, maybe a few ears ripped off of heads. Then vamoose before the lackluster LAPD Riot Squad made the scene. *Easy*" (p. 77; original emphasis).

that Ellroy perceives gender identity as fluid and open to a multiplicity of potential configurations, in actuality his conceptualisation of masculinity is highly rigid and constricted. Throughout the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* Ellroy envisages masculine subjectivity only in terms of three models more or less condensed in the terms with which Buzz Meeks refers to himself and his colleagues, Mal Considine and Danny Upshaw: "hardcases, rogue cops and Red chasers" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 472). Within this typology of masculinity, the term "hardcase" (a phrase emphasising these men's emotional and physical vitrification) corresponds to the professional killer personified by Meeks, Pete Bondurant and Bud White, all of whom are "hired thugs" distinguished by their brute physical presence, who exploit and commodify their capacity to unflinchingly visit violence upon others. The subject-position of "rogue cop" is embodied by Dave Klein, Jack Vincennes and Kemper Boyd—corrupt agents of the state and ruthless opportunists whose ardent desire for wealth, power and celebrity is externalised in their sartorial style and impeccable physical grooming[174]—while the phrase "Red chaser" connotes the type of idealist to whom these men are diametrically opposed. The latter group encapsulates men like Littell and Exley who are motivated (at least initially) by ideals and ideological precepts rather than the pursuit of "'self-preservation and monetary advancement'" that is the pragmatic Boyd's primary impetus (*American Tabloid*, p. 302). Given that both men discard their idealism, it is

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174 The dapper Vincennes is a dandy whose participation in the "Bloody Christmas" brawl occurs because one of the Mexican youths being beaten spills blood on his "cashmere blazer" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 29). Boyd is likewise known for his "sartorial flair" (*American Tabloid*, p. 23); both he and Klein are described in terms of their physical style and appeal—Klein has "Hollywood looks" (*White Jazz*, pp. 25-6) while Boyd is viewed by Bondurant as "too handsome to live" (*American Tabloid*, p. 43) and by Littell as "beautiful Kemper—so fit and groomed that he sparkled" (p. 368).

possible to overstate its function as a cardinal element of a particular masculine "type"; while the term "Red chaser" conveys these men's ideological (as opposed to self-aggrandising) motivations, it fails to capture the other sites of commonality between them: the fact that they are engaged in projects of self-construction stemming from their perceived status as "weak sisters," and that they are tortured by their own senses of masculine inadequacy, particularly in relation to the "hardcases" with whom they form enmities.[175]

Through constructing a taxonomy of masculine identity in which the only subject-positions available to men are concentrated into three archetypes, Ellroy circumscribes what had appeared to be the limitless possibility of masculine roles and negates the transgressive potential deriving from his conception of identity as fluid and mobile. A closer inspection of these masculine types confirms that Ellroy's evident representation of gender identities as mutable, which apparently served to jettison any notion of individuals possessing a "stable" self, is actually negated by his *restatement* of the fabrication that individuals retain a "core" identity. Of these three modalities, it is only the "weak sister" male who is insecure and crisis-ridden about his masculinity, who feels the pressure of the panoptic gaze directed upon himself and who is represented as "performing" gender in an attempt to embody the masculine/professional "ideal." While

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175 In each of Ellroy's novels featuring three protagonists (*The Big Nowhere*, *L.A. Confidential* and *American Tabloid*) the "weak sister" type has a violently antagonistic relationship with a "hardcase"—Mal Considine and Buzz Meeks, Ed Exley and Bud White, and Ward Littell and Pete Bondurant—that is resolved when the two combine to conspire against another rival (in the first two instances this opponent is Dudley Smith, in the latter John F. Kennedy). Perhaps inevitably, men like Bondurant and White despise men like Littell and Exley precisely *because* they are "weak sisters" and cowards, while Exley and Littell loathe their "hardcase" adversaries because they consider them "thugs."

"rogue cops" adopt different personae, these either represent only a superficial shift in these men's "core" identities or are products of conscious artifice;[176] although Kemper Boyd "acts" when he feigns an introspective, sensitive image to impress Laura Hughes (*American Tabloid*, p. 216), this is a qualitatively different performance to that undertaken by his protégé Littell, whose enactment of particular behaviours as a conduit to his "manhood" implies a schism between his "self" and the masculine ideal to which he aspires. Littell's exertions to achieve his "manhood," imply that masculinity is not a stable condition but a process. Yet while masculinity, as Butler observes, is a normative gender identity which can never be accomplished—there is no end point of a "true" masculinity to be reached, because any notion of "true" gender identity is itself a construct—the fact that Boyd knows how to behave "appropriately" while Littell must be *taught* how to conduct himself affirms that, in Ellroy's terms, the masculine ideal is for some men not an ideal but an *actuality*. For Ellroy, masculinity *is* a condition that can be "achieved" in the sense that some men "naturally" possess it and others do not.

It is because appropriate masculine identity does not inhere in men like Littell that they must perform it, and implicit in this performance of masculinity is its failure. While Littell believes that he obtains "manhood," Bondurant's conviction that Littell's new persona is purely cosmetic—he remains a "pseudo tough guy," not an "authentic"

176 Kemper Boyd resurrects his discarded Southern "drawl" around the Kennedys (*American Tabloid*, p. 27), while Jack Vincennes' assumption of what he calls his "carefully-constructed nice-guy Big V image" to impress Karen Morrow clarifies Ellroy's adherence to a concept of subjectivity that sees a "surface" concealing an "inner depth" or "core." While initially, as Vincennes thinks, "his hero role worked" because "all he had to do was act natural—and keep certain secrets hidden" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 100-1), the façade he constructs later disintegrates and, as he puts it, Karen "learned who he was" (p. 285)—the latter phrase assuming a "who" or self intrinsic to Vincennes that his charade only temporarily masked.

male—confirms that while Ellroy's novels foreground the instability of identity, the potentially emancipatory possibilities opened up by its mutability inevitably come to a dead-end against a "essence" posited as intrinsic to men. Despite Ed Exley's ostensible transformation from ambitious ingenue to ruthless overlord in the time elapsed between *L.A. Confidential* and *White Jazz*, Dave Klein still labels him a "weak sister" in the latter novel and observes that when Exley removes his glasses, "his eyes looked soft without them" (*White Jazz*, p. 281). Exley's "inadequacy" is thus encoded on his body, which betrays his "real" identity (associated with weakness, femininity, cowardice), the "core" self that he is incapable of transcending or altering.[177] Klein's compulsion to rip apart Exley's façade and reveal the "reality" underlying his "iceberg cold" image (p. 23) correlates with Ellroy's broader thematic drive to unearth the "secret underside" of L.A.. Just as the latter project is predicated on the unveiling of a concealed "truth," so there is a correlative endeavour within his works to expose "inauthentic" masculinity. Arbiters of masculinity are able to penetrate through the veneer of viability to reveal "true" inadequacy, enabling Inez Soto to inform Exley that Bud White knows what he "'really'" is—a "'run-of-the-mill coward'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 238).[178] Men like White and Klein

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177 Similarly, Mal Considine's determination to show Dudley Smith that he is not "afraid" of him is betrayed by his body; despite his efforts to "keep his voice steady" in order to demonstrate that Smith does not intimidate him it begins to "quiver" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 17).

178 White's capacity to penetrate Exley's façade is indicated when he seems to possess a psychic insight into the fact that Exley fabricated his reputation as a "war hero," saying to him "'War hero, huh? Those Japs must've rolled over for you'"(*L.A. Confidential*, p. 167). Another incident involving the disruption of a courageous exterior to reveal a "core" of cowardice occurs when Bucky Bleichert confronts Emmett Sprague with his knowledge of the latter's wartime cowardice, advising him that he knows about Sprague "'turning tail and running like a goddamn chickenshit coward.' Emmett flushed and tried to dredge up a smirk; his mouth twitched spastically with the effort. I shouted, 'Coward!' and slapped him full force-and the hardcase Scotchman son of a bitch sobbed like a child" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 346). Bleichert here assumes the role of hegemonic patriarchal authority, with its capacity to appellate ("'Coward!'") and unerring instinct for the "reality" underlying men's façades—a reality that in this case Sprague confirms by bursting into tears.

can "detect" Exley's "true" weakness because they themselves personify appropriate masculinity; unlike Exley, their gender credentials are never questioned, their right to assume the role of "policeman" is never challenged, and they do not need to be tutored into the behavioural codes associated with the hegemonic masculine/professional ideal because such conduct comes "naturally" to them.

The concept of "natural" masculinity is explicitly raised in relation to Exley when he is unfavourably compared to his dead brother and the latter is described as a "'natural'" (p. 18)—that is, a subject in whom appropriate masculinity and adequate professionalism "naturally" resides. Implying that Exley is not an "innately" viable masculine subject, the concept of the "natural" crystallises the difference between men who embody "manhood" and those who can only strive towards it and never "really" obtain it. It suggests that within Ellroy's narrative universe gender norms are not "phantasmatic" and "impossible to embody" but are in fact actualised by particular men; specifically, "natural" masculinity inheres in "hardcases" like Buzz Meeks, whose adeptness at violence makes him a "born policeman" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 27). In Ellroy's taxonomy of masculine subjectivity the "hardcase" is the subject-position that most closely corresponds to the masculine/professional ideal. The attributes required to succeed in this world—the ability to "harden the self" and "smash apart the other"—are represented as intrinsic to "hardcases," who are also exempted from the self-flagellating introspection of their "weak sister" colleagues because avatars of hegemonic authority recognise them as "adequately" masculine. Representing these men as "naturally" embodying the attributes associated with "masculinity" in this world, and positing them

against men who are coded as weak and who must rid themselves of their "feminine" attributes of sensitivity and compassion in order to navigate the power matrix in which they are sited, Ellroy's texts consistently valorise the mode of subjectivity associated with the former group and chronically devalue the latter. I will expand upon this point in the final chapter of my thesis, where I will explore the implications of Ellroy's valorisation of hegemonic masculinity, particularly in terms of its implication in the naturalisation of the relationships of abjection and legitimation which structure his narrative universe, and in respect of his representation of the violence so frequently perpetrated by his hegemonic males.

Part Three: Subject and Abject

The measure of a thing is the effort made to destroy it.

Andre Gide[1]

By foregrounding the fragmentary, fluid nature of identity Ellroy ostensibly subverts notions of "stable" subject-positions; yet in mapping his protagonists' negotiation of his textual universe's masculine ideal Ellroy privileges an essentialist model of subjectivity whereby individuals retain a "core" gender/sexual identity expressed through their corporeality or behavioural mannerisms. Ellroy's restatement of a depth model of subjectivity is particularly evident in his depiction of characters who, as homosexual men—the most reviled and shunned of all abject figures—are positioned at the furthest vicinity from the masculine ideal that shapes men's self-perception and sense of identity. The brutally homophobic insider sphere locates homosexual males as the site against which viable masculine subjectivity is gauged and deems homosexuality antithetical to "professionalism," ensuring that Danny Upshaw submerges his homosexual yearnings by

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[1] Andre Gide quoted in Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); p. 4.

reminding himself that he is a *policeman*.[2] Upshaw's perception of the incompatibility of the subject-positions of "homosexual" and "professional" leads him to "perform" gender, consciously emulating culturally authorised models of heterosexual masculinity to obfuscate his homosexuality from himself and others. While his gradual consciousness of his "real" sexuality forwards the narrative momentum of *The Big Nowhere*, for the majority of the novel Upshaw rigorously suppresses his sexual proclivity and affects a blatantly heterosexual persona, both to foster the delusion that he is not gay and to further his career.[3] The dual motives underpinning Upshaw's heterosexual "charade" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 342) fuse when he is required to convince Dudley Smith and Mal Considine of his "fitness" to participate in their anti-Communist inquiry. Advising Upshaw that he might be required to seduce the pro-Communist union leader Claire De Haven,[4] Smith winks at him—a gesture signalling confederacy, an assumption of a shared heterosexual complicity which Upshaw automatically validates by declaring "'I welcome the opportunity'" (p. 178).

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2 Aroused by a pornographic video showing a young man "naked and hard," he "got his shakes chilled with a litany: BE A POLICEMAN BE A POLICEMAN BE A POLICEMAN" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 340; original emphasis). In another instance Upshaw "kills" memories of a high school friend to whom he was attracted with what he calls "police work" (p. 56); the violence of the term "kills" suggests the correlative intensity of his desire to suppress his homosexuality and, perhaps, of the force of his longing.

3 Upshaw's adoption of a heterosexual persona to further his career is evinced by the way that he ingratiates himself with his "errand girl" Karen Hiltscher, whose assistance he requires to solve cases (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 42, 109), by flirting with her; and by the way in which he appeases his captain by inventing a mistress to explain his presence at a crime scene (p. 157).

4 Specifically, Smith informs Upshaw that "'there's a woman you'll have to get next to, lad. You might have to fuck the pants off of her'"—a phrase that conveys the fact that his seduction of De Haven is also intended to disempower her, to strip her of the type of authority typically inhering in men which she has abrogated for herself (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 178).

Upshaw's instant, seamless adoption of a heterosexual persona contradicts his progressively escalating suspicion of his own homosexuality; a possibility that he does not openly concede but tacitly alludes to when, recalling Smith's comment that he might have to "'fuck the pants off" De Haven, he describes this as a welcome "bludgeon to smash his nightmares" (p. 203)—these being the unconscionable prospect that he might be gay.[5] Upshaw's assumption of a heterosexual role to ward off the nightmarish potentiality of his own "deviance" ramifies into a project to defraud his superiors by convincing them of his unimpeachable masculinity and appropriateness for the role of "ladies man" assigned him (p. 342). He accomplishes this prior to meeting De Haven when, in a "test" of both Upshaw's acting ability and adequate heterosexuality, Smith proposes to "'give our fair Daniel some De Haven lines to parry. Let's see how he fields them'" (p. 210). De Haven's part is played by Mal Considine (Smith is presumably incapable of adopting a feminine persona), whose evident distance from the "character" he portrays—and thus the feminine subject-position he provisionally occupies—is

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5 Upshaw's awareness of this possibility arises after he is sexually aroused while voyeuristically spying on gay men kissing at Felix Gordean's escort agency; in "Man Camera" mode, Upshaw "pulled back so that his eyes could capture a larger frame, saw tuxedos entwined in movement, cheek-to-cheek tangos, all male. The faces were up against each other so that they couldn't be distinguished individually; Danny zoomed out, in, out, in, until he was pressed into the window glass with the pins and needles localized between his legs, his eyes honing for mid-shots, close-ups, faces" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 166). Upshaw believes that "nailing" De Haven will prove this reaction was a "fluke" (p. 213). The phrase "nailing" is a violent sexual euphemism which implies that aggressive sexuality is an integral element of "authorised" masculinity. This suggestion resurfaces in *American Tabloid* when the arsenal of "weapons" amassed prior to the Bay of Pigs invasion is described as incorporating both technological instruments of destruction—"mortars, grenades, rifles, machine guns"—and "six hundred Sheik prophylactics" that are included because a CIA psychiatrist "foresaw mass rape as a victory by-product" (*American Tabloid*, p. 395). Parallels between male violence and male sexuality are also implicitly drawn when, while awaiting the invasion, Pete Bondurant compiles mental lists of "the men he killed. The women he fucked" (p. 397). It should be noted that while some theorists have followed Sigmund Freud in hypothesising male sexuality as innately containing "an element of *aggressiveness*—a desire to subjugate" (Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the History of Sexuality* [trans. James Strachey; New York: Basic, 1962], p. 23; original emphasis), this is a reductive and monolithic account of male sexuality that normalises rather than challenges its materialisation in violent practices.

signalled by the textual device of double quotation marks indicating two levels of encodement. Whereas Considine speaks both as himself and as "Claire," Upshaw's project to simulate another man is less transgressive and is represented in terms of single quotation marks: "Considine flipped to the next note page. "' But I'm thirteen years older than you.'" Danny made his tone satirical. 'A grain of sand in our sea of passion'" and so on (p. 211).

Upshaw and Considine adopt clichéd gender-coded behaviours during their "performance"; while Considine acts like a "vamp" and a "femme fatale," Upshaw patterns himself on culturally received notions of heterosexual masculinity congruent with a stereotype of aggressive, predatory male sexuality. Initially focusing on politics, when the men's dialogue segues into feigned "'sex banter'" (p. 211) the sequence becomes charged with a peculiar eroticism, an undercurrent of sexual excitement. Considine says "'let's get dirty. "It's so *good* with you"'" (p. 212; original emphasis) and the scene's tempo increases, with the two exchanging repartee at an escalatingly sharp, staccato pace. Reinforcing the episode's double level of performance, Smith applauds at the end of the "act"; Upshaw, who closed his eyes during his "performance," opens them to find them "misting" (p. 212)—perhaps a symptom of relief at securing patriarchal sanction for the heterosexual "normalcy" he has displayed. Yet this incident disrupts any comfortable notions of "normal" heterosexual identities. Considine's ostensible distance from the De Haven "persona" is undermined by the enthusiasm with which he enacts the role and the eroticism inflecting the scene, while the sardonic edge to Upshaw's performance—his overtly satirical recycling of clichés from pulp novels and

movies—implies that his heterosexual mime is actually a heterosexual *parody*. Yet if Upshaw ironises his use of heterosexual clichés, it is precisely his heterosexual inexperience and erotic identity as a (closeted) homosexual that necessitates his recourse to these as a means of authenticating his "act," thereby reminding readers that his performance occurs on several different levels. The complexity of gender role-playing in this sequence, its multiple strata of performance and *mise-en-abymè* ambience—at one stage Upshaw, by imitating Considine's emulation of De Haven ("Danny, aping Considine's vamp contralto"), sediments at least four layers of "identity" into his own—creates a sensation of gender identity as unstable, in a state of flux, a site of expanded possibilities.

Highlighting the contingency and mobility of identity, this episode seems to represent gender as a play of *surfaces* rather than the expression of a stable "core." This envisioning of gender as fluid and fragmented is consolidated by the dizzying rapidity with which Upshaw glides between his different identities—including his role as a fledgling criminologist, his professional persona of "Daniel T. Upshaw, policeman, replete with badge, gun and official ID" (p. 346), his alter-ego of the "Man Camera," and his assumed persona of "Ted Krugman," Communist agitator (p. 223)—and is also mirrored in Ellroy's characterisation of Lenny Sands. Sands' initial description as a "lounge entertainer/Cuban bagman/Mob mascot" (*American Tabloid*, p. 71) encodes his chameleonic nature. Like Upshaw, Sands is a closeted homosexual who "performs" gender, erecting a heterosexual façade and simulating a "tough-guy" persona (p. 121) to

preclude his sexuality from being detected by his Mafia associates.[6] Sands secretes his homosexuality beneath a virulently homophobic persona reified in comedy routines where he impersonates famous men and satirically portrays them as homosexuals by viciously mimicking, in a highly constructed, exaggerated way, stereotypical conduct associated with gay men—a "swishy" demeanour, a falsetto voice, a "feminine" archness.[7] However, his "real" proximity to this evident "persona" is suggested by Kemper Boyd, who, aware of Sands' sexual preferences, accuses him of "'reverting, Lenny. You're not coming off like the hard boy that took out Tony Iannone. You're starting to sound like a little fairy with a squeaky voice'" (p. 134). Throughout *American Tabloid* it is unclear whether Sands is "really" a "hard boy" or a "fairy"; he is imaged simultaneously as a ferocious killer—who bites off Tony Iannone's nose before killing him (p. 105)—and a man whose "hardness" is merely "fag bravado" that dissolves when he is challenged (pp. 452-3).

It is impossible to determine which aspects of Sands' identity are "innate" or *performed*; if his putative effeminacy is an "inherent" quality, so that he really is, as Bondurant calls him, "Swishy Lenny" (p. 451), if his capacity for violence authentically constitutes him as the "cool cat/tough guy" whose image he tries to project (p. 287); or if his "real" nature

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6 Sands alters his verbal and behavioural mannerisms according to whether he is in the company of his Mafia acquaintances or his gay friends, in whose presence his vocal inflections are "polished" and "devoid of growl and Yiddish patter" (*American Tabloid*, p. 74). He actively feigns heterosexuality in conversation with Pete Bondurant—claiming to have had sex with Grace Kelly and found her "'frigid'" (p. 147)—and when performing comedy sketches for the benefit of "'insider crowds'" (p. 103) he employs a savagely homophobic rhetoric to convey the impression that "Lenny hated fags. Lenny ate fags like Godzilla ate Tokyo" (p. 206).

7 See *American Tabloid*, p. 102 (original emphasis): 'Lenny minced. Lenny preened. Lenny DID Robert F. Kennedy, faggot crusader. 'Mr. Hoffa, you stop that nasty forced bargaining this instant!' 'Mr. Hoffa, stop yelling, you're wilting my hairdo!' 'Mr. Hoffa, be NIIICE!'"

is an amalgam of these qualities: "Schizophrenic Lenny" (p. 121). While the interplay of identities associated with both Sands and Upshaw seems to militate against any authoritative resolution of their "intrinsic" characters—to radically destabilise any notion of them as possessing an "essential" or "core" self—Ellroy actually reinforces the depth model of the subject as proceeding from a "stable" locus of agency that he appears to disrupt. Although both men have access to a potentially liberating array of personae—and indeed Upshaw initially experiences his "Ted Krugman" identity as a source of exhilaration[8]—they are ultimately represented as retaining a "core" or stable identity by being fixed, frozen in a moment of definition, as occupying the subject-position of the abject homosexual. This subject-position is realised in the moment of death, with both men openly conceding their homosexuality only immediately prior to committing suicide. Sands flamboyantly inscribes his sexuality, resolving his (and readers') crisis of definition by representing himself as a "fairy" (rather than a "tough guy") in the moment of his death, slashing his wrists and writing "'"I am a homosexual" in blood on the wall above [his] bed'" (p. 515).[9] Upshaw, while unable to *name* himself as a homosexual, also acknowledges his sexual identity before killing himself. Pre-empting public exposure of his sexuality, Upshaw's death is described in elegiac terms that imply it is an act of *honour*: "he held the knife up ... put the blade to his throat and slashed himself ear to ear, down to the windpipe in one clean stroke" (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 368-9).

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8 For Upshaw, marching in the UAES picket line in his Krugman persona feels like "chaos in a vacuum, being shoved into a meat grinder and laughing as you got chopped up" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 272).

9 Sands' association with a superfluity of blood, like the description of Coleman Healy's victims in terms emphasising fluidity and an excess of blood (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 3, pp. 130-1), perhaps suggests Ellroy's relocation of homosexuality as a site of biologically/physiologically-based pollution congruent with contemporary AIDS-related hysteria and dread of viral contamination through exposure to bodily fluids (see footnote 43, Part Two).

The sombre tenor of this passage, the sureness and resoluteness of Upshaw's suicidal gesture and its association with "cleanliness"—as if in destroying himself and therefore the source of his homosexuality he "purifies" himself—suggests that he has chosen a "noble" death over a shameful existence as a "known" homosexual. That both Upshaw and Sands commit suicide reinforces the dynamic of abjection sustaining this society, whereby the corpse doubles as both the ultimate abject figure and the state to which abjected groups are forced to return as blood-drenched, shattered masses of flesh, intelligible only in the moment of negation or self-annihilation. If in suiciding Sands permanently concretises his identity as a homosexual, Upshaw's identity is stabilised for him by Buzz Meeks, whose unspoken epitaph engraves him eternally as "Daniel Thomas Upshaw, 1922 – 1950. Queer" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 377). Upshaw's identity is thus distilled into one static entity—"queer"—as if this one element of all the possibilities engendered by the proliferating identities he generates is that which must inevitably define him. This reveals Ellroy's adherence to a model of subjectivity whereby an individual's surface can only ever conceal an interior core of a "true" sexual/gender identity to which they inevitably "revert."[10] Confirming this, despite Upshaw's efforts to sublimate his sexuality, his "true" sexual impulses repeatedly surface; his body rebels against itself, dramatising its internal turmoil and struggle to free itself from its repressed

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10 This suggestion that individuals possess an intrinsic "essence" also underpins Jack Vincennes' description of a man as "'wrong to the core'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 421), Ed Exley's declaration that Dudley Smith is "'brilliant and vicious to the core'" (p. 360), and Smith's comment that Bud White has returned to his "'old cruel self'" when he voluntarily assaults a man (p. 352).

state,[11] and his sexuality implacably forces itself to the forefront of his consciousness until he tentatively concedes "what he himself was" before committing suicide. The recurrent corporeal manifestations of his sexuality posit Upshaw as possessing an "innate" sexual identity to which he inevitably "regresses." Similarly, Sands' attempts to camouflage his sexuality and project an "appropriately" masculine image are sabotaged by the revelation of his "real" identity on a morphological plane—his "squeaky" voice which leads Boyd to categorise his "hard boy" masquerade as fraudulent.

Ellroy's representation of Sands' and Upshaw's homosexuality as inevitably written on and rendered through their bodies problematically reinforces the logic underlying the persecution of gay males in this realm, where their potential "invisibility" induces the perceived "need" for their subjection to hegemonic scrutiny. The surveillance of gay men results in a semiotics of male homosexuality whereby its "presence" within a man is able to be read on his body, and particular visual signifiers permit men to be identified as gay. The premise that homosexuality is inevitably embodied reflects the essentialising assumption that, as Foucault observed when summarising the nineteenth-century formulation of the homosexual, "nothing that went into his total composition was

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11 Hence Upshaw fails to be aroused by Claire De Haven (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 342), sweats in the company of gay men (p. 266) and flinches when other officers use homophobic appellations such as "queer," or question his interest in pursuing a serial murderer of gay men. Discussing the latter, Gene Niles says "'it's homo horseshit, we'll never get him, and if we did, so what? Do you care how many queers he cuts? I don't.' Danny flinched at 'homo' and 'queers'; holding a stare on Niles made his eyes flicker, and he realized that he hadn't used the word 'homosexual' in his profile of the killer. 'I'm a policeman, so I care. And the job is good for our careers'" (p. 208). That the only policeman to care about resolving this string of brutal homosexual murders is himself closeted is indicative of this world's ingrained homophobia, which is so intense and so paranoid that, as seen here, Upshaw's dedication to solving these homicides is enough to cast suspicion on his own assumed heterosexual "normality." Upshaw's instant self-defensive manouevre of proclaiming that he is interested in the case because he is "'a policeman'" is again predicated on a cognisance of the incommensurability of the subject-positions of policeman and homosexual.

unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitively active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away."[12] The homophobic construction of homosexuality as a guilty "secret" that always corporeally expresses itself or in some fashion "gives itself away" surfaces in Ellroy's representation of Upshaw and Sands. Imaged as conforming to physical stereotypes of gay men,[13] these characters' sexuality discloses itself with seeming inevitability to panoptic arbiters of appropriate masculinity; Boyd penetrates Sands' "cool cat/tough guy act" to reveal his "queer" essence, and Dudley Smith discerns Upshaw's homosexuality before he admits it (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 367).[14] Even after his death, the "secret" of Upshaw's sexuality cannot be kept from Buzz Meeks, who manages to determine that his colleague was a "queer" even though he has absolutely no evidence of this.

Ellroy's postulation, via Meeks' epitaph, of Upshaw's "essence" as that of a "queer" is insultingly and damagingly homophobic insofar as it asserts an intrinsic sexual identity from which Upshaw cannot "escape" and derogates this identity in the moment of its

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12 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley; 1978: reprint Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 43.

13 Upshaw is "picture-pretty" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 174) and the "tiny," "cute" Sands, in addition to possessing a "squeaky voice," affects archly effeminate mannerisms (*American Tabloid*, p. 288, 145).

14 Just as Smith "knows" Upshaw better than he himself does, Dave Klein is represented as having privileged access to his closeted police partner Junior Stemmons' "secret" sexuality. He dismisses the latter's "tough guy" masquerade as merely "punk bravado" (*White Jazz*, p. 72, 39) and when Stemmons subsequently transpires to *literally* be a "punk" (a slang term for a homosexual) the implication is that Klein has pierced through his superficial viability to unveil his abject "core." Stemmons' inability to measure up to the masculine ideal is imprinted on his body—according to Klein, Stemmons does not possess a "'forceful enough presence'" to flourish as a detective (p. 24), and he is also associated with a feminised physicality: he "pouts" (p. 32), wears makeup (p. 116) and is paralleled with Klein's sister Meg by virtue of his narcissistic self-admiration ("'Jesus, you and Junior. He can't stop admiring himself either,'" says Klein [p. 24]).

inscription. He is not just a "queer" (in itself, in this context, a vilificatory term) but the unstated implication is that he is "*only* a queer"—an implicit devaluation of this subject-position covalent with Ellroy's representation of Upshaw's suicide as a preservation of dignity rather than a descent into ignominy. Ellroy's offensive derogation of homosexuality is compounded by Meeks' subsequently expressed opinion that Upshaw committed suicide because he "couldn't take it"—in other words, both because he could not "take" or tolerate the "shameful" prospect of being outed, and also because he was unable to "take it," that is, to successfully negotiate the perilous terrain of the insider realm. This declaration, which reifies a conception of homosexual men as "inadequate" males incapable of surviving in a domain where men like Meeks prosper, is textually legitimated by Ellroy, who represents gay men as unable to function in the insider world and entrenches the homophobic construction of them as antithetical to the professional/masculine ideal. Thus the "authenticity" of Lenny Sands' "toughness" seems to be demonstrated by the fact that he passes the two litmus tests of "masculinity" in this world, efficiently disseminating brutality while stoically enduring violence inflicted upon him.[15] While for any other male this would presumably validate their "masculinity," Ellroy represents Sands' evident "toughness" as chimerical and unreal, implying that he can never *embody* the "tough" masculine ideal but only impersonate or pastiche it.[16]

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15 See eg *American Tabloid*, p. 120, 137. Sands' repertoire of violent attacks includes his vicious murder of Mafia thug Tony Iannone (*American Tabloid*, p. 105), as well as his assaults upon Ward Littell (whom he hits and kicks [p. 249, 291]), Kemper Boyd (whom he flicks a lit cigarette at [p. 508]), and Fred Turentine, whom he hits over the head with a chair (p. 510).

16 Hence "Lenny smiled this preposterous pseudo-tough-guy smile" (*American Tabloid*, p. 135); his "tough-guy voice didn't quite work" (p. 121); "Lenny came on hard butch ... Lenny put on an instant rough-trade face" (p. 135) and so on.

Sands' suicide suggests his inability to integrate both aspects of his subjectivity and implies that being "tough" and being "queer" are distinct, irreconcilable phenomena.[17]

Ellroy entrenches this polarisation of "homosexuality" and "toughness" (or adequate masculinity) by suggesting that homosexual men are incapable of obtaining the latter quality precisely *because* they are homosexual. Thus while he is anxious to measure up to this normative ideal, Danny Upshaw fails to achieve it because of what is represented as his excessive "sensibility"—an attribute stereotypically associated with homosexual men which is anathema to the clinical objectivity, emotional stoicism, and capacity for self-control privileged in the insider realm. Just as Lenny Sands leads a dual life, Upshaw is figured as possessing effectively a split personality that fissures into an objective/authoritative (masculine) "self" associated with being a "policeman," and an emotional/sensitive (and therefore feminine/ homosexual) side. Both components of Upshaw's subjectivity are foregrounded from *The Big Nowhere's* inception; he is initially glimpsed fantasising that he is the assistant of a famous criminologist who gives him "a fatherly embrace every time he made a brilliant logical jump" (p. 2). The so-called "fatherly" embrace that Upshaw craves reflects both a desire for patriarchal sanction and a yearning for interpersonal contact antithetical to the mandatory induration and self-sufficiency of the masculine/professional ideal. Examining a series of grotesque

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17 In a similar fashion, Ward Littell's astonishment at discovering Tony Iannone's homosexuality is generated by his perception of the incompatibility of the particular brand of macho "toughness" embodied by Iannone with his sexual identity: "Icepick Tony Iannone walked in. "One of Giancana's most feared underbosses" started French-kissing the barman. The Chicago Mob killer suspected of nine mutilation murders was sucking and biting on the barman's ear" (*American Tabloid*, p. 105). In emphasising the incongruity of Iannone's "image" as a cold-blooded murderer with his "reality" as a gay male, Littell's reaction again casts homosexuality and "masculinity" in a binary framework.

mutilation-murders of several men perpetrated by a gay serial killer, Upshaw's empathetic capacity undermines his drive towards professional "objectivity" by manifesting itself in an emotional, visceral response to the sight of butchered corpses (p. 3). While he attempts to assume a clinical, "textbook" demeanour while surveying cadavers, as soon as he abandons this scientific persona his self-control evaporates and his body betrays his "sensitivity" (or squeamishness) (see *The Big Nowhere*, p. 4, 9).

Throughout the novel Upshaw displays an increasingly hysterical response to the corpses he encounters—hyperventilating (p. 131), vomiting (p. 133), blacking out (p. 323)—which is part of a process of psychological disintegration that he undergoes and that is precipitated by his attempts to embody the masculine/professional ideal. Investigating the serial murders, Upshaw's endeavours to become an adequate professional lead him to strive to function as the personification of what would appear to be the ultimate rational/technologised instrument of professional objectivity, the "Man Camera." Yet adopting this perceptual device entails "screening details from the perpetrator's viewpoint" (p. 94) to foster an understanding of criminals' motivations—an identificatory process which militates against the requirement that men "harden" themselves against others as a prerequisite to obtaining viable subjectivity.[18] As Upshaw utilises this

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18 Discussing the "Western male epistemological ideal" of "unemotional, objective, distanced knowledge" that underpins the crime fiction genre, Vanacker argues that authors like Patricia Cornwell destabilise this by "rejecting the concept of a detective who can remain unaffected by her research ... [Cornwell's protagonist Kay Scarpetta] remembers the faces of every victim's parents. ... Scarpetta's detection method consists of detailed pathological examination and systematic documentation and requires professional impartiality. But this is combined, however, with an imaginative and empathetic reconstruction of how the victim felt, how the culprit reasoned, of the emotional processes determining how and why the murder occurred" (Sabine Vanacker, "V.I. Warshawski, Kinsey Millhone and Kay Scarpetta: Creating a Feminist Detective Hero" in Peter Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* [London: Pluto, 1997], pp. 80-1).

technique while pursuing a homosexual killer, his transformation into the "Man Camera" countermands the professional necessity to maintain a rigorous detachment from the feminised "other." His assumption of a "homosexual" perspective dissolves his capacity to maintain an equilibrium between the discrete aspects of his bifurcated psyche—the professional and homosexual components which Upshaw views as mutually exclusive—and causes Upshaw to lose a coherent sense of identity. This destabilisation is exemplified when, attempting to assert authority over his adversary Gene Niles, Upshaw hollers at the man then "looked around to see who shouted, felt his throat vibrating and saw that he'd gripped the lectern with blue-white fingers. Niles evil-eyed him; Danny couldn't match the stare. He thought of the rest of his pitch and delivered it, a trace of a flutter in his voice" (p. 142).

Unable to withstand the assaultive gaze of a hegemonic male or to affirm his own hierarchically-derived power with conviction, Upshaw's body betrays his endeavours to validate his authority. He is imaged as a divided self[19] whose fragmentation into two "incompatible" identities (the aggressive policeman, the weak homosexual with a stereotypically "fluttering" voice) renders him overwrought and unstable. Upshaw is unable to master himself or synthesise the diverse elements of his subjectivity. Yet by implying that it is impossible for the two "halves" inhering within Upshaw to successfully co-exist, Ellroy restates and validates the homophobic assumption that being simultaneously "tough" (or authoritative) and "queer" is impossible. This is underscored

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19 Upshaw's identity fragmentation is perhaps an example of what Grosz refers to as "psychotic depersonalization, in which the subject's ego is no longer centered in its own body, and the body feels as if it has been taken over by others or is controlled by outside forces" (Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* [St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1994], p. 43).

by the increasing hysteria which accompanies the fracturing of Upshaw's identity and intensifies as he draws closer to locating the object of his investigation and thereby (in theory) obtaining his professional ideal. Apparently approaching a nervous breakdown,[20] Upshaw grows increasingly prone to brutal outbursts, reacting to Niles' insinuation that he is "queer" with ferociously punitive violence (p. 302). An example of beleaguered masculinity "smashing apart" an "other" to maintain a stable sense of identity, this incident is also an expression of the hypersensitivity which precludes Upshaw from obtaining his professional ideal. The uncontrolled anger and "'unstable violent behaviour'" he displays is identified by Dudley Smith as signalling Upshaw's "weakness" (p. 344, 345) and leads him to confront Upshaw with his knowledge of the latter's sexuality (p. 367), thereby precipitating his suicide. It is Upshaw's inability to "harden" himself, to embody the structures of order, control, and emotional self-discipline in which the professional ideal is grounded, which occasions his irreversible expulsion from the insider sphere of power. This failure to achieve

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20 Evidence of this impending breakdown is provided through the "weird jag of sobbing" that Upshaw embarks on after being praised by Mal Considine for his work in the anti-Communist investigation (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 287, 297) and through his surreal (and ostentatiously "symbolic") erotic dream which foregrounds the guilt and paranoia his repressed sexuality induces within him: "this tall, faceless man, silver-haired, naked, is there, all around him in a circle, and squinting to see his face makes him go soft in Susan's mouth. Then a whole corridor of mirrors, him chasing HIM. Karen Hiltscher, Roxy Beausoleil, Janice Modine and a bevy of Sunset Strip gash swooping down while he hurls excuses. 'I can't today, I have to study.' 'I don't dance, it makes me self-conscious.' 'Some other time, okay? 'Sweetie, let's keep this light. We work together.' ... He was gaining ground on HIM, gaining focus on the gray man's brick shithouse build. The apparition twirled around; he had no face, but Tim's body and bigger stuff than Demon Don Eversall, who used to hang out in the shower, trap water in his jumbo foreskin, hold his thing out and croon, 'Come drink from my cup of love.' Hard kissing; bodies mashed together, the two of them inside each other, Claire walking out of the mirror, saying, 'That [sic] impossible'" (pp. 303-4; original emphasis). The mirror motif implies that this is Upshaw's own version of Lacan's "mirror phase" (see footnote 57, Part One)—that is, within this dream he is defining and becoming aware of his own subjective identity as a homosexual—while the passage's alignment of mirrors (symbolising subjectivity) with Coleman Healy, the murderer whom Upshaw refers to as "HIM," suggests a parallel between the two men that is later explicitly spelled out by Healy's former psychiatrist, Saul Lesnick, who says that Healy felt a "complete identification with Upshaw, a symbiosis" (p. 462).

self-mastery unhinges him, stretching him perilously close to breaking point and consequently implying that his exclusion from the realm of viability is actually *merited* insofar as he is indeed, as Buzz Meeks declares, unable to "take it"—"incapable" of functioning effectively within the insider domain, the "'frightened, impotent and treacherous'" individual that Claire De Haven posthumously summarises him as (p. 382).

Ellroy's refusal to imagine Upshaw and other gay men[21] competently negotiating the fraught terrain of the "power matrix" is merely one example of a systematic deauthorisation of homosexuality that pervades his fiction. The "invisibility" of homosexuals in the dominant culture is contrasted textually with a hyper-visibility of this abjected other; Ellroy's fiction is permeated with gay characters whose function is frequently to provide scapegoats for his hegemonic males to act their violent fantasies out against. While the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* display a certain restraint in comparison to Ellroy's earlier texts—which are saturated with a homophobia almost vitriolic in its intensity[22]—throughout his oeuvre Ellroy consistently devalues homosexual

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21 This includes Lenny Sands, who kills himself in an evident admission of his inability to succeed in the domain of power, and *White Jazz*'s Junior Stemmons, who is also associated with the exaggerated emotionalism rippling so close to the surface of Upshaw's psyche. Stemmons is endowed with an "excessive" sensitivity which enables Dave Klein to dismantle his veneer of "adequate" masculinity and reveal this as a façade.(*White Jazz*, p. 70). Like Upshaw, Stemmons' quest for "viability" leaves him progressively psychologically dislocated. His aspirations to the "tough guy" image which he associates with the police role and with "appropriate" masculinity (p. 70) are ultimately sabotaged by his inability to achieve self-mastery, his volatility and hyperemotionalism which leads him beyond the brink of psychosis and causes him to become, as Klein puts it, literally "CRAAAZY" (p. 188; original emphasis).

22 While elucidating every incident evincing homophobia in Ellroy's pre-"L.A. Quartet" texts would be redundant, a glaring example of this occurs in *Clandestine* in one the most shocking, visceral and disturbing sequences in Ellroy's oeuvre. This episode features the agonisingly protracted torture of a gay character, Eddie Engels, by the novel's narrator and several other policemen (including, in his first appearance in Ellroy's fiction, Dudley Smith). Drawn out over twenty excruciating pages, it features one savage attack upon Engels after another: he is lashed across the face with a belt, picked up and thrown across the room, slapped, repeatedly and viciously punched in the face, the groin and the rib cage, his back is slammed "repeatedly into the wall" until he is as "limp as a rag doll in Dudley's hands" (*Clandestine*, p. 169). The

male subjectivity and reproduces the oppressive tactics which enable their abjection in his narrative universe. Just as Foucault observed that hegemonic attitudes towards homosexuals consider their sexuality their defining characteristic, the "active principle" underlying all their conduct, Ellroy represents the closeted Junior Stemmons' homosexuality as his primary behavioural determinant. Stemmons' hostility towards Dave Klein is explained as deriving from his attraction to Klein and jealousy of the latter's interest in Glenda Bledsoe (*White Jazz*, p. 118), thereby virtually configuring Stemmons as the classic "woman scorned." Klein assumes that Stemmons is infatuated with him because, after discovering that Stemmons is gay, he finds a photograph of himself in Stemmons' apartment—as though being homosexual renders Stemmons incapable of sexual selectiveness and ensures that he must inevitably lust after any man in his orbit.

This stereotype of gay men as chronically promiscuous and sexually indiscriminate[23] is accompanied by Ellroy's totalising configuration of homosexuals as narcissistic[24] and

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violence inflicted on Engels is excessively punitive and sadistic and is described by the novel's narrator Fred Underhill with an unflinching, clinical detail mirroring the dispassionate way that he dispenses it: "I curled my hand into a fist and swung it full force at the side of his nose. It cracked, and blood and cartilage fragments burst into the air" (p. 171).

23 Hence Bud White's observation that "'fruits ... can't stick to the same bed for five minutes, let alone five years'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 431) is borne out by *White Jazz*'s Touch Vecchio and Rock Rockwell in *White Jazz*, lovers who are described as "'porking in trailers every chance they get, *and* chasing chicken down at the Fern Dell toilets'" (*White Jazz*, p. 59; original emphasis).

24 Michael Warner observes that since Freud declared that "the homosexual chooses 'not another of the same sex, but himself in the guise of another,'" homosexuality has often been conceptualised as a form of narcissism, a libidinal investment in the "self rather than in the other" (Michael Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality" in Peter F. Murphy (ed.), *Fictions of Masculinity: Crossing Cultures, Crossing Sexualities* [New York: New York University Press, 1994], p. 190 – 191). The most exaggerated example of homosexual narcissism in Ellroy's fiction is the fact that Reynolds Loftis not only seduces his son Coleman Healy but does this only after he has arranged for the boy to receive cosmetic surgery to make him look exactly like Loftis himself—"Reynolds seduced his own youthful mirror image" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 454).

feminised: virtually every gay character in his novels lisps, swishes, minces, prances, or otherwise evinces behaviour coded in their world (in a construction that is both homophobic and misogynistic) as "effeminate."[25] Ellroy reinforces this association of "homosexuality" and "effeminacy" or "non-masculinity" by endowing his gay male characters with diminutising names—Danny Upshaw, Lenny Sands, Billy Dieterling and, in the apotheosis of this recurring pattern, "Junior" Stemmons—which bear connotations of childishness and immaturity and imply that these individuals are not quite "men." Not only does Ellroy conflate homosexuality with "femininity" and devalue it as an inferior mode of masculine subjectivity, but he also catachrestically enfolds it with other sexual practices deemed "deviant" in this realm. Hence Dave Klein discovers lipstick-smudged cigarettes ("Junior's brand") and a makeup kit in Stemmons' apartment (*White Jazz*, p. 116), items aligning Stemmons with both "femininity" and transvestism. In Ellroy's narrative universe homosexuality is frequently positioned in a metonymic relationship to a broader spectrum of "perversions" including transvestism, sadism, and paedophilia, as

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25 See for example *American Tabloid*, p. 206, 452), *The Big Nowhere*, p. 161, 264) and *L.A. Confidential*, where Jack Vincennes impersonates a homosexual by adopting a "falsetto trill" (p. 104), a "fag lilt" (p. 138) and a lisp (p. 141). In addition to reinforcing this stereotype of the feminine, "limp-wristed and lisping male homosexual" (David Buchbinder, *Masculinities and Identities* [Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994]; p. 2), homosexual men are also identified with women on a physical level; thus Felix Gordean's houseboy peroxides his hair (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 281) and the only other "bottle blonde" in the novel is Danny Upshaw's dispatcher, Karen Hiltscher. Ellroy's insistent alignment of femininity and homosexuality recirculates what Sedwick has identified as the prevailing stereotype that homosexuality consists of a "woman's soul trapped in a man's body," a trope which preserves "an essential *heterosexuality* of desire itself" by assuming that desire "by definition subsists in the current that runs between one male self and one female self, in whatever sex of bodies these selves may be manifested" (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* [London: Routledge, 1994], p. 56, 171; original emphasis). This is most forcibly brought out in an earlier Ellroy text, *Blood on the Moon*, in which a gay man—who, unsurprisingly, works as an interior decorator—instigates an affair with the primary character Lloyd Hopkins' wife Janice because he "decided he needed to experience women to be more of one himself" (*Blood on the Moon*, p. 80. In the course of the novel Janice goes to a disco and as "the only woman on the dance floor, Janice knew that she was the most desired body under the lights—desired not in lust but in desperate yearning for transference—tall, regal, tanned, and graceful, every man there wanted to *be* her"(p. 149; original emphasis).

suggested by the existence of police files where distinctions between these groups are blurred and they are collapsed into one amalgam of "deviance" (*White Jazz*, p. 49). Unlike, for example, his fellow "hard-boiled" author Andrew Vachss, who carefully distinguishes between homosexuals and paedophiles,[26] Ellroy restates the erroneous synthesis of these discrete sexual modes, so that Lee Blanchard refers to a paedophile as a "'homo'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 64). More disturbingly, Ellroy reproduces the epidemiological construction of homosexuality as a "disease" that bolsters the logic of boundary maintenance in which his textual universe is grounded. He images homosexuality as both contaminated[27]—capable of inducing symptoms of physical illness in Danny Upshaw (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 215, 281)—and as contaminating or *contagious*. When Upshaw theorises that the serial killer whom he has been pursuing, Coleman Healy, "murdered because someone made him what he himself was"—that is, a homosexual, a subject so external to his culture that he cannot even bring himself to definitively *name* himself as one (p. 369)—the implication is that Healy's father Reynolds Loftis, who instigated an incestuous relationship with Healy, somehow "made" his son gay, "infected" him with his own homosexuality.

Upshaw's awareness of his own sexuality occurs only after he is exposed to a homosexual subculture in the course of investigating the homicides committed by Healy, which again

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26 See the exchange between Vachss' series character Burke and a confessed paedophile who says to the former, "'I love boys—you probably assume I'm a homosexual, don't you?' 'No, I don't,' I assured him. It was the truth—homosexuals were grown men who had sex with other grown men; some of them were standup guys, some of them were scumbags. Like the rest of us. This freak wasn't like the rest of us" (Andrew Vachss, *Strega* [1987; reprint: London: Collins, 1988], p. 209).

implies that merely being adjacent to same-sex desire might somehow spark a chain reaction of pathogenesis. Even more destructive is the implication is that Healy's insanity was precipitated by his father's seduction; this restates an intimation made even more forcibly within an earlier Ellroy novel, *Blood on the Moon*, that being the object of homosexual rape could inspire or catalyse psychopathy.[28] This suggestion reasserts a particularly loathsome representative convention whereby homosexuality is troped as a type of *pathology*,[29] a conceptualisation of homosexuality which circulates throughout Ellroy's fiction. Ellroy's gay characters occupy a register of mental instability ranging from emotional volatility to outright psychopathy: Lenny Sands is imaged as "volatile" and unpredictable (*American Tabloid*, p. 214), Coleman Healy is arguably the ultimate extrapolation of Danny Upshaw's "unstable" nature, while Junior Stemmons is a flat-out "'psycho'" (*White Jazz*, p. 118).[30] Through representing homosexuals like Healy and Sands as visiting horrific violence upon other gay men, Ellroy depicts homosexuality as the pathological double of "normal" sexuality—a diseased sexuality embodied in unstable subjects and expressed in acts of grotesque sadism. Gilman has noted that initial

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27 On the historical construction of the homosexual male as an agent of "filth and degradation" by medico-scientific discourses, see Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 49.

28 The insanity of the novel's serial killer Teddy Verplanck is represented as literally caused by the fact that he was raped by two male classmates when he was a teenager (*Blood on the Moon* [New York: Avon, 1984a], p. 44).

29 On artistic representations of homosexuality as a pathology and on the way in which psychoanalytic discourse has historically constructed—and in some instances continues to construct—it as such, see Warner, "Homo-Narcissism; or, Heterosexuality," p. 194; Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971), p. 45; and Marty Roth, "Homosexual Expression and Homophobic Censorship: The Situation of the Text" in David Bergman (ed.), *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 268.

30 The pathologisation of homosexuality also occurs inversely, insofar as psychopaths like Wylie Bullock and Coleman Healy feature the bifurcated self and "psychotic depersonalisation" associated with Danny Upshaw; Healy's alter ego is a wolverine (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 330), while Bullock believes that his behaviour is controlled by an "Eyeball Man inside him" (*White Jazz*, p. 326).

discursive constructions of same-sex desire as a pathology coincided with its appellation by the "medical label 'homosexuality.' No longer a 'sin', it became the concern of the physician and the specialist."[31] Ellroy sites the "specialist" function in the professional detective, who marshals his expertise in identifying men as homosexual and codifying them according to a typology of sexuality. This classificatory function inheres in men like Dudley Smith, who confronts Danny Upshaw with his knowledge of the latter's sexuality. While aware that Smith's motives in "outing" him are self-aggrandising and reflect his fear that Upshaw will incriminate him in several murders, Upshaw docilely submits to his specification as abject and commits suicide to avoid being publicly exposed as gay.

Represented as a face-saving act of nobility, Upshaw's suicide reveals that just as homosexuals within this world are interpellated into a discourse of stealth, secrecy and shame, so Ellroy reinscribes homosexuality as a "secret" preferably kept hidden, a source of potential ignominy and dishonour for those unfortunate enough to be "afflicted" with this "disease." Yet *The Big Nowhere*'s narrative momentum is driven by Upshaw's progressive awareness of his sexuality, with the novel climaxing at the epiphanic moment when he acknowledges that he is gay. As such, Ellroy restates the dynamic underlying the scrutiny of homosexuals by panoptic authorities, whereby the potential "threat" of this hidden sexuality ensures that it must be brought into the field of intelligibility—decoded and wrested to the surface of the text. Upshaw operates as the agent of his own "detection," compulsively recalling incidents from his adolescence which foregrounded

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31 Sander L. Gilman, "Damaged Men: Thoughts on Kafka's Body" in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 177.

his sexual responsiveness towards men, agonising over his reactions to the men he encounters in the course of his homicide investigation, relentlessly interrogating his sexual impulses as he approaches an understanding of "what he himself was." He is thus situated as an object for readers to inspect and aligned with the disempowered role of the "surveyed" which homosexuals inevitably embody in this universe. He is also located as complicit in his own oppression, a point compounded by his suicide, which is premised on the assumption that existence as a "known" homosexual would be unlivable and therefore affirms his society's relations of domination and submission. That both Upshaw and Lenny Sands kill themselves reiterates what Russo identified as the "worn-out stereotype" that "rote suicide" is "the only solution to homosexuality."[32] It could be argued that their suicides are intended to reflect the ingrained homophobia of postwar American society which makes death seem preferable to a clandestine, shameful existence as a "queer."

However, this overly charitable interpretation obfuscates Ellroy's reinforcement of the strategies of expulsion grounding his narrative universe. In a realm where hegemonic authorities' efforts to subjugate liminal subjects ensues in a program of catastrophic annihilation, Ellroy reproduces this dynamic of elimination by relegating virtually every gay character in his novels to what Kristeva identified as the "utmost" state of the abject,

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32 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981); pp. 267-8; p. 51. See also Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, pp. 50-1, and Richard Dyer on the "tragic" gay in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993).

a corpse.[33] Any homosexuals who do not die are subjected to extraordinary violence, with one of the most sadistic sequences in Ellroy's fiction involving Bud White's torture of a gay pimp, Dwight Gilette.[34] Doubly abjected by virtue of being both a "swish" and a "mulatto" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 191), Gilette accentuates his non-viability by striking stereotypically gay poses.[35] When he refuses to co-operate in White's homicide investigation by yielding his "client book" to White, Gilette becomes the recipient of a calamitous, outrageously disproportionate violence:

> Bud hooked him to the gut. Gilette rolled with it, grabbed a knife, swung. Bud sidestepped, kicked at his balls. Gilette doubled up; Bud hit the garbage [disposal] switch. The motor *scree'd*; Bud jammed the queer's knife hand down the chute. SCREEEE—the sink shot back blood, bone. Bud yanked the hand out minus fingers (p. 192; original emphasis).

White's punitive assault on Gilette exemplifies the most distressing manifestation of Ellroy's chronic degradation of gay men: his persistent location of them as the objects of the most barbaric excesses of violence in his fiction. In Ellroy's texts excruciating violence is repeatedly visited upon homosexuals and men occupying other subordinate

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33 Thus Upshaw and Sands commit suicide; Junior Stemmons, Reynolds Loftis and Coleman Healy are all murdered (*White Jazz*, p. 189; *The Big Nowhere*, pp. 438-9); and ancillary characters such as *The Big Nowhere*'s Charles Hartshorn and Augie Duarte, *L.A. Confidential*'s Billy Dieterling and *American Tabloid*'s Tony Iannone are all brutally slain (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 405, 322; *L.A. Confidential*, p. 440; *American Tabloid*, p. 105). Even the primary lesbian reference point in Ellroy's fiction, Dot Rothstein, is not exempted from this strategy of abjection but is found hanging in her apartment, the victim of either murder or suicide (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 455).

34 While Gilette survives in *L.A. Confidential*, he is revealed in *White Jazz* to have been murdered by Glenda Bledsoe when she worked for him as a call girl (*White Jazz*, p. 72), thereby confirming Ellroy's logic of abjection whereby every gay character inevitably becomes a corpse.

35 Gilette, who inhabits a house described by White as "fruit heaven: deep pile rugs, Greek god statues" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 191-2), is portrayed as standing with "one hip jutting," and he makes "kissy sounds" into a telephone when he receives a call during the meeting with White.

subject-positions; gay men are castrated, their noses bitten off and their hands plunged into garbage disposal units, while Cuban men are electrocuted and scalped (*American Tabloid*, p. 475, 489) and an African American man is beaten until he is left "blowing teeth out his nose" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 301).[36] Violence inflicted on gay men is often perpetrated precisely as a consequence of their sexuality; that White initially refers to Gilette by name but labels him a "queer" in the moment of brutalising him—"Bud jammed the queer's knife hand down the chute"—confirms that it *because* he is a "queer" that White violates him in this way.[37] Like Ward Littell escaping into the "sanctity" of a telephone booth when he is required to enter a gay bar, as if to avoid contamination (*American Tabloid*, p. 104), White's reaction upon finding himself in the "enemy" territory of Gilette's apartment (which is overtly demarcated as gay, "fruit heaven") is an instinctively adverse one. His violent acting out of the distaste he feels is a form of arming himself against the abjected homosexual, a violent shattering of the "other" to

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36 Ellroy describes incidents in which abjected males are tortured with a detail so vivid that it implies his acquisition of a vicarious pleasure through their ritualised punishment. See for example the sequence in which Pete Bondurant tortures a Cuban man, Wilfredo Delsol (*American Tabloid*, pp. 475-6): "Pete sucker-punched him. Delsol jackknifed. Pete dropped the radio in the sink. Water fizzed. Pete kicked Delsol in the ass and shot him into sink water up to his elbows. He screamed. He cut loose with this godawful shriek. ... Pete shoved the dishrag in his mouth. Delsol's arms were scorched bright red and hairless ... Pete picked up a kitchen knife. 'Tell me what I want to hear.' Delsol double-flipped him. Dig those two 'Fuck You' fingers shedding skin down to the knuckle. Pete stabbed the chair. The blade ripped a trouser seam half an inch from Delsol's balls. Delsol pulled the knife loose and dropped it on the floor" and so on.

37 White's ritual penalisation of Gilette for transgressing the heterosexual norm recurs when Kemper Boyd facilitates Lenny Sands' beating at the hands of several Teamsters: "Kemper heard footscrapes. He saw Teamsters left and Teamsters right—chain swingers crouched at both ends of the alley. They had their sights on Lenny. Tiny Lenny, Jewish Lenny, Kennedy toady Lenny— Lenny didn't see them. Pissy Lenny was too entrenched in his cool cate/tough guy act. Kemper said, 'I'll be in touch.' Lenny said, 'See you in shul.' Kemper backed through the alleyway door and double-locked it behind him. He heard shouts, chain rattles and thuds—the classic labor-goon two-way press. Lenny never yelled or screamed. Kemper timed the beating at a minute and six seconds" (*American Tabloid*, p. 288). Boyd's callous timing of the assault conveys his palpable satisfaction at the violence being inflicted on Sands; that the attack occurs because Sands is too "entrenched in his cool cat/tough guy act" to notice the Teamsters' approach implies that Sands "deserves" this beating for dissembling his non-viability and feigning a "tough guy" demeanour at odds with what Boyd considers his "real" identity as a "little fairy" (p. 134).

preserve his own parameters; it is as though merely being within abjected precincts ensures that White construes himself as contextually and contingently defiled and must resort to appalling brutality to extricate himself from any lingering taint of abjection.

The harrowing brutality which White expends against Gilette does not surface in his assaults upon comparatively viable men (like "wife beaters" or gangsters), whom White simply punches or kicks. This reflects a broader motif in Ellroy's fiction whereby authorised males confirm one another's "equal" status by beating or shooting one another but emphasise their power over abjected men by inflicting ornate atrocities upon them or subjecting them to a particularly emasculating form of violence—the "Russian Roulette" manouevre in which a gun containing one bullet is held to an individual's head and fired, testing their stoicism in a context calculated to diminish this while demonstrating the relative "toughness" of the man wielding the gun (see eg *L.A. Confidential*, p. 132; *White Jazz*, p. 70). Suggesting that subordinate males' primary function is to act as repositories for their hegemonic counterparts' aggressive urges, homosexual men are inserted into Ellroy's narratives purely to serve as objects of violence or as *already* the recipients of catastrophic brutality, like Coleman Healy's victims, who are inaugurated into the text as corpses.[38] Ritually expelling homosexual men from

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38 These men emblematise the excessive sexual demarcation of the violence perpetrated against gay men which reinforces the fact that the aggression directed towards them is occasioned *by* their sexuality. Gay hustler Augie Duarte is slaughtered by Healy and his cadaver viewed by Danny Upshaw: "bite marks ran up his torso in a pattern free of overlaps. His cheeks were slashed down to the gums and jawbone and his penis had been cut off, inserted into the deepest of the cuts and hooked around so that the head extended out his mouth, teeth clamped on the foreskin, rigor mortis holding the obscenity intact" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 322). Similarly, Tony Iannone's lover is murdered by Mafia members who believe the youth killed Iannone and Kemper Boyd takes Ward Littell to the morgue where the boy's body lies: "Kemper pulled a slab out. The tray held a male Caucasian dead body. The boy was torture slashed and cigarette burned. His penis was severed and stuffed in his mouth" (*American Tabloid*, p. 131).

his narratives in a manouevre which directly echoes their elimination from the power matrix, Ellroy inversely authorises the type of masculine subjectivity whose hegemony is predicated on the violent subjugation of subordinate men. This point is clarified by the narrative surrounding Bud White's assault upon Dwight Gilette. Within the torture sequence textual sympathy lies with White; events unfold from his perspective, ensuring that readers are not given access to the agony that Gilette would be experiencing but are encouraged to see him instead as merely the "queer" upon whom White inflicts annihilatory violence. The attack occurs because Gilette obstructs White's investigation into a series of prostitute murders; White's cruelty is linked to his self-conceptualisation as a facilitator of "justice" and "protector" of women who believes that men who abuse women "'deserve'" to have violence inflicted upon them (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 214).

Insofar as White's project to avenge abused women was forged when he witnessed his father murder his mother,[39] any brutality that he administers in the course of this mission is pre-emptively absolved because it stems from adolescent trauma and is mobilised in the pursuit of "justice." After assaulting Gilette White claims that he did not "enjoy" doing this (p. 241), reinforcing the justificatory illusion that the violence visited by policemen upon "civilians" is merely a function of their professional duty rather than a source of malicious gratification. This construction of White's savagery as the outcome of his "obligations" to perform his job and "protect" women vindicates his behaviour; it could

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39 As White recalls the incident: "He'd seen the killing: sixteen years old, helpless to stop it. The old man came home; he must have believed his son's warning: you touch Mother again and I will kill you. Asleep—cuffs on his wrists and ankles, awake—he saw the fuck beat Mother dead with a tire iron. He screamed his throat raw; he stayed cuffed in his room with the body: a week, no water, delirious—he watched his mother rot" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 27).

be asserted that White's violation of Gilette is also retrospectively "validated" insofar as Gilette is subsequently revealed to be a courier of death responsible for providing a sadistic killer with "toddlers" to murder (*White Jazz*, p. 147). There is a sense in which all of White's acts of violence are exonerated because of his construction as a "hero" within *L.A. Confidential*. Throughout the novel White's "'propensity for violence'" (p. 82) generates an ambivalent response. Revered by Inez Soto for murdering one of her rapists (p. 148), he is excoriated by others as a "'caveman'" (p. 366), an "animal" (p. 326), and (as Ed Exley calls him) a "'homicidal thug'" (p. 64). White himself is frustrated because "he wasn't really a Homicide detective—he was the guy they brought in to scare other guys shitless" (p. 235). As this suggests, White desires to embody both aspects of the professional ideal, to master the detective's probing heuristic as a complement to the tactical brutality which comes "naturally" to him. Yet any negative valuation of White's violent tendencies is dispelled by *L.A. Confidential*'s conclusion, which sees his former critic Exley consciously adopting White's brutal methodology—and proving himself an "effective" policeman accordingly—and White achieving the professional ideal by solving the "Nite Owl" and prostitute murder cases. In the novel's climactic sequence White confronts this killer, Deuce Perkins:

> Perkins walked up shooting. Bud caught one in the leg, one in the side. ... Two misses, a hit in the shoulder. Another miss—Perkins dropped the gun, pulled a knife. Bud saw rings on his fingers. Deuce stabbed. Bud felt his chest rip, tried to make fists, couldn't. Deuce lowered his face, smirked [and] made animal noises. Bud thrashed his head, felt the arm rip out of its socket. Deuce dropped the knife. Bud picked it up—blinded by rings that killed women. He dropped the knife, beat Perkins to death with his own two wounded hands (pp. 456-7).

The sequence's melodramatic flavour configures this as an "epic" duel in which the valiant White triumphs over a foe imaged as sadistic, unrepentant and bestial. The emphasis on White's tenacity in subduing Perkins despite enduring severe corporeal trauma propels the masculine currency of stoicism as "valour" to an extreme and constructs White's efforts in slaying Perkins as superhumanly courageous and heroic. This glorification of White's prowess as a killer is entrenched by the reverent textual rendition of the cataclysmic injuries he sustains as a result of his clash with Perkins. While readers are not shown the aftermath of violence upon White's many victims—the effect of having his hand shoved in a garbage disposal is not a topic that Dwight Gilette is permitted to articulate—White's wounds are outlined by his former nemesis Exley in detail: White "survived massive shock, neurological trauma, the loss of over half the blood in his body" (p. 461); "his chest held three hundred stitches. Bullets had shattered bones, ripped arteries.. ... White could not talk—being able to talk in the future was doubtful. His eyes were eloquent" (p. 463).

Delineated with a dramatic urgency calculated to maximise its impact on readers ("massive," "shattered," "ripped"), White's physical impairment is as extravagant as the violence that he inflicted upon individuals like Gilette. The lavishness of his wounds and his stubborn "refusal" to die indicate White's preternatural stamina; his ability to remain intact despite the flood of violence unleashed upon him restates the valorisation of physical induration and calibration of "masculinity" in accordance with a register of stoicism that commands Ellroy's narrative universe. Maimed and paralysed, White is associated with an "eloquence" he could not achieve while fully functional; his

textual canonisation as a hero is consolidated when Exley lauds him as "a limited man reaching for the stars, pulling most of them down. Limits exceeded through a brilliantly persistent rage. Absolute justice—anonymous, no rank and glory" (p. 464). Imaged here as a man of integrity, perseverance and honour—as opposed to a "homicidal thug"—White's embodiment of the professional ideal is signalled by his actualisation of a cerebral, ratiocinative telos with a brutal methodology, a merger of skills encapsulated in the phrase "brilliantly persistent rage." The lionisation of White situate him as the hero of the text and apply a retroactive gloss of legitimacy to all of his previous acts, including the extraneous violence he metes out to Gilette and to several Chinese men whom he beats "half to death" (p. 417) because they impede his pursuit of the prostitute murderer, and his vicious assault upon his lover Lynn Bracken.[40] White's recuperation is verified by the fact that even though he slaps his lover Bracken repeatedly for sleeping with Exley (p. 386)—a gesture that is both spiteful and hypocritical insofar as it militates against his self-appointed status as a "protector" of women—she ultimately "chooses" him over Exley, simpering to the latter "'I can't believe it. I'm giving up a hotshot with seventeen million dollars for a cripple with a pension'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 479).

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[40] Searching for the killer, White enters an opium den: "Papa-san waved his cleaver. 'You go now! Go now! I pay!' Bud fixed a line on the floor. Papa stepped over it. Bud swung his stick—pops caught it waist-high. He crashed into the stove, his face hit a burner, his hair caught fire. The kids charged; Bud got their legs in one shot. They hit the floor tangled up—Bud smashed in their ribs. Pops doused his head in the sink, charged with his face scorched black. A roundhouse to the knees—Papa went down glued to that cleaver. Bud stepped on his hand, cracked the fingers—Papa let go screaming. Bud dragged him to the oven, kicked the pallet loose. Yank the trapdoor, drag the old man downstairs. Fumes: opium, steam. Bud kicked Papa-san quiet" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 410). He strikes Bracken as retaliation for her affair with his adversary Ed Exley: "Lynn looked away. Bud hit her—once, twice, three times. Lynn faced straight into the blows. Bud stopped when he saw he couldn't break her" (p. 386).

That Bracken "chooses" White over Exley emblematises the broader privileging in Ellroy's fiction of the "hardcase" modality of masculinity which White embodies. As an author who has confessed to having "worshipped testosterone overload" and "reveled in tales of male energy displaced" (*My Dark Places*, p. 293), Ellroy's valorisation of White is unsurprising. Yet it is problematic insofar as by sanctioning the configuration of masculinity that White personifies, Ellroy endorses the hegemonic masculine ideal which encourages the punitive externalisation of aggressive impulses onto a feminised "other" and ratifies the qualities associated with this ideal—sustained unemotionalism, belligerent self-assertion, and the calculated use of grievous violence. Indeed, Ellroy almost overtly approbates the use of violence as a means of constituting masculine identity, or at least naturalises it as a constitutive feature of appropriate masculinity. Thus he represents women taking masculine violence for granted—either tacitly approbating it by reacting nonchalantly to its display,[41] or explicitly endorsing it[42]—and glamorises White's exorbitant violence as "brilliantly persistent rage." He also textually rewards men who overcome their "feminine" distaste for violence and adopt a brutal praxis; Ed Exley's "self-hardening" enables him to reap the dividends of power and "glory" and ascend to

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41 This is exemplified by Lynn Bracken's deadpan reaction to Bud White's admission that he stuck Dwight Gilette's hand down a garbage disposal: "No gasp, no double take" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 215); and by the fact that Buzz Meeks tells Audrey Anders, "'I coldcocked a guy today. It was shitty'" and she responds by saying, "So? That's what you do for a living.'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 198). Anders' comment reiterates the professionalisation of violence and the widespread acceptance of the phenomenon whereby men's capacity for brutality is commercialised and translated into the role of hired killer.

42 Thus Laura Hughes responds delightedly to Kemper Boyd's "macho" gesture of shooting a street sign (*American Tabloid*, p. 153), and his daughter Claire reacts to Boyd's confession that he killed two pro-Castro Cuban men by exonerating him with "anti-Communist platitudes" (p. 214). Indeed, there is an appalling suggestion that some women actually derive pleasure from masculine violence—Claire De Haven is sexually aroused by "'rough stuff'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 299), and women are said to "get a kick out of" the ties that Bud White wears denoting the number of men he has killed (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 151).

the pinnacle of this society's oligarchic elite (*White Jazz*, p. 358). Yet Exley's ascension to authority remains provisional and suspect; consonant with Ellroy's figuring of appropriate masculinity as "naturally" inhering in particular men and not others, Exley remains, in Dave Klein's eyes, not an "authentic" male but a "string-pulling weak sister" (p. 280).

While Klein assumes the classificatory function of panoptic authority and assesses Exley, he, like all of Ellroy's "hardcase" and "rogue cop" alpha males, is not required to undergo evaluation, and unlike Exley there is no dissonance between the hardened "image" he projects and the "reality" of his "toughness." Even when Klein develops a sense of guilt regarding the brutality that pollutes his existence, this does not ensue in a reworking of his "core" identity, which essentially remains that of a ruthless killer—as his attempt to "redeem" himself by using the same violent methodology which inspired his desire for absolution confirms. The motif of "hardcases" expressing contrition for their past brutality—which does not refute Ellroy's sanctioning of violence but arguably merely mitigates readers' revulsion for these characters, preparing them for these men's ultimate deification as "heroes"—extends to White, who acquires an increasing distaste for the violence that is integral to his profession,[43] and even to the conscienceless

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43 One of White's "fitness reports" observes that "'it is known that he has sometimes avoided work with Lt./Capt. Smith's Mobster Squad … Citing the violent nature of the assignment, White has been quoted as saying, "I've got no more stomach left for that stuff"'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 260). White subsequently reflects on working for the Mobster Squad, "meeting trains, planes, buses, taking would-be racketeers to the Victory Motel, beating the shit out of them and escorting them back to planes, trains, buses. Dud called it 'containment'; he called it too much to take and still like looking at yourself in the mirror" (p. 277). White's reference to "looking at himself in the mirror" clarifies that even in the act of denouncing it, violence is still figured as crucial to his subjectivity. The "aversion" that he evidently feels for his brutality does not prevent him from continuing to recycle it not only on a professional level but also as a means of facilitating his personal agenda, as his savage murder of Perkins graphically illustrates.

Pete Bondurant. Initially able to slaughter men with flagrant callousness,[44] by *American Tabloid*'s conclusion Bondurant must persuade himself to kill a man: "Pete got butterflies. Go ahead, do it—you've killed at least three hundred men" (*American Tabloid*, p. 535). The invocation of the "three hundred men" whom he has slain emphasises the ritual patterning of violence within his life, its repetition as a mode of conduct conjuring and conditioning his identity. Yet after meeting Barb Jahelka violence, for Bondurant, loses its savour and his ability to unflinchingly disseminate it is attenuated—as one reviewer drily observed, "murderous mega-goon Bondurant become[s] human with love."[45] Bondurant's romantic entanglement precipitates his "ruin"; his love for Jahelka etiolates his brutality to the extent that he desires to quit the insider sphere, an impetus provoking his acquiescence to Kemper Boyd's scheme to steal heroin from the Mafia (p. 534).

Bondurant's participation in this theft ensures his perpetual enslavement to the Mafia, who reprieve him from Boyd's death sentence only because of his potential utility to them.[46] While the fact that his love for Jahelka, the source of Bondurant's "humanisation," is also the source of his downfall seems bitterly ironic, it is actually the dramatisation of the apparently inevitable consequences of men "softening," relaxing

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44 See *American Tabloid*, p. 20 (original emphasis): "Gretzler squirmed. Pete grabbed his wrist and snapped it—bones sheared and poked out through his skin. … Pete checked the highway. No cars in view, no witnesses— Gretzler said, 'PLEASE.' Pete blew his brains out halfway through a rosary."

45 Gary S. Kadet, "The Demon Dog Barks His Woof of Time" in *The Boston Book Review* (1 August 1995), p. 2. A comparable cause-effect link is posited between White's affair with Bracken and his antipathy for brutality: it is only after meeting Bracken that White evinces repugnance for violence; similarly, Dave Klein does not express contrition for his brutality until he embarks on a liaison with Glenda Bledsoe.

46 Similarly, while falling in love with Glenda Bledsoe provokes Klein into reconsidering the indifference and cruelty which previously characterised his relations with other individuals and enabled him to function as a hired assassin, their affair is also responsible for his fugitive status and exile from L.A.—necessitated by his murder of a man in Bledsoe's defence (*White Jazz*, p. 146, 347)—and for the beating he endures at the novel's conclusion as "payback" for her jealous former lover, Howard Hughes (pp. 348-9).

their hard-won induration and allowing their emotional boundaries to be penetrated by the feminine "other." In a universe where men are required to suppress their receptivity to other humans, it is only when Bondurant disarms himself emotionally that he experiences any difficulty in negotiating the "game." While Jahelka does not consciously manipulate Bondurant to contrive his downfall, in representing her as the agent of his destruction Ellroy invokes the misogynistic stereotype of the "femme fatale" that has a particular historical association with his chosen genre of "hard-boiled" fiction and that glimmers beneath his characterisation of Jahelka, who is depicted as using her sexuality instrumentally in an attempt to blackmail John F. Kennedy (p. 465). Just as Ellroy's offensive stereotyping of homosexuality allows insight into his recirculation of the homophobia with which his textual universe is suffused, so his reproduction of clichés casting women as femmes fatales—"temptresses" who cause men's "ruin"—reveals the basis of his fiction in the same hatred, fear and abjection of "femininity" that subtends the vilification of both women and homosexual men in his narrative landscape. Ellroy uncritically recirculates the generic formulation of women as duplicitous "sirens" who seduce and betray men, effecting their ruin. On the one hand he reductively distils women to an essence defined by their sexuality, thereby confirming the logic in his narrative universe whereby women are intelligible only as bodies to be made sexually available to men.[47] Fulfilling the role of sex object does not require a unique subjective

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47 This function is encapsulated in the terms habitually used to describe women: "snatch," "cooze" and so on (*White Jazz*, 267, 70). The use of these generic phrases confirms that women's primary function as receptacles for men's sexual urges renders them interchangeable; just as Theweleit's "soldier males" envisioned the feminine "other" to whom they were opposed as a fluid, chaotic mass, devoid of individuation and hence not fully intelligible as "subjects," so Ellroy's men view women as amorphous and indistinguishable from one another. The Freikorpsmen refer to their feminised opponents in liquid imagery that emphasises their undifferentiated status, as a "nameless force that seeks to engulf ... [a] 'flood,' a 'tide,'a threat that comes in 'waves'" (Barbara Ehrenreich, "Foreword" in Klaus Theweleit, *Male*

agency, as revealed by Bucky Bleichert's wish that Elizabeth Short exist only as "the spark point of [his] imagination"—the silent, pliant source of his sexual fantasies as opposed to a "real," autonomous being (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 212).[48]

This effacement of meaningful feminine subjectivity enables men to perceive women as equivalent and easily substituted for one another, a point also confirmed by the commodification of women's sexuality and their status as items of sexual trade between men.[49] Ellroy sediments this condensation of women to their erotic function by representing women as defined by their sexuality and complicit in their own exploitation: virtually every woman in his oeuvre has worked either as a prostitute or a stripper,[50] has

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Fantasies, Volume One: Women Floods Bodies History [trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner; 1977: reprint: Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], p. ix.

48 The objectification of women is often encoded in the nicknames such as "The Black Dahlia" that women like Short attract and that are typically related to their sexuality (so that Audrey Anders is known as the "Va Va Voom Girl" [*The Big Nowhere*, p. 30] while a (real-life) actress is referred to as "'Marie "the Body" McDonald'" [*White Jazz*, p. 66]).

49 This occurs on both an overt level—so that women are "pimped" by their husbands (see eg *L.A. Confidential*, p. 11; *White Jazz*, p. 51)—and in the sense that women frequently function as objects of exchange in the ongoing process of intramale rivalry structuring this world. Seen by men as potentially serviceable "pawns to operate" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 151), women are exploited by men to impress others in the way that Kemper Boyd uses Laura Hughes to demonstrate his audacity and panache to the Kennedy family by parading their liaison—"Kemper posed Laura beside him and opened the door. Joe and Bobby looked up and froze" (*American Tabloid*, p. 217). His display of the quiescent Hughes (whose passive construction in the sentence "Kemper posed Laura beside him" emphasises her docile acceptance of Boyd's authority) is a consciously crafted spectacle calculated to make Boyd "the stuff of legends" (p. 217); similarly, Mickey Cohen publicly flaunts the "showstopper" Audrey Anders to prove his success as a dominant male to other members of the "game" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 105; see also *American Tabloid*, p. 147, where Cohen's sex life is described as "'cosmetic. He doesn't really dig cooze, but he likes to be seen with beautiful women'"). Men's exploitation of women to achieve their own agendas is also highlighted in *The Black Dahlia*, where both Ellis Loew and Bucky Bleichert use the deceased Elizabeth Short as springboards for their careers (see *The Black Dahlia*, p. 92, 95, pp. 183-4).

50 While both Audrey Anders and Barb Jahelka worked as strippers, Ellroy's roster of ex- or current prostitutes includes Lynn Bracken, Glenda Bledsoe, and Elizabeth Short, who also acted in a pornographic film—aptly titled *"Slave Girls From Hell"*—to earn money (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 127, 175, 180). While Mal Considine's wife Celeste "whored" herself to a Nazi death camp commandant in order to survive Buchenwald (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 74), Lucille Kafesjian not only consents to being her brother's "personal whore" (*White Jazz*, p. 322) but is also a part-time prostitute and an exhibitionist who "'dances naked in her bedroom window,'" consciously offering her body for the voyeuristic enjoyment of men (p. 46).

been "kept" by a man or (in much the same way that men use violence to facilitate their goals) has utilised her sexuality to actualise her agenda.[51] This "femme fatale" image of women as sexual strategists who utilise their primary assets in this economy, their bodies, to connive their own ends is foregrounded in Ellroy's representation of Claire De Haven, the UAES leader who literally seduces men into joining this union (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 237). De Haven's sexuality is tactically deployed to "treacherous" ends; she attempts to sexually beguile Danny Upshaw into disclosing his knowledge of Reynolds Loftis' implication in Upshaw's homicide case in what is represented as a predatory, unscrupulous manner.[52] Ellroy's depiction of De Haven degrades her for what is represented as her sexual aggressiveness, with her efforts to seduce Upshaw provoking a nauseated physical response: "Danny felt his whole body choking him. ... Her breasts were freckled—spots that looked cancerous" (p. 342). The aversion that she inspires within Upshaw reifies a malignant stereotype of gay men as misogynists, while the reference to her "cancerous" morphology constructs her as both tainted and potentially contagious—"something wrong to touch," as Considine sees her (p. 383), a vectoral body capable of transmitting her contamination to others.[53]

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51 The latter point reflects Ellroy's tendency to correlate what are posited as the core constitutive elements of the "masculine" and "feminine" subject-positions: that is, violence and sexuality respectively (see footnote 84, Part Two). This distinction is encoded in Buzz Meeks' assertion to Audrey Anders that her lover Mickey Cohen is not interested in her but enjoys displaying her in nightclubs where "'every man there is droolin' for you and afraid of him'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 105), which posits Cohen's "worth" in terms of his "toughness" and Anders' in terms of her desirability.

52 *The Big Nowhere*, pp. 341-2: "She sighed—phony ... she touched his back and chest and shoulders—hands kneading—it felt like she was gouging him." Upshaw's outrage at the fact that De Haven is prepared to "*fuck him just to get what he knew*" about Reynolds Loftis' implication in the Goines homicide (p. 341; original emphasis) is flagrantly hypocritical insofar as his mission in the grand jury investigation into the UAES is likewise to seduce De Haven in order to obtain information on the organisation.

53 In this respect Ellis Loew's perception that De Haven is "'a promiscuous woman, women like that are unbalanced'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 150) dovetails with Ellroy's configuration of homosexuality as

Considine describes De Haven as "eating Danny Upshaw alive" (p. 384), constructing her as sexually voracious (a stereotypical "maneater"), diseased (a virus capable of consuming men whole), and—insofar as the image of her "eating" Upshaw invokes an archetypal symbol of masculine terror, the vagina dentata—vengefully castratory. Verifying this, De Haven attempts to emasculate Upshaw both metaphorically, by questioning his adequate heterosexuality (p. 342), and literally, by "threatening" the physical emblem or source of his phallic entitlement: "she reached between his legs. He was frozen and shriveled there ... Claire kneaded muscles that would not yield" (p. 338, 342).[54] While his sexual disinterest in De Haven is related to his erotic identity as a homosexual, the "unyielding," rigidly impermeable corporeality that Upshaw maintains is a function of the cultural imperative for men to arm themselves against the feminine "other." Ellroy's insistence

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pathological and pathogenetic. Like gay men, women are imaged not only as "insane" but as transferring this dementia to others. Thus Coleman Healy's psychosis is attributable not only to his father's incestuous seduction of him, but also to his mother's maniacal religious fervor (pp. 401-4), while *L.A. Confidential*'s psychopathic Douglas Mertens is the progeny of Raymond Dieterling and a "disturbed woman" who is represented as having "caused" her son's mental derangement by forcing him to watch certain "erotic, horrific" cartoons produced by his father (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 466-7). *The Black Dahlia*'s resident femme fatale, Madeleine Sprague, is also characterised as "a 'severely delusional violent schizophrenic adept at acting out many different personalities'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 378); the motility and fludity of identity for her is not a liberating possibility but an indication of mental illness.

54 This conception of women as castrating extends to Ellroy's characterisation of the viciously manipulative Celeste Considine, who dissembles to her husband Mal about the reality of her relationship with the Nazi commander whom he killed for her. In the moment of informing him that she invented the man's sadism to "'excite'" Considine, Celeste challenges his masculinity by asserting that he is a coward who murdered her alleged violator to prove himself "like a real policeman'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 128). Considine explodes in impotent rage at her, focusing particularly on her mouth, a body part which, as Theweleit has argued, can "symbolically represent the vagina" and therefore the source of masculine anxiety and castration fears (Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume One: Women Floods Bodies History* [trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner; 1977: reprint Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], pp. 191-2). Theweleit notes that in novels and diaries written by the Freikorps "soldier males," these men described or fantasised assaults upon women in which "it is specific *parts* of the female body that are attacked: the mouth, the buttocks, and the entire area beneath the woman's skirts. *Mouth*: a woman is punched in the mouth; she is clubbed in the teeth with a rifle butt; a shot is fired into her open mouth. The mouth appears as a source of nauseating evil. It is 'that venomous hole' that spouts out 'a rain of spittle'" (p. 191; original emphasis).

on the causative role played by women in men's downfalls[55] emphasises the primacy of men's need to "harden" themselves against them, irrespective of whether women's expedition of men's destruction is intended (as in Claire Boyd's deliberate betrayal of her father [*American Tabloid*, p. 515]) or merely a by-product of what Ellroy represents as innate feminine "duplicity." Even women who are not conscious agents of men's ruin contribute to this through what Ellroy depicts as their mendacity and treacherousness. Audrey Anders precipitates Buzz Meeks' death by deserting Mickey Cohen for him, causing Cohen to decree Meeks' murder (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 199, 260). Cohen's response to Anders' defection is to construe it as a personal attack by Meeks upon him—as he tells Meeks, he is unable to fathom "'why you should do me like you did'" (p. 423)—thereby affirming that women are little more than weapons mobilised by men in the process of intramale rivalry. That Meeks "returns" Anders to Cohen (p. 471) confirms her lack of autonomy and highlights women's expendability in the homosocial realm, their status as acted-upon bystanders in a male drama in which they have no role beyond functioning as conduits between men.

Women's extraneousness is exemplified by Ward Littell's abandonment of his lover

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55 Ellroy's representation of De Haven as innnately perfidious recurs through his texts, which frequently and misogynistically construct women as deceitful and treacherous. Hence Upshaw's eventual ruin is precipitated by Karen Hiltscher, who informs Upshaw's adversary Gene Niles of Upshaw's infractions of various departmental regulations (p. 364); Ellroy implies that her actions are vindictive and stem from Upshaw's sexual rejection of her. Both Lynn Bracken and Inez Soto deceive and are unfaithful to their respective partners, Bud White and Ed Exley (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 273, 362), while *The Black Dahlia*'s Madeleine Sprague is an archetypal "femme fatale", who slays Lee Blanchard and has sex with Bucky Bleichert to protect herself and her family from incrimination in the "Black Dahlia" murder (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 164, 374). One of the most grievous acts of feminine betrayal occurs in *American Tabloid*, when Kemper Boyd's daughter Claire informs on her own father to the US Justice Department, causing him to lose not only his position with the Kennedy administration but also his cherished friendship with John F. Kennedy (*American Tabloid*, p. 515).

Helen Agee. As he grows progressively immersed in the "game" of power Littell spends increasingly less time with her and finally says that he "cut Helen down to one night a week" (*American Tabloid*, p. 248), constructing her as a possession to be discarded rather than a willed, volitional subject.[56] Agee disappears from *American Tabloid* with an abruptness revealing that women's expendability is a feature both of Ellroy's discursive landscape and of his texts. Introduced to secure Littell's heterosexual credentials and deflect attention from the potential implications of his "interest in" Robert Kennedy—whose advent in Littell's existence occurs immediately prior to Agee's entrance into it (p. 60, 79)—she is banished from the world of the novel suddenly and without explanation after her narrative function has been fulfilled and Littell no longer requires her to demonstrate his "adequate" masculinity.[57] Agee's exclusive definition in terms of her relationship with Littell illustrates the intrinsic liminality of women in Ellroy's fiction. Subsidiary characters who are never agents in the unfolding of these texts' dramatic action, Ellroy's women are restricted to propelling certain aspects of the narrative forward by (ostensibly) providing male characters with motivations to act.[58] This phallocentric

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56 The expendability of women also underlies Robert F. Kennedy's scornful dismissal of Barb Jahelka ("'we've given this woman two minutes more than she deserves'" [*American Tabloid*, p. 504]) and Kemper Boyd's readiness to allow his relationship with Laura Hughes to be a casualty of his association with the Kennedy family (p. 348: "Laura said, 'Them or me?' Kemper said, 'Them.'").

57 Similarly, after Inez Soto has executed her textual role as mediator between Bud White and Ed Exley and the rivalry between the two men has devolved into friendship, her elimination from the novel is forcibly realised through her participation in a suicide pact with Exley's father Preston and her employer Raymond Dieterling (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 475). Soto's suicide strikes a notably dissonant chord in the novel—she possesses no comprehensible motive for killing herself and is merely mimicking the actions of the men to whom she has harnessed her fate—and thereby reveals her essentially peripheral status within the text.

58 This reflects what Munt has identified as the traditional generic bias whereby "the reader's pleasure and admiration is directed uncritically at the hero who is always a unitary figure through whom all meaning in the text is distributed. Women, if appearing at all, do not act, they *react* to primary characters—men" (Sally Munt, *Murder by the Book?: Feminism and the Crime Novel* [London and New York: Routledge, 1994], p. 4; original emphasis).

marginalisation of feminine agency is most evident in Ellroy's representation of Elizabeth Short, upon whom Bucky Bleichert is fixated and whose efforts to locate her murderer and deconstruct her "mystery" drive the text's momentum, as its opening paragraph pre-empts: "working backward, seeking only facts, I reconstructed her as a sad little girl and a whore, at best a could-have-been—a tag that might equally apply to me" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 9).

Bleichert's paralleling of himself and Short clarifies his desire to understand her existence as less a mission to "find" her than a voyage of self-discovery. Embarking on his narrative, Bleichert declares that he is "the only one who does know the entire story" (p. 9). Assuming the empowered role of omniscient narrator, he (and by extension Ellroy) ventriloquises Short, appropriating her "story" and subjectivity to unravel his own narrative and actualise his own identity. Short's tragic demise gains urgency for Bleichert only insofar as it impacts on him emotionally; viewing her horrifically mutilated remains, he reflects not on how she must have suffered, but on how he would carry the "image" of her cadaver with him to his "grave" (p. 87). The allusion to Short's "image" establishes the dialectic of simulation and spectacle by which Ellroy's representation of her is conditioned and from which she is unable to emerge as an authentic, autonomous subject. In a rhetorical manouevre akin to the incident in which Ed Exley arrogates representational power to himself and negates Lynn Bracken's capacity for self-expression by literally erasing her taped deposition,[59] Ellroy implies that he will

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59 After Bracken calls him a coward, "Ed pressed 'Erase,' 'Stop,' 'Start'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 343), a manouevre which reflects the fact that "the political hierarchy built upon male sexual dominance requires the violent appropriation of the woman's power to speak" (Patricia Klindienst Joplin, "The Voice of the

endow Short with viability as a subject and then reneges on this, eliding her subjectivity and reproducing the tactics of specularisation which enable her to be transformed into "The Black Dahlia"—an object for men's scopophilic enjoyment and scientific scrutiny. Ellroy ostensibly critiques Short's objectification in a macabre sequence where Bleichert's partner Fritz Vogel attempts to discern whether several lunatics who have "confessed" to her murder are innocent by producing a simulacrum of Short—"a naked female corpse, cut in half at the waist ... coiffed and made up to look like Elizabeth Short" (p. 232)—and instructing the alleged killers to demonstrate on the cadaver how they "murdered" her.

An appalled Bleichert sabotages the morbid scheme by discharging a fire alarm and fleeing, his shocked reaction implying a sensitivity and respect for Short's status as a subject. Yet this recognition of her humanity is undermined by the fact that Bleichert is, like Vogel, guilty of fetishising Short's image. She obtains meaning for him solely as an object of clinical interest or erotic gratification, an "image" of either a shattered corpse in autopsy photographs (p. 130) or an alluring vision from a pornographic film which Bleichert exploits to fuel his sexual fantasies (p. 180). Ramifying his voyeuristic obsession with Short from the scopic realm to the material world, Bleichert also objectifies his lover Madeleine Sprague by visually "remaking" her into Short during the act of intercourse: "I made Madeleine Betty—made her eyes blue instead of hazel, made her body Betty's body from the stag film, made her silently mouth, 'No, please'" (pp. 210-11). Bleichert's

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Shuttle is Ours" in Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (eds), *Rape and Representation* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1991]; p. 41).

substitution of Sprague for Short reinforces women's interchangeability in this world; his masculine agency—entrenched in the declaration "I made Madeleine Betty" which signals omnipotence, mastery and control—occurs at the expense of a feminine subjectivity configured as passive and sexually ambiguous or treacherous (as the self-contradictory "no, please" suggests).[60] Using Sprague as a palimpsest to efface and reinscribe with his (necrophiliac) fantasies, Bleichert also elides Short's subjectivity. *The Black Dahlia* is configured as an investigative endeavour to obtain an understanding of Short, its hermeneutic dynamic established by the recurrent phrase "cherchez la femme" ("look for the woman") (p. 17). Yet Short is never concretised as a coherent subject but remains what Bleichert calls a "human riddle," an enigma impossible to explain or decode (p. 308). Unable to solve the "riddle" of Short's identity, Bleichert's "final analysis" is that she is a "chameleon who would be anyone to please anybody" (p. 308).

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60 The power imbalance between the two subject-positions here is later reified in an even more disturbing fashion when Sprague refuses to "be" Short for Bleichert, leading him to attempt to corporeally remodel a prostitute into the "Black Dahlia." Providing the woman with a black wig and the black dress and yellow hair barettes associated with Short, Bleichert, in a grotesque collision of several realms of representation and simulation, takes her to a hotel room covered with photographs of "Elizabeth Short on all four walls: alive and smiling, dumbstruck with cheap dreams, vivisected in a weedy vacant lot" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 310)—a condensation of her dual specularisation as object of scientific and erotic scrutiny—which he has concealed beneath a curtain. Reinforcing the integrality of violence and the victimisation of feminised "others" to the construction of masculine subjectivity, Bleichert is aware that the girl is frightened by his gun and handcuffs but continues to wear these, partially because her apprehensive demeanour "seem more like Betty." His attraction to Short is thus in part a function of her perceived docility and vulnerability, her status as an object for masculine erotic and violent urges. In an act of sexual terrorism which crystallises several of Ellroy's thematic preoccupations—the tension between "reality" and "image," the interimplication of sexuality and violence, the homologous basis of visual and literal power—Bleichert, believing that "the pictures on the wall would spark perfection," unveils the concealed photographs of Short to the petrified woman, then attacks and partially strangles her when she tries to escape (p. 312). In this incident Bleichert replicates the exploitation and objectification of Short that he had previously reviled Vogel for perpetrating. Yet while his actions during this sequence provoke a sense of shame—he looks at himself in the mirror and sees "a naked fraud transfixed by 39th and Norton"—it is also responsible for reviving Bleichert's determination to solve Short's murder (p. 313) and thereby effecting his "salvation" by enabling him to prove himself both an "honourable" man and a proficient detective. Again, the traumatisation of a subaltern, abjected figure is responsible for permitting a man to actualise his identity.

A cipher who permits her subjectivity to be defined for and by others, Short is said to have adopted the "'mannerisms of whoever she was with ... but she was always herself when she was doing it'" (p. 126). Ellroy emphasises the fluidity of Short's identity while depicting her as possessing a "self" which she "always" expresses and which Bleichert identifies as that of "a sad little girl and a whore" (p. 9)—a denigration of Short in the act of definition directly coefficient with the hostile interpellation of Danny Upshaw as "queer." While Ellroy's characterisation of Short restates a depth model of subjectivity, all that is glimpsed within the novel of Short is her surface—she is known only to readers, as to Bleichert, in terms of her "image" in photographs or through secondhand testimony stressing her mutable, multiply identified status: "portrait-perfect Betty/Beth/Liz" (p. 312). Both Bleichert and readers "look for the woman" here in vain, finding in place of a unique, willed individual merely a blank text for Bleichert to etch his own narrative on, a nebulous phantasm for him to construct his fantasy life around. By obliterating Short's subjectivity and representing her not only as subject to the desires of men but as responsible for her own subjugation, Ellroy legitimises the hegemonic conception of women as fundamentally passive. This is paradigmatic of his representation of women as dependent on men in every respect; in Ellroy's narratives women require men to support them financially, to choreograph their behaviour, and to "protect" them from adversity.[61] Kay Lake's description of her relationship with her former lover Bobby De Witt

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61 Hence Audrey Anders begs Buzz Meeks to reassure her that everything will be "'all right'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 318) while Glenda Bledsoe enables Dave Klein to script her conduct, asking him to "'direct'" her as to how to act when interrogated by police (*White Jazz*, p. 199). Perhaps reflecting the socio-economic "realities" of the postwar era, Anders is "kept" by Mickey Cohen, Laura Hughes is supported by her father, and Kay Lake is economically reliant on first the criminal Bobby De Witt and subsequently his police nemesis Lee Blanchard.

highlights Ellroy's equation of "femininity" and "passivity." Declaring that "'Bobby took pictures of me with animals, and Lee [Blanchard] stopped it'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 277), Lake implies her inability to function autonomously and suggests that she needed to be rescued from one man by another.

Compounding her acquiescence to masculine authority is Lake's acceptance of Blanchard's role as the architect of her "identity." Casting himself as Lake's guardian, Blanchard remakes her in accordance with specifications reflecting her status as his surrogate younger sister (p. 93). Bleichert's description of Lake as "South Dakota white trash molded by a cop's love" (p. 110) confirms that her interaction with Blanchard is not the mentor-pupil relationship enjoyed by men, but a wholesale attempt on Blanchard's part to reconstruct her, a restatement of the Pygmalion/Galatea dynamic premised on the unquestioned authority of an instructing masculine figure and the docile submission of his female mannequin. Although Lake avers independence—when Bleichert accuses her of ingratitude, reminding her that Blanchard "'*saved* you, he *made* you,'" she replies, "'*He only helped me*'" (p. 209; original emphasis)—Ellroy negates any feminine aspirations to autonomy by insistently reasserting the motif of men remaking women[62] and portraying women as active co-conspirators in men's drives to remodel

62 Ellroy credits the entrepreneurial pimp Pierce Patchett with having "made" Lynn Bracken by teaching her "how to dress and talk and think'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 343), and enables Ed Exley to racistly remind Inez Soto that "'I took you out of Boyle Heights and gave you a life ... You'd be pounding tortillas on a rock if it wasn't for me'" (p. 274).

them.[63] He sediments this configuration of women as passive by imaging them as resigned to their function as sexual commodities traded between men; hence Ramona Sprague cites the fact that her husband married her "'for my father's money'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 162) with a calm, conversational detachment implying an acceptance of her status as an item of exchange.

Of course, the very casualness with which Sprague alludes to her marriage of convenience hints at her virulent loathing of her enslavement and of the husband who ensured her compliance with her exploitation by beating and humiliating her (p. 367). Despite this, Sprague's fundamental acquiescence to her function as "property" in the patriarchal/ capitalist economy ensures that she does not meaningfully challenge the masculine source of her subjection. Rather than disturbing the patriarchal equilibrium of this universe, she externalises her loathing of her husband onto Elizabeth Short and gains revenge on him by brutally murdering his proxy—another feminine figure also posited as an "object" (p. 367). The catastrophic violence that Sprague unleashes on Short is also connected to her corrosive jealousy of the girl, who embodies the sexual charisma that Sprague notably lacks. Short functions as a repository for the self-loathing generated by Sprague's

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63 Madeleine Sprague consciously enhances her physical resemblance to Elizabeth Short to satisfy Bucky Bleichert's sick sexual fetishisation of the murder victim—telling him "'I'll be Betty or anyone else you want me to be'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 211)—and the prostitutes constituting the Fleur de Lis network voluntarily submit to plastic surgery to enable their physical reconstruction as simulacra of Hollywood stars. As described by Jack Vincennes: "he'd never forget the women. One almost Rita Hayworth á lá *Gilda*. One almost Ava Gardner in an emerald-green gown. A near Betty Grable—sequinned swimsuit, fishnet stockings. Men in tuxedos—background debris. He couldn't stray his eyes from the women. Astonishing make-believe. Hinton on Patchett: 'He sugar-pimps these girls made up to look like movie stars.' 'Made up' didn't cut it: call these women chosen, cultivated, enhanced by an expert. Astonishing." (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 180). The reference to Patchett casts him in terms of the specialised expertise typically inhering in classifiers of abjection, reinforcing women's typical relegation to this condition in Ellroy's narrative universe.

inadequate morphology (p. 157) and inability to sustain the sexual interest of either her husband or her lover, Georgie Tilden, whose desire for Short sparks Sprague's acrimonious envy (pp. 367-9). For Sprague to scapegoat and destroy Short suggests that the docility of the abject realm is secured through the promotion of internecine warfare within this domain, either by placing members of abjected groups in competition with each other for the approval of hegemonic subjects,[64] or—as Lenny Sands' murder of Tony Iannone confirms—by creating a climate of hostility and hatred so intense that the imperative to conceal one's non-viability ensures that it is preferable to murder another member of the abject sphere than to be publicly disclosed as belonging to this world.

Yet while Ellroy hypothesises Sprague as Short's killer, this fictional solution to the notorious "real-life" murder is both disingenuous and incongruous in the context of his fiction, which habitually portrays women as victims rather than perpetrators of violence. If masculinity in Ellroy's discursive universe is constituted by the compulsive, ritualised repetition of acts of violence, then the feminine subject-position is defined through its location as the object of violence. The endemic brutalisation of women by men is attested to by the devastated female bodies scattered throughout the background of Ellroy's textual universe—the prostitutes murdered by serial killers in both *L.A. Confidential* and *American Tabloid*, the woman beaten to death by her pimp with a "metal-studded dildo" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 71)—which form a silent, inexorable reminder

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64 Given the insistent reduction of women to their function as sexual chattel, it is unsurprising that while intramale competition is played out against the backdrop of culturally privileged masculine aggression, rivalry between women constructs them as competitors for men's sexual approval. This also dovetails with Ellroy's paralleling of sexuality and violence as quintessential features of feminine and masculine identity (see footnote 51 above).

of the concrete, literal abjection of women in this sphere, the translation of men's fear and hatred of the feminine "other" into a holocaustal violence. The project to annihilate femininity incorporates the destruction of both actual bodycoded females[65] and male members of "feminised" subject-positions: homosexual men, "effeminate" men ("weak sisters"), and men from African American and other ethnic backgrounds.[66] The dispensability of African Americans is elaborated in a sequence where Mal Considine, attempting to kill Reynolds Loftis, casually shoots and kills "a black guy" who tries to block his aim (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 438). This disregard for the life of abjected "others" is developed to its limit point in *American Tabloid*, in which the sheer quantity of Cuban men slaughtered in the novel attests to their extraneousness in this society (see eg *American Tabloid*, p. 532, when Kemper Boyd and his cadre launch an attack upon Cuba and take "a hundred Commie scalps").

Two parallel incidents in Ellroy's fiction highlight women's expendability within the homosocial economy and their naturalisation as seemingly inevitable targets of masculine violence. In both instances a "shootout" between policemen and criminals is interrupted

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65 While all of Ellroy's characters' existences are suffused with violence, the systematic terrorisation of women by men is so ingrained a feature of his narrative landscape that violence has been inflicted on most of Ellroy's female leads. Not only are Celeste Considine and Inez Soto viciously attacked, but Lynn Bracken is savagely struck by Bud White (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 386) and Glenda Bledsoe was beaten by her former pimp (*White Jazz*, p. 147).

66 The nature of the violence inflicted upon women and homosexual men is directly analogous and consequently reinforces the appropriateness of their mutual categorisation as "feminised" objects of violence. Danny Upshaw's self-negation, cutting his throat from "ear to ear" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 369) echoes the murder of Elizabeth Short, whose face was similarly slashed (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 87), and a parallel is also drawn between Coleman Healy's homosexual or homosexually-identified victims and the "Black Dahlia." Healy, who wished to publicise his victim's deaths as part of his strategy to have his father held responsible for the murders, is said to have deliberately deposited his first victim "nude in a vacant lot on Allegro, prime fruit territory, a corpse on display like The Black Dahlia. If he was lucky, victim number one would get just as much ink" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 459).

by a woman's intrusion into the arena of masculine conflict; in one sequence a gangster, Lee Vachss, reacts to police gunfire by grabbing a woman and holding a gun to her head: "Vachss blew the woman's brains out point-blank. White fired. Vincennes fired. Ed fired. No hits—the woman's body took their shots" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 452). A strikingly similar and equally horrific scenario unfolds when Dave Klein is attacked by a would-be assassin who subsequently snatches an elderly woman and holds her hostage. The woman is shot by another gunman, causing the assassin to use her, as Klein states, as a human "shield": "on him, his shield up—this mouth-gaping, neck-severed thing. I shot through her face and ripped them separate" (*White Jazz*, p. 299). Literalising women's function as conduits between men and hapless pawns in ongoing male rivalries, these episodes reinforce the construction of the feminised body as "permeable and receptive," able to "absorb" violence.[67] In a world where the feminised body is a dense, highly cathected site—both a repository for masculine desire and longing and a source of fear and suspicion, a reminder of the softness and penetrability that men are required to eradicate from themselves—women often bear the physical burden of men's agitated attempts to prove their masculinity.[68] Rather than critiquing the location of the feminine as the "natural" site of violence, Ellroy reinforces it, as the discrepancy between his explanations for the violence perpetrated by the two serial killers featured in *L.A. Confidential* reveals. Of these, David Mertens indiscriminately kills children and men

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67 Catherine Waldby, "Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body" in Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn (eds), *Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 268.

68 This is exemplified by Mal Considine's impotent, malicious attack upon his wife (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 128) and by Inez Soto's rape by a gang of youths because one of them wanted to "lose his cherry," implying that the rape was for these adolescents part of a rite of passage into "manhood" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 133).

alike while Deuce Perkins murders several female prostitutes. While Ellroy offers a baroquely detailed exegesis of Mertens' psychosis—a baroque confection of pornographic cartoons, a laudanum-addicted mother and an accomplice who believed he was a vampire (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 466-7)—the only "insight" provided into Perkins' motivation for killing is Jack Vincennes' declaration that "'I buy Deuce as a woman-killer. He's wrong to the core'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 421).

The murders of women are so commonplace that attending to their underlying motivation is irrelevant; violence against women is represented here not as a subject for inquiry or explication but a matter of fact. Representing femininity as co-extensive with victimisation, Ellroy often *defines* women by their status as victims of brutality, describing Inez Soto as a "beautiful rape victim" (p. 271). He entrenches the feminine-violated/masculine-violator dichotomy by figuring women as seldom instigating violence or conducting it without masculine intervention; on the rare occasions when women commit murders, they do so with the aid of a male accomplice, so that Ramona Sprague's murder of Elizabeth Short is conducted with Georgie Tilden's assistance (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 369). While the dissemination of violence is not exclusively the province of men, any aggression manifested by women qualitatively diverges from that exhibited by men. While violence enables men to obtain self-definition and viability as subjects, women who utilise it do so reluctantly, as a final resort, and in a purely retaliatory fashion. Violence is either a self-protective resource deployed to preserve their bodily integrity when this is assailed—as when Glenda Bledsoe stabs a potential rapist (*White Jazz*,

p. 146)[69]—or an instrument enabling them to defend others to whom they are posited in a nurturing relationship.[70] Ramona Sprague, who wantonly and sadistically tortures Elizabeth Short, is the sole anomaly in this model of reactive feminine aggression. In the context of Ellroy's depiction of gendered patterns of violation and victimisation, his hypothesis that Sprague murdered Short strikes a discordant note. Throughout *The Black Dahlia* Ellroy encourages readers to assume that Short's murderer is a man: all the apprehended murder suspects are male (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 143, 215), the police investigating the case presume that the killer is a man (p. 131), and even when Bleichert locates the diary in which Short's death is described in gratuitously extensive detail, this testimonial of violence is said to be inscribed in "neat, masculine printing" (p. 352).

Despite all prior indications to the contrary, in a cheap narrative shock tactic—a "gender switch" akin to the conclusions of Mickey Spillane novels in which murderers are exposed, to readers' surprise, as women[71]—Ellroy reverses readers' expectations by

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69 Both Barb Jahelka and Glenda Bledsoe are also said to have stabbed lesbians who tried to seduce them (*American Tabloid*, p. 448; *White Jazz*, p. 90), instrumentalising violence to safeguard their bodily parameters and perhaps also ritually penalising these women for acting as sexual aggressors and exhibiting "masculine" desires.

70 The objects of women's protective instincts are either actual relatives (so that Madeleine Sprague murders Lee Blanchard to preclude her family from being implicated in the "Black Dahlia" slaying, and Madge Kafesjian kills Junior Stemmons because she fears he might harm her daughter [*White Jazz*, p. 323]) or simply individuals even more "vulnerable" than themselves (like the "toddlers" whose death provides Glenda Bledsoe with the impetus to murder Dwight Gilette [*White Jazz*, p. 147]).

71 The most notorious example of this is *I, The Jury* in which Spillane's "hero," the sadistic thug Mike Hammer, discovers that his lover is the murderer of his best friend whom he has been tracking throughout the novel (Mickey Spillane, *I, The Jury* [1952; reprint: London: Corgi, 1971]). A similar motif informs *Kiss Me, Deadly* (1953; reprint: London: Corgi, 1975).

revealing Sprague to be Short's killer.[72] This, however, is implausible both in respect of her characterisation (the language used in the diary entry is inconsistent with the previous renditions of her verbal style) and in the extra-diegetical sense that for a woman to engage in a highly sexualised mutilation-murder of another human is, if not exactly unprecedented, at least exceedingly improbable.[73] To assert the incongruity of Ellroy's conjecturing of Short's killer as female is not to advocate a fallacious conception of women as "intrinsically" non-violent; as Waldby notes, to assume that the male body is an instrument of violation and correspondingly conceive of "the body of woman as violable space" cedes "far too much power to a phallic masculine imaginary" and "helps to extend and naturalize these imagos rather than challenge them."[74] Furthermore, as Creed has observed, the essentialist argument that "that only phallic masculinity is violent and that femininity is never violent" has historically been used within patriarchal ideology as a tool to "control" women through fostering an image of them as helpless, feeble creatures who require "men to 'guide' them through life's stormy passage."[75] Yet it is Ellroy's reification of precisely this misogynistic perception of women as weak and indebted to men which causes his depiction of Short's murderer as a woman to resonate so falsely. Ellroy's promulgation of a sentimentalised view of women as vulnerable,

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72 Readers' intuitive rejection of the specious casting of a woman as the "Black Dahlia" slayer is in some respects vindicated by Ellroy's analysis of the murder in *My Dark Places*. Chronicling his fascination with the case, which stemmed from reading about it in *Dragnet* star Jack Webb's non-fiction text *The Badge*, Ellroy theorises the crime as "pure misogynist violence" and offers a critique of Webb's interpretation of the murder: "[Webb] didn't understand the killer's intentions or know that *his* gynecological tampering defined the crime. He didn't know that the killer was horribly afraid of women. He didn't know that *he* cut the Dahlia open to see what made women different from men" (*My Dark Places*, pp. 102-3; my emphasis).

73 See Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer. *The Lust To Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Sexual Murder* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987).

74 Waldby, "Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body," p. 270.

75 Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 122, pp. 155-6.

susceptible to brutalisation and hence in need of male protection underlies Pete Bondurant's grandiloquent declaration that "'we [i.e. hegemonic males] don't kill women'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 498), as though women's ostensible "fragility" provided them with a dispensation from violation when precisely the reverse is the case.[76]

While in a quantitative sense the majority of individuals murdered or assaulted in Ellroy's fiction are hegemonic males, the worst excesses of savagery in his texts are visited upon subordinate groups, who—like Dwight Gilette and the teenage girls killed by Deuce Perkins—experience violation in direct, inverse proportion to their perceived "weakness." In what amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy, it is the hegemonic construction of feminised subjects as "vulnerable" that causes them to be brutalised. Their perceived defenselessness enables men seeking to obtain appropriate masculinity through the reiterative practice of violence to construct feminised subjects as "natural" targets, easy prey to enact their realisation of authorised masculine agency against. Ellroy consolidates this continuum of masculine violence/feminine submissiveness which enables violence against the feminine to proliferate by portraying women and non-hegemonic men as "weak."[77] While Ellroy has argued that his female characters are

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76 It also underlies Ellis Loew's outrage at Mal Considine's attack upon his wife Celeste—an ire so intense that he virtually terminates his friendship with Considine (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 147)—and the fact that even the remorseless killer Mickey Cohen is "'sugar and spice with women and kids'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 200).

77 Felix Gordean's houseboy Christopher is depicted as quiescent and yielding, passively accepting the violence that Danny Upshaw inflicts upon him (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 281). Liberal political aspirant Morton Diskant is also imaged in terms that emphasise his physical weakness and inability to endure violence. Dave Klein assaults Diskant after placing the latter in a compromising position with a prostitute; invading their hotel room, he sees "Diskant and LaVerne floor-tumbling—naked, flailing ... LaVerne vs. the pinko: kicks, sissy punches" then confronts Diskant, "'Now, are you sure you want to be a city councilman?' Sobs. Brass knucks on. 'Are you sure?' More sobs. Kidney shots—my knucks tore flab. '*Are you sure?* 'Beet-red bawling. 'Please don't hurt me!'" (*White Jazz*, p. 36; original emphasis).

"'strong,'"[78] even those women who, like Inez Soto, are admired by men for their "guts" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 151) are imaged as fundamentally helpless. Introduced into the narrative as a "victim," Soto makes the "hardcase" men to whom she attaches herself "grateful for a chance to feel gentle" and anxious to safeguard her from further harm (p. 271). While possessing a veneer of "strength" that manifests itself in a ruthless resolve to see her rapists punished (p. 237), even her declaration that "'I want them dead!'" (p. 148) is framed passively, implying that she is incapable of acting aggressively but must depend on others to discharge her violent impulses for her. Indeed, Soto relies upon Bud White and Ed Exley to exact retribution for her, confirming that she has internalised the association of violence with the masculine subject-position to the extent that she is unable to envisage activating vengeance herself but assumes that it is more appropriate for men to engage in violence on her behalf.

This insistent representation of women as passive recipients rather than agents of violence renders Ellroy's portrayal of Elizabeth Short's murderer as a woman unconvincing. Yet, conversely, it also ensures that his representation of Ramona Sprague as the killer is somewhat explicable, insofar as Sprague is actually aligned with masculinity through the references to her "neat, masculine printing" and the fact that she, like Ellroy's masculine agents, acquires agency and vitality in moments of potential destruction. Holding a gun, Sprague's usually "glassy-eyed" stare grows "'scary

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78 See Ellroy's comments in Joe Jackson, "Crimes and Misdemeanours" in *Hot Press* (1995, vol. 19 no. 3), p. 4: "'In my books the women are strong, complete characters and my men characters relate to them almost exclusively on the basis of their strength. And because most of these books are set in a time before Women's Liberation, I see that as really something. These women are strong.'"

alert" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 365), and when Bleichert slaps the weapon from her grip "her eyes lost their focus." Ellroy's portrayal of Sprague as an ersatz man reveals that he is incapable of imagining the role of "violator" outside the context of the masculine subject-position. Ellroy's gendered binarisation of violence entrenches the active-masculine, passive-feminine dichotomy that provides the conditions of possibility for the genocidal destruction of feminised subjects by inscribing them as vulnerable and hence "natural" victims. Yet women's perceived vulnerability also leads hegemonic males to treat them with exaggerated chivalry— illustrated by the patronising affection Inez Soto inspires and by policeman Russ Millard's "reverential" attitude towards Elizabeth Short (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 209)— and to construct them as inappropriate objects for men to expend their violent urges against. This sentimental veneration of women is grounded in a condescending belief that they are insufficiently "tough" to function competently in the masculine realm of power and are therefore to be pitied and exempted from violence.[79] Hegemonic males similarly consider feminised men incapable of constituting appropriate adversaries; Buzz Meeks feels uneasy after physically harassing a gay man while Danny Upshaw castigates himself for "strong-arming a pathetic homo" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 287, 198).

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79 Hence Danny Upshaw scornfully dismisses Claire De Haven as a less than "fit" enemy for him to engage with (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 300), while Bucky Bleichert does not consider Ramona Sprague a suitable antagonist—even after reading her excruciating account of torturing Elizabeth Short and gaining insight into the cruelty she is capable of—but channels his retributive violence exclusively towards her accomplice Georgie Tilden. When Bleichert is confronted by Sprague with a gun (which, unsurprisingly, is a "ladylike automatic" [p. 365]) he slaps this out of her hand with a disdainful ease emphasising her relative physical "weakness" and implying that she (unlike Tilden) is an unworthy opponent for him. This view of women as unable, like the "weak sister" males to whom they are equated, to successfully negotiate the "game" of power leads Dave Klein to *entrust* his sister Meg to her lover Jack Woods—telling him to "'stash her some place safe ... look after her" (*White Jazz*, p. 265)—and also underlies Buzz Meeks' act of "returning" Audrey Anders to Mickey Cohen. Visualising Anders dying violently as a result of being a fugitive prompts Meeks to send her back to Cohen and thereby spare her this fate (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 470).

Yet while women are considered "inappropriate" objects of brutality, men occupying subordinated subject-positions are often scapegoats for hegemonic males. When Kemper Boyd is charged with eliminating "security risks" from his anti-Castro cadre—a group of criminals whose offenses include rape and murder—he singles out for execution only two men, a "child molestor" and a "homosexual pimp" (*American Tabloid*, p. 129, 172). Collapsing homosexuality into a broader spectrum of "perversions" by implying a connection between the pimp and the paedophile, Boyd consolidates the demonisation of homosexuals in his world by privileging even rapists and murderers over them. Yet it is difficult to see how a gay pimp could possibly constitute more of a "security risk" than a murderer, and indeed Ellroy offers no plausible explanation for this, thereby legitimising the homosexual panic informing Boyd's decision and siting violence against homosexual men as an unquestioned norm, appropriate behaviour for his hegemonic males to engage in. The inquisition of the "Black Dahlia" confessors by Vogel and Bleichert highlights the hegemonic location of violence perpetrated against women as inappropriate and that directed against subordinate men as acceptable. Exemplifying various liminal masculinities—they comprise a child molester, a "mulatto" drug addict and rapist, a "pimp and career confessor" and a male prostitute (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 227)—the "Dahlia" confessors are subjected by Vogel to a physical and psychological violence that is ultimately too much for Bleichert to endure. While Bleichert balks at Vogel's ferocity, it is only the impending violation of a woman—occurring when Vogel produces his "Black Dahlia" replica and orders the suspects to "recreate" the tortures they purportedly inflicted upon it—which catalyses Bleichert's departure from this scene. The classification

of violence into levels of "acceptability" on which Bleichert's behaviour is predicated is also invoked when Bud White meditates that Deuce Perkins' gangster confederates "didn't know that [Perkins] beat hookers to death—they'd consider it amateur shit, wouldn't tolerate it" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 418).

Abhorrent as the notion of "amateur" violence is, it efficiently differentiates Perkins' vicious rape-murders of women from the professional violence of gangsters, constructing the latter modality of violence as "tolerable" and the former as beyond the realm of acceptability. The divergence between functional violence and its amateur counterpart reflects the widespread acceptance of violence as a formative element of masculinity. In a world where masculine aggression is taken for granted as an urge ever present to men, a valid response to situations jeopardising their integrity or positioning in the power matrix, the imperative for men to exercise self-discipline extends to a need to manage their capacity for violence.[80] Uncontrolled violence is unacceptable insofar as it represents a loss of order and an excess that this society links with the "abject." Men are also not supposed to derive sadistic or gratuitous pleasure from inflicting pain, as Boyd's increasing concern that "he was starting to enjoy killing more than he should" confirms (*American Tabloid*, p. 394). While the ability to control violent impulses and direct these towards appropriate recipients is rewarded, men who unleash violence either upon inappropriate targets or in an excessive fashion are reviled; thus when Boyd and Bondurant select candidates for their anti-Castro cadre they distinguish between

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80 The need to control violence is part of the belief that "'police officers who cannot control their impulses have no business being police officers'" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 59) and that "policemen were subject to the same temptations as civilians, but needed to keep their baser urges in check" (p. 273).

"psychos," whom they refuse to tolerate, and men who are "violent in a controlled manner," whose behaviour they approbate (*American Tabloid*, p. 244, 173).[81] For Bondurant, who admits to having killed three hundred men, to implicitly distinguish himself from "psychos" appears ludicrous. Yet he actually embodies the pragmatic violence associated with "professionalism" in this world, channelling his violence purposefully and possessing a capacity to "ration" out his brutality, inserting a drug-dealer's hand into a deep-fryer he does this for "six seconds only" because "pill heists didn't rate total mayhem" (p. 84).

Bondurant's professional ability to determine the levels of brutality that specific offences "rate" is congruent with White's conception of men who abuse women as "deserving" violation. Women's perceived helplessness ensures that hegemonic males are encouraged to direct their brutal impulses towards men who violate them,[82] and Ellroy actually implies that any violence inflicted upon women's assailants is acceptable,[83] thereby

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81 Ellroy himself reasserts a connection between "psychosis" and uncontrolled violence by representing overtly psychopathic individuals as experiencing a loss of control over their actions, which results in a fragmentation of their identity into discrete "personae" (so that Wylie Bullock believes that an "Eyeball Man" within him directs his behaviour and urges him to murder people [*White Jazz*, p. 328]). It also underlies Smith's conviction that "'violence is often the province of weak men'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 344), in the sense that uncontrolled violence is seen as an indicator of the mental instability associated with homosexuals and psychopaths.

82 Ironically, this desire to protect women and punish their aggressors often obtains such urgency for men that it catalyses their own dissolution into uncontrolled violence. Thus when Bleichert and Vogel beat Kay Lake's former lover, Bobby De Witt, Bleichert calmly documents Vogel's actions—which include kicking De Witt in the testes, flushing his head in a toilet, and pinching his carotid artery—without participating in them. Yet when De Witt calls Lake a "cunt" Bleichert lashes out viciously, his loss of control euphemised as memory loss: "I remember picking [De Witt] up two-handed by the neck, wondering how hard you had to squeeze a dog's throat to make its eyeballs pop out. ... Then I remember nothing" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 198). While his memory malfunction is arguably an attempt to distance or exculpate himself from his brutal conduct, imaging De Witt as bestial tacitly validates Bleichert's actions. It should be noted that episodes in which men "avenge" brutalised women could also be read in terms of men using women as an excuse to validate their violent urges; this could certainly be the case with Bud White, whose attack upon Lynn Bracken reveals the expediency of his mission to "protect" women.

legitimising the construction of women as "vulnerable" which enables their violation in the first place. This restatement of women's "passivity" also informs Ellroy's representation of women as not only resigned to their function as docile receptacles for violent masculine impulses but as complicit in this. Hence Kay Lake represents herself as an object of violence when she silently reveals her body to Bleichert, exposing "old knife scars criss-crossing her backside from thighs to spine" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 88). Confirming her implication in her construction as a blank text for men to indite with the physical outpouring of frustrations engendered by their beleaguered masculinity, this incident also reveals Lake's self-promulgation as a site for the specular masculine gaze, symbolised by and inhering within Bleichert, to scrutinise. That Lake's ravaged body is represented to readers only as refracted through the eyes of a hegemonic male reveals Ellroy's embedding of feminine "passivity" and recirculation of the specularisation of feminised subjects by positioning them as objects for men to dissect. His exposure of Lake's tortured corporeality is merely one example of his insistent probing into the agonising injuries sustained by feminised subjects. Reiterating the permeability of the feminised body and correlative rigidification of the hegemonic masculine physique,

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83 Bud White's murder of one of Inez Soto's rapists is represented in a way that implicitly vindicates this act. The scene is narrated from White's perspective: "A nude woman spread-eagled on a mattress—bound with neckties, a necktie in her mouth. … A fat mulatto at a table—naked, wolfing Kellogg's Rice Krispies. He put down his spoon, raised his hands. 'Nossir, don't want no trouble.' Bud shot him in the face, pulled a spare piece—bang bang from the coon's line of fire. The man hit the floor dead spread—a prime entry wound oozing blood. Bud put the spare in his hand; the front door crashed in. He dumped Rice Krispies on the stiff, called an ambulance" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 133). White's victim is represented as almost comically absurd ("a fat mulatto wolfing Rice Krispies") and is stripped of subjectivity (labelled a "coon," objectified and subjected to to the indignity of being salted with cereal). Any potential sympathy for him is diffused and relocated in White, who is imaged here as a "crusader" engaging in violence to defend a woman rather than as a violent bigot who displays an inhumane insensitivity towards his victim. Interestingly, the film adaptation of *L.A. Confidential* almost explicitly represents White's murder of the man as justified by representing Inez Soto as overtly advocating it; entering the house to find the captive Soto tied to a bed, White and Soto exchange a mute look of complicity and she nods towards the room where her rapist sits watching television, implicitly sanctioning his impending destruction.

Ellroy's texts rarely allude to the aftermath of violence on the bodies of authorised males—unless, as in the case of Bud White, representing these affirms their "heroism"—but map the wounds inflicted upon women and feminised men with an extensive, grueling attention to detail.

Just as a medical examiner urges Danny Upshaw to "feast [his] eyes" on the body of a gay hustler murdered by Coleman Healy (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 322), Ellroy encourages readers to voyeuristically surveil the corpses of Healy's other victims—whose injuries are graphically, almost obsessively explicated[84]—and the shattered bodies of women like Inez Soto (whose physical appearance is described only in terms of the damage that her rapists inflicted upon it [*L.A. Confidential*, p. 147]) and Elizabeth Short, whose remains are documented by Ellroy with an "empirical detail that borders on the fetishistic."[85] While

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84 Danny Upshaw documents the wounds inflicted on Marty Goines in methodical detail ("'There is a total of six oval, irregular, circumscribed wounds on the torso between the navel and rib cage. Shredded flesh outlines the perimeters, entrails with coagulated blood extruding from them'" [*The Big Nowhere*, p. 3) and the injuries inflicted on Healy's remaining victims are also outlined at length (p. 141, pp. 145-6, 322). Upshaw also reconstructs the murders in an extremely graphic way: "the killer throttles his victim postmortem; fondles his genitals until they bruise, slashes his backside with the razor blade device, pulls out his eyes, screws him in the sockets at least twice, bites—or has an animal bite—through his stomach to the intestines ... the killer bit and gnawed and swiveled and gnashed his teeth to get a purchase on his victim's entrails, sucking the flesh upward to leave inflamed borders as he ravaged [him]"(p. 86).

85 This phrase is used by Munt in *Murder by the Book?*, pp. 202-3. Ellroy describes Short's corpse as follows: "It was the nude, mutilated body a young woman, cut in half at the waist. The bottom half lay in the weeds a few feet away from the top, legs wide open. A large triangle had been gouged out of the left thigh, and there was a long, wide cut running from the bisection point down to the top of the pubic hair. The flaps of skin beside the gash were pulled back; there were no organs inside. The top half was worse: the breasts were dotted with cigarette burns, the right one hanging loose, attached to the torso only by shreds of skin; the left one slashed around the nipple. The cuts went all the way down to the bone, but the worst of the worst was the girl's face. It was one huge purpled bruise, the nose crushed deep into the facial cavity, the mouth cut ear to ear into a smile that leered up at you, somehow mocking the rest of the brutality inflicted. I knew I would carry that smile with me to my grave" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 87). It could be argued that Ellroy's objectification of Short's cadaver reflects what has been described as the typical demystification of the human body in crime fiction. Murray argues that because "death—a dead body—is so often just the starting point in crime fiction, the body is ruthlessly dehumanised, demystified. Once the experts get going it is just a collection of evidence" (David Murray, "Reading the Signs: Detection and Anthropology in the Work of Tony Hillerman" in Messent (ed.), *Criminal Proceedings*, p. 130), while Mandel

Ellroy's delineation of Short's corpse is superficially sympathetic to her status as a violated subject ("the worst of the worst was the girl's face" [*The Black Dahlia*, p. 87]), this nominal attempt to assert her subjectivity is actually a reflection of her cadaver's impact on Bleichert, as his comment that "I knew I would carry that smile with me to my grave" confirms. Although Short's cadaver is described in laborious detail, the only other corpse glimpsed within the novel belongs to Lee Blanchard and is portrayed with a minimal level of detail, seen by Bleichert as only "sunburned pink skin and blond eyebrows covered with stitch scars that looked familiar" (p. 272). Emphasising Blanchard's unique subjectivity—symbolised by the scarred eyebrows that Bleichert has previously alluded to (p. 47, 50)— the brevity of the description confirms that authorised males like Blanchard are not appropriate objects for the analytical masculine gaze to plunder.[86] Although Bleichert cannot endure looking at Blanchard's corpse and flees as soon as he recognises it, he views Short's remains with rapacious avidity: "I got itchy to stare and gave the girl a detailed eyeing" (p. 89). Bleichert's curiosity reflects his desire to be a "good" detective (p. 234), a role that for him entails embodying the logic of the speculum,

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has observed that "death—and more particularly murder—is at the very centre of the crime story. There is hardly one without violent death. ... But death in the crime story is not treated as a human fate, or as a tragedy. It becomes an object of enquiry. It is not lived, suffered, feared or fought against. It becomes a corpse to be dissected, a thing to be analyzed. Reification of death is at the very heart of the crime story" (Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], p. 41).

86 When the injuries of individuals occupying the masculine subject-position are attended to, this occurs in a context which not only does not objectify them but actually emphasises their subjectivity; hence the extensive physical damage endured by Ward Littell after he is beaten by Pete Bondurant—"a massive series of posterior cuts and lacerations, broken ribs, contusions, a broken nose, broken collarbone, internal hemorrhaging and facial gouges" (*American Tabloid*, p. 298)—is closely detailed but is not visibly shown to readers in the way that Elizabeth Short's cadaver is. Furthermore, when Littell contemplates and catalogues his wounds he does so in front of a mirror, thereby emphasising the fact that he is a subject rather than an object to be viewed in the way that Short seems to exist solely to be specularised by a masculine gaze.

obtaining forensic prowess and mobilising an enquiring, analytical gaze in the pursuit of evidence.[87]

As the troping of Bleichert's investigative practices in violently sexual metaphors—so that he speaks of "raping" a crime scenes for evidence (p. 339)—suggests, the "objective," objectifying gaze of the detective is part of the broader continuum of violence against the abject realm. This is particularly evident in terms of the medico-scientific discourse in which detectives, as surveillers of damaged bodies, are inevitably implicated, and which involves a desubjectification of murder victims and reduction of their humanity to a series of shattered body parts: "Three dead on the floor: one male, two female. Details: Their eyes shot out—powder-black cheeks, exit spatter ... His pants down. Castrated—his penis in an ashtray. The women: Cut/sawed/ snipped—limbs dangling by skin shreds" (*White Jazz*, p. 227). The "objective" gaze marshalled here by Dave Klein is deplored as insensitive by Bleichert when he witnesses Short's autopsy. This is conducted by a doctor who catalogues her injuries with a clinical precision and subsumes her humanity beneath a torrent of medical jargon (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 101). While Bleichert initially evinces a similar detachment, describing Short as "the stiff" and watching the

87 For Bleichert the spheres of scientific investigation and police work collide when he joins a forensic police unit where his job is collect evidence at crime scenes. The satisfaction that he derives from his status as a repository of technical knowledge is evident in a sequence in which he explores a suicide: "It looked like a classic self-inflicted shotgun job: overturned leather chair, the outline of the stiff chalked on the floor beside it. The weapon ... [was] in front of the body, the muzzle coated with blood and shredded tissue. The light plaster walls and ceiling showed off blood and caked-on brains to full advantage, the teeth fragments and buckshot a dead giveaway that the victim had stuck both barrels in his mouth. I spent an hour measuring trajectories and spatter marks, scraping matter into test tubes and dusting the suicide weapon for latents" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 287). This excerpt, with its references to the "stiff" and callous allusion to body parts being "shown to full advantage," further reinforces the desensitisation occasioned by the detecting function.

autopsy progress with clinical interest, he ultimately expresses anger at the "coldness" of the doctor's voice and the terms with which he describes Short's ravaged form (p. 101). The medico-scientific vocabulary that Bleichert considers destructively "cold" is another example of insider knowledge, an exclusionary form of technical expertise akin to the detective's interrogative semiotic which is deployed at the expense of the denigrated abject to obscure their humanity. While Bleichert decries this dehumanising discourse, Ellroy reproduces it in his exhaustive descriptions of Short's cadaver. Probing her abjected body with a dispassionate interest in the details of her defilement, Ellroy exhibits her desecrated body as an object for both Bleichert and readers to inspect. This double negation of Short, her observation both through a gendered field of vision and the lens of scientific "authority," textually dissolves her, leaving behind only shards—a bruised mouth, fragmented flesh—and strips her of subjectivity and dignity.

Mirroring her literal dismemberment, Ellroy's representation of Short's body replicates both the act of violence originally perpetrated against her, and the strategies of specularisation and passification which more generally enable men in this universe to violate women by constructing them as quiescent receptacles for their desires—"cooze" to rape and defile, bodies to torture and murder. In a text in which issues of power and control are operated through metaphors of sight and specularity, Ellroy's narrative itself functions as a specular instrument; indeed, the entire novel, driven by Bleichert's desire to investigate or "look for" Short ("cherchez la femme"), constitutes a reification of the speculum. As Bleichert explicitly says, his project is to "reconstruct" Short by means of an "impartial," objective investigation; "working backward, seeking only facts," he

endeavours to piece together her past, and by extension Short herself. Bleichert thus envisages detection as a process of recombining dislocated pieces into a coherent whole. Insofar as Bleichert's interpretative project does not ultimately enable him to "solve" Short's enigma, Ellroy problematises the idea of closure, stability and resolution. While this undermines the very notions of "objectivity" and of categories of stable knowledge underlying Bleichert's investigative impetus, it does not displace the teleological and classificatory drive of his project. Bleichert detects in order to make evidence cohere into a solution, to render chaotic, random circumstances intelligible. Similarly, Dave Klein's project in *White Jazz* is an attempt to impose order and structure through narrative; the text constitutes Klein's professed intention to "link the dots" and "connect" events that had previously remained "dispersed" (*White Jazz*, p. 1). Structurally, *White Jazz* is configured as an exploration into the history of the Kafesjian family, whose "secrets" Klein is anxious to unveil. Like all of the "L.A. Quartet" texts, it features a dynamic whereby the process of accumulating information and clues culminates in an expository ending where crucial "secrets" are unveiled.[88]

This process of revelation ensures that Ellroy's narratives mirror the hermeneutic epistemology of the detective, who sifts material evidence and semiotic systems to acquire information before decoding this evidence to "make sense" of it. The "jigsaw puzzle" dimensions of the detective function configure it as analogous to Ellroy's project to

88 These include the identity of the "Black Dahlia"'s murderer (*The Black Dahlia*), the origins of Coleman Healy's psychosis (*The Big Nowhere*), the implication of Raymond Dieterling, Preston Exley and Dudley Smith in various criminal activities (*L.A. Confidential*), and the backgrounds of both the Kafesjian family past and Wylie Bullock, the psychopath who sought to destroy them (*White Jazz*).

reconstruct America's "hidden history"; his detectives' imperative to probe beneath the "visible" L.A. and excavate its subterranean mysteries parallels Ellroy's drive to disinter the "secrets" of his imaginary American past. Ellroy thus metaphorises narrative as a detecting process—into the bodies of feminised subjects, the "hidden" truths underlying horrendous crimes, the "secret history" of the postwar era—and an act of suturing, a re-memberment. Yet as the textual disassembling of Short's body reveals, Ellroy's novels are not fictions of integration but what could be called, following Jeffords, "narratives of dismemberment." Jeffords argues that the "'murder scene'" commonly occurs in texts as " the dismemberment of the female body," thereby enabling a narrative process in which the "narrative/narrator (man)" constructs a text's "plot/body" from the "re-membered pieces" of a disintegrated feminine corpse.[89] This narrative mode commences "with the representation of the dismemberment of the female body; plotting is the process of renegotiating that body to an apparently controlled coherence."[90] It is epitomised by *The Black Dahlia*, where Bleichert seeks to reconstitute the eponymous victim's *literally* vivisected corpse and make its fragments coalesce into a whole. Jeffords observes that "narratives of dismemberment" are predicated on the fact that the female corpse is "silent, and 'needs' to have someone else tell its story ... Narrative is ventriloquism."[91] This trope is also concretised in *The Black Dahlia*, where Bleichert speaks on behalf of Short—"as brutal as the facts were, she would have wanted them all known"—and announces that he is "the only one who does know the entire story" (p. 9). Bleichert's

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89 Susan Jeffords, "Narrative as Violence, Violence as Patriarchy, Patriarchy as Story-Telling" in Jeanne Ruppert (ed.), *Gender: Literary and Cinematic Representations (Selected papers from the Eleventh Annual Florida State University Conference on Literature and Film)* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1989a), p. 83.

90 Jeffords, "Narrative as Violence, Violence as Patriarchy, Patriarchy as Story-Telling", p. 84.

91 Jeffords, "Narrative as Violence, Violence as Patriarchy, Patriarchy as Story-Telling", p. 84.

assumption of the narrator's prerogative reflects the fact that, as Jackson has observed, narrative is a "process of knowledge production and transmission ('to narrate' and 'to know' have a common etymology). The narrator is the powerful one (the one supposed to know); the narratee is the supplicant, who seeks the narrator's knowledge."[92]

In Ellroy's texts the capacity to represent is an empowered one; the privileged position of narrator is both a source of authority and a reflection of power inhering in individuals in both a localised and collective sense. Bleichert is able to narrate Short's story because of the "power" accorded him as an emblem of police "authority" with access to data and investigative tools, and as a hegemonic male exempted from the catastrophic violence visited upon women. Yet the narrative of Short's destruction is ultimately only communicable by the individual who annihilated her, and the fact that Ramona Sprague outlines this murder in garish detail[93] vividly illustrates the "power" intrinsic to the position of narrator. Just as hegemonic subjects or those associated with the masculine subject-position are able to treat the bodies of the subaltern as *tabulae rasae* to inscribe with pain, so the act of narration itself is aligned with destruction and imaged by Ellroy as

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92 Earl Jackson, Jr., *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 118.

93 *The Black Dahlia*, p. 353: "'When she woke up Tuesday morning I knew she couldn't take much more ... I could tell she was so damn proud of her little titties even while I took Chesterfields to them yesterday. I decided to cut them off slowly. She was still in a stupor, maybe even shock. I showed her the Joe DiMaggio Louisville Slugger which had given me so much pleasure since Sunday night. I teased her with it. That took her out of her shock. I poked it at her little hole and she almost swallowed her gag. I wished there were nails to put in it, like the iron maiden or a chastity belt she would not soon forget. I held the bat in front of her, then I opened up a cigarette burn on her left tittie with my knife. She bit on her gag and blood from where I took the Joe DiMaggio to her teeth came out due to her biting so hard. I stuck the knife down to a little bone I felt, then I twisted it. She tried to scream and the gag slipped deeper into her throat. I pulled it out for one second and she yelled for her mother. I put it back in hard and cut her again on the right tittie. She's getting infected where she's tied up now. The ropes are cutting her ankles and they're squishy with pus.'"

a sadistic process. The exploits of psychopathic murderers are often relayed through monologues like Sprague's diary entry or the "story" that the psychotic Wylie Bullock recounts to Dave Klein (*White Jazz*, p. 352). These narratives are typically figured as sadistic chronicles which traumatise those exposed to them, ensuring that Sal D'Onofrio's accounts of violating others give Ward Littell "nightmares" (*American Tabloid*, p. 157, 169, 178). Danny Upshaw deliberately seeks to distress Felix Gordean, who possesses a "'low threshold [for] descriptions of violence,'" by documenting the grisly details of Coleman Healy's murders: "'We're talking about three people dead. Cut up with a fucking zoot stick, eyes poked out, intestines chewed on'" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 222).

Ellroy himself—as the latter example reveals—portrays violence with a graphic attention to detail. His conflation of narrative and sadism is reproduced by his own textual style and tactics, which ensure that his fiction itself constitutes an act of sadism directed against readers. If Ellroy, as an author, echoes the investigative heuristic of his detectives, his texts also embody their violent ontology. They are constituted by a gradual accumulation of information and details that is then suddenly interrupted by the intrusion of violence into the narrative, either in the form of an explosion of brutality between individuals or the production of a corpse or violated subject. This pattern of narrative exposition disrupted by a display of violence corresponds to the exegetical continuum conceptualised in film theory as encompassing "narrative" and "spectacle"—the former constituting the explicatory process and the latter encapsulating those moments when

exegesis is arrested and the screen is flooded with "pure" imagery.[94] In Ellroy's texts violence is a spectacle in the sense of being treated as "spectacular," an occasion for macabrely inventive flights of authorial fancy which lead Ellroy to devise such hyperbolically savage incidents as the crucifixion of a man with icepicks (*American Tabloid*, p. 541) and a psychopath's dismemberment of children to create a hybrid infant (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 46). Violence is also a spectacle in that it "freezes" Ellroy's narratives or brings them to a halt; thus when Fritz Vogel restages Elizabeth Short's violation the scene increases in tension and momentum until it culminates in the moment that Vogel whips away the sheet concealing the "Black Dahlia" simulacrum, spectacularising the corpse in the instant of its unveiling.

The freezing of the narrative at the moment of the faux-"Dahlia"'s exposure reflects Mulvey's argument that the "split between spectacle and narrative" is a gendered one which "supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen."[95] Mulvey suggests that while "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film ... her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation."[96] This distinction is reified in Ellroy's texts insofar as masculine violence emphasises masculine agency, so that violent episodes between hegemonic males are

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94 For discussions of this differentiation between "narrative" and "spectacle" see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975; reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [Bloomington and Indianopolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989]); Steve Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema" in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1993).

95 Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 20.

96 Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 20.

typically depicted in the process of their occurrence and resemble either boxing matches or cinematic action sequences.[97] Duels between men are chronicled with a kinetic immediacy creating a sense of urgency and confirming that this violence is delineated in the context of men achieving agency and purpose through brutalising others. While such incidents invariably occur in exterior environments,[98] Ellroy emphasises the "feminised" status of subaltern individuals by situating scenes of violence enacted against them either in domestic locales which entrench their exclusion from the public sphere—Bud White tortures Dwight Gilette in his kitchen, a site which also serves as the location for Pete Bondurant's sadistic inquisition of a Cuban man (*American Tabloid*, p. 475)—or in other enclosed spaces such as the torture chamber where Elizabeth Short was murdered. The latter setting, described by Ellroy in lurid detail,[99] is the domicile of Georgie Tilden, whose fetishisation of the dead feminine form is indicated by the photographs of human detritus littering the walls of his monstrous hut, the reproductive organs and genitals he

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97 This underscores the fact that these are "duels," battles between matched antagonists rather than the ritualised performance of torture upon a passive ("feminised") recipient. See for example the altercation between Danny Upshaw and Gene Niles (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 302); Buzz Meeks' attack on Tommy Sifakis (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 29); the opening sequence in *L.A. Confidential* featuring a shootout between Buzz Meeks and various gangsters (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 5-6), the scene in which Jack Vincennes shoots two liquor store "heisters" (pp. 283-4); and the shootout between Vincennes, White, Exley and two of the Nite Owl gunmen, Abe Teitlebaum and Lee Vachss (pp. 452-3).

98 This observation is indebted to Caputi's analysis of Bret Easton Ellis' gendered representation of violence in *American Psycho*: "When Bateman murders men, the scenes are relatively short, take place outside, and are asexual. When women are murdered, the sequences are extensive, take place in private and frequently follow upon several pages of basic sadomasochistic sexual description clearly aimed at arousing the reader. With the reader sexually primed, Ellis then offers scenes of unmatched violence wherein the women are tortured and killed in ornate and highly sexualized ways." See Jane Caputi, "American Psychos: The Serial Killer in Contemporary Fiction" in *Journal of American Culture* (Winter 1993; vol. 16 no. 4), pp. 103-4.

99 *The Black Dahlia*, p. 338: "The side walls were papered with pornographic photographs of crippled and disfigured women. Mongoloid faces sucking dildoes, nudie girls with withered and brace-clad legs spread wide, limbless atrocities leering at the camera. There was a mattress on the floor; it was caked with layers and layers of blood. Bugs and flies were laced throughout the crust, stuck there as they feasted themselves to death. The back wall held tacked-on colour photos that looked like they were torn from anatomy texts: close-up shots of diseased organs oozing blood and pus."

preserves in formaldehyde (*The Black Dahlia*, pp. 351-2), and the erotic gratification he is said to obtain from photographs he takes of girls "'playing dead, all smeared with red dye'" to resemble blood (p. 292).

Imaged as fundamentally "passive" (p. 348), Tilden's sexual interest in Short lies more in the fragments of her body than in enacting the violence that rends her into pieces. However, in an extrapolation from what Neale terms "the sadism inherent in voyeurism,"[100] he becomes an active accomplice in Short's murder. This outcome is in many respects the appropriate consequence of his incarnation of the speculum—described as "a man, his face all scars, his hands holding little hooked instruments for cutting and probing" (p. 353), Tilden represents the nightmarish extension of the specular function that Ellroy's detectives aspire to embody. Tilden's project is one of destruction rather than detection, his mission to dismember the feminine "enigma" rather than collate its disparate pieces, and in this regard he is also a personification of Ellroy's "narratives of dismemberment." Just as Tilden fetishises the feminised corpse, so Ellroy seems to derive a voyeuristic pleasure from restaging its violation and graphically representing the visceral details of its sundering. Returning to Mulvey's explication of the gendered narrative/spectacle divide, within Ellroy's texts feminised subjects are often introduced into the text as dead or otherwise violated bodies: the "woman" whose presence fixes Ellroy's narratives in moments of "erotic contemplation" is not an eroticised subject but an eroticised victim or corpse. The repugnant concept of "feasting one's eyes" on a cadaver invoked in *The Big Nowhere* encapsulates the salaciousness of

Ellroy's lingering descriptions of women's defiled bodies; he not only linguistically segments Elizabeth Short's corpse, avidly documenting the minutiae of her destruction, but he also augments this with descriptions of photographs of her devastated body: "there was Betty Short's bashed head; Betty Short's slashed breasts; Betty Short's empty bottom half and Betty Short's wide-open legs—all in glossy black and white" (p. 130; see also p. 103, 180).

The term "glossy," reiterated in a reference to "horror glossies from 39th and Norton" (p. 201)—the site where Short's body was located—imparts a specious kind of glamour to the corpse which implies that Short's allure is enhanced by her status as an embodiment of docilised abjection. Ellroy's unsavoury dwelling on the visual reminders of Short's destruction enacts what could be called a "pornography of violence"[101]—a libidinal representation of the feminised corpse, calculated to stimulate readers, which is reminiscent of the pornography simulating the dismemberment of beautiful women that Jack Vincennes derives a sexual thrill from in *L.A. Confidential* (p. 194, 285). The latter photographs are the product of the psychotic David Mertens, who derives inspiration for his horrific work from portraits which his psychopathic associate Loren Atherton created of children whom he murdered and dismembered. Just as the deranged Mertens literalises his horrific imaginative creations by murdering Sid Hudgens in a way that

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100 Neale, "Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema," p. 17.

101 This phrase is used by John Cawelti in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 15.

precisely mirrors his pornographic creations,[102] so Ellroy himself recreates Mertens' "pornography of violence" by describing Hudgens' corpse in graphic detail: "Sid Hudgens hacked up on the floor—a rug soaked black, the floor a blood slick. Arms and legs severed, out at weird angles off his torso. Split open crotch to neck, bones showing white through red. ... Hudgens naked, coated red-black. Limbs off his torso, strands of gore at the cut points" (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 222-3). In voyeurising Hudgens' corpse in this way, presenting it as an object for readers' gazes, Ellroy not only crafts a "pornography of violence" but also restates the power imbalance of the visual field in which his characters operate, where the role of spectator is privileged and power inheres in a gaze posited as masculine, interrogative and sadistic.

This power asymmetry is dramatically illustrated by the fate of Georgie Tilden, who is murdered by Bucky Bleichert in a punitive, symbolically castrating amelioration of the control inhering in Tilden's specularising gaze. Targeting the repository of masculine power, Bleichert gouges out one of Tilden's eyes and then shoots him through the vacant socket.[103] The latter sequence, like the description of Sid Hudgens' corpse, is merely one

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102 Vincennes similarly tries to bring the pornographic scenarios to life, albeit in a less concretely harmful way: "He got bored with Karen, ran to the smut, went crazy with it. ... No way to have the real thing—he decided to fake it. He bought hookers, shook down call girls. He fixed them up to look like the girls in his books. He had them three and four at a pop, chains of bodies on quilts. He costumed them, choreographed them. He aped the pictures, took his own pictures, recaptured; sometimes he thought of the blood pix and got scared: perfect matches to murder mutilations. Real women never thrilled him like the pictures did" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 285). Vincennes' fetishisation of these destroyed, objectified women, like Bucky Bleichert's obsession with Elizabeth Short, alarmingly restates links between masculine sexuality and violence by implying the erotic potentiality of devastated feminine flesh.

103 *The Black Dahlia*, p. 354: Bleichert recounts that he "flailed for a weapon and touched a big piece of glass. I dug it into Georgie's face ... Georgie fell on top of me, blood pouring from an empty eye socket. I saw my .45 on the floor a few feet away, dragged the two of us there and grabbed it. Georgie raised his head, making animal screeches. He went for my throat, his mouth huge in front of me. I jammed the silencer into his eye hole and blew his brains out."

of countless gruesome set-pieces threaded throughout Ellroy's texts which exemplify his spectacularisation of violence. As if to emphasise the fact that his narratives pivot towards a focal point of violence, chapters in Ellroy's novels frequently conclude with such brutal interludes as Bleichert's murder of Tilden and Bud White's torture of Dwight Gilette. Ellroy's treatment of violence as a spectacle to break up his narratives or shape their momentum has been noted by critics like Kim—who wryly observed that "Ellroy uses murder the way other writers use paragraph breaks, as a pacing device"[104]—and Gray, who declared that "Ellroy uses spurts of unimaginable violence the way other writers deploy commas and periods."[105] Gray's use of the phrase "unimaginable" is intriguing insofar as violence is actually *overtly* "imagined" and represented by Ellroy, to the extent that it seems to become the actual point of the narrative. Verifying Dunant's observation that "many crime thrillers ... are as much about graphic violence as they are about plot,"[106] entire chapters within *White Jazz* are devoted to single acts of brutality (see eg pp. 347-8, p. 356). Ellroy also obviously "imagines" violence by describing it in a viscerally evocative way; his fiction is characterised by a surfeit of brutality, an overstatement of blood and decay which saturates his work, spilling over the margins of

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104 Walter Kim, "Worst and Darkest" (review of *American Tabloid*) in *New York* (March 13, 1995), p. 64.

105 Gray, "The Real Pulp Fiction," p. 75.

106 Sarah Dunant, "Rewriting the Detectives" in *The Guardian* (29 June 1993), p. 27. Dunant's comment echoes Mandel's observation regarding what he calls the "*serie noire* genre" identified with Mickey Spillane: "what characterized this new offshoot of the traditional detective novel was its greater preoccupation with violence than with the unravelling of any mystery: the mystery often became a mere pretext or vanished altogether. Violence, brutality, cruelty, sadism, maiming and killing for their own sake, became the main subject of the genre" (Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, p. 94).

the text.[107] In Ellroy's violence-drenched oeuvre, resembling a "slaughterhouse, reeking of blood and shattered flesh" (*Blood on the Moon*, p. 201), the number of "ravaged human beings" is so vast, the array of exaggeratedly brutal incidents so astonishingly great,[108] that the cumulative effect is a desensitising one. As Kim observed of *American Tabloid*, "so many point-blank head shots are fired, they sound like the *pfft* of beer cans after a while: no big deal."[109]

Through overstating violence Ellroy transfers the induration obtained by his protagonists to readers, who become capable of calmly absorbing horrific textual carnage in the same way that the jaded Dave Klein dispassionately scrutinises a crime scene which causes

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107 There are innumerable examples of the *literal* saturation of Ellroy's fiction in blood, including Danny Upshaw's registering of an apartment in which Coleman Healy murdered several of his victims—"Blood on the walls. Huge, unmistakable streaks … Four whole walls of it … Blood matting a threadbare throw rug, blood in large caked pools on the linoleum floor, blood saturating a light-colored sofa oozing stuffing, blood splashed across a stack of newspapers … Much too much blood to come from one ravaged human being" (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 130-1)—and Buzz Meeks' inspection of a man whom he has just murdered—"The room reeked of cordite; the bed was soaked in blood; the pillow was solid saturated crimson. Buzz lifted it off and propped up the dead man's head. It had no face, there were no exit wounds, all the red was leaking out his ears" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 317).

108 While there are too many episodes of excessive violence in Ellroy's fiction to catalogue, examples include David Mertens' murders of several men cited in the previous footnote; the opening sequence of *L.A. Confidential*, where Buzz Meeks kills numerous men (*L.A. Confidential*, pp. 5-6); and the countless incidents in *American Tabloid* in which Cuban men are brutally slaughtered (see eg p. 107, 162,. 228, 396). The excesses of violence that characterise Ellroy's texts are not always represented but occur as possibilities; an extremely disturbing sequence occurs in *The Big Nowhere* when Danny Upshaw, seeking an explanation of the animal bite marks left on Coleman Healy's victims, asks a dog breeder how he would encourage a dog to attack a cadaver, if he ever needed to do so. In what amounts to a metaphor for the type of masculine impotence and frustration that can lead to outbursts of sexual violence the man tells Upshaw "'I'd starve [the dog] and pen him and let bitch dogs in heat parade around in front of his cage and make him crazy. I'd muzzle him and bind his legs and put a restrainer around his dick so he couldn't get himself off. I'd get me a rubber glove and tweak his dick until he just about got there, then I'd clamp his balls so he couldn't shoot. I'd get me some doggie menstrual blood and spray it in his eyes and nose for a week or so, till he came to think of it as food and love. Then, when I had me a dead man, I'd spread a big puddle of pussy blood right where I wanted him to bite'" (*The Big Nowhere*, pp. 114-15). The misogyny informing this, the implicit construction of women as sexually provocative and treacherous, and the revulsion of feminine secretions like menstrual blood evinced yet again demonstrates a horror of femininity on Ellroy's part that underlies his suspicion and abjection of the feminine realm.

109 Kim, "Worst and Darkest," p. 64; original emphasis.

other policemen to "ooze shock" (*White Jazz*, p. 227). The numbing effect occasioned by the sheer quantity of violent episodes and devastated corpses is compounded by Ellroy's mode of describing these. While Ellroy lingers lasciviously over feminised subjects' corpses, violence between hegemonic men is described with a terse, clipped impassivity mirroring the mechanical ease with which brutality is disseminated: "Jack stood up, kicked, pistol-whipped ... Hinton went down dropping paper; Jack broke his arms—knees to the elbows, jerks at the wrists" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 240). The violence inflicted upon Hinton is staggering, unfathomable, and yet is described with a casualness textually coeval with the breathtaking indifference with which it is conducted. The accumulation of such episodes and almost incidental embedding within the text of details like the fact that Pete Bondurant "led a raid on a militia station and took sixteen scalps" (*American Tabloid*, p. 314) dilutes readers' sense of horror at the type of environment in which such violence would flourish. Both Ellroy's deadpan allusions to episodes of excruciating violence and his exhaustively detailed depictions of the aftermath of violence are rarely signposted, ensuring that readers are effectively frozen before horrific scenes that so abruptly and without warning unfold before them. The suddenness and frequency with which violence occurs in Ellroy's fiction, the exaggerated savagery of the atrocities in his texts and the attention paid to gruesome details, combine to ensure that Ellroy's novels themselves constitute an assault upon his readers, an act of sadism directly analogous to what Littell sees as Sal D'Onofrio's unconscionable, intentioned scheme to torture him by graphically outlining the murders he has committed.

While Littell is able to order D'Onofrio to desist from tormenting him, Ellroy insists on regaling readers with the spectacular details of violence. By representing it *as* a spectacle he forces readers to occupy a voyeuristic perspective, casting them in the role of spectators preying upon the violated bodies of feminised subjects or constituting detached witnesses to the "action sequences" that constitute the other half of the gendered narrative/spectacle divide. Ellroy's construction of readers as voyeurs is compounded by the fact that he insistently portrays violence from the perspective of its perpetrators;[110] rather than examining brutalised individuals' experiences of violation Ellroy narrates violence instrumentally, in the context of its deployment by his protagonists, or as an event that has already wrought its effects on a traumatised subject whom his narrators scrutinise. Displaying only the aftermath of violence, Ellroy describes this with a clinical detachment which rescripts victims' dehumanisation by objectifying them for readers' gazes and failing to represent them as embodied individuals suffering real (or realistic) pain. Tanner suggests that because "violence thrusts its victims into the status of uncontestable embodiment," any "representation of the victim's

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110 The only times that violence is experienced from the perspective of its recipient are those infrequent episodes where Ellroy's protagonists are subjected to beatings. Yet even in these cases, Ellroy emphasises the process of violence rather than its effects on the individual subjected to it. See for example *White Jazz*, p. 349, where Dave Klein is brutally beaten: "Jerked upright—left hook/left hook—splitting gums, no nose, hard to breathe. Left hook/left hook—bones cracking. No legs, no face—signet ring rips jaw to hairline"; and *American Tabloid*, p. 296, where Ward Littell is beaten by Pete Bondurant: "The moon lit up a huge shape walking toward the car. The windshield exploded. The dashboard fell on his lap. A steel bar cracked the steering wheel and ripped the gearshift out. Hands jerked him across the hood. Glass ripped through his cheeks and lodged in his mouth. Hands dumped him in a ditch. Hands picked him up and pinioned him against a barbed-wire fence. He was dangling. Steel barbs pierced his clothes and held him upright. The monster ripped his holster off. The monster hit him and hit him and hit him. The fence shook. Twisty metal gouged his backside down to the bone. He coughed up blood and chunks of glass and a big piece of a Chevy hood ornament. He smelled gasoline. His car exploded. A heat blast singed his hair." Stressing Littell's helplessness, his status as a mannequin subordinated to Bondurant's superior physical strength, the complete lack of insight into Littell's physical and psychological experience of his violation ensures that the incident could almost be perpetrated against a literal mannequin rather than an embodied and cognisant subject.

experience of torture must recreate for the reader the sensation of an ever-present, ever-vulnerable body."[111] However, to paraphrase Kowalewski, Ellroy fails to grant recipients of violence a "fictional substantiality" that allows them to "become susceptible to realistic pain."[112] By casually documenting that Bondurant "led a raid on a militia station and took sixteen scalps" (p. 314) Ellroy represents his victims not as subjects with lives, personalities, individual histories, but reduces them to "scalps," corpses waiting to happen. Readers are given no insight into these men as individuated human subjects before they are slain, ensuring that Ellroy reifies them in precisely the same way that they are viewed within the broader culture: as undifferentiated objects to be obliterated, rendered into pulp.

Through failing to realistically limn his victims' agony Ellroy ensures that readers are insulated from the shock and terror of violence inflicted on characters like the suspect whom Jack Vincennes strikes: "the kid dribbled teeth—'One-two-one' came out bloody" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 117). That this youth—who is, not coincidentally, an African American—"dribbles teeth" underscores the negligible status of victims of violence, who rarely merit anything more than an implausibly hyperbolic description of their suffering which tacitly re-objectifies them and neutralises any sympathy for them

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111 Laura E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 6, 36. Tanner identifies a responsible model of representing violence that is developed by Gloria Naylor in *The Women of Brewster Place*, which "attaches the reader to the victim's tortured body, subverting the scopophilic gaze of the reader by turning it inward to focus on the victim's pain. By denying the reader the freedom to observe the victim of violence from behind the wall of aesthetic convention, Naylor disrupts the connection between violator and viewer that Laura Mulvey emphasises in her discussion of cinematic convention" (p. x).

112 Michael Kowalewski, *Deadly Musings: Violence and Verbal Form in American Fiction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 95. Kowalewski's remarks occur in the context of a discussion of the fiction of Edgar Allan Poe.

that readers might have obtained. Ellroy's fiction features an endless parade of characters whose responses to violence are represented in a cartoon-like way that is all the more offensive because it is typically represented as the physical outcome of violence on *abjected* individuals. An African American man is beaten by Danny Upshaw and is said to have "hit the rug, moaned and spat out cracked bridgework" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 59), while Lenny Sands "went down spitting teeth" and on two separate occasions spits out "gold bridgework" (*American Tabloid*, pp. 135-6, 454). The grotesque brutality inflicted on these men is not accompanied with a realistic sense of the pain they endure, and the exaggerated nature of their violation confirms that Ellroy's narratives themselves constitute acts of sadism against the "abject." Aligned by Ellroy with the subject-position of the perpetrator, readers are prohibited from accessing brutalised individuals' perspectives upon their suffering; yet, short of flinging the book away in revulsion, readers are incapable of interceding to prevent violence from occurring. Instead, they are held hostage by the text, frozen before the panorama of violence in precisely the same way that Ward Littell is paralysed when watching Sid Kabikoff and several accomplices viciously beat and rape Mexican women whom they are forcing to act in a pornographic film.[113]

That Littell is severely distressed by this incident does not lessen his culpability in permitting it to occur, as he acknowledges when he savagely beats Kabikoff in an act of

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113 See *American Tabloid*, p. 223: "His zoom lens got him in very close. He snapped pictures and watched them develop. ... He snapped dildo gang bangs. He snapped smut boys whipping Mexican women bloody. ... Littell shot his way through forty rolls of film. Sweat soaked the ground all around him. ... Snap!—a prisoner tries to escape. Snap!/snap!/snap!—two cops catch her and rape her. Littell walked back to his car. He started sobbing just over the border."

penance for his implication in the man's crimes (*American Tabloid*, p. 224). Just as Littell's inactivity places him in a collusive relationship with the men torturing these women, Ellroy's readers are rendered complicit in abjected individuals' objectification and violation. While Littell views violence against the abject from behind the mediating lens of a camera, readers are frequently unable to obtain a comparable distance from the tableaux of violence they are witnessing because violence in Ellroy's texts is frequently committed and narrated from the perspective of the protagonists constituting the narrative's primary identificatory figures. Mulvey has observed that the ""grammar" of the story places the reader, listener or spectator *with* the hero."[114] In Ellroy's texts this is the case even when the "hero" is an anti-hero like Dave Klein, the individual at the centre of *White Jazz*'s maelstrom of apocalyptic violence who is responsible for focalising the narrative and guiding readers through this chaotic universe. That readers are encouraged to mimetically affinitise with Klein is disturbing insofar as Klein is both the spectator of innumerable scenes of violence—which he registers in a clipped, imagistic fashion emphasising his lack of empathy with victims[115]—and the disseminator of an extraordinary amount of brutality, typically recorded with a casualness belying the ferocity of his actions.[116] The thematic positioning of Klein as both disseminator and surveyor of

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114 Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*" (1981; reprinted in Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* [Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989]), p. 32; original emphasis.

115 Seen through Klein's jaundiced eyes, victims of violence are not subjects to be accorded dignity and respect but "a nigger coughing glass. A pachuco minus some fingers" (p. 12). See also p. 183: "Tommy behind [Wenzel], hands in his coat. Hands-out—a sawed-off pump getting loose. I yelled- Some nigger hit a switch—the room went black. Shotgun roar—full auto—one long blast. Sputter spray/ random pistol shots/screams—muzzle flash lit up Steve Wenzel, faceless. Screams. I ripped through them out the window. I crawled the plank, glass and brains in my hair."

116 See eg *White Jazz*, p. 177: "I sapped him down, broke his wrists"; p. 270: "I bashed his face, racked his nuts, cracked his arms"; p. 17: "I banged his head against the wall, threw him out of the window screaming," and so on.

violence collides in the narrative surrounding his murder of Johnny Duhamel, which is described in an impressionistic, almost surreal manner requiring readers to fill in narrative gaps and thereby play an active role in constructing the text: "focused in: Johnny Duhamel naked … Miss, hit, miss—pale skin ripped, tattoos gouging blood. Hit, rip, rip—an arm gone, socket spray. ... Jap Johnny prone, twitching crazy" (*White Jazz*, p. 204).

As Klein operates as their textual surrogate or equivalent, readers are implicated in his violence and distanced from Duhamel, the object of Klein's brutality. This detachment is intensified by the fact that readers have access only to Klein's perspective on the incident and not Duhamel's, ensuring their complicity in Klein's objectification of Duhamel as "Jap Johnny." The highly cinematic style of the death sequence—the description of Klein's actions as a series of images flickering in rapid succession, the metaphors used ("focused in"), the lack of transitional clauses heightening the immediacy with which readers experience the incident and which also evoke film editing—reinforces the positioning of readers as *spectators* to the scene of violence. This is entrenched when—in a sequence that oscillates disturbingly between real and represented violence, complicating both categories—Klein is forced to watch the murder, which has been filmed by Dudley Smith: "A white screen ... Cut to: Dave Klein, gutting motions—Johnny D. coughing entrails. Cut to: lens glass dripping red; a finger flicking spine chips off the surface" (p. 205). Klein's references to himself in the third person perhaps constitute an attempt to dissociate himself from his murder of Duhamel in order to render it more palatable. Yet if Klein is rendered ill-at-ease by being forced to watch a

murder that he cannot recall committing, his sense of dissonance is magnified for readers experiencing his discomfort at being simultaneously positioned as a spectator to and perpetrator of violence. The gratuitously gory detailing of the injuries inflicted upon Duhamel demarcate this episode as part of his "pornography of violence." In some respects Ellroy's delineation of violence is—like the "Russian Roulette" manouevre favoured by men like Klein[117]—both a sadistic torture inflicted by Ellroy on his readers and an attempt to demonstrate how "tough" Ellroy himself is: the "Demon Dog of American literature" whose expressed intention is to create "'the biggest, baddest, sickest, ugliest, most sex-saturated, unformulaic, most pervasively evil, profound fucking crime novels of all time.'"[118]

Authorship, Dyer has suggested, is a "performance,"[119] and Ellroy's flamboyant aestheticisation of violence and desire to be more "hardcore" and shocking than other hard-boiled authors is a theatricalisation of his authorial "self" consonant with the role-play of his protagonists. His garishly violent texts reflect his self-construction as a genre renegade and constitute his response to the current climate of crime fiction, in which many of his peers create texts that are not only substantially less violent than those of

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117 Klein deploys this maneouvre against Georgie Ainge (*White Jazz*, p. 70) and against Chick Vecchio: "I grabbed the magnum and popped the cylinder. Six rounds—I dumped five. … Chick—read his eyes—'You wouldn't.' I aimed point-blank—my gun, his head. 'You said, "they." Did you mean the Kafesjian family?' No response. I pulled the trigger—*click*—empty chamber" (p. 272; original emphasis).

118 Ellroy quoted in Karl Miller, "Demon Dog Days" (review of *American Tabloid*) in *The Times Literary Supplement* (February 24 1995), p. 21.

119 See Dyer, *The Matter of Images*, p. 188: "all authorship and all sexual identities are performances, done with greater or less facility, always problematic in relation to any self separable from the realization of self in the discursive modes available. ... What is significant is the authors' material social position in relation to discourse, the access they have to discourses on account of who they are"; and p. 190: "authorship [is] multiple, hierarchical, performed within material and semiotic circumstances."

their predecessors but which problematise the unquestioned violence[120] that has historically irradiated the hard-boiled genre. Authors writing from feminist perspectives critique the way in which, as Dunant has observed, within crime fiction "women [are] easy targets. Terrorised, battered, sexually assaulted, mutilated, even dismembered, their bodies [are] part of the grammar of the form."[121] Counteracting this by developing strong, resourceful female protagonists, authors like Sara Paretsky defy hard-boiled convention by representing the violence enacted against women in terms of its physical and psychological effects.[122] Rather than endorsing "a vision of violence that divorces an act of violation from its human consequences,"[123] Paretksy foregrounds the material agony endured by her detective V.I. Warshawski. The facial wounds inflicted on Warshawski in the course of an investigation elicit such continual comment on the part of her friends and colleagues that she feels like "charging admission" to others to see them.[124] The attention paid by other characters to the corporeal evidence of Warshawski's violation delimits this violence as excessive, obtrusive, unintelligible within the fabric of their everyday lives; it thereby conveys a sense of violence as loathsome and

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120 The "need" to use violence is simply taken for granted by private eyes like Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, who describes shooting at people with an emphasis on technique that illustrates the fact that it is second nature to him, and a careless disregard for the outcome of his actions: "I yanked the gun out and snapped a cap at Thaler, trying for his shoulder. That was wrong. If I had tried for a bull's-eye I would have winged him. Chinless Jerry hadn't laughed himself blind. He beat me to the shot. His shot burnt my wrist, throwing me off the target. But, missing Thaler, my slug crumpled the red-faced man behind him" (Dashiell Hammett, *Red Harvest* [1929: reprint: London: Picador, 1982], p. 97).

121 Dunant, "Rewriting the Detectives," p. 27.

122 Dyck notes that "readers and movie viewers, when seeing interpersonal violence, have learned not to think of the pain of the victim—physical or emotional—because ... this violence has no consequences: the gunshot always misses and the broken nose only lasts for a sentence" (Reginald Dyck, "Frontier Violence in the Garden of America" in Eric Heyne (ed.), *Desert, Garden, Margin, Range: Literature on the American Frontier* [New York: Twayne, 1992], p. 68).

123 Tanner, *Intimate Violence*, p. 8.

124 Sara Paretsky, *Bitter Medicine* (New York: William Morrow, 1987), p. 112; see also p. 88, 90, 95, 147.

unwarranted rather than an inevitable fact of life which individuals should become desensitised to or a crucial factor enabling individuals to actualise their "selfhood."[125]

In addition to explicating the physical aftermath of violence, contemporary feminist authors explore the psychological ramifications of their protagonists' use of violence.[126] Janet Evanovich's protagonist, bounty hunter Stephanie Plum, wrestles with guilt and ambivalence after killing a man; she cannot casually accept her act but must psychically process and come to terms with it, meditating that she is unsure about how she feels after "killing a man. Pride seemed out of place. Sorrow didn't quite fit. There was definitely

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125 Paretsky does not suggest that Warshawski's fragility is a by-product of her "femininity" but examines it in the context of an examination of the reality of embodied pain and its impact on an individual's perception of their own mortality; as Vanacker notes, "every Warshawski story contains a hospital narrative, a compelling moment of physical weakness after the detective has pushed herself to the limit, where she is forced to consider her own helplessness and death" (Vanacker, "V.I. Warshawski, Kinsey Millhone and Kay Scarpetta: Creating a Feminist Detective Hero," p. 68). Glenwood Irons notes that "the violence in Paretsky's novels is different from that of the early tough-guy works. We suffer through attacks and recuperation, but, unlike those of the classic private eye, many of Warshawski's injuries are long term, and memories of them often carry over into the next novel. There is no sense that she is superhuman, nor is there a sense that we can forget the fact that all her attackers are men" (Glenwood Irons, "Introduction: Gender and Genre: The Woman Detective and the Diffusion of Generic Voices" in Glenwood Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995], p. xiv). Interestingly, Irons hypothesises that "violence in woman detective novels is a kind of *inoculation* against the intimidation, beatings, and related violence to which women are often subjected" (p. xiv; original emphasis).

126 Grafton has observed that "'most of the hard-boiled detectives go through murder and mayhem, and it has absolutely no impact on their personalities. I find it more interesting to see what the constant exposure to violence and death really does to a human being, how an individual incorporates that into their psyche'" (Grafton quoted in Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* [Cambridge: Polity, 1990], p. 167). Grafton explores the effect of violence on both the psyche and the corporeality of her series protagonist Kinsey Millhone in various novels, including *"T" is for Innocent*, where Millhone is stalked and almost killed by the murderer whom she has been pursuing throughout the novel: "I hugged the wall, feeling tears well, not from sorrow, but from pain ...I was feeling clammy, that cold, sick sensation that overwhelms you when you're about to pass out. ... Fear had settled over me like an icy vapor, rippling against my spine. The notion of dying is, at the same time, trivial and terrifying absurd and full of anguish" and so on (Grafton, *"T" is for Innocent* [1992; reprint: London: Pan, 1993], p. 281). Ann Wilson has observed that while Paretsky's and Grafton's novels "affirm that when faced with threatening situations, women are fully capable of taking care not only of themselves but of others," their heroines never initiate violence but "respond violently only when it is clear that inaction on their part would result in death either for themselves or for someone who is defenceless" (Ann Wilson, "The Female Dick and the Crisis of Heterosexuality" in Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, pp. 149-50).

regret."[127] Female novelists are not alone in exposing crime fiction's violent heritage to scrutiny. Jonathan Kellerman ruptures the generic acceptance of the "necessity" of violence by representing his series lead, child psychologist Alex Delaware, as a vehicle for *healing* violence—as opposed to an administrator of brutality—who counsels a class of children to assist them in coping with their exposure to the random violence of a sniper.[128] Kellerman examines the social dimensions of violence, its impact on individual victims and the broader community they inhabit. James Lee Burke's series character, police detective Dave Robicheaux, analyses his propensity towards violence, its effect upon others, and its tactical "requirement" as an investigative tool.[129] Robicheaux's everyday world, like Ellroy's "nightmare" landscape, is one of excruciating violence,[130] yet unlike Ellroy, who celebrates violence as a means for men to achieve self-realisation, Burke represents Robicheaux's violence as purely reactive.[131] Rather than deploying

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127 Janet Evanovich, *One for the Money* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 288.

128 Jonathan Kellerman, *Time Bomb* (London: Warner, 1990), pp. 32-5.

129 Robicheaux tells his adopted daughter that "'when you kill another human being, no matter how necessary it might seem at the time, something goes out of your life forever'" (James Lee Burke, *Burning Angel* [London: Orion, 1995], p. 195). He also adds that "'I still have dreams about the [Vietnam] war, I have them about men I ran up against as a police officer. Their faces don't go underground with them'" (pp. 195-6).

130 See James Lee Burke, *The Neon Rain* (New York: Pocket, 1988), p. 11-12: "I had a whole file drawer of misery to look at, too: a prostitute icepicked by a psychotic john; a seventeen-year-old runaway whose father wouldn't bond him out of jail and who was hanged the next morning by his black cellmate; a murder witness beaten to death with a ball-peen hammer by the man she was scheduled to testify against; a Vietnamese boat refugee thrown off the roof of the welfare project; three small children shot in their beds by their unemployed father; a junkie strangled with baling wire during a satanic ritual; two homosexual men burned alive when a rejected lover drenched the stairwell of a gay nightclub with gasoline. My drawer was like a microcosm of an aberrant world populated by snipers, razor-wielding blacks, mindless nickel-and-dime boost artists who eventually panic and kill a convenience-store clerk for sixty dollars, and suicides who fill the apartment with gas and blow the whole building into a black and orange fireball" (see also *Burning Angel*, pp. 96-7).

131 See eg *The Neon Rain*, p. 230, where Robicheaux murders a man in self-defence but "took no joy in it"; *Cadillac Jukebox* (1996; reprint: London: Orion, 1997), p. 42-3, in which Robicheaux throws coffee in an adversary's face after the latter assaults him (and is subsequently hit "harder than I'd ever been struck by a fist in my life, the kind of blow that fills your nose with needles, drives the eye deep into the socket."

violence unreflectively, Robicheaux frequently and guiltily justifies his use of it—after murdering a man, he declares that the victim "'called the play ... I tried to deal myself out'"[132]—and employs it primarily as a means of negotiating moral dilemmas and restoring "justice" in his world. In this respect he is an embodiment of the "noble-loner" detective hero epitomised by Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe, the literary model whom Ellroy disavows and in whose shadow Ellroy's narratives of "bad white men doing bad things in the name of authority" are forged.

Insofar as Marlowe himself frequently had recourse to violence when solving cases,[133] Ellroy's use of violence is consonant with that of his literary antecedents, whose works are characterised by a quantitative excess of violence and suffused with scenes of often extraordinary brutality.[134] The incorporation of violence remains one of the defining characteristics of the hard-boiled genre; Burke's works, for example, resonate with such

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132 Burke, *The Neon Rain*, p. 237, 239.

133 For example, Marlowe shoots a man who has abducted him (Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* [1939; reprint: London: Heinemann/Octopus, 1977], p. 115: "I shot him four times, the Colt straining against my ribs") and in *Playback* assaults another criminal: "I saw the glint of his gun in the faint light. I smashed his wrist with the tyre iron. He screamed. I smashed his other wrist" (Chandler, *Playback* [1958; reprint: London: Heinemann/Octopus, 1977], p. 695).

134 Hammett's *Red Harvest* features an astonishing body count, with virtually every character in the novel dying; see also Chester Himes, *All Shot Up* (1960; reprint: New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1996), pp. 28-32, p. 88; Mickey Spillane's *Kiss Me, Deadly* (p. 124, 154, 158), *The Big Kill* (p. 46, 169) and *My Gun Is Quick* (1950: New York: Dutton, 1950; p. 29, 102, 138). Spillane's protagonist, Mike Hammer, is notorious for his brutality; "a thug and a brute, Hammer would have been the villain of most mysteries, but in Spillane he is the new superman, a plainclothes Nazi" (George Grella, "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel" in Robin W. Winks (ed.), *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1980; p. 117). Munt suggests that "World War II had hardened and reified a brutal masculinity, which, blended with the paranoid patriotism of the McCarthyite 1950s, created a figure of monological misogynist megalomania" embodied in Hammer (Munt, *Murder by the Book?* , p. 3). Hammer's brutality makes Ellroy's protagonists' violence seem almost restrained: "I brought my knee up and smashed his nose to a pulp and when he screamed he choked on his own blood" (*My Gun Is Quick*, p. 78); "my hands had his throat, squeezing ... slamming his head to the concrete floor until he went completely limp. I rolled on top of him and took that head like a sodden rag and smashed and smashed and smashed and there was no satisfying, solid thump, but a sickening squashing sound that splashed all over me" (*My Gun Is Quick*, p. 162).

astoundingly violent set-pieces as a shocking incident in which Robicheaux smashes a glass pitcher into the face of a gangster who has assaulted him.[135] As this suggests, it would be fallacious to vindicate Ellroy's self-deification as a maverick in today's hard-boiled milieu by asserting the uniqueness within this field of the holocaustal violence with which his texts resonate. Violence remains a staple of police and detective protagonists' arsenal of weapons; Robert B. Parker's detective Spenser assumes the inevitability of violence as part of the private investigator's modus operandi, and indeed sees the readiness to kill if necessary as such an integral element of the job that *not* being called upon to commit murder in the course of one inquiry creates a sense of discord for him.[136] Yet there is a qualitative difference between the brutality depicted by authors such as Parker and Burke, and that textually delineated by Ellroy. While his peers subject violence to a sustained interrogation, Ellroy uncritically recirculates its structural necessity within the hard-boiled genre. It should be noted that the violent incidents adumbrated in his texts are occasionally accompanied by a consciousness of the psychic trauma these induce within their perpetrators, and the hyperbolic quality of his violent episodes is also

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135 "Then his hand shot up from under the table and bit like a vise into my scrotum. I vaguely recall the screams of the women at the table and Clete locking his big arms around me and dragging me backward through a tangle of chairs. But I remember my palm curving around the handle of the pitcher, the heavy weight of it swinging in an arc, the glass exploding in strings of wet light; I remember it like red shards of memory that can rise from a drunken dream. Then Dapolito was on his knees, his face gathered in his hands, his scarlet fingers trembling as though he were weeping or hiding a shameful secret in the stunned silence of the room" (Burke, *Burning Angel*, p. 90). Emphasising the reactive nature of Robicheaux's violence, he typically experiences destructive urges as a loss of control (see eg *Burning Angel*, pp. 240-1, and *A Morning for Flamingoes* [New York: Avon, 1990b], p. 275).

136 Robert B. Parker, *Taming a Sea-Horse* (New York: Delacorte, 1986). Spenser's precise words, "'I haven't killed anyone yet this trip'" (p. 120) emphasise the casualness with which he is able to take lives; in a dubious rhetorical manouevre, his lover Susan not only vindicates his recourse to violence ("'you are the best at what you do. ... if you are to continue what you do you cannot be afraid to kill someone if you must'" [p. 221]) but almost celebrates it ("'you're a violent man. You wouldn't do your work if you weren't. What makes you so attractive is that your capacity for violence is never random, it is rarely self-indulgent, and you don't take it lightly'" [p. 222]).

a constitutive element of other authors' works. Carl Hiaasen's oeuvre, for example, features incidents of often outrageous, explicitly comedic violence, such as a sequence in *Stormy Weather* in which a hitman crucifies a man in a TV satellite dish.[137]

Yet the humorous edge to Hiaasen's rendition of violence is offset at all times by an awareness of the fact that, as Fraser, cogently if simplistically, suggests, "the primary fact about violence is that it hurts, that sometimes it hurts appallingly, and that one wouldn't want violences to be inflicted on oneself."[138] Thus *Stormy Weather*'s comedic violence is counterpointed with a sharply interpolated, sobering sequence in which the damaging effects of brutality upon a policewoman, Brenda Rourke, are sombrely delineated.[139] It could be argued that Hiaasen's representation of Rourke's experience of her violation is a co-optative recodification of a subordinated subject-position from a hegemonic perspective; irrespective of this, Hiaasen's contextualisation of her pain in terms of an ongoing narrative of her life affirms her subjectivity and ascribes meaning to her suffering. Victims of violence in Ellroy's novels, by contrast, appear on the page in a whirlwind of "cracked bridgework" and "dribbled teeth"; as several critics have noted, it is difficult to care when individuals in Ellroy's texts are murdered precisely because of

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137 Carl Hiaasen, *Stormy Weather* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 68, 81.

138 John Fraser, *Violence in the Arts*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

139 Hiaasen, *Stormy Weather*, p. 172 (after Brenda Rourke is assaulted by a criminal, her "head was fractured in three places, and one of her cheeks needed reconstruction. She was bleeding under the right temporal bone, but doctors had managed to stanch it. A plastic surgeon had repaired a U-shaped gash on her forehead, stitching the loose flap above the hairline. Bonnie Lamb had never seen such terrible wounds. Even the governor seemed shaken"); p. 246 ("Brenda lying pale and shattered in the hospital") and so on.

their lack of "fictional substantiality."[140] Ellroy fails to counterbalance the dehumanisation of victims engendered by his unrealistic representation of their pain by allowing them to articulate their suffering. The only contexts in which Ellroy's victims are able to express their experience of pain are those in which (like Kay Lake revealing her violation to Bucky Bleichert) their passivity is emphasised and their naturalisation as recipients of violence entrenched. While cataloguing the enactment or aftermath of violence, Ellroy does not counteract its victims' implicit objectification by representing their experience of violation from their point of view. Elizabeth Short's injuries are described in extensive detail, yet no insight is given into the agony behind each wound, the trauma accompanying each fresh invasion of her body, beyond the perspective provided by her murderer. Whereas authors like Hiaasen represent violence from the perspective of the violated, Ellroy's texts reposition the objects of violence in his narratives *as* objects. While authors like Parker also represent acts of brutality from the perspectives of the figures who conduct these, they complement these by engaging with victims' subjectivities. Hence Parker enables one character, Rachel Wallace, to attempt to articulate the trauma of being kidnapped and molested; echoing Scarry's insight that pain is intransmissible on a linguistic or verbal level, that its essential feature is its irruption of communicative channels between others and unintelligibility to anyone other than the individual enduring it,[141] Wallace finds herself incapable of doing so.[142]

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140 See Wendy Lesser, "Giving Hate a Bad Name" (review of James Ellroy's *White Jazz*) in *The New York Times Book Review* (October 18 1992); William T. Vollman, "En Route to the Grassy Knoll" (review of James Ellroy's *American Tabloid*) in *The New York Times Book Review* (February 26 1995), p. 12.

141 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 4-5: "physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it ...unlike any other state of consciousness [physical pain] has no referential content" and as such it "more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language."

It should be noted that even if pain is "incommunicable" this does not mitigate the need to *try* to represent it. Ellroy's peers accomplish this by portraying their protagonists imagining the experience of pain from the perspective of its recipients and evincing sympathy for victimised individuals, and by exploring the impact of violence through situating their protagonists as recipients of brutality—often with harrowing results. In the climactic sequence of Patricia Cornwell's *Postmortem*—described by Tomc as "surely one of the most horrifying scenes ever to appear in a detective novel"[143]—the narrator, medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, is confronted in her bedroom by a serial killer. Her silent pleas for the man to respect her status as a unique individual and spare her life constitute an agonisingly empathetic account of victimisation that urgently restates Scarpetta's humanity: "Thoughts were sparks flying so fast and in so many directions. ... I'm going to die. Don't. You don't want to do this. You don't have to do this. I'm a person, like your mother, like your sister. You don't want to do this. I'm a human being like you."[144] Burke similarly imagines violence from victims' perspectives, either by highlighting Robicheaux's experience of physical pain—the most traumatic tableaux in Burke's novels foreground (almost masochistically) Robicheaux as the object of

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142 Robert B. Parker, *Looking for Rachel Wallace* (1980; reprint: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), pp. 216-221. Wallace, an author, says "'I'll write about the feelings. I write better than I speak. I do know that being a captive is a humiliating, a debasing experience. To be in someone else's hands. To be without control of yourself is terribly destructive of personality and terribly frightening and terribly ... I don't know quite what I want to say'" (p. 218).

143 Sandra Tomc, "Questing Women: The Feminist Mystery After Feminism" in Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, p. 51.

144 Patricia Cornwell, *Postmortem* (London: Warner, 1990), pp. 277-8.

violence[145]—or by enabling him to enter sympathetically into other individuals' suffering.[146] Aching with the type of compassion for victims of violence dismissed by Ellroy as "'cheap empathy,"[147] Burke's fiction routinely represents violence from the perspective of those upon whom it is inflicted, permitting Robicheaux to abandon his first person narrative and imaginatively connect with victims' experience of suffering.[148] Through emphasising the effects of violence rather than simply attending to the act itself, Cornwell and Burke deglamorise it, strip it of any potentially "liberating" dimensions and

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145 See for example the extended sequences in *The Neon Rain* in which Robicheaux is violently assaulted and almost drowned by hired hitmen (pp. 54-7) then viciously tortured by the same men (pp. 107-115); or the episode in *A Morning for Flamingos* in which Robicheaux is attacked by a convict (pp. 12-14).

146 In *A Morning for Flamingos* Robicheaux listens to a woman articulating her experience of being attacked: "'I opened the door to get the newspaper and he hit me in the face and knocked me back inside the room. I never had anybody hit me like that. I didn't believe anyone could hit that hard." I could hear the humiliation in her voice, see the shame in her face. I had seen the same look of debasement in victims of violence many times, and it was almost impossible to convince them that they were not deserving of their fate" (p. 253); see also James Lee Burke, *Dixie City Jam* (London: Orion, 1994), p. 71, 215, pp. 245-6, p. 302, p. 325.

147 Ellroy quoted in Martin Kihn, "Doctor Noir" in *New York* (August 24 1992), p. 109. The full text of Ellroy's statement is his expressed desire to "'burn crime fiction to the fucking ground ... I want to destroy every last bit of niceness and cheap empathy in the American crime novel. All other crime novels are tepid compared to mine. *I want to be known as the greatest crime novelist who ever lived!*'" (original emphasis). It should be noted that Ellroy's evident refusal to participate in the "cheap empathy" that he believes his peers promulgate is undermined by his extremely sympathetic renditions of, for example, the wounds endured by Bud White after his "duel" with Deuce Perkins.

148 There are several instances in Burke's fiction in which Robicheaux tries to reconstruct the deaths of individuals, including criminals whom he has pursued, by establishing a sympathetic affiliation with their point of view; see eg *Burning Angel*, p. 201, on the death of Sonny Boy Marsallus; *In the Electric Mist With Confederate Dead* (1993; reprint: New York: Orion, 1997), p. 105, 399; and *Cadillac Jukebox*, pp. 295-6: "Batist never heard the intruder in the black rubber raincoat, not until he cinched his arm under Batist's throat and squeezed as though he were about to burst a walnut. He wrenched Batist's head back into his own ... the arm snapped tight under Batist's chin again, and through the front screen Batist saw the world as a place where trees torn from their roots floated upside down in the rain." The final sentence exemplifies Burke's vividly descriptive, sensorily evocative style, a narrative technique that is light years from Ellroy's terse prose and that Ellroy has actually explicitly derided: "'James Lee Burke? The wind blew in from the bayou, it ruffled the trees ... Oh, fuck you.'" (Ellroy quoted in Steven Kelly, "The Sub-Definitive Ellroy on Ellroy" in *The Richmond Review: Demon Dog Central* [1997], p. 3). While Burke may, perhaps, be at times a little too self-consciously poetic, it is intriguing that Ellroy's contempt for his work is grounded in a disdain for precisely that sensitivity and empathetic attunement to others—be they trees in the bayou, recipients of violence, even criminals whom he has assaulted—which makes Burke's protagonist Robicheaux capable of critiquing his own aggression and sympathising with those who endure violation.

reveal it as a traumatising, devastating occurrence rather than the act of self-actualisation that it constitutes for Ellroy's masculine characters.

Lacking the empathy with which his peers' texts reverberate, Ellroy's novels focus instead on the *staging* of violence, the act as it occurs. Thus a woman's murder is described with an emphasis on visual indicators which underscore the episode's dramatic or spectacular qualities: "Vachss [held] his gun to a waitress' head. White walked toward him. Vincennes circled left; Ed circled right. Vachss blew the woman's brains out point-blank" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 452). This spectacularisation of the scene of violence occurs at the expense of the woman's subjectivity, which is denied any capacity for self-expression, any status beyond its situation as a mass of flesh to be brutally sundered in the ritualised enactment of a drama of male rivalry. It could be argued that the "neutrality" of this description is merely an objective correlative for the indifference with which professional killers like Vachss take others' lives, that the flat textual rendition of this act underscores the pervasiveness of violence and "horror" in this realm, affirming readers' sympathy for its victims. Yet the minimal level of attention paid to the woman creates precisely the opposite effect; she is merely an extra to be disposed of as rapidly as possible in the staging of this spectacle, not a subject whose experience of pain is meaningful. The power relations condensed in this scene—a vulnerable feminine presence violated by an aggressive masculine agent—constitute the paradigm of both Ellroy's narrative universe and his fiction, which naturalises this power differential through restating the passive-feminine, active-masculine binarism on which his textual landscape pivots. Ellroy's account of the society supporting this dichotomy contains the

potential for its disruption, but he ends by reinforcing it through a number of means which I will elucidate in the conclusion to my thesis.

Conclusion: Reaping Profit From Horror

> For me, my big thematic journey is twentieth century American history, and what I think twentieth century American history is, is the story of bad white men, soldiers of fortune, shakedown artists, extortionists, legbreakers. The lowest level implementors of public policy. Men who are often toadies of right wing regimes. Men who are often racists. Men who are homophobes. These are my guys. These are the guys that I embrace. These are the guys that I empathise with. These are the guys that I love.
>
> James Ellroy[1]

Reconstructing postwar American history through the conceptual lens of hard-boiled fiction, James Ellroy chronicles a society embedded in hierarchical relations of masculine privilege and grounded in a series of dichotomies—self/other, subject/object, spectator/surveyed, active/passive—played out on the field of sexual difference. Envisaging the postwar landscape as a universe of "nightmares" whose ideological fabric is woven from the intersecting strands of misogyny, racism and homophobia, Ellroy's narratives are refracted through the consciousnesses of hegemonic males benefiting from the relations of domination and submission in which their society is grounded. Staging his documentation of this society as what he has labelled a "'male drama,'"[2] Ellroy's

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1 James Ellroy quoted in Paul Duncan, "Call Me Dog" in Paul Duncan, *The Third Degree: Crime Writers in Conversation* (Harpenden: No Exit, 1997), p. 22.

2 Ellroy quoted in John Krewson, "Dog's Life" in *The Onion* (20 November-3 December 1996; vol. 30 no. 15), p. 65.

narratives unfurl within the homosocially organised insider sphere which governs this universe. Charting this realm's co-ordinates of oppression, Ellroy reveals that the integrity of both this precinct and its masculine constituents is secured through the rigorous marginalisation and exclusion of groups designated as "abject." It is particularly realised through the vilification of male homosexuality, which is constructed as the "deviant" antithesis of viable masculinity by men obtaining the capacity to legitimise and deauthorise particular socioerotic identities. Ellroy's framing of his novels as a "*male* drama" encodes the tropes of masculine subjectivity and self-realisation with which his texts are concerned. Narratives of masculine agency and actualisation, the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* forward similar "types" as their primary protagonists and share parallel thematic preoccupations with "male bonding," processes of masculine subjectification and the attainment of "manhood," crises of gender and sexual identity and the anxieticisation of masculinity against a cultural backdrop of authorised modes of male subjectivity.

Ellroy emphasises the difficulty of surviving within the sphere of power, whose perpetuation is enabled by the calamitous violence it inflicts on those transgressing its rules or threatening its rigorously maintained boundaries. Scrambling to exist in this power matrix, Ellroy's protagonists struggle to secure the coveted status of "inviolability" by approximating a normative professional/masculine ideal whose core constitutive features are the capacity to disseminate and withstand violence. Ellroy's metaphorisation of men's endeavours to achieve viability as part of an ongoing "drama" invokes the

"compulsory social ritual"[3] of gender performance which he represents his characters as constrained by, and the dialectic of reality and inauthenticity structuring his portraits of these men. While Ellroy evidently conceptualises gender as mobile, complex and multiform, he retains a "depth" model of subjectivity whereby an individual's surface always conceals a "core" or "true" gender and sexual identity. Ellroy represents the modality of masculine subjectivity approbated in the insider world as "naturally" inhering in some men but not in others, who are, accordingly, forced to perform different identities or personae in their pursuit of "viability." Associating "true" masculinity with the capacity to distribute and endure violence, Ellroy valorises the authorised model of masculinity which he portrays as gaining its legitimacy at the expense of this society's abjected "others." The strategies of repetition governing gender performance in Ellroy's texts extend to his representations of masculine and feminine behaviour, which correspond to hegemonic notions of what appropriate gender identities consist of by locating agency as "masculine" and passivity as "feminine." Mapped onto the social terrain and scopic field, this binarism sites feminised individuals as objects of violence and the specularising masculine gaze, and masculine subjects as perpetrators of violence and controllers of the gaze.

While feminised subjects are visually surveilled and corporeally probed by empowered masculine repositories of technical expertise, the latter are exempt from this process of objectification. Similarly, feminised subjects constitute the majority of "victims" in

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3 Judith Butler, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification" in Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis and Simon Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 31.

Ellroy's fiction but rarely manifest violence. This restatement of the relationship between an active/masculine violator and a passive/feminised recipient of violence is entrenched by Ellroy's depiction of women as not only acted-upon but—like Kay Lake, who discloses her traumatised body to Bucky Bleichert in an act of self-objectification—as complicit in (even agents for) their own degradation. Just as Lake sheds her garments to expose her scarred physique, Ellroy strips away the layers of feminine subjectivity to reveal the violated "core" quivering beneath its surface. In the same way that his texts assert a "core" identity inhering within his protagonists to which they inevitably "revert," so his representations of women and feminised subjects always reveal a passive "essence" and a history of victimisation ensuring that they are intelligible within his novels primarily as objects of masculine violence. In a "pornography of violence" situating the corpses of feminised subjects as "objects" to be scrutinised by readers (whose gazes are constructed as interrogative, "masculine" and specularising), Ellroy recreates the originary violence of his narrative landscape in which feminised individuals are submitted to the enquiring, violating gaze of authority. Repeatedly blocking readers' access to feminised characters' subjectivity by failing to represent events from their perspectives, Ellroy reproduces the strategies of abjection and objectification which enable violence against them to proliferate in his discursive landscape. Locating his texts within the insider sphere and narrating them from the perspectives of hegemonic males and representatives of

patriarchal authority,[4] Ellroy naturalises the distinction between viable, interrogating subjects and denigrated, specularised abjects in which this world is grounded. His narratives are structured as investigations by detectives into this abject realm—the "feminine" mystery of *The Black Dahlia*, the clandestine homosexual subculture of *The Big Nowhere*, the shadowy underworld of prostitution, drugs, incest and murder in which *White Jazz*'s Kafesjian family are mired—which hypostasise the division between the insider sphere and its constitutive inverse and reveal the latter as a domain of "horror."

If the teleological drive which sustains *The Black Dahlia*—"cherchez la femme"—locates the "feminine" symbolised by the titular murder victim as a chimerical vacuum into which men project their erotic or violent fantasies, then the comparable project of *The Big Nowhere*, which probes into the history and motives of a gay serial killer, ultimately constructs homosexuality as a form of "horror" from which there is "no escape" (p. 454). Prospecting the abject domain, Ellroy reveals its surface as always bland, amorphous, undifferentiated: the "blank," "glassy-eyed" Ramona Sprague (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 157, 366), the cipher Reynolds Loftis who is literally seen by Danny Upshaw as "just an image" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 306). Yet beneath its vapid, textureless exterior lies a core of "horror"—on the one hand a femininity whose "horror" falls within three possible

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[4] This restates the masculinist bias of the genre, which is "most often concerned with the aims, ambitions and activity of a male protagonist" (Frank Krutnik, *In A Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* [London: Routledge, 1991], p. 42) and in which "although the initial mystery which provides the narrative's pretext may be a domestic, and sometimes a female, crime, the search for a solution is invariably displaced on to a series of confrontations with other men [and] the hero pursues his search through predominantly male-segregated milieux of work and leisure, returning obsessively to those public places like clubs and bars where men can enter alone and belong" (David Glover, "The Stuff that Dreams are Made Of: Masculinity, Femininity and the Thriller" in Derek Longhurst (ed.), *Gender, Genre, and Narrative Pleasure* [London: Unwin Hyman, 1989], p. 77).

categories: in stasis, as a shattered corpse like the "Black Dahlia"; as an embodiment of the "'monstrous maternal'"[5] like Ramona Sprague, the "torturer Mommy" who murdered Elizabeth Short (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 371); or as a stereotypical "femme fatale" like Sprague's daughter Madeleine. On the other hand, Ellroy pierces the façade of heterosexual "normalcy" to reveal specific men (including *The Big Nowhere*'s Danny Upshaw) as homosexual before delving beyond this to expose the "essence" of homosexuality as aligned with monstrosity.

Reinscribing the dominant view of homosexuality as "deviant" and diseased, Ellroy associates it with incest, paedophilia and insanity, thereby legitimising the homosexual panic of the insider sphere, its conception of homosexuality as contagious and dread that this "pathology" will proliferate beyond its capacity to "contain" it. Demonising women and homosexuals, Ellroy aggressively validates the spectacular inscription of fraught masculinity on their bodies and reasserts hegemonic masculine dominance by

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5 This phrase is used by Mulvey in a discussion of the Oedipus myth that reveals clear parallels between this and the narrative of *The Black Dahlia*. Discussing Jean-Joseph Goux's reading of the Oedipus story as a type of "initiation rite," Mulvey cites Goux's observation that "the Sphinx, structurally situated as the creature that must be defeated for the tale to reach its appropriate conclusion, is a female monster ... Goux argues that the female monsters [of Greek mythology] stand in for a 'monstrous maternal,' whose murder is essential for the rite of passage to take place. Thus the heroes' victory represents an act of matricide that necessarily precedes their ascension to kingship and marriage." Oedipus, however, "fails to kill the Sphinx. He answers her riddle and thus, as Goux points out, omits the initiate's act of matricide, leaving the Sphinx to self-destruct." See Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 137-140. Ellroy's troping of femininity as concealing a "monstrous" core also mirrors what Ann Wilson has identified as a common "patriarchal" thematic whereby "woman is presented as having a split nature, the façade of the nurturer masking her dangerous sexuality, which destroys men" (Ann Wilson, "The Female Dick and the Crisis of Heterosexuality" in Glenwood Irons (ed.), *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995] p. 153). This conception of women is of course consonant with the cliché of the "femme fatale"; Wilson adds that it reflects early twentieth century readings of sexuality, where "sexologists understood the homosexual to have a nature split between a feminine spirit and a masculine body. This split nature, like that of a woman, is represented within patriarchal (and hence, heterosexist) perspectives as dangerous to dominant, masculine order because appearance is a façade under which the 'true' nature or spirit of a woman or homosexual is hidden" (p. 153).

pathologising and abjecting its "others." Interestingly, in the three final novels of the "L.A. Quartet," the "horror" associated with these "others" is aligned with an individual who would otherwise have appeared to be the antithesis of abjection: Dudley Smith, the panoptic authority and corrupt LAPD officer who constitutes the primary nemesis for Ellroy's protagonists. Smith's connection with the abject domain is clarified when Ed Exley, investigating the "Nite Owl" massacre which Smith is responsible for, declares that "the Nite Owl had a life past any detective's volition—and the will to make its *horror* known whether he was there to probe evidence or not, whether he was capable of forming plans or just hanging on for the ride" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 359; my emphasis). Making the "horror" symbolised by Smith "known" is the project informing the "L.A. Quartet," whose final three novels feature a narrative trajectory moving inexorably towards revelations that various murders and illegal activities have been perpetrated by Smith. The series' climactic moment is the "duel" between Smith and the psychopathic Wylie Bullock that results in Smith's permanent paralysis. Insofar as Smith is explicitly associated with both the abject and insider realms, his immobilisation is a function of his status as both an abjected scapegoat who must be ritually expelled from the insider sphere to ensure its internal cohesion, and a patriarchal figure who must be symbolically disabled—killed or castrated, stripped of authority—in a restaging of the violent Oedipal fantasy transmitting power from one generation of masculine authority to the next. Introduced in the early novel *Clandestine*, where he is described as "'a fearsome personage

and legendary cop'" (*Clandestine*, p. 100),[6] Smith personifies patriarchal power, as his habitual references to other men as "lad"—situating himself as a "father figure" and locating himself in a hierarchically dominant relationship to them—confirm. His essential personality condensed in his description as a "big white man with a bone-deep cruel streak" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 363), Smith is a sadist whose misogynistic reification of women as vulnerable and requiring guidance leads him to "order" his niece's life and a chronic racist who murders this niece's Mexican lover (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 452). That Smith shouts "'spic filth! I'll teach you to traffic with clean young white girls!'" (p. 452) in the process of killing the youth exposes the fear of miscegenation (and hence the potential contamination of the insider realm's "purity" by the polluting abject) which motivates this homicide.

The bigotry and mania for order symbolised here coalesce to provide Smith with his "master-plan" which, as he informs Bud White, involves controlling L.A.'s criminal underworld and "containing" African Americans (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 400). Smith's power is such that even "hardcase" men like White and Buzz Meeks are terrified of him (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 360; *The Big Nowhere*, p. 295). Despite the fear that he generates,

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6 The characterisation of Smith in *Clandestine* is particularly interesting not only in light of his prominence in Ellroy's later novels, but also in the sense that it occurs in terms of the performance metaphors that pervade the "L.A. Quartet": "There was a frightening set to his face, regardless of the interrogation technique he was explaining. He was a master actor with a huge ego who was adept at changing roles at the drop of a hat, yet who always managed to impart purity of personality to the part he was currently playing" (*Clandestine*, p. 101). Smith is also called an "applause-loving actor" (p. 101), "'an actor, and a damn good one'" (p. 110), and the novel's narrator Fred Underhill notes that "Dudley Smith smiled slowly, a blank-faced, emotionless carnivore smile, and I knew that this was the real man, devoid of all his actor's conceit" (p. 121). Another interesting element of the portrait of Smith developed in *Clandestine* is that the act of restaging the "Black Dahlia"'s murder, which is performed by Fritz Vogel in *The Black Dahlia*, is attributed here to Smith (pp. 128-9).

Meeks and Mal Considine, hitherto bitter rivals, unite in opposition to Smith, as do White and Ed Exley in *L.A. Confidential* and Exley and Klein in *White Jazz*. This unification of antagonists echoes what Girard has identified as the "frequent motif in the Old Testament, as well as in Greek myth" of "brothers at odds with each other" whose "fatal penchant for violence can only be diverted by the intervention of a third party, the sacrificial victim or victims."[7] The alliances forged by these men to overthrow Smith can also be read in the context of a narrative outlined by Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, in which "a horde of sons murder and incorporate the father, and then elevate the paternal principle to a Law."[8]

In some ways Smith is little more than a larger-than-life nemesis for Ellroy's protagonists to combat, a stereotypical "arch-villain" whose every trait is exaggerated. Physically outsized, he is an actual Irishman (complete with a thick brogue) rather than the usual policeman of Irish descent, and he has a seemingly limitless capacity for evil—from supplying "black-market penicillin to escaped Nazis" to strangling a three day old baby (*White Jazz*, p. 321), there is literally no act too wicked for him to have perpetrated.[9] Yet the hyperbole informing Smith's portrait is also a quality ascribed to him by other characters which contributes to mandating his destruction; his function as an abject

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[7] Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (trans. Patrick Gregory; Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 4.

[8] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 37.

[9] Virtually every felonious act in the "L.A. Quartet" is traceable to Smith: he murders the Mexican youth at the centre of the "Sleepy Lagoon" incident in *The Big Nowhere*, oversees the "Nite Owl" murders, and "suborned the Kafesjians into the LAPD fold [and] initiated the notion of contained narcotics peddling" (*White Jazz*, pp. 282-3); the only surprise is that he is not blamed for the "Black Dahlia" murder as well.

scapegoat stems from his association with the immoderacy and disorder inflecting his characterisation. Described as "crazy Dud" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 183), Smith's excess is first glimpsed when Ellis Loew instructs Considine to "'keep him on a tight leash'" (p. 20). Perhaps reflecting Cranny-Francis' insight that villains in crime fiction "transgress the social order in some way, but often their crime is that they come too close to deconstructing that order, their avarice or viciousness too clearly indicative of the ideological basis of that order,"[10] Smith's venality is exorbitant and his loathing of subordinate groups is demarcated as excessive; even his obsession with "order" is, paradoxically, tinged with a lack of control.[11] While his alignment with insanity, chaos and transgression would in itself require Smith's ritual exorcism from the insider realm, there is an additional implication that his removal from the domain of power is also a consequence of his association with the abjected figure of the homosexual.

Smith represents both the authoritative patriarch in whom the capacity to surveil and classify inheres, and the monstrous double of this figure. The tension between these aspects of Smith's characterisation is foregrounded in the sequence where he interpellates Danny Upshaw as homosexual by kissing him "full on the lips" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 367). This bizarre gesture functions as a kind of negative imprimatur irrevocably sealing Upshaw's newly abjected status; it is both abusive and contemptuous and yet expressive of same-sex desire—and, in conjunction with Smith's celibacy and well-known interest in

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10 Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), p. 201.

11 Smith is described as "off the deep end on coloreds" and "too volatile on Negroes" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 129, 177), while Exley declares that Smith has gone "'crazy with the notion of containment'" (*White Jazz*, p. 283).

developing protegees (he "'drool[s] for tough boys'" [*White Jazz*, p. 305]), it arguably aligns him with homosexuality. Any association of Smith with this subject-position is intriguing insofar as it dovetails with what Mulvey describes as the extended version of the original narrative of Oedipus, in which the Oedipal father (Laius) was indirectly murdered by his son because he raped a male youth.[12] Exley's Oedipal conflict with Smith, who despite his affiliations with the abject remains an embodiment of patriarchal authority, results in the spectacularly violent climax of the "L.A. Quartet": the battle between Smith and Bullock orchestrated by Dave Klein (*White Jazz*, p. 329). Congruent with the Oedipal narrative, Smith's patriarchal power is embedded in and textually manifested through his visual control of others. His assassin, Bullock—a man for whom vision is implicated in fantasies of power and domination outside the normal structures of spectatorship and control that order the masculine psyche—determines to kill Smith by divesting him of the site of his authority ("'the Eyeball Man said ... rip Dudley Smith's eyes out and eat them'" [p. 328]).[13] A Grand Guignol confrontation between Smith and Bullock (p. 333) leaves Smith partially blind—consolidating the Oedipal overtones of his downfall—paralysed, and brain damaged. With a heavy-handed (presumably conscious)

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12 Laura Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 143: "In the pre-story of Oedipus, which Freud has been accused of repressing, Laius had been exiled temporarily from Thebes and had taken refuge in the court of King Pelops in Sparta. There he had fallen in love with the king's young son Chrysippos, raped him and attempted to kidnap him. In revenge for this act of brutal violence, the king pronounced the curse that Laius would be killed by his son who would then incestuously marry his own mother."

13 Bullock's loathing of Smith stems from his complicity in preventing J.C. Kafesjian from being implicated in the death of Bullock's parents, who were shot and killed by a man blinded by alcohol that Kafesjian had illegally brewed (*White Jazz*, pp. 325-6). Ironically, the power vested in Smith and played out on the visual realm is precisely that which secures his downfall; his boasts to Dave Klein of the way in which he persuaded Kafesjian to join the LAPD as a narcotics informant—"'I understood the metaphors of greed and blind rage, and the absurdity of a sightless man wielding a ten-gauge did not escape me. ... I also offered visual persuasion. A coroner's photograph of a young couple rendered headless expressed a certain shock value.'" (p. 333)—are references to Bullock's parents which are overheard by Bullock and which goad him into viciously attacking Smith.

irony, a newspaper quotes Exley as stating that "'It's important that Captain Smith remains *contained* and receives the care he deserves'" (p. 344; my emphasis).

Insofar as Smith is a chronic bigot responsible for violently subjugating subaltern groups, his "containment" in Ellroy's re-enactment of the Oedipal drama could potentially operate as a liberating overthrow of the worst excesses of patriarchy, an opportunity to recast this world's hierarchical relations of hegemony and subordination. Yet Smith is eliminated only to be replaced as a patriarchal figure by Exley, ensuring the regeneration of the "loop" of masculine sovereignty and entitlement. In the Oedipal model of patriarchal succession, "to achieve 'correct manhood,' the male subject is forced to identify with the Law of the Father and at the same time to accept his own subjection to that law."[14] In actualising Smith's symbolic patricide Exley signals his endorsement of the "Law of the Father" and his resignation to the violence underpinning and enabling this "dominant fiction"—a violence whose utilisation he had once resisted (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 32). Hopelessly co-opted into his universe's regime of terror, Exley ultimately recirculates the "Law of the Father" by becoming a repository of patriarchal power, cementing Klein's contention that Exley and Smith are not "opposites" but two facets of the same corrupt entity (*White Jazz*, p. 280). Augmenting the bleakness of Ellroy's vision of a perpetual continuum of patriarchal succession, the corruption which Smith symbolises escalates and ramifies into the moral wasteland of *American Tabloid*, where men are "imprisoned" by the web of venal forces in which they are enmeshed. A narrative less of paternal displacement than fraternal rivalry, *American Tabloid* conveys

Ellroy's defeatist conviction that "once you're in the loop you're in the loop." Doomed to this system's endless recycling, men's urgent desire to avoid abjection secures their compliance with its inner dynamic and ensures their readiness to annihilate others to facilitate their ascent to "inviolability."

Validating Girard's suggestion that "at the core of the Oedipus myth ... is the proposition that all masculine relationships are based on reciprocal acts of violence,"[15] Ellroy is unable to envisage co-operative, non-competitive relationships between men. His restatement of the patriarchal status quo incorporates an acceptance of violence as integral to the competitive homosocial sphere. Hence Dave Klein concludes the "L.A. Quartet"'s cycle of violence by destroying the male members of the Kafesjian family (*White Jazz*, p. 356), a negation of the abjected "other" which is also, paradoxically, an attempt to redeem his history of brutality and corruption. As Klein's quest for absolution confirms, Ellroy's texts are occasionally infused with a consciousness of the soul-destroying nature of the violence his protagonists perpetrate. Yet his explication of this is localised within these men's psyches, and he does not extend his critique to examining the effects of violence on those liminal subjects on whom it is typically enacted.[16] Even when Klein is overwhelmed by "guilt" regarding murders he has

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14 Krutnik, *In A Lonely Street*, p. 80.

15 Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, p. 48.

16 Even when Ellroy's protagonists repent their brutality, its implication in their construction as specifically *masculine*-gendered subjects remains uninterrogated; it is identified as a vaguely "moral" issue rather than questioned as a constitutive element of a prevailing code of "machismo" in the way that, for example, Robert B. Parker's protagonist Spenser tracks his own relationship to the cultural conflation of "masculinity" and violence as a self-reflexive practice and in dialogue with others (see eg *Looking for Rachel Wallace* [1980; reprint: Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987], pp. 27-9, p. 49). This is not to suggest that Spenser is an icon of self-aware masculinity or that his readiness to violate—as suggested by the sequence in which he and his accomplice

committed he continues to recycle the subject/object dichotomy enabling his role of "professional killer," recalling his victims as "the Two Tonys—pomade splatter off point-blank head shots. ... Rape-o double-header—buckshot tore this nigger faceless" (p. 245). Klein's casual reference to an African American man as a "nigger" re-objectifies his victim and restates the logic of abjection sustaining this universe—a dynamic of defilement which Ellroy naturalises by forwarding bigots like Klein as primary narrative identificatory figures. Walton has observed that "the act of reading is a process which involves the development of an identificatory relationship between the protagonist and the reader."[17] In hard-boiled fiction this relationship is typically a positive one; the morally ambivalent status of Ellroy's protagonists constitutes a significant subversion of the prevailing generic orthodoxy whereby the narrative identificatory figure provides a "moral centre"[18] within the text whose ethical code provides the normative framework against which other characters and events are judged.

While Ellroy's early fiction continued the condensation of moral arbiter/structuring narrative consciousness into one agent, *The Black Dahlia* inaugurated a progressive break with that tradition, a blurring of the distinction between "cops" and "criminals" which ultimately ensued in Klein, the ultimate "rogue cop": a ruthless exemplar of LAPD corruption and a bigot who physically and linguistically assaults African Americans (*White Jazz*, p. 17, 52, 177) and whose most violent impulses are channeled

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Hawk casually discuss whether or not to kill people (see eg *A Catskill Eagle* [New York: Dell, 1985], p. 55)—is somehow validated by his consciousness of its implication in a particular "macho" ethic.

17 Priscilla L. Walton, "E' is for En/Gendering Readings: Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone" in Kathleen Gregory Klein (ed.), *Women Times Three: Writers, Detectives, Readers* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1995c), p. 102.

towards his homosexual colleague Junior Stemmons (p. 39, 74, 115). Focalising his narratives through men like Klein, Pete Bondurant and Buzz Meeks, Ellroy's identificatory figures are racist, homophobic crackers who violate subaltern individuals with disquieting ease and into whose perspective readers are co-opted because they have no access to alternate points of view. It could be argued that readers are provided with some distance from the men through whose consciousnesses Ellroy's novels are filtered; Klein's amorality, for example, is represented as provoking his colleagues' censure.[19] Moreover, as Smith has observed,

> "there is a distinction to be made between the subject-position prescribed by a text and the actual human agent who engages with that text and thus with the subject-position it offers. Clearly, any given text is not empowered to *force* the reader to adhere to the discursive position it offers. ... [what] always stands between the text's potential or preferred effect and an actualized effect is a reader who has a history of his/her own."[20]

While Smith correctly suggests that no author can "force" readers to adopt their preferred discursive position, and while readers invariably apply different textual "strategies" to works of fiction,[21] texts can nonetheless be structured to elicit particular

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18 This phrase is used by Krutnik in *In A Lonely Street*, p. 39.

19 These include fellow law enforcement agent Welles Noonan, who "sucker-punches" Klein for murdering Sanderline Johnson, and Noonan's underling Will Shipstad who asks Klein, "'attorney to attorney, how can you live the way you do?'" (*White Jazz*, p. 135, 259). Interestingly, Klein's blithe amorality actually seems preferable to the prissy self-righteousness of these puritans, or the hypocrisy of Ed Exley, who assumes an unfounded moral superiority to Klein, consistently referring to him denigratively by saying "'given what you are'" (p. 32) and refusing to allow him to work robbery cases because "'I wouldn't want to tempt you with saleable items like furs'" (p. 22).

20 Paul Smith quoted in Laura E. Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 14; original emphasis.

21 Walton, "'E' is for En/Gendering Readings," p. 102.

responses from readers. Ellroy's casting of Klein in the role of narrator, combined with the generic tendency to conflate a text's primary narrative agent with its primary *moral* agent, ensures that readers are predisposed to approach Klein as their most salient positive identificatory figure.

In some contexts being confronted with a xenophobic, morally bankrupt narrator could theoretically be a dislocating experience encouraging readers to oppose his ideology and re-evaluate their own belief-systems. However, the structure, grammar and style of *White Jazz* militate against this possibility. Its frenetic pace precludes reflection on Klein's use of prejudicial epithets like "nigger," which are inserted into the text so casually that they appear "normal" rather than assaultive and loathsome. An interior monologue whose minimal use of verbs and terse, impressionistic style forces readers to rely on Klein's perceptions in order to decipher what is occurring on a direct narrative level, *White Jazz* ensures that readers experience the world of the text virtually through Klein's eyes. This collapsing of boundaries between readers and Klein engenders sympathy for him or least constrains any formulation of an oppositional moral stance towards him, despite his virulent bigotry. Compounding this, Klein is not explicitly configured *as* a "bigot" within the text, and his verbal and physical assaults on subordinate individuals are not offset with access into their consciousnesses or perspectives on the prejudice they attract. This is paradigmatic of Ellroy's fiction, in which the "white, male, heterosexual" subject is privileged by virtue of the inaccessibility of other viewpoints. Reflecting their status as objects of knowledge, subaltern groups are not permitted to "represent" themselves in Ellroy's fiction or to verbalise their experiences but are represented by

Ellroy—invariably as refracted through the phobic perspectives of hegemonic males like Klein. Ellroy does not counteract his narrators' bigotry and the overwhelming critical mass of hatred evinced towards occupants of marginalised subject-positions in his texts by promoting even the most token "positive" representations of them. Instead, all women are wicked "femmes fatales," all homosexual men are narcissistic or suicidal, and all African Americans are criminals, entertainers or athletes, and are depicted as slavishly grateful towards their white oppressors.[22]

Ellroy does not overtly identify his narrators' prejudices as unacceptable; again, this differentiates him from his hard-boiled peers, who frequently situate racist, homophobic individuals as embodying a norm unsanctioned by the text.[23] While the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* represent the misogyny and homophobia of police and other institutions without explicitly deploring this, Ellroy's contemporaries offer stringent

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22 The vast majority of African American men witnessed in Ellroy's texts are drug dealers (see eg *The Black Dahlia*, pp. 301-2; *The Big Nowhere*, pp. 58-9), jazz musicians or singers like Lester Lake, who manifests excessive gratitude towards his white "benefactor" Dave Klein (see eg *White Jazz*, p. 158), or boxers like Sanderline Johnson, who is doubly stereotyped as a simpleton. Reading a religious tract, Johnson marvels to Klein that "'it says this woman who came back to life said Jesus guarantees all gold-star contributors a new car every year in heaven.' JESUS FUCK. 'Sanderline, did you catch a few in your last couple of fights?' 'Uh, no. I stopped Bobby Calderon on cuts and lost a split decision to Ramon Sanchez'"(p. 17; original emphasis). While *American Tabloid* features several "positive" African American figures, including a church congregation whom Kemper Boyd endeavours to protect from racist attacks, these figures are introduced into the novel in the context of their victimisation, which reinforces their ostensible "passivity" and status as evidently "natural" victims of violence.

23 Thus the villains in both Carl Hiaasen's *Lucky You* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 197) and James Lee Burke's *Dixie City Jam* are neo-Nazi agitators, while the villain in Burke's *A Stained White Radiance* is a former member of the Ku Klux Klan. Even in Joseph Wambaugh's humorous *The Choirboys*, an LAPD officer Roscoe Rules depicted as a consummate bigot (to whom an African American colleague says, "'"You don't just hate brothers. You hate *everyone*'") is loathed by his peers (Joseph Wambaugh, *The Choirboys* [1975; reprint: London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, p. 76], p. 24; original emphasis).

critiques of these phenomena.[24] Like Ellroy, hard-boiled author Walter Mosley locates his fiction—centring on the African American detective Easy Rawlins—in 1950s L.A. and, like Ellroy, he exposes the structural racism of both the era in general and the LAPD in particular. Yet Mosley's texts code the domination of African Americans by whites *as* racism; Rawlins bitterly deplores his maltreatment by whites and explicates its basis in the endemic prejudice clouding his world.[25] While Mosley uses Rawlins as a vehicle to decry

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24 Cornwell's protagonist Dr. Kay Scarpetta describes the sense of isolation obtaining from her location as a woman in a male-dominated field: "I was a small insect faced with a formidable male network web in which I might be ensnared but never a part" (Patricia Cornwell, *Postmortem* [London: Warner, 1990], p. 60). Wambaugh targets ingrained LAPD misogyny by documenting the experiences of a female officer who "had been through it all, through the humiliating chauvinism in a macho job where women couldn't advance past sergeant until recent years when they magnanimously promoted *one* woman to the rank of lieutenant. ... Now the women were on patrol with the men. Wearing men's uniforms, of course. A nasty gesture by the brass to humiliate them since the courts forced the brass to give the women parity. Now they were doing patrol work—the amazons, that is, who were as big and strong as men, as though size and strength were meaningful. But in the investigative divisions they still had them working mostly on juvenile cases, dealing with children and rape victims, doing paper work like glorified file clerks" (Joseph Wambaugh, *The Black Marble* [1977; reprint: London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978], pp. 50-1; original emphasis). Kellerman foregrounds LAPD homophobia through the character of Milo Sturgis, a gay LAPD officer and sidekick to Kellerman's narrator. Alex Delaware who continually encounters bigotry on the part of fellow policemen (see eg Jonathan Kellerman, *Over the Edge* [1987; reprint: London: Warner, 1993], pp. 181–3). Kellerman's *Silent Partner* (New York: Bantam, 1989), also targets the homophobia of the 1950s LAPD by enabling Ellston Crotty, a former LAPD officer, to describe his experiences in being required to entrap homosexuals. Crotty—at the time an unconsciously closeted homosexual—joins the police force because, as he says, he "'thought I was King Hetero Stud. Being Butch Blue was going to solve all my problems.'" Kellerman to some extent reasserts the fiction of homosexuality as a signifier written on the body and decipherable by hegemonic males, noting that as a young man Crotty possessed the "pretty," "easily bruised countenance of a young Monty Clift" and that after leaving the police academy, "'the brass took one look at me and knew exactly where to send me. Toilet decoy in MacArthur Park till all the local queers made me, then gay-bar detail over in Hollywood.'" Yet he critiques LAPD homophobia by representing its psychic consequences for Crotty: "'I was great, busted more faggots than any other piece of bait. Got promoted, assigned to Vice, spent the next ten years of my life busting *more* faggots ... Another meat wagon full of faggots expressed to County Lockup, black-and-blue, puking blood. Once in a while one of them would hang himself in his cell. ... For ten years I was an accessory to the assault and murder of gay men, never stopped to wonder why I was going home each night, puking my own guts out and drinking gin until I could feel my liver sizzling'" (pp. 276-7).

25 See eg *In A Blue Dress* (1990; reprint: London: Picador, 1996), p. 106, which describes a white character's behaviour as "the worst kind of racism"; for other incidents in which Rawlins explicitly identifies and disavows racist behaviour see also p. 87, 141, and *Black Betty* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), pp. 41-3. The racism of the LAPD is elucidated in *Devil In A Blue Dress* (p. 61) and *A Red Death* (1991; reprint: London: Picador, 1996), p. 335, 338, 462. Willett notes that "Mosley's villains are usually racist whites, members of the bourgeoisie. His powerful portrayal of the oppression, and virtual segregation of black citizens by the white power structure, is juxtaposed with images of racial harmony" (Ralph Willett, *The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996], p. 31).

this racism, Ellroy normalises the inequitable power relationships of his postwar landscape by treating them as a given, to be taken for granted by readers in precisely the same way that his protagonists accept them. Thus the pervasiveness of phobic ideologies in this era is emphasised by Ellroy's protagonists' uncritical reproduction of them, particularly through their casual references to marginalised groups in words that function as "'badges of degradation.'"[26] Yet while Ellroy's characters habitually utilise a vast, vituperative array of examples of racial and sexual invective, the hateful terms they employ are never identified *as* racist, sexist or homophobic, but merely reflect a behavioural norm that remains uninterrogated by the text. To recycle the logic underlying Guy Banister's declaration that "'accepting Communism is promoting Communism'" (*American Tabloid*, p. 244), Ellroy not only implicitly endorses the use of such expressions, and by extension the entire matrix of abjection that enables them, but also assumes what Ogdon refers to as a "pre-existing colluding perspective"[27] on readers' parts, encouraging them to view these as acceptable terms with which to denominate minority groups.

It is this refusal to temper his characters' xenophobic rhetoric with an acknowledgement of its unacceptability that causes critics to equate Ellroy with his protagonists and label him a "'fascist, racist, homophobic, misogynistic anti-semite.'"[28] Ellroy's response to such criticism has been to cite his intention to create narratives of "bad white men doing

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26 Richard Delgado quoted in Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 100.

27 Bethany Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology" in *Critical Quarterly* (Spring 1992; vol. 34 no. 1), p. 84.

28 Sarah Schulman quoted in Joe Jackson, "Crimes and Misdemeanours" in *Hot Press* (1995, vol. 19 no. 3), p. 7.

bad things in the name of authority." Unrepentant about recirculating the traditional hegemonic/masculinist bias of hard-boiled fiction, Ellroy vocally articulates his impatience with the increasing politicisation of the genre, deriding the existence of ""the gay private eye, the black private eye, the woman private eye, and every other kind of private eye.""[29] Without suggesting that Ellroy should pay what Mercer calls "tokenistic lip service to the bureaucratic formula of 'race, class, and gender'"[30]—as Mercer notes, "today we are adept at the all too familiar concatenation of identity politics, as if by merely rehearsing the mantra of 'race, class, gender' (and all other intervening variables) we have somehow acknowledged the diversified and pluralized differences at work in contemporary culture, politics and society"[31]—Ellroy's rejection of the "identity politics" of contemporary crime fiction exposes him to charges that his texts are irrelevant anachronisms seeking to safeguard the genre against the incursion of denigrated subject-positions by resituating it in a pre-feminist utopia of unreconstructed masculinity. His refusal to negotiate the terrain of "identity politics" in the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* is particularly problematic insofar as his earlier novels accomplished precisely this task. Whereas the later texts silently approbate their protagonists' brutality, Ellroy's pre-"L.A. Quartet" novels subjected the conflation of violence and "masculinity" to a critique and manifested an ambivalence towards exemplars of hegemonic masculinity conditioned to be "professional killers." *Brown's Requiem*'s protagonist Fritz Brown vomits after hitting a man and rationalises his use of violence—"I don't like hurting

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29 Ellroy quoted in Ron Hogan, "James Ellroy" in *Beatrice* (1995 edition), p. 5.

30 Kobena Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary" in Bad Object-Choices (eds), How *Do I Look?: Queer Film and Video* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991), p. 195.

31 Mercer, "Skin Head Sex Thing," pp. 217-8.

people, no sane man does, but there had been no alternative this time" (*Brown's Requiem*, p. 14)[32]— while LAPD detective Lloyd Hopkins, the primary character in three pre-"L.A. Quartet" novels, is described as a "sociopath" with "'a violence-prone obsessive-compulsive personality [which manifests] itself in acts of excessive physical force'" (*Suicide Hill*, p. 1).

Clandestine critiques the LAPD's "macho" culture and institutionalised racism, its narrator Fred Underhill consciously dissociating himself from the conduct of his fellow patrol officers, whom he contends "all hated Negroes [sic] and who all seemed to possess a hundred esoteric synonyms for 'nigger.' ... They were sent to the Seventy-Seventh to hold down the lid of a boiling cauldron, by scaring or beating the shit out of suspects real and imagined, and that was it" (*Clandestine*, p. 67). Yet, as Hogan commented to Ellroy in an interview, in *The Black Dahlia* Ellroy "'stopped having your protagonists be outside the racism and homophobia, like in *Clandestine*, where the protagonist clearly distances

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32 See also the sequence in which Brown recounts an "adventure" from his past in which he and his then-partner Snyder instigated a "drug bust" on their own; seeing themselves as "rogue cops, out for the big kill," (*Brown's Requiem*, p. 77) they break into a house belonging to some countercultural ("long-hair") drug dealers and arrest them. To the disappointment of Snyder, a former Marine, the hippies submit quietly without necessitating the use of his shotgun; a raid without firing his gun is, to Snyder, like "getting laid without getting your dick sucked first," so he proceeds to shoot a poster of Che Guevara. As Brown narrates the incident: "'I'm gonna kill him, I'm gonna kill that Commie cocksucker!' [Snyder] cried, and blasted Che Guevara, the mirror, and a good part of the bedroom wall to kingdome come with his Remington pump. Before I could stop him, he blasted the other wall, sending Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix to hell. When the dust cleared, Snyder was grinning like a sated lover, our prisoners were screaming 'Police brutality' and I quite literally shit in my pants" (p. 77). When police officers arrive at the scene in response to the gunshots, they laugh the incident off and, as Brown concludes, "Snyder and I received a commendation and by the perverse logic of the macho mentality my floundering police career was back in stride" (p. 78). This episode reveals both the sexualisation of violence in both the police and military cultures ("getting laid," "sated lover") and these culture's approbation of a violent, right-wing, "macho" code or stylisation of behaviour; and yet, via the absurd image of Snyder blasting a poster and losing control of his bodily functions, crucially undermines the basis and legitimacy of this code.

himself from the attitudes. You've allowed yourself to position your characters within that mindset."[33] Ellroy's response to this observation was to declare that

> "I'm an unregenerate white Anglo-Saxon Protestant heterosexual. So are my men. Their racism and homophobia is appalling, but it's germane to their characters ... These are fully rounded characters, and the racism and homophobia are casual attributes, not defining characteristics. They are not lynchers or gaybashers ... When you have characters that the reader empathizes with, who are carrying the story, saying 'nigger' and 'faggot' and 'spic,' it puts people off. Which is fine. I would like to provoke ambiguous responses in my readers. That's what I want. There's part of me that would really like to be one of Dudley Smith's goons and go back and beat up some jazz musicians, and there's part of me that's just appalled."[34]

Confirming that readers are intended to "empathise" with his protagonists, Ellroy is apparently oblivious to the fact that proclaiming his desire to "be one of Dudley Smith's goons and go back and beat up some jazz musicians" (all of whom, in Ellroy's novels, are of course African American) reveals precisely the xenophobia he is supposed to be defending himself against. Yet Ellroy maintains that his novels do not enact violence and bigotry but "merely" reflect or represent it.[35] Observing that "'since the 1950s, L.A. has

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33 Ron Hogan, "James Ellroy" in *Beatrice* (1996 edition), p. 6.

34 Ellroy quoted in Hogan, "James Ellroy," p. 6. Ellroy's comments here are inaccurate and misleading; characters like Bud White and Danny Upshaw could be classified as "gaybashers" in the sense that they specifically and deliberately target gay men as appropriate objects of violence. Upshaw's intolerance of homosexual men is actually a "defining characteristic" insofar as it is integral to his maintenance of a heterosexual façade and continued self-delusion regarding his "true" sexual identity. While Ellroy asserts that he is 'appalled" by his characters' xenophobia, this militates against the evident satisfaction he derives from subjecting non-hegemonic subjects to harsh and punitive violence (see footnote 38, Part Three). Ellroy's remarks are also irresponsible insofar as he claims to wish to provoke "ambiguous responses" in his readers without clarifying precisely why he feels the need to do this and what possible value this could contribute to contemporary political discourse and debates on representations of liminal subject-positions.

35 Ellroy states in another interview that "'PC people like their fascist, racist, homophobes to be defined solely by those things, whereas they are just attributes of the characters in my books, as in someone calling another character 'a faggot'. I don't use those words in my life. Likewise I'd never call a black person a 'nigger.' But I will allow my characters to reflect those tendencies in society'" (Jackson, "Crimes and Misdemeanours," p. 7). In the publicity accompanying the film adaptation of *L.A. Confidential*, Ellroy admitted the potential for abrasively denigrative words to shock and offend irrespective of whether they are contextualised as part of an unenlightened past or not—a point which highlights the irresponsibility of his

been a city rife with racism, homophobia and simmering, insidious violence,'"[36] Ellroy has explained that the views expressed by his characters are a function of their immersion in this milieu rather than indicative of his own ideology—"'I write books of the time, in the language of the time'"[37]—and adds that "'I think that social revisionism and political correctness make for very, very bad crime novels.'"[38]

The latter comment is ironic insofar as Ellroy himself conducts the "revisionist" project of subverting received images of postwar America as a socially stable (even bland and conformist) society and evoking what he represents as the "reality" of this era: the "nightmares" submerged beneath "official history" which he retrieves and makes textually explicit. Ellroy obscures the revisionism of his own texts by claiming to expose the hidden "truth" of endemic violence and corruption within America. Privileging his

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own uncritical replications of prejudicial discourses. As one interviewer recorded, "there remained contention over the translation from page to screen. While Ellroy conceded that his book's terse, adrenaline-fuelled violence had to be toned down for a mainstream movie, he stood out for the realistic racism that constantly comes out of the mouths of his three anti-heroes. 'When I [Ellroy] read the script, I said: 'These cops would say "Nigger" more,' and [film director Curtis] Hanson explained something that I didn't quite buy at the time—which was, if you start using language like that, it completely blows the character out of the audience's mind; just the casual utterance of that word destroys any given scene that it's spoken in. After seeing the film, I came to believe it'" (Tom Dewe Mathews, "Ellroy barks his approval" in *The Sydney Morning Herald* [October 23 1997], p. 17).

36 Ellroy quoted in Louis B. Hobson, "Author D.O.W.N. on the L.A.P.D." in *Calgary Sun*. October 7 1997, p. 1).

37 Ellroy quoted in Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 22. To cite Ellroy's comments in full: "'For me, my big thematic journey is twentieth century American history, and what I think twentieth century American history is, is the story of bad white men, soldiers of fortune, shakedown artists, extortionists, legbreakers. The lowest level implementors of public policy. Men who are often toadies of right wing regimes. Men who are racists. Men who are homophobes. These are my guys. These are the guys that I embrace. These are the guys that I empathise with. These are the guys that I love. Now, parenthetically, a number of critics have called me a fascist, a racist, an anti-Semite, an anti-papist because my characters are like that. These are the characters who are portrayed as multi-faceted human beings. The reader on some level is meant to empathise with them, and I certainly do. I think what angers critics is that the racism and homophobia and anti-Semitism and everything else that these characters express is not fundamental to their character—they are just casual attributes that they possess because they are men of the time. So I write books of the time, in the language of the time in the first and third person, refer to Jews as kikes, homosexuals as faggots, and blacks as niggers. People don't know how to take it.'"

authorial "omniscience"—the impression of his evident access to the "reality" of the postwar period created by the incorporation of historical characters, "real-life" crimes and actual celebrity scandals, into his narratives—Ellroy represents himself as possessing superior "insight" into the workings of this universe which enables him to "shed light on" the era, as *American Tabloid*'s preface announces (p. 5). Adapting Ellroy's logic that his texts map the "reality" of 1950s America, it could be argued that the atrocities saturating his fiction merely mirror the "real" violence and corruption of the period—a point arguably consolidated by the imaginative foundation of *The Black Dahlia* in a notorious "real-life" homicide, and the fact that the "Sleepy Lagoon" incident in *The Big Nowhere* was an actual historical event.[39] It could also be asserted that Ellroy's attribution of xenophobic rhetoric and behaviour to his narrators is a textual strategy designed to preserve the "realism" of his narratives and that for Ellroy to overtly problematise his characters' use of prejudicial language would be anachronistic insofar as the construction of their terminology as racist or homophobic is a retroactive manouevre predicated on critical discourses unavailable to individuals at the time.

The latter possibility is, however, negated by the fact that Ellroy's earlier texts—including *Clandestine*, also located in the postwar period—overtly distanced their protagonists from the unreflective use of violence and the bigotry imbuing their narrative landscape, and

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38 Ellroy quoted in Martin Kihn, "Doctor Noir" in *New York* (August 24 1992), p. 116.

39 For an account of this incident, see Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir" in Mike Hill (ed.), *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 89-90.

subjected both phenomena to critical interrogation and re-evaluation.[40] It is also undermined by the fact that anti-racist and anti-homophobic ideologies did obtain currency in the 1950s—despite the violent repression of homosexuals in the postwar era, the first "pro-homosexual" organisations were formed in this period[41]—and that even within the "L.A. Quartet" there are faint glimmerings of awareness that, for example, the racist terms deployed by Ellroy's protagonists are not considered acceptable by all individuals in this realm. Evincing a dim recognition of their terminology's potential for insult, one character corrects himself when instinctively preparing to use a racist phrase, saying "'some of my best friends are nig—I mean Negroes'" (*White Jazz*, p. 109), while Jack Vincennes guiltily recalls saying "'nigger' in front of [his wife's] parents" (*L.A. Confidential*, p. 285). Ellroy thus concedes the possibility that the linguistic vilification of abjected groups is unacceptable; yet the two incidents in which the offensiveness of this loathsome term is acknowledged are thoroughly outweighed by the overwhelming number of instances in which it (and other injurious words) are uttered by Ellroy's protagonists without being simultaneously problematised. While Ellroy may consider his characters' bigotry "appalling," it is not located as "appalling" within his texts. Characters like Bucky Bleichert are depicted using racial slurs—goading African Americans by saying "'your mother sucks a mean dick, Sambo'" (*The Black Dahlia*, p. 301)—without their speech being accompanied by any authorial signposting that their vocabulary is repellent. By textually incorporating a lexicon of oppression without

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40 Furthermore, *White Jazz* is narrated by Dave Klein retrospectively, some thirty years after the events described therein "occurred"; in this respect he would clearly have had access to the type of critical discourse maligning racism that informs Easy Rawlins' retrospective narration in Walter Mosley's fiction.

41 Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971), pp. 102-3.

signalling that it *is* oppressive, Ellroy's use of hate speech is itself an instrument of subjugation. While he claims that he includes words like "nigger" in his texts to achieve "verisimilitude," that he does so without providing any critical brackets to indicate his consciousness of these terms' prejudicial nature ensures that they float as signifiers stripped of context and meaning.

In unreflectively utilising these injurious terms Ellroy ignores the fact that, as Toni Morrison has observed, "'oppressive language ... does more than represent violence; it is violence.'"[42] Ellroy's use of "oppressive language" is often both excessively demarcated and conducted with a type of breathless excitement—as evinced by Danny Upshaw's litany of homophobic abuse—"QUEER, FAGGOT, FRUIT, HOMO, PEDERAST, BRUNSER, PUNK, COCKSUCKER" (*The Big Nowhere*, p. 265; original emphasis)—which implies a certain pleasure on Ellroy's part derived from his gratuitous use of these words, a transgressive joy in being "politically incorrect" commensurate to the evident delight he acquires from representing his "pornography of violence." Like Ellroy's overstatement of violent incidents, the sheer quantity of abhorrent terms used to denominate abject classes—like the police in *Clandestine*, Ellroy has his own "hundred esoteric synonyms for 'nigger'"—and the frequency with which these are deployed, create a cumulative effect of desensitisation causing readers to become inured to these vile words. Matsuda argues that "to the extent that certain groups have been 'historically subordinate,' hate speech directed towards such groups consists in a reification and

42 Toni Morrison quoted in Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 6.

extension of that 'structural subordination.'"[43] Ellroy's exaggerated, extraneous use of injurious language—his over-emphatic recourse to the vocabulary of hate, exemplified by superfluous, out-of-context comments like Pete Bondurant's observation that "Hoffa went bug-eyed like a fright-wig nigger" (*American Tabloid*, p. 64)—ensures that his texts themselves concretise and entrench the subordination of abjected groups. What Ellroy considers "provoking ambiguous responses" in readers is actually the normalisation of a politics of hatred and abjection; his disingenuous claims to simply "reflect" a historically "real" racism and homophobia mystify his own strategies of violence against the individuals subordinated by predominant power structures.

Babener has observed that "fiction often serves culture by naturalizing its credos, making invisible its politics of domination."[44] In Ellroy's texts power is residual in the author function and the capacity to narrate; yet as an author he uses this power to reabject those groups devalued within his discursive universe, interpellating these "others" in terms affirming their debasement, and failing to use his power as an author constructively, to critically examine the norms of the regime he depicts. Blithely explaining his fictional paradigm as "reflecting" the prejudices of the postwar era, in the "L.A. Quartet" and *American Tabloid* Ellroy does not consider whether or not an author writing in the 1980s and 1990s has a responsibility not just to simulate the past but to contextualise it, interrogate its characters' value-systems and identify attitudes that no longer have

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43 Mari Matsuda quoted in Butler, *Excitable Speech*, p. 76.

44 Liahna Babener, "Uncloseting Ideology in the Novels of Barbara Wilson" in Kathleen Gregory Klein (ed.), *Women Times Three: Writers, Detectives, Readers* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1995c), p. 143.

currency. This responsibility was figured in his early novels but abdicated in the post-*Black Dahlia* texts, as though his new project to "realistically" recreate 1950s America exonerated him from what was flagged in *Clandestine* as an imperative to critically evaluate its underlying socio-political realities. Certainly the axes of oppression charted within Ellroy's fiction are apparently historically "accurate." The endemic homophobia of his textual universe is congruent with the postwar subjugation of homosexuals, the program of state-instigated persecution instigated conducted on a scale that is literally inconceivable today and of which D'Emilio paints a chilling portrait.[45] While the oppression endured by homosexuals in this era could have provided Ellroy with an impetus to critique this society's power imbalances, he not only fails to undertake such a project but actually legitimises this systematic repression and climate of homosexual panic by pathologising and abjecting homosexuality. His texts do not simply "represent" the postwar period (as if that were possible) and "reveal" its inequitable power structure but actively recycle its practices of abjection and oppression.

Asseverating insight into the "reality" of the postwar period, Ellroy's claim to "represent" the "truth" of this era ignores the fact that, as Kappeler has suggested, "representations

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45 D'Emilio observes that as gay and lesbian subcultures "expanded and grew more visible in the post-World War II era, oppression by the state intensified, becoming more systematic and inclusive. The Right scapegoated 'sexual perverts' during the McCarthy era. Eisenhower imposed a total ban on the employment of gay women and men by the federal government and government contractors. Purges of lesbians and homosexuals from the military rose sharply. The FBI instituted widespread surveillance of gay men and of lesbian and gay organizations, such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society. The Post Office placed tracers on the correspondence of gay men and passed evidence of homosexual activity onto employers. Urban vice squads invaded private homes, made sweeps of lesbian and gay bars, entrapped gay men in public places, and fomented local witch hunts" (John D'Emilio, "Capitalism and Gay Identity" in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell and Sharon Thompson (eds), *Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* [1983; reprint: London: Virago, 1984], p. 147).

are not just a matter of mirrors, reflections, key-holes. Somebody is making them, and somebody is looking at them, through a complex array of means and conventions."[46] Ellroy's efforts to "document" the epoch are neither neutral nor objective but are ideologically driven; he undermines his pretence to have "impartially" chronicled postwar history by explicitly describing his project in the "L.A. Quartet" as a mission to "canonize the secret L.A." (*My Dark Places*, p. 124). The nostalgia for the postwar period—complete with its virulent racism, misogyny and homophobia—implicit in this phrase is reflected in the salutory authorial declaration "here's to bad men" which prefaces *American Tabloid* (p. 5), and in Ellroy's contentions that is a "'laureate of bad men'" who "loves" and "empathises with" the bigots whose adventures he limns.[47] As his textual veneration of hegemonic "hardcases" like Bud White and Pete Bondurant suggests, Ellroy does not "represent" "bad men" but *celebrates* them; he does not "reflect" but endorses the masculinist ideology of this society. In doing so he consolidates the relations of subordination and domination which undergird this society. Reinforcing this inequitable distribution of power by subjecting feminised subjects to an objectifying, specularising gaze, Ellroy effaces feminine subjectivity and portrays women and feminised men in terms of a series of offensive stereotypes. Insistently relocating the feminine as "passive" and the masculine as "active," Ellroy's selective revisionism of the postwar period ensures that even though his detailed mapping of homosexual men's subordination is historically "valid," his depiction of gay men as resigned to their

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46 Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), p. 3.

47 Ellroy quoted in Duncan, "Call Me Dog," p. 27, 22.

oppression disregards the existence of pro-homosexual organisations in that era and, accordingly, entrenches the purported "passivity" of this group.

Casting homosexual men in the clichéd roles of either suicidal "queers" incapable of surviving within the insider sphere, or as diabolical, pathological embodiments of "horror," Ellroy's demonisation of the homosexual male effectively legitimises the overwhelming onslaught of hatred directed towards this figure in his narrative universe. Without wishing to overly psychologise Ellroy's representations of gay men, his negative delineation of homosexuality—in conjunction with the holocaustal brutality unleashed upon homosexual males within his texts—suggests an abhorrence of this subject-position by Ellroy parallel to the loathing it engenders in his textual world.[48] Yet if, as Kappeler notes, representations are always the product of a particular authorial consciousness with its own predilections and objects of disfavour, they are also communicative vehicles: "somebody is making them, and somebody is looking at them, through a complex array of means and conventions." In this respect Ellroy's hate-drenched representations of homosexuals and other feminised groups themselves constitute an act of violence against these marginalised classes. Discussing aesthetic representations of rape, Higgins and Silver suggest that these can "contribute to the social positioning of women and men and

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48 This homophobia is more or less explicitly confessed to in Ellroy's *My Dark Places*, in which he reveals his adolescent participation in "mutual masturbation sessions" with a male friend and his consequent petrified dread that these would turn him into a "fruit" (*My Dark Places*, p. 113: "I was afraid my father would catch us. I was afraid I'd start emitting fruit vibes. I was afraid that God would turn me into a fruit"). This echoes the ludicrous suggestion made within *The Big Nowhere* that being exposed to intramale sexuality could somehow "make" someone gay and arguably provides insight into why homosexual men are figured, over and over again, as objects of agonising violence in Ellroy's fiction. Without wishing to assert that any virulently expressed vilification of homosexuality necessarily has its roots in a latent homosexuality, perhaps Ellroy should not—as Pete Bondurant says of Lenny Sands—wear his "hate so outré and naked" (*American Tabloid*, p. 208).

shape the cognitive systems that make rape thinkable."[49] Dyer adds that the way in which "social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in life ... poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation [and] negative designations of a group have negative consequences for the lives of members of that grouping."[50] Utilising these theorists' insights, by vilifying feminised groups and portraying violence against them as legitimate, Ellroy's restatement of dominant paradigms of power relations also ramifies into the non-textual world into which his fictions are produced. In a world that continues to be characterised by chronic racism, homophobia and misogyny, Ellroy's texts are not only destructively ignorant but potentially dangerous; like Ward Littell, Ellroy gains his "selfhood" as an author at the expense of abjected and brutalised "others," yet unlike Littell he does not pause to calculate the cost of doing so.

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49 Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, "Introduction: Rereading Rape" in Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (eds), *Rape and Representation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 3.

50 Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 1, 3.

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Filmography

Cop (USA; 1987; directed by James B. Harris; produced by Harris-Woods Productions/ Atlantic Entertainment Group; running time 110 minutes; cast: James Woods – Lloyd Hopkins; Lesley Ann Warren – Kathleen McCarthy; Charles Durning – Dutch Peltz; Charles Haid – Delbert Haines; Raymond J. Barry – Captain Fred Gaffaney)

L.A. Confidential (directed by Curtis Hanson; 1997; USA; produced by Warner Bros./Monarchy Enterprises B.V/ Regency Enterprises; running time 136 mins; cast: Kevin Spacey – Jack Vincennes; Russell Crowe – Bud White; Guy Pearce – Ed Exley; James Cromwell – Dudley Smith; Kim Basinger – Lynn Bracken; Danny DeVito – Sid Hudgens; David Strathairn – Pierce Patchett; Ron Rifkin – D.A. Ellis Loew)

White Jazz (documentary on James Ellroy directed by Reinhard Jud; 1993)