

Topic Page: [Ellroy, James \(1948 - \)](#)

Summary Article: **Ellroy, James**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

US writer. His novels are set in his native Los Angeles and explore the sordid side of US society. In his later works Ellroy has played with the formal structure of the novel, cutting between traditional narrative, first person observations, media-style excerpts, and official reports. He achieved this most successfully in the popular 'LA Quartet', comprising the novels *The Black Dahlia* (1987; filmed 2006), *The Big Nowhere* (1988), *LA Confidential* (1990; filmed 1997), and *White Jazz* (1992). He has also written numerous short stories and essays.

Drawing both from an established literary tradition and the images of 1950s film noir, Ellroy's writing career has been one of constant evolution. His first novel was a detective mystery, *Brown's Requiem* (1981), influenced by Raymond Chandler. He later abandoned the tradition of the loner private eye, preferring instead tales in which the enforcers of law and order become implicit in the corruption that pervades Los Angeles. His books have become increasingly experimental, using multiple narrators and blurring the boundaries between autobiography, fiction, and historical fact.

Ellroy first turned to the LA police novel with a trilogy – *Blood on the Moon*, *Because the Night* (both 1984), and *Suicide Hill* (1985). Following the success of the 'LA Quartet', he embarked on the more ambitious 'Underworld USA' trilogy, a blend of fiction and US history. The first instalment – *American Tabloid* (1995) – deftly interweaves public figures and characters from Ellroy's earlier novels, skilfully playing with long-standing conspiracy theories surrounding President Kennedy's assassination. This was followed by *The Cold Six Thousand* (2001) and *Blood's a Rover* (2009).

Ellroy's feverish, bloody narratives are fuelled in part by his own problematic childhood and history of youthful delinquency, alcoholism, and substance abuse, and in particular by the unsolved murder of his mother when he was a child. He has published two memoirs: *My Dark Places* (1996) and *The Hilliker Curse: My Pursuit of Women* (2010).

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