

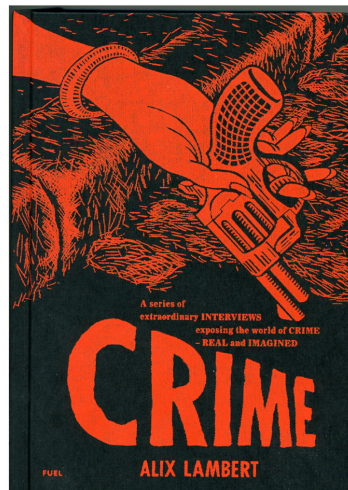
**FAQ 73**  
(8/18/08)

**73.1**

In **CRIME**, Alix Lambert merges her many talents(artist/photographer/journalist/documentarian)to create a truly remarkable work. Fifty (50) separate voices weighing in on the subject of **CRIME**. We hear from all of them. As fiction we listen to the authors and actors who write and imagine **CRIME**. As fact we hear from cops and victims who live and have suffered it. Then there are the voices of the **USUAL SUSPECTS**. Murderers, rapists, gang bangers. We listen as they describe their home, their universe.  
A fine piece of journalism-- **HIGHLY RECOMMENDED**.

Steve Hodel  
Los Angeles, California

***CRIME*- by Alix Lambert**  
**A series of extraordinary INTERVIEWS exposing the world of CRIME**  
**REAL and IMAGINED**



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Alix Lambert's interview of author, Steve Hodel, from CRIME pages 146-156:

## **He used her body as his canvas and his scalpel as his paintbrush.**

### STEVE HODEL

Steve Hodel was a homicide detective with the Los Angeles Police Department for nearly twenty-five years, until he set up Hodel Investigations in 1986. His book *Black Dahlia Avenger* (2003) examines his theory that his father was the real murderer in the infamous case of Elizabeth Short.

#### *First memories of crime*

I had heard a story of my father being arrested in 1949, but knew very little about it. The story went that he was charged with sexual intercourse with his daughter Tamar, my half-sister. Dad's side of the story was that she was a pathological liar and not to be believed. And he was acquitted. He left the country, he felt he had to move on because his reputation had been damaged. Mom kind of supported him, although she didn't take a strong position.

When I applied for the Los Angeles Police Department I was called in, unlike the rest of the applicants, for a personal interview. The Captain of Personnel said to me, 'I know all about you, I know your family, I'm not going to certify you for the Police Academy.' At first I was shocked and then it was like, 'Why is he blaming me for my father's crime of incest?' So, I responded, 'Are you talking about my father and the trial and stuff?' Of course, he probably wasn't. He was probably talking about the Dahlia, which I didn't have a clue about. That's when he looked at me and realises for the first time that I don't know what he's talking about. I made an impassioned plea and said, 'Judge me for myself.' He said, 'I'll certify you for the Academy, but it's a waste of time and taxpayers' money.'

#### *Discovering George Hodel's history after he died*

There were basically three triggers that got me going. After I received the phone call telling me that my father had died I flew to San Francisco. His wife, June, who was forty years his junior, was ready to commit suicide. I dealt with that, then I dealt with all the things you have to when a father passes. We were reviewing his life, by then he'd had eleven children by five different women.

June brings out this small album. We're going through it and there are the Man Ray pictures, and we're talking about how much he loved Man Ray. We're looking at pictures of my mother taken by Man Ray and dad too. Then I come to this photograph of this attractive dark-haired young woman with her eyes closed and her head bent forward. I said, 'Who's this?' She said, 'I don't know, somebody your father knew from a long time ago.' But it seemed so familiar. Somewhere the Black Dahlia comes to my mind. Even though I had been with the LAPD for twenty-four years, and in homicide eighteen years, I knew very little about the Black Dahlia case. All I knew was that it was a famous murder from the forties.

I started looking at old photographs, and to my mind that one picture particularly looks like the Black Dahlia. I find out her name's Elizabeth Short, and I start doing a little investigating. I discover she was surgically bisected. The cops back then knew that. This was skilled surgery. I knew that dad was a skilled surgeon, but I still didn't think that he was the suspect. Then there was a newspaper front page that says the suspect in the Black Dahlia case is going to turn himself in. It says, 'Turning myself in on Thursday January 29th. Had my fun at the police.' And it's in undisguised handwriting. It's my father's handwriting. I still said to myself, 'Well, he's not the suspect, why is he sending them the notes?' There must be some reason.

I then spent the next three years doing dozens of interviews and putting all of the pieces together. I was an alcoholic, like most homicide detectives. I quit drinking at the time I started the investigation. When I started getting into this I realised, 'I can't do this unless I quit drinking.' I've gained a hundred pounds, but it's been interesting because I am wired to pursue the truth. My God is truth. That's probably why I was as

successful as I was in LAPD. I had a pretty high solve rate. Most murders are crimes of passion. Those that aren't are usually unimaginative. I'm not an expert on serial killers, I don't go home and read these things, because I've been living them. But I do know, in my personal experience, that I have never come across anything even close to it.

#### Black Dahlia Avenger

When the book came out there was a lot of controversy, a lot of, 'It's a "Daddy Dearest" thing'. One of the problems I didn't have any clue I would come up against, is the history of the Black Dahlia as a myth. That has really been an eye-opener. Everybody knows that the Black Dahlia as a mythic story has been deeply wrapped around the psyche of Los Angeles. But I had no idea so many people had vested interests in so many ways. One of my favourite films is *Sunset Boulevard*. You're probably aware of the line in there where he goes to the New Year's Eve party and Jack Webb, who is playing the part of a screenwriter, introduces him to the crowd saying, 'You know, this is my friend, he's a screenwriter, uranium smuggler, and the Black Dahlia suspect.' And everybody laughs. Well this is 1949-50, which is just two years after, and already it's a kind of a joke. Then Ellroy's *The Black Dahlia* came out, which has nothing to do with the real crime...

I won't watch DePalma's film. I read the screenplay a couple of years ago and I thought, 'This is a disaster.' I thought that if they stick to the screenplay, they'll be in serious trouble. I don't read fiction. I find the truth far stranger than any fiction. I read Ellroy's book about a year into the investigation and realised that the only similarity is the fact that he uses her name and the location. So you've got these very strong forces out there that basically have the position: 'Don't mess with my myth.' I didn't realise I would be facing this kind of force.

#### George Hodel

Born in Los Angeles in 1907, he's identified as highly gifted at five or six and sent to Paris. He's there about a year until for unknown reasons he comes back. By age seven or eight he's a musical prodigy. He has one of the top piano teachers in Vernon Spencer and he's playing his own piano concerts at the Shrine

Auditorium at the age of nine. He goes on to public school and has the highest scores ever attained. At the age of fourteen he begins at the California Institute of Technology. He has an IQ of 186, one point over Einstein. At fourteen he has a liaison with one of the professor's wives at Cal Tech and she gets pregnant. Her marriage breaks up, she goes east, he follows her, says, 'I want to marry you.' She laughs at him, 'Oh my God George, you've ruined my life, this whole thing has been a terrible mistake. Get out of my life, I never want to see you again.'

He comes back broken-hearted. He gets a job as a cub crime reporter with the *LA Record*. He quickly advances, he's riding around with the vice squad. Of course, this is prohibition time, they're kicking in doors and he's writing tabloid stories about the vice busts. He then graduates to the big boys, and starts riding around on homicide call-outs with the LAPD. He's also double dating with John Huston who is a friend of his since they were teenagers. John is dating a woman by the name of Emilia and dad is dating a woman by the name of Dorothy. At some point in their double dating, John and Dorothy fall in love. They run off to Greenwich Village and get married. George and Emilia are kind of looking at each other like, 'I guess it's you and me.' She gets pregnant.

They go north and Dad starts pre-med at Berkeley, California. He does four years there and then he starts medical school at University of California, San Francisco. He graduates in 1936. During that period he is also having an affair with a different Dorothy. Dorothy gets pregnant and that's Tamar's mother. So he's got the two small children, the two women, and he's just graduating. He got an offer to go into public health in New Mexico. He takes off, goes to the Navajo and Hopi reservations, he's a surgeon at a Civilian Conservation Corps camp. Then he comes back to Los Angeles in the late thirties.

By this time the Dorothy who had married John Huston, they broke up. So Mom and George hook back together in the late thirties and my older brother Michael is born in 1939. I'm born in 1941. I was a twin. The twin died in a couple of weeks. Kelvin, my younger brother was born in 1942. Dad now quickly rises to the top of LA County health and becomes Senior Venereal Disease Control Officer for all of LA County. He buys this

incredible Frank Lloyd Wright Jr. house in Hollywood, which is this Mayan temple. It's like a huge Hollywood set. We all move into the Franklin house.

This begins a fascinating time of all these interesting people: Henry Miller, Man Ray and Juliet [Browner] are here – a very eclectic group. Everything is going swimmingly until October of 1949, when there's a knock at the door, and it's the LAPD, 'Dr Hodel, you are under arrest for incest.' Tamar is put into protective custody at juvenile hall. When he was arrested he was quoted in the paper saying, 'Everything is unclear, like a dream to me. I can't figure out whether someone is hypnotizing me or I am hypnotizing someone... If this is real, and I am really here, then these other things must have happened. I want to talk to my psychiatrist but I'm afraid to, I'm afraid he'll think something's wrong with me.'

We discover that there was this 'sex party' at the house in July of 1949. Two women in their twenties, another man called Fred Sexton, and Dad are all in the bedroom with Tamar. They give her a tumbler full of sherry and she drinks it. Fred has sex with her, and then Dad has sex with her. Dad gets Jerry Geisler who was the Johnny Cochran of his day, as his criminal defense lawyer. They have a three week trial where Jerry Geisler gets twelve witnesses to testify that: 'Well, don't really believe Tamar because this fourteen-year-old has an inclination to lie; she said that maybe there were sex acts before.' Well actually there *were*, when she was eleven. Those were true allegations. He parades all of these witnesses and, in very much of an OJ verdict, after forty-five minutes the jury comes back not-guilty. Here's this distinguished, debonair doctor who gets up and says, 'Please don't blame my daughter, she's disturbed.' Case over.

Of course, it wasn't until we got the secret files open that I discover the real reason he left the country, that they were about to arrest him for the Black Dahlia. He was the prime suspect all along. Eighteen detectives from the LAPD and the District Attorney's Office had been assigned around the clock for six weeks' surveillance. In modern years, I never had a case with that kind of manpower on it. They've got a thousand hours of recording, reduced down to 146 pages. We have all of these very damning statements from my dad: 'Suppose I did kill the

Black Dahlia? They can't prove it now, my secretary is dead.'

In 1945 they had investigated the suspicious death of his secretary, who overdosed. They felt that it was a forced overdose but there wasn't enough evidence to prove it. She could have connected him to Elizabeth Short.

#### *The LAPD and the Black Dahlia case*

The first thing you've got to realise is that LA in 1950 was a real live *L.A. Confidential*. Half the department was on the take. They were crossing over to becoming good guys, trying to get rid of all the corruption. Now they've got George Hodel on tape basically admitting to being the Black Dahlia murderer. As I see it they had a real problem, because a couple of detectives from the gangster squad had kind of given him a clean slate in 1947. They said, 'We checked him out, he's fine.' By 1950 I think what happened was that a couple of detectives from Internal Affairs said, 'We've got a problem here, a couple of gangster squad detectives know this guy Dr George Hodel, who knew Elizabeth Short, and they gave him a clean bill of health. We've got some damning statements from the tape recordings, but it's unlikely we'll ever find him because he's split. Even if we do, we're not sure we can extradite him.'

As I see it, they made a management decision. They said, 'OK, we could make this public, which will open up the coffers to lawsuits and ruin our reputation...' You know, sixty-eight high-ranking officers were fired just six years earlier, there was a big scandal. So they say, 'We want to turn things around and make this a clean department. Maybe the best thing to do is just to seal it off, shut it down, and forget about it.'

#### *Becoming a cop*

When I was nineteen years old my new wife Kiyo said, 'Why don't you join the police department?' I had been through some difficult times, joined the Navy, came out and got married. I said, 'What does a cop do? He writes tickets – I don't want to do that. And, oh yeah – he's Jack Webb on *Dragnet* – that's kind of cool.' My first real introduction to crime was in the streets of Los Angeles at age twenty-one as a rookie cop. Two years later I'm in the midst of the Watts riots. I was terrified, for the first time

I realised: damn, this is dangerous work, you know, somebody could get killed doing this. We had real problems back then, still do. I just kind of got sucked into it and started working crime.

*Dragnet* was a big factor to a lot of guys like me who just got out of the military, twenty-one, looking for a job, I was right out of central casting, six foot two, a hundred and seventy pounds, military service – the next thing I know I was wearing a badge and I had a gun. Most cops dream from childhood that they want to become a cop. I never put one thought into becoming a cop. My background, my family, I was like the black sheep. It was a different time. The sixties was revolution, there was a spirit of rebellion. Had I not become a cop, I'd have probably become an anarchist.

#### *Kiyo's connection to George Hodel*

After three years of a rather tumultuous relationship that ended in me finding Kiyo in the arms of another man, I split. Keep in mind I am married to a woman who I think is twenty-eight but is actually forty-one, and I am eighteen going on fifteen. I moved out and went to my mother's. I never had contact with Kiyo again.

Kiyo had really hammered home, 'You're not to contact any family members, you're not to let them know we're married.' I never quite knew why. I told Mom the story, and then she told me that my father and Kiyo had been lovers. Back in 1941-42 they had helped Kiyo, who was afraid of being picked up and sent to one of the Japanese camps. She was an eighteen-year-old when my father had an affair with her. He dumped her, moved on to the next woman, and she was heartbroken. I think that moment as I describe it in the book, of running into him at the Biltmore Hotel was her moment of triumph. 'I've married your son, and not only that but I've talked him into becoming an LA cop.' That this was her moment of truth. How much did she know? We'll never know. She's dead now.

Dad was this larger than life renaissance man. It didn't surprise me too much that he would have an affair with a young and beautiful woman. I knew he had a strong sex drive, and was very suave and debonair. Every woman who came in contact with him fell in love with him.

#### *George Hodel's connection to the surrealists*

In Dad's heart of hearts he was a surrealist. He was a scientist and a physician but he really wanted to be an artist. He had some one-man shows as a photographer, but no real success. So, when he hooked up with Juliet and Man Ray in the forties, there was a lot of talk about surrealism. I believe he became very much enamoured and in awe of Man Ray, and this was all part of his 'masterpiece'.

He actually used her [Elizabeth Short's] body as his canvas, and his scalpel as his paintbrush. He took two of Man Ray's more famous works as inspiration. First *The Minotaur*, a photograph that Man Ray did in the mid-thirties, of a nude woman bisected at the waist, her body posed, arms above her head. I started investigating the crime scene – it was quite unusual in the sense that the first thing you see is posing. Posing is in less than one per cent of all crimes. So it was obvious the body wasn't just dumped there. Not only that, but it had been washed clean. You have this white body, bloodless, perfectly surgically bisected at the waist, with the arms posed above the head in the exact manner of Man Ray's photograph *The Minotaur*. There's a geometrical section cut out of the thigh. It's clear that he was using a scalpel, because it's a very deep, sharp cut. You see this segmentation in a lot of surrealist work. He took one of the earrings and placed it inside her left ear. Then he takes lipstick and he puts it on very thick around the lips. That was probably done before the bisection. It resembles Man Ray's *The Lovers* photograph. Then he takes a scalpel and he cuts her from ear to ear. It's not a jagged cut, it's not a laceration.

Clearly it's an homage in some way to Man Ray. In a little bit of research I discover the story of the *L'Inconnue de la Seine*, which was very popular in the thirties and forties in Paris. She was a beautiful young woman whose body was found in the river Seine. Some say it was murder and some say it was suicide. Anyway, they did a death mask of her face and her head is forward and her eyes are closed. This was in many, many artists' homes, it was a very popular piece. In 1945 I discover that Man Ray took photographs of this *L'Inconnue de la Seine*. Again, it's a picture of a woman with her eyes closed. I think this may have been an inspiration for Dad too. Man Ray's in Hollywood, he's



in close association with Dad. You see a lot of photographs of the surrealists and they're posing with their eyes closed. And of course, all of this goes with their belief that the dream state is equal to the waking state. In their manifesto itself is André Breton's quote, 'The mind of the man who dreams is fully satisfied by what happens to him. The agonising question of possibility is no longer pertinent. Kill, fly faster, love to your heart's content... I believe in the future resolution of these two states, dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a *surreality*, if one may so speak.' I think that whenever you have that stratospheric intelligence Dad had, you're going to have problems. They just put things together differently than perhaps you and I. A lot of my critics have accused me of attacking surrealists. That's not the case at all. I'm looking at it as a criminal investigator. I'm not an expert in regards to the Marquis de Sade. Man Ray's take on him – he calls him one of the freest thinkers he's ever known. Man Ray isn't supporting his actions, he's not saying, 'Let's go out and rape and plunder and torture women.' But he's defending Sade's right to state his beliefs. Dad, on the other hand, crosses over the line and yes, he admires Sade for his freedom of thought, but it's *also* the actions. I think that clearly Dad was a misogynist of the first order. He was a classical sadist. Elizabeth Short was probably tortured for three or four hours. There were cigarette burns to the back, cuts to the vagina, blows to the head. That's what made him the monster that he was.

I do believe that he was a victim of incest, probably with his mother. Generally there is that cycle of re-offending. He names his daughter Tamar after Robinson Jeffers' poem *Tamar*, which deals with incest. He's preordained it.

His parents indulged him, they treated him like he was a king. All of these things came together in this perfect storm of psychosis where he's given free run. When you think back at what his situation was, he was fourteen years old, he's in college, all of his classmates are much older, he's kind of a joke. Because of his brilliance I suspect all of those years leading up to that he was a misfit, an outsider. He's intellectually a man of thirty, and emotionally he's twelve. That's gotta create some problems. ●