

## Book Review

## Legal, literary, living wax museum

*AMERICAN GROTESQUE*, by James Kirkwood (Simon and Shuster, \$11.95)

RICHARD HILL

The ultimate judicial mindfuck: Imagine, if you can, the Manson trial conducted in New Orleans and prosecuted by Jim Garrison. It wasn't,

had been responsible for much of New Orleans' French Quarter renovation and who had run the International Trade Mart.

The alleged co-conspirators: David Ferrie, a preposterous dude who pasted red hair on his head and above his eyes and spent a lot of time with

the basis for Garrison's original charge against Shaw. "I was just huffin' and puffin,'" he said. "I'd like to be famous too — other than as a perjurer."

Charles I. Spiesel, my favorite. Spiesel came volunterily from New York to testify that he'd attended a party and seen Oswald, Ferrie, and Shaw together. On cross-examination, he stated that police had been hypnotizing him in order to interfere with his sex life, indeed, that some fifty or sixty people had hypnotized him against his will. If there ever had been such a party, Spiesel belonged there, along with the doormouse and the Mad Hatter.

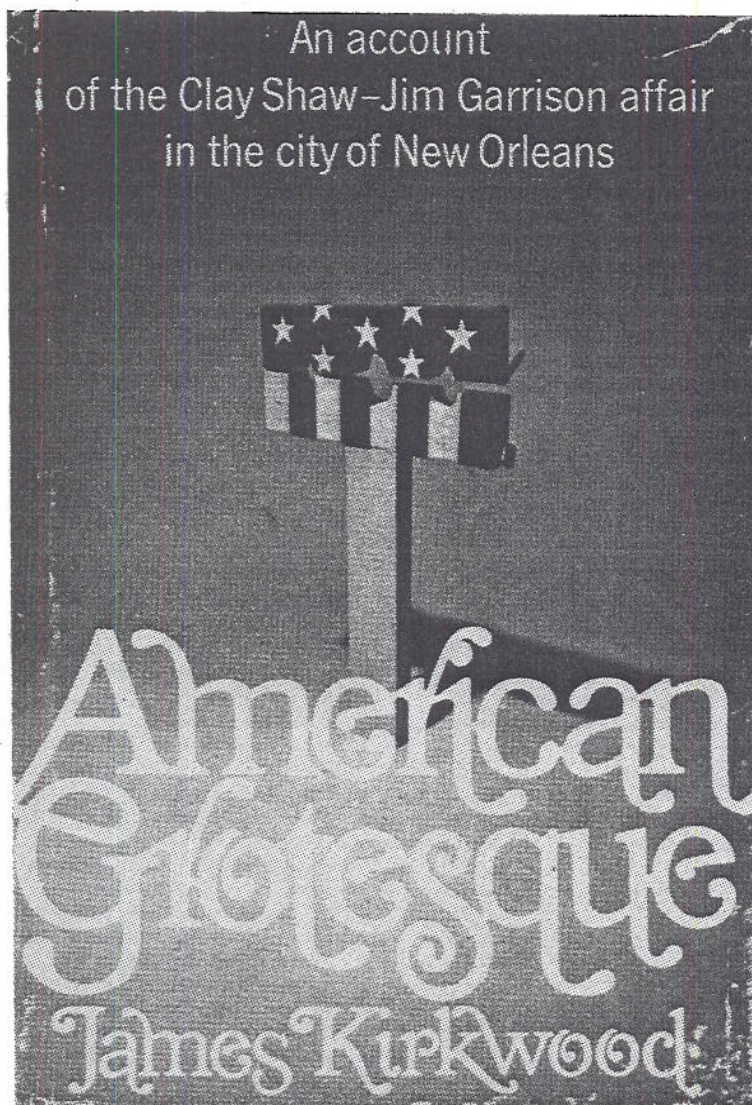
There were stronger witnesses, like the mailman who said he'd delivered mail to Clem Bertrand at Clay Shaw's address. Later he said he'd delivered other mail to names the defense invented.

A couple named Tadin claimed they'd seen Shaw with Ferrie at the airport where Ferrie worked. They stuck by their testimony and remained the strongest link between Shaw and Ferrie, Bundy's testimony seemed discredited, and Russo hinted strongly to several reporters that he'd lied.

The judge, Edward A. Haggerty, Jr. Haggerty stayed on the wagon during the trial, was arrested by Garrison in a vice raid after the jury had cleared Shaw.

Garrison's behavior is material for another book. He wrote his own book, *Heritage of Stone*, on the subject. He has his adherents, among them Mark Lane and Mort Sahl. And he had his theory — or theories. As I understand the latest version, he discredits the Warren Report (So do a lot of people) and believes that Shaw, Ferrie and Oswald were CIA agents or agents of some other secret government agency employed by the military-industrial complex (not so easy to swallow) to kill Kennedy. If any of this is true, he failed to prove it; moreover, he employed what appear to be some of the most reckless and ruthless tactics in judicial history to prosecute — or persecute — Shaw.

Why Shaw? It might have been more personal than political. Garrison was accused after the trial of molesting a young boy in the New Orleans Athletic Club. Garrison was a married man with a political career to protect from scandal, while Shaw moved comfortably through various elements of New Orleans society. Both



of course, but Clay Shaw's conspiracy trial was, and novelist James Kirkwood's account of it reflects the range and degree of its insanity. It could only have happened in Louisiana, the state which brought you Huey Long; Earl K. Long, a former governor who, when committed to the state asylum, fired the staff and walked out; Jimmy Davis, who was elected governor on a platform of singing "You Are My Sunshine"; Hadacol; Annie Christmas — 6'8", 250 pounds with a nicely trimmed moustache — who, when she wasn't kicking the shit out of river men, balled them in her floating brothel; Marie Laveau, the voodoo queen; Rober Lovin; and other wonders.

It's hard to believe it *did* happen; Kirkwood's amazement and horror are evident throughout this long, literary, living wax museum. Indeed it seems to have affected his style — sometimes as tangled and legalistic as the lawyers', other times almost chatty, the way people sometimes talk when they're afraid. This had to be a bitch to write. Nobody could have done it without sharing Kirkwood's fascination and outrage at the circus he witnessed.

The charge: that Clay Shaw, alias Clay Bertrand, alias Clem Bertrand, conspired with David Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald to assassinate John F. Kennedy.

The defendant: Clay Shaw, a gay gentleman of considerable substance, reputation, and sophistication who

young boys and anti-Castro Cubans; Lee Harvey Oswald, whose pro-Castro sentiments would seem to make him an unlikely friend of Ferrie. Ferrie died, apparently of natural causes, before Shaw's arrest. Oswald was already dead at the hands of Jack Ruby. This opened the way for Jim Garrison's other witnesses, than whom a stranger group was probably never assembled.

Perry Russo, Garrison's principal witness, claimed he'd heard Oswald and a man named Clem Bertrand plotting to kill Kennedy during a party at David Ferrie's house. He testified, with some of the most mind-boggling circumlocution ever recorded, that Clay Shaw was that man. He had not mentioned Shaw at first, only that he'd known Ferrie. The Shaw testimony came after several long sessions with Garrison. Later he implied to several reporters that he'd lied, said "What would I say to Clay Shaw . . . What would Judas Iscariot say to Jesus Christ?"

Vernon Bundy testified that he saw Shaw give Oswald a bundle of something on the shore of Lake Ponchartrain, while he was cooking his drugs for a fix. He was released from prison to testify; some of his cellmates claimed they'd been offered the same reward for the right testimony.

Dean Andrews. Attorney Andrews claimed a man named Clem Bertrand had called him to ask him to defend Lee Harvey Oswald. Later he repudiated his testimony, which was

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gigantic men, both respected in their community, one relatively free and the other pinned by the public eye and restricted by his own ambition. Along comes Dean Andrews with his "huffin" about a phone call from Clem Bertrand. Clem Bertrand might be that goddamn Clay Shaw. Garrison starts to put the pieces together, except they're not really pieces and they never really fit. Soon it's gone too far to stop. This isn't Kirkwood's theory or mine. It's New Orleans street talk, nothing more, but it's as sensible as the other recipes for this witch's brew.

Shaw is suing Garrison for \$5 million in damages. After the jury cleared Shaw of conspiracy, Garrison indicted him for perjury. Shaw has asked for an injunction against further harassment.

Confused? Everybody is, except possibly those who know what really happened and aren't telling. Frightened? Wait until you've read this book.

What came down in New Orleans should frighten us all. In a trial concerning no less matter than the assassination of a president, we saw justice perverted and used for personal advancement, if not for personal revenge. We saw the courtroom crowded with more loonytunes

characters, than we'll probably ever see in a courtroom again. Though Shaw survived, he spent more than four years defending himself against charges which were virtually unsubstantiated in the first place.

Enough. Don't spend the \$11.95 unless you're really interested. Get it from the library or wait for it in paper, which should be soon. Visit this wax museum, if you're ready for that kind of heavy trip.