

LITERARY TOUGH GUYS

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“As for the War of God and the Devil . . .”

Norman Mailer, Letter to J. Michael Lennon,
Selected Letters of Norman Mailer (p. 427)

“The Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light, might
close after all, and all be lost, taken back into the darkness

Thomas Pynchon, *Inherent Vice* (p. 254)

CRITICAL REACTION TO NORMAN MAILER’S *Tough Guys Don’t Dance* was, to quote Robert Merrill, “extremely hostile” (161). Indeed, J. Michael Lennon’s “average score” for reviewer responses to *Tough Guys* was “the lowest for any Mailer book.”¹ Merrill partly attributes this response to the crime-novel “form” of the book (161).

Robert Merrill goes far toward rebutting the negative reaction to *Tough Guys* by arguing that the work compares favorably with much praised examples of the hardboiled mystery genre. Merrill argues for *Tough Guys*’ effectiveness as a mystery, good use of a tough investigator protagonist, engaging struggle with a corrupt society, affinities with *film noir*’s pessimism, use of *film noir*’s *femme fatale* as lure and scapegoat, and embodiment of “themes less successfully developed in earlier novels” (Mailer’s *An American Dream*, in particular). However, although Merrill’s treatment of *Tough Guys* is effective on the novel’s merits as a mystery solved, an investigator’s quest pursued and, to an extent, investigator’s idealist struggles and muckraking enacted vis-à-vis a corrupt world, it is thin on *Tough Guys* qualities as noir narrative and as expression of the thematic Mailer.² Moreover, Merrill is largely silent on the caché of the hardboiled/noir genre and on the literary style of *Tough Guys* and the hardboiled/noir more generally.

Here I mainly extend Merrill’s generally positive assessment of *Tough*

Guys in ways just suggested. However, I maintain a check on easy affirmation by recurrently referring to negative criticisms of *Tough Guys* in Denis Donoghue's 1984 review for the *Sunday New York Times Book Review*. These criticisms, which address *Tough Guys* style, themes and characterization, are well addressed as parallel foci of my genre-centered discussion. Since Donoghue's treatments of style, themes and characterization are much entwined, these three foci are mostly addressed toward the end of this paper when they are most effectively addressed together.

On the genre's caché, suffice it to say that hardboiled/noir crime genre authors Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, David Goodis, Elmore Leonard, Ross MacDonald and, under the rubric of "American noir" and American "woman crime writers," individual works of James M. Cain, Kenneth Fearing, Cornell Woolrich, Dorothy B. Hughes, Patricia Highsmith, and others, have been included in the Library of America. Hammett, Chandler, and Cain frequent the pages of such literary reference volumes as the *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature* about as invariably, if not with such long entries, as do Faulkner, Mailer and Pynchon.

Readers wishing some acquaintance, or re-acquaintance, with the plots of *Tough Guys*³ and *Inherent Vice*⁴ before turning to this paper's analysis of these works can find assistance by turning to the notes just signaled.

On style, to which I turn first, two ostensibly contrasting but acceptably combined literary styles dominate hardboiled/noir. One is distinguished by the use of elaborate metaphor and simile. The other is marked by a terse behavioral objectivism free of any obtrusive authorial presence. True "objective" style is qualified by pessimistic and ironic tone. However, pessimism and ironic wit mark the exposition as well as dialogue of the more authorially intrusive metaphoric style and may be regarded as constants of the hardboiled/noir genre.⁵

Tough Guys mixes use of the two narrative hallmarks of hardboiled/noir, but it draws more on a Hammett-like tersely objective style than it does on elaborate metaphor and simile or witty dialogue. (*Inherent Vice*, as we'll see has a different mix of the same two types of style.)

Some hint of *Tough Guys*' tersely muscular style can be found in its exposition of setting, and character. Take the first line or two of each of the book's first three expository paragraphs: "At Dawn if it was low tide on the flats, I would awaken to the chatter of birds" (3). "In fact I was awakening alone in bed on the twenty-fourth dear morning after my wife had de-

camped" (3). "Little came back to me of what I did after I got out of bed" (3). These are lines not only quite free of metaphor and simile and objective in their reference to things and events such as "low tide on the flats," a "twenty-fourth" morning and "getting out of bed." As Marlowe's use of first person narrator may incline them, these lines are subjective in their reference to things and events as experiences into a narrator protagonist's consciousness and not just a narrator's telling. For example, the first two lines of observation are shaded by the lens of awakening. Moreover these lines quickly segue into more subjective lines. For example the "At dawn" sentence is followed by "On a bad morning, I used to feel as if I had died and the birds were feeding on my heart." In these lines, "objectivity" is qualified by *verstehen*, aided by such simile as "as if I had died and the birds were feeding on my heart." The lines are quite a ways from the pure objectivity of Hammett opening of *The Maltese Falcon* with the following sentences. "Sam Spade was long and bony, his chin a jutting V under the more flexible v of his mouth His nostrils curved to make another v. His yellow grey eyes were horizontal" (3).

Mailer does offer more purely objective descriptions like this one late in the book when Regency, facing defeat from Madden and Dougy and experiencing the onset of a stroke, "made gurgling sounds in his throat. His mouth was distended at the corners" (223). However, he also goes fully subjective with such self-expressions by the protagonist narrator as "The foul plenitude of losing a wife was embracing me" or such strong intrusions of authorial voice into the objective world as "on many a shortening November afternoon you could have taken a bowling ball and rolled it down the long narrow one-way lane of our main street (a true New England Alley) without striking a pedestrian or a car" (6) or this description of suppressed tension within Regency so strong that, "If he had had a tail, it would be have been whipping the rungs" (211). Mailer's uses of "Bowling ball" and "tail" help exemplify his skill with metaphor.

Compared to Hamlett's dialogue, *Tough Guys'* dialogue is often present with more authorial intrusion than a minimal "he said/she said" framing. Take these first lines of dialogue from Jessica Ponds: "'Miss,' she told the waitress, 'give another Chivvies, lots of diamonds.' That was her word for ice, ha, ha." Or take this first line from Tim Madden's Dad Dougy, "'Hello, Tim?' 'Well, Dougy,' I said. 'Let us speak of the devil.' 'Yeah,' he said. That told me how hung over he was."

As for witty dialogue, there is a wealth of this in *The Maltese Falcon*

beyond what can be gleaned from *Tough Guys*. Take for example the line “The cheaper the crook, the gaudier the patter” (120). Or take for example the following repartee.

Cairo: ‘You always have a very smooth explanation ready’.

Sam Spade: ‘What do you want me to do, learn to stutter?’ (96)

What Mailer best offers in the way of wit is less often outright comedy than amusing acuity, language and observations that provide the pleasures of what Amis, in a review of *Oswald’s Tale*, called “The performance of an author relishing the force and reach of his own acuity.” *Tough Guys* is rich in such amusingly clever metaphors as that Main Street “bowling” lane (6) and such nice diction as “decamped” (3).

Inherent Vice, to add some perspective, also mixes the metaphorically elaborate variants hardboiled/noir style with the terse. However, it leans sharply toward the ornate. It also is richer than *Tough Guys* in comic wit. It is hard to beat Chandler on metaphoric witticism. Take, for example, *Farewell, My Lovely’s* “Inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food” (4) and “A blonde to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained-glass window” (74). However, Pynchon’s display of metaphoric invention in *Inherent Vice* is extravagant, especially rich when trafficking in trademarks of Gordita Beach, hippie surfer and the greater LA. Culture. Take, for example, “what was walking on water, if it wasn’t Bible talk for surfing?” (99). Or take this pair of sentences: “What goes around may come around, but it never ends up exactly the same place, you ever notice? Like a record on a turntable, all it takes is one groove’s difference and the universe can be on into a whole ‘nother song” (334). And “You can only cruise the boulevards of regret so far, and then you’ve got to get back up onto the freeway again”(40).

Witty repartee abounds, much of it ridicule of hippie culture with Doc as the loser. For example, at one point an FBI agent whom Pynchon investigator Doc Spotello has sought to befriend with a “Sure, but aren’t we all in the same business?” fires back with “no need to be insulting” (74). On another, Bigfoot, barges in on Doc saying, “I apologize if I interrupted some exceptionally demanding hippie task like trying to remember where the glue is on the zig-zag paper” (202). On a third, when Doc asks his prospective Vegas limo driver “You got time to run me up to North Vegas later tonight?” the driver responds with “”No prob-limo, as they say in my business” (233).

Witty terms abound like “Wavos” (a Gordita breakfast spot), Bigfoot’s reference to hippie revelations like “hippiphanyes” (202) and such inventive plays on Gordita TV viewing as “Godzillian Island” (45) abound as well.

Although *Tough Guys* is lean on elaborate metaphors and laugh-out-loud wit, it is rich in acute diction and metaphors that enliven description. However, if *Tough Guys*’ use of a metaphorically enriched variant of terse hard-boiled style seems to some to deliver what Merrill calls a strong “narrative drive” (164), to others Mailer’s moments of stylistic flamboyance may seem a distraction. For Denis Donoghue, Mailer lets “his obsessions dominate the narrative, to the extent of confounding main roads with side issues, highways with detours” (32). Indeed, as we shall consider in a little detail further down, Donoghue suggests that grandiloquence of style, thematic OCD and a insubstantially drawn Madden are all sides of a single problem. When protagonist narrator Madden says, “I preferred to molder in the last suppurations of cowardice” instead of saying, “I couldn’t face it” Donoghue suggests that the reader experiences a style that not only distracts because the phrasing is obtrusively idiosyncratic but that also rings false by doing less to evoke a convincing Madden than an irritating side of Mailer (32)—a suggestion to which I skeptically return.

On the investigator as a courageous do-gooder in a corrupt world, affinities between *Tough Guys* and hardboiled/noir genre certainly can be found. However, though Madden’s antagonists are less tokens of class, policy and social groups than they are the antagonists of many hardboiled/noir novels. The central dramatic encounters of *Tough Guys*—in particular those between Madden and Wardley and Madden and Regency—do compare nicely to those between Spade and the fat Man and Spade and Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* as they do to many of the dramatic pairings of Chandler’s fictions. In *Tough Guys* and *The Maltese Falcon* protagonists certainly do battle with a corrupt world. However, Madden’s world is principally marred—“corrupted,” if you will—by a sexual unruliness and economic venality that engender jealousies and revenge. Moreover, Madden is intricately entangled with his corrupt antagonists.

However, Madden’s antagonists, bear little relation to the corrupt urban machines and big-money exploiters—all conventional mucking targets of hardboiled/noir investigators from *Red Harvest* to *Chinatown*. True, overbearingly macho police chief antagonist Regency, who believes Madden to have permanently harmed wife (and Madden ex-wife) Madeleine, is a DEA

as well as local law enforcement officer; insecure bisexual antagonist Pang-born, whom Madden sexually humiliates, is wealthy and entangled in real estate schemes involving Patty Lareine and Wardley; and the insecure bisexual antagonist Wardley, who resents Madden's past with Patty Lareine, is wealthy as well (wealthy enough to hire thugs Spider Nissen and his friend Stoodie). Still, the evils that threaten characters in Mailer's tale are more rooted in personal psychology and metaphysical forces than elite or class entitlements. These threatening forces do not much resemble the kinds of sociological and cultural forces of criminal organization and upper class that dominate the world of capital-labor struggle and gang wars foregrounded in Hammett's *Red Harvest*—or such large scale, organized, criminal-corporate conspiracies as *Inherent Vice*'s Golden Fang.

There is no social structure of oppression in Mailer's Provincetown to compare with the interlocking facets of the LAPD and FBI and interlocking drug dealing, counterfeiting and quasi-psychiatric and dental facets of the Golden Fang, nothing any sociologically grander than some intimidated Regency-and-DEA-tied drug dealing network. *Tough Guys* contains nothing like the large war-machine perceptions of *The Naked and the Dead*, *The Armies of the Night* and *Why Are We in Vietnam?*, much less the societal scope of Mailer's sociological vision in "Time Machine" portions of *The Naked and the Dead* or the socially sprawling chorus of voices in *The Executioner's Song*. If *Inherent Vice*'s muckraking targets compare in extent with those of the political-machine and capital-labor-gangland landscape of Hammett's *Red Harvest*'s mining-town Colorado, *Tough Guys*' sociologically greedy and sexually unruly players evoke the San Francisco of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* than the Colorado of *Red Harvest*, indeed evoke not conventional muckraking targets at all.

The Mailerian Manichean metaphysic, to which we shall soon turn, lacks even the implicitly sociological vision that one can reasonably read into the individualized amorality of *Falcon*'s San Francisco.⁶ Still, *Tough Guys*' interpersonal dramatics are strong. Indeed, the dramatic tensions between Madden and Wardley and Madden and Regency are as powerful as those between Spade and the fat Man and Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*. Pynchon's corrupt LA world is rich in explicit, multi-layered social context, (Mob, LAPD, partisan), while Mailer's Cape Cod oppressors are personalized ones that are largely free of any more sociological context than region (Patty Laraine's South, Wardley's New England), and occupation (Re-

gency as cop, Pangborn as realtor) and money (Pangborn and Wardley as affluent).

As far more a make righter of personal than societal wrongs, and no very chivalrous do-gooder at that, Madden lacks the appeals of a modern Knight Errant like Marlowe. However, some will admire the heroism of sorts with which he tackles his messes largely of his own making.

Like Marlow and Spade before them, Madden and Spotello are tough guys. Especially when push comes to shove. (Both, especially Doc, are poor matches to Marlow and Spade for the tough guy patter.)

As for *noir* narrative, Robert Krutnik's *In a Lonely Street* provides a cogent delineation of noir narrative for *films noirs* that also nicely extends to novelistic *noir* narrative.⁷ Krutnik builds on Birmingham School studies of masculinity identity and neo-Freudian feminist film criticism to sketch out key aspects of noir protagonists and themes, plus key types of noir narrative structures. He starts out with a core thematic conceptualization of noir as a narrative of "enigmas and anxieties of masculinity" and "male cultural authority" (75) and a structural focus on a "tough guy thriller" (84) genre that comes in three subgenres, the "Tough Investigative Thriller" (in which an investigator resolves threats to his sense of control), the "Criminal-Adventure Thriller" (in which a *femme fatale* lures a male into a dangerous criminal exercise), and the "Male Suspense Adventure," in which the protagonist find himself fleeing threats from criminals and police alike (84). The "Tough Investigative Thriller" dovetails with my hardboiled/noir.

Krutnik's focus on "enigmas and anxieties of masculinity" can be broken down into foci on three elements. One is *Oedipal insecurity*, for example, fears related to poor resolution of the Oedipal complex and accompanying homosexuality and/or homophobia. This refers more to implied homophobia and latent homosexuality than to explicit manifestation of either (e.g., to the implied homophobia of Sam Spades' abusive disregard for the Fat Man's gay stooges Joel Cairo and Wilmer Cook and of Philip Marlowe's strong feelings for *The Long Goodbye* cad Terry Lenox). A second is *conformist social psychological anxiety* (e.g., about masculine identity before a conformist and domineer tough guy male world as well as persons shaped by such worlds. (Recall Sam Spade's far greater concern for respect from peer professionals than for the life of his precious" Brigid O'Shaughnessy; and recall Philip Marlowe's relentless tough guy patter). A third criterion is what I'll term, *Femme fatalism*—social psychological anxiety about emas-

culation by a beloved *femme fatale* (e.g., by say *Falcon's* O'Shaughnessy or *Double Indemnity's* Phyllis Dietrich, who each plays her tale's male protagonist for a patsy).⁸

Tough Guys and *Inherent Vice* differ more sharply on the noir narrative criteria than on hardboiled "corrupt world" criterion. Spotello like Madden does confront threats to his life and limb to which he, like Madden, frenetically responds with investigative and defensive ploys. Yet any comparative expectations about Madden and Doc's masculine security that one might base on Madden's boxing and cocksmanly background and Doc's flower child facet are belied by the novels. Non-hippie folks wisecrack about Spotello's masculinity; but their jests, though they may ruffle Doc's feelings, never cut very deep nor deny him a decent retort. In contrast, Madden is plagued by deep anxiety about his masculinity. Indeed, he reports one exchange with Regency that "Homosexuality was sitting as palpably between Regency and me as the sweat you breathe when violence is next to two people. (89). He tells Dad Doug, "Hey Dougy. . . . You think I feel like a man most of the time. I don't" (156). He writes of his feelings about efforts to scale the Provincetown Monument, "I had some idea of what could be at the core it" for "years later . . . I came across a reference Freud had made to what was 'doubtless, an unruly attack of homosexual panic in myself' and "I was suddenly I was overcome with thinking of the night I tried to scale the monument" (62). Yes, for Madden, anxiety to the point of panic, if not worse, is revealed by his encounters with the Monument. "I must climb it. If I did not make the attempt, something worse than panic would befall me" (82).

Tough Guys' manifestations of masculine anxiety are consistent with Krutnik's view of noir as a drama of masculine anxiety complete with Oedipal complications. Yet, as Hammett wrote in an objective style in a pre-Kinsey era, it is not clear that the homophobia implied by Sam Spade's gratuitous cruelty toward Joel Cairo and Wilmer Cook should be taken less seriously than what Mailer wrote of "homosexuality" and "panic" in the 1984 *Tough Guys*. Indeed, it is not clear whether Madden is a man who would score high (for homosexuality) on the Kinsey scale or less unusual fellow simply exposed by Mailer's post Stonewall candor. Perhaps Madden's anxiety results largely from tensions that would unsettle most men under the sway of the daunting standard of masculinity that Madden has adopted from hyper-masculine Dad Dougy. Moreover, the masculine anxieties of Madden

in *Tough Guys* are consistent not only with Krutnik's analysis. They also follow in the literary tradition of sexual tension between Sam Spade and Fat Man and crew in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* and Philip Marlowe and Terry Lenox in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, or, for that matter, within James M. Cain's pairings of insurance sales rep Walter Neff and beloved insurance investigator and father figure Barton Keyes in *Double Indemnity* or of insecure tenor Damon Vincente and dominating opera impresario Charles Winthrop in *Serenade*.

On the metaphysics/poetics of Mailer and Pynchon, I'll start with brief introductions to how I use "metaphysics/poetics" with regard to Mailer and Pynchon. For Mailer's case, I stipulatively define what I dub the Manichean Mailer. I principally draw upon Mailer's *On God* (Chapter 2). This metaphysics/poetics, as phrased here, consists of (1) a world much shaped by both God and the Devil; (2) a God and Devil "who are often present in our actions" (15) and by implication the actions of others; (3) a God who does not necessarily triumph over the Devil (18, 34); and, finally, (4) courage as supreme human virtue (28).

For Pynchon's case, I draw on Dwight Eddins' *The Gnostic Pynchon* (1990) to delineate an eponymous "Gnostic Pynchon." This I distill into three characteristics: (1) the immediate world created not by a supreme omniscient, omnipresent and benevolent God but instead by an inferior Demiurge who creates and rules out of malevolence and ignorance, (2) human access to the *pneuma*, a divine spark reflecting the absent supreme and providing humans with some knowledge (*gnosis*) of the alienated and subjugated human situation as well as (3) powers for somewhat transcending that alienation and subjugation.

These authorial metaphysics and poetics share a stress on conflicting forces of good and evil, God and the Devil. In *Tough Guys* these are take the form of conflicting personalized forces such as self and antagonist (Madden versus Regency or Wardley), the strengthening and emasculating (manly Dougy and nurturing Madelaine versus hostile Wardley and overbearing Regency; courage and timidity), love and hate (Madeleine and Regency). By contrast, in *the Gnostic Pynchon*, personal forces like local cop and DEA agent Bigfoot Bjornsen and Cop Assassin Adrian Prussia; realtor tycoon Mickey Wolfmann and Drug Lord and South Bay Millionaire, Crocker Fenway; President Nixon, Governor Reagan and Coy Harlengin; and a large hippie ensemble and are all synecdoche for such large social and cultural forces as

police authorities, big money capital, GOP conservatism, and the good people of Gordita. In short, *Tough Guys*' Mailer's metaphysics and poetics, like the novel's social world more generally, stresses a foreground of strong characters that virtually eclipses sociological context.

In summary, Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance*, like Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*, fits the bill as a novel by a major literary figure that excels in the practice of an oftentimes demeaned genre that also carries some literary clout. Like *Inherent Voice*, *Tough Guys* utilizes criteria of hardboiled/noir genre in question and uses them well. Its protagonist-narrator is a reasonably successful, if amateur, sleuth who in general mystery story style solves the proverbial "Who done it?" and who, in hardboiled/noir style also deciphers enigmas and resolves challenges confronting his masculine identity. Protagonist-narrator Madden's tale is told in a forceful style that combines the description terseness of the Hammett of *The Maltese Falcon* with moments of Chandler's metaphoric flair. It also gains shape and force, as well as continuity with much of the rest of Mailer's *oeuvre*, as an expression of Mailer's metaphysics/poetics of conflicting spiritual forces. The hardboiled/noir genre's capacity to accommodate authors' deepest metaphysical and poetic concerns certainly is not unique to Mailer's *Tough Guys*, for we see a parallel accommodation of genre and literary giant in Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice*.⁹

This said, it is good to take a step beyond the consideration of what *Tough Guys Don't Dance* accomplishes within the hardboiled/noir genre alone. On characterization, Merrill writes, that Mailer's "characters such as Wardley, Regency and especially Dougy testify to Mailer's desire to create characters 'as complex as those in non-murder books'" (164). (Conversations 331–32).¹⁰ Merrill may or may not be praising Mailer's creation of Madden as well as his story when he writes "development of Madden's story is almost always deft" (177). However, Donoghue refers to a failure of characterization as well as style when he writes, "Madden is preposterously unequal to the work he is supposed to do. He is hardly imagined at all. His name merely brings together the already well-documented sequence of Mailer's obsessions" (33). Further, although he only stipulates obsessions with "fear, anxiety, dread, desire, guilt" among causes for "the kind of indulgence asked of readers (32)," I think Denis Donoghue would happily include the book's recurrent concern for homosexuality, spooks and coincidence as potential annoyances as well.¹¹

Now, Donoghue's neglect of the flamboyant side of hardboiled/noir styles

that results from his rather narrow focus on Hammett as a hardboiled standard of comparison undercuts Donoghue's purely stylistic critique of *Tough Guys*. Moreover, Donoghue's thin reference to the noir literature undercuts his view that Madden is little more than a medium for Mailerian (as opposed to hardboiled/noir) obsessions. Indeed, in my view, Madden works well, indeed, amusingly, as a ne'er-do-well alter-ego for Mailer precisely because he caricatures eccentric aspects of the real Mailer—from arcane diction and ornate metaphor to pre-feminist gaucheries and occult fancies—that would be accessible to Mailer's down-and-out, strenuously tough Provincetown novelist/protagonist. For me, Madden is quite vivid and convincing enough for a thriller narrator/protagonist—and amusing to boot. However, the idea that Mailerian eccentricities like the aforementioned might tax the indulgence of readers who have long shunned Mailer as a radical, hipster, feminist or self-aggrandizing *bête-noir* is not surprising to me in era of cultural change such as ours. Taste for Doc Spottello and Papa Pynchon's anarchic pot and flower-people loving, cheerfully paranoid ways are probably as close to cultist as are tastes for the tough, randy anxieties and redemptions of Madden and Mailer.

Still, the literary taste for quality hardboiled/noir is something more than cultist, if something less than consensual; and critical consensus has not been too common across the post-War era of Mailer and Gaddis, Updike and Pynchon, each with a substantial ratio of detractors to celebrants. In any case, I hopefully have clarified the criteria for literarily accomplished hardboiled/noir, strengthened the case for the genre's occasional literary excellence, and enhanced the genre-centered case for *Tough Guys*' literary excellence initiated by Robert Merrill.

NOTES

1. Merrill, "Mailer's *Tough Guys Don't Dance* and the Detective Tradition," p. 163, on the problem of form and on Lennon's accounting.
2. Merrill gives some attention to the role and discussion of coincidence in *Tough Guys* as a link to noir and to Mailer's work in general. However, I ignore this aspect of the Merrill paper, which I find unconvincing.
3. On the 29th day after the departure of wife Patty Laraine, Tim Madden, an unsuccessful writer living in Provincetown, awakes with a painful hangover and tattoo and little memory of the night before, during which he has drunk with a Lonnie Pangborn and companion Jessica Pond. Soon after awakening he discovers blood on his car's front seat; and, following advice from Capt.

Alvin Luther Regency to visit his marijuana stash, he discovers a severed female head in a plastic bag in the stash—plus the body of Pangborn in the trunk of Pangborn's abandoned car. His sleuthing leads to discovery of a second female head in his stash and identification of the two heads as those of Jessica Pond and Patty Lareine. Aided by encounters with Regency and one-time prep school friend (and Lareine husband) Wardley Meeks III, eventually reveals the killers. Pangborn has commit suicide in his car trunk following a humiliating tryst between Madden and Jessica Ponds in front of the sexually insecure bisexual Pangborn. Regency has killed and decapitated Ponds in an attempt to incriminate Madden and avenge himself upon Madden whom he believes to have done grave damage to Mrs. Madelaine Regency during an affair with her some years earlier. Wardley, like Pangborn bisexual, has killed Patty Lareine following hurtful remarks by her regarding his sexual adequacy that include invidious comparisons to stud Madden; and he commits suicide after confessing commission of the Lareine murder to Madden. Madden's very manly Dad Doug helps Madden deal with the ostensibly hyper-masculine Regency, who had sought to terrorize and frame Madden for the psychological harm he had presumably once inflicted on Madelaine, as well as to dispose of the two heads and several corpses) including ones of Regency and of Wardley henchmen Stoodie and Spider Nissen. Identification of the killers of Lareine, Madelaine, Pangborn, and Jessica Madden dispels the clouds of guilt and fear of police apprehension that had spooked Madden; the death of the threatening, if nerdy, Wardley lifts a second oppressive cloud; the death of the overbearing and hostile Regency lifts a third. Alliance with Dad Dougy in their settling murder puzzle and threats of murder, brings Madden into a better-than-ever relation with Madden's role model Dad. Indeed, the guilt and threat free, Madden ends up happily ensconced with Madelaine in a Key West writers retreat where he attempts a return to the practice of fiction writing—or almost happily as heads and bodies disposed at sea haunt Madden's dreams.

4. Pynchon's mystery begins by introducing us to Private Eye pothead surfer "Doc" Spottello in 1970 seaside ("Gordito Beach") LA when former girlfriend Shasta Fay Hepworth requests that Doc investigate threats to her lover real-estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann (Whose wife Sloane and her lover Riggs Warbling are scheming to commit Wolfmann to a mental institution.)

Shasta's request is the first of the set of cascading investigative challenges that propel *Vice*. These include the disappearance of Wolfmann from one of his housing developments; the concurrent death of Wolfmann body guard Glen Charlock; the search for the dead or simply missing surfer-jazz-rock sax player Coy Harlingen; locations of patient exploiter Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd, D.D.S, and Trillium Fortnight lovers (and prison joined gay partners) Puck Beaverton and (no-last-name) Einar; the relations of suspects Puck Beaverton and Adrian Prussia to the murder of Gordita Beach Chief of Police Det. "Bigfoot" Bjornsen's close buddy one time patrol partner Vincent Indelicato; and emerging rumors concerning the location of Mickey Wolfmann and a planned turn to philanthropic housing. Interlocked with all these puzzles is the identity or identities of the Golden Fang (smuggling schooner, dental association, Shell Company for the Chryskyldon Institute mental health clinic and/or multifaceted global crime syndicate) plus

the Fang's relations to Wolfmann, Charlock, Harlingen, Prussia, Beaverton and Einar, Bigfoot Bjornsen and Crocker Fenway. Entwined with Doc's world and pursuits are the good surfer hippie dopers of Gordita Beach, token for "the Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light" amidst "the ancient forces of greed and fear."

Doc is maneuvered by Bigfoot into killing and Fang and LAPD thugs (and Indelicado killers) Beaverton and Prussia in self-defense. However, Doc foils Bigfoot's plan to pin Beaverton and Prussia's deaths and a heroine heist on him by parlaying the planted heroine into an exchange with Fang kingpin Crocker Fenway, for Fenway wants his drug asset more than revenge and gratefully recalls that Doc had ameliorated Japonica Fenway abuse at the hand of D.D.S Blatnoy and the Chryskylodon Institute. Indeed Doc gets the Fang to drop retribution against sleuthing allies Shasta and Harlingen (and wife and daughter).

Doc and Sauncho strike it rich with a claim on the strangely abandoned Schooner *Golden Fang*; and Doc earns some brief respite from the Fang and other forces of "greed and fear" (including the LAPD related vigilante supporters of the rising California GOP of Governor Ronald Reagan) that had seemed to be closing in upon himself, friends and that hippie/surfer/psychedelic brief "parentheses of light."

5. Although Merrill also stresses flashback framing of narration and voice-over narration as stylistic traits, I ignore these as preponderantly features of cinematic variants of the hardboiled/noir genre(s).
6. Interestingly, Mailer's early Marxism leaves no mark on *Tough Guys* while the mercenary venality of *The Maltese Falcon* arguably is as traceable to the Marxian theory of capitalist culture as the political-economic forces at play in *Red Harvest* are to Marxian conceptions of class and the state. The Marxian intellectuality of the Mailer of *The Naked and the Dead* and *Barbary Shore* seems as gone by *Tough Guys* as traces of Pinkerton union busting work that preceded Hammett's Communist turn seems gone after *Falcon*.
7. Krutnik's narrative profiles does not focus on such essentially cinematic and stylistic narrative techniques as the flashbacks or such exclusively cinematographic and stylistic technique as expressionist chiaroscuro.
8. Krutnik, pp, 76–83.
9. Bases for more extensive comparisons of hardboiled/noir by literary lions can be found in James Jones' *A Touch of Danger*, Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, and John Banville's hardboiled/noir efforts as Benjamin Black. Extension of comparisons to related modes of work like the classical mystery and (non-mystery tough guy pulp can be found in Faulkner's *Intruder in the Dust* and *Sanctuary*, respectively.
10. Merrill, p. 177.
11. I am silent here on the topic of coincidence, which Merrill find quite fascinating.

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