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ARTICLE

Doc, the Dude, and Marlowe: Changing Masculinities from *The Long Goodbye* to *Inherent Vice*

Sean Carswell

California State University, Channel Islands, US
sean.carswell@csuci.edu

Inherent Vice is rich with intertextual allusions to both Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels and the Coen brothers' film *The Big Lebowski*. All three works follow a private eye into the hidden worlds of wealth and corruption in Los Angeles. All three utilize similar character archetypes and detective story tropes. All three employ comparable plot structures. *Inherent Vice* uses these previous texts so flagrantly that the novel goes beyond simple intertextual allusions and employs a form of intertextuality that Christian Moraru terms "rewriting." *Inherent Vice* polemically rewrites its source material, specifically renegotiating Chandler's and the Coens' constructions of masculinity. Utilizing both Moraru's theory of postmodern rewriting and Judith Butler's notions of gender performativity, this essay explores Doc Sportello as a new construction of masculinity, one who exists in opposition to Chandler's Philip Marlowe and *The Big Lebowski's* Dude.

1. Intertextuality, Rewriting, and Gender

Upon its release in 2009, several reviewers of Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* noted the similarities between the novel and both Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels and the Coen brothers' film *The Big Lebowski*.¹ Some reviewers commended Pynchon for creating a pastiche of Chandler's work or for taking *The Big Lebowski* further. Other reviewers argued that Pynchon's blending of postmodern fiction and the tropes of a detective novel was a failed experiment. The mere fact that so many reviewers began the discussion of the novel with Pynchon's pastiche suggests that there is something significant in the similarities between Pynchon's novel and the works with which he seems to be in dialogue. Authors tend to reveal a great deal by what they choose to keep and what they choose to change from their source material. A close examination of Pynchon's interplay with the tropes of detective fiction and his deviating from the form's conventions afford a deeper understanding of the novel and Pynchon's construction of masculinity.

The first step in understanding the negotiations of masculinity in the novel lies in an exploration beyond pastiche and into the specific form of intertextuality that Christian Moraru dubbed "rewriting." Moraru's use of the term rewriting denotes

¹ Robert Sheffield, in his *Rolling Stone* review "The Bigger Lebowski," mentions both Chandler and the Coens. First, he characterizes the novel as "shaggy-dog stoner noir in the style of *The Big Lebowski*" (38). Later, he writes, "A master of pastiche, Pynchon is working this time in the mode of the hard-boiled detective novel à la Raymond Chandler" (38). Richard Lacayo's *Time* review describes Doc Sportello as "George Carlin as Philip Marlowe" (60). Lacayo also describes the novel as "second-tier Pynchon," adding "there's not much here that's new" (60). Robert McLaughlin, in the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, begins his mostly-positive review, "Imagine a Raymond Chandler novel, but instead of gritty, black-and-white WWII-era Los Angeles, we have smoggy, over-developed LA in 1970" (163). David Flusfeder, in his largely-dismissive *New Statesman* review "Chandler in Flares," laments, "[W]hereas Chandler once admitted that whenever he didn't know how to advance his plot, he'd have a man walk through a doorway holding a gun, Pynchon just has his detective fire up another joint" (43). Louis Menand's *New Yorker* review, "Soft-Boiled" (which I discuss in more detail below), begins with a discussion of Chandler's fiction and advises readers to think of *Inherent Vice* as "*The Big Sleep* as told by the hippy-dippy weatherman," adding, "Whether you think it's funny depends a little on whether you think Cheech and Chong and the hippy-dippy weatherman are funny for more than about two minutes" (74). Walter Kirn, in his *New York Times* pan of *Inherent Vice*, calls Doc "a psychedelic homage to Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler" and "a literary joke" (BR 9). Sheffield, Lacayo, McLaughlin, Flusfeder, Menand, and Kirn are six reviewers among many who read *Inherent Vice* as a pastiche of *The Big Lebowski*, Chandler novels, or both.

the practice of utilizing so many key elements of a previously-written, canonical text that similarities between the rewritten text and the original appear both deliberate and polemical. In *Rewriting: Postmodern Narrative and Cultural Critique in the Age of Cloning*, Moraru clarifies, "Rewriting does not equal intertextuality" (19). To be clear, all rewriting is intertextual, but all intertextuality is not rewriting. While a comprehensive history of intertextuality is beyond the scope of this essay, a brief foray into the theory would help situate Moraru's concept of rewriting into the field. The notion that a new text relates to previously created texts in a variety of ways and that this relationship shapes the meaning of the new text dates back to at least the Russian Formalists of the early twentieth century. Julia Kristeva's work with Mikhail Bakhtin's central ideas in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" gives rise to the term intertextuality. Kristeva summarizes one of Bakhtin's core tenets by stating, "[L]iterary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure" (35–6). For Kristeva, this relationship challenges the notion that a word has a fixed or static meaning. Meaning is instead formed through a discourse among "the writer, the addressee (or the character) and the contemporary or earlier cultural context" (36). A writer, then becomes situated in a society and a cultural history. Much as Roland Barthes argues in "The Death of the Author," authorship, or the total authority of the author, is surrendered in some respect to language, to the flexibility of the concepts that create the signified in relation to every signifier. For Kristeva, the concepts creating the signified are dynamic depending on not only society and history, but on the "vertical" dimension of language, the ways in which the word relates to a cultural or literary body. Kristeva argues, "The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure" (36). Moraru is similarly concerned with a writer engaging in a literary corpus, specifically when that writer does so self-consciously and polemically. However, Moraru's focus is very different from Kristeva's. While both develop from intertextual theory, Moraru performs postmodern literary analysis on complete texts and Kristeva is a linguist examining meaning in specific words from a traditional structuralist model.

Moraru owes a further debt to Stephen Greenblatt's "The Circulation of Social Energy." Greenblatt is also performing literary analyses on complete texts and is similarly concerned with how these texts develop from the literary corpus. For Greenblatt, "literature professors are salaried, middle-class shamans" (1) speaking to the dead through textual traces. He begins by "taking seriously the collective production" of language, literary pleasures, and texts (4). To do so, he must shrink the notion of total authority from the author. Like Kristeva, he must recognize that all literature works in relation to not only history and society, but to a body of literature. For Greenblatt, literature produces a "social energy," which, at the minimum, is able to transcend certain material conditions of gender, class, and time periods to move people to laughter, to tears, to pain, to pleasure, etc. Greenblatt investigates how this social energy develops in texts and ties various texts together. "The textual traces," according to Greenblatt, "were made by moving certain things—principally ordinary language but also metaphors, ceremonies, dances, emblems, items of clothing, well-worn stories, and so forth—from one culturally demarcated zone to another" (7). Following these textual traces leads Greenblatt to surmise that "there is very little pure invention in culture" (13).²

² There are numerous and varied approaches to intertextuality. A full exploration of them all is beyond the scope of this essay, but, were it feasible, a more complete exploration would show Moraru's approaches to rewriting as one among many voices theorizing intertextuality. Readers may wish to consult: Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 37; Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 229–235; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991), 16–19; Stephen Slemon, "Modernism's Last Post," in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. by Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State U of New York P, 1993), 426–439; Paul Maltby, *Visionary Moment: a Postmodern Critique* (Albany: State U of New York P, 2002), 48–53; Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. by Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Julia Kristeva, *Semiotike: Recherches Pour Une Sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969); Roland Barthes, 'An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative', trans. by Lionel Duisit, *New Literary History*, 6.2 (1975), 237–72 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/468419>>; Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976); Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); Ulrich Broich, 'Intertextuality', in *International Postmodernism*, ed. by Hans Bertens and Douwe Fokkema (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1997), 249–55.

Similarly, Moraru defines rewriting as “an intertextual form that entails a strong tie to ‘chronologically prior works,’ the ‘trace’ of which is discernable in the text” (19). However, for Moraru, rewriting goes beyond cultural traces that expand the signified of a given signifier or create a social energy that helps explain a literary work’s broad appeal. Rewriting instead “is marked by the author as an ‘intentional’ presence rather than as an elusive, faint ‘echo’” (19). Moraru theorizes rewriting “as a ‘flagrant’ retelling of identifiable literary tales” (17). Thus, for a work to be a rewriting and not merely intertextual, the work must contain traces that are obvious, that link in recognizable ways to specific texts, and that are hinted at in some way by the author as deliberate. Moraru’s concept of rewriting can be a particularly useful tool when studying the work of Thomas Pynchon who, as Linda Hutcheon argues, weaves intertextual traces through his “historiographical metafiction”³ and who, as Brian McHale demonstrates, “poaches” the popular genres of the historical periods in which his novels are set. Rewriting becomes an even more useful theoretical model when specifically discussing Pynchon’s *Inherent Vice*, which seems to be a flagrant, intentional reconstruction of Raymond Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*.

This essay will argue, first, that *Inherent Vice* is one of several rewrites of Chandler’s Philip Marlowe novels and second, that in the tradition of these rewrites, *Inherent Vice* performs an overt reconstruction of Marlowe’s representation of hegemonic masculinity. Moraru clearly and repeatedly argues that rewriting must have an ideological component. A “trace” is not enough. A rewrite must examine the ideology of the previous text—or the text’s “mythology,” in Moraru’s terms—and enter into a conversation with it. This conversation explicitly or implicitly stands in opposition to the source text’s ideology and makes an argument for a new mythology. According to Moraru, authors “‘wage’ rewriting to polemically ‘update’ a ‘familiar story.’ To do so, they usually take on the representation of race, gender, or class in the ‘model’ story and alter it” (9). Race, gender, and class are all essentially ideologies and mythologies. They are socially constructed belief systems that have

³ See her chapter “Re-presenting the Past” in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, where, among other things, she coins the term “historiographic metafiction.”

the mythological element of seeking to use fiction to explain a phenomenon that is beyond a society's capability to adequately explain. Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* overtly engages in this type of mythmaking, self-consciously seeking to define masculinity through Philip Marlowe's performance of it. Several of the rewrites of Marlowe—from Haruki Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase* to Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* to the Coens' *The Big Lebowski*—seek to update this performance of masculinity. To a greater—and perhaps more subtle—extent, *Inherent Vice* seeks to write a new myth about masculinity.

Since much of the second half of this essay will examine performances of masculinity, perhaps a few words theorizing masculinity would be helpful here. A comprehensive history of masculinity studies is beyond the scope of this essay, and a short summary should suffice. Most approaches to theorizing masculinity build from feminist studies and grow, specifically, from Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement in *The Second Sex*, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (283). Fundamental to this expression is the notion that, while sex may be a biological fact, gender is not. Gender is instead a series of learned behaviors, and culture—through films, novels, religious texts, church sermons, elementary school practices, basic childrearing, and so on—teaches these behaviors to boys and girls. We all learn how to adopt certain behaviors that enable us to perform socially constructed gender norms. In other words, we learn to act like a man or a woman. "Act" is a key term. We do not learn how to *be* a man or a woman. We learn how to *act* like one. Gender is a performance.

This notion of gender as a performance can be traced back to Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. As Butler explains, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33). For Butler, there is no core, inherent, or true gender identity. It is all a series of learned and reinforced behaviors. Butler's primary concern in *Gender Trouble* is the performance of femininity. She expands this focus into queer and trans performances, but spends very little time exploring masculinity itself. There would be no sense of a "Butlerian masculinity." There is only the notion that all gender—masculine, feminine, or otherwise—is a performance.

Further, gender performances change over time. In *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, sociologist Michael Kimmel demonstrates that the social and cultural constructions of what makes a man and what performances of masculinity are required of men change and evolve over time. Beginning with the birth of the American republic and continuing until the 1990s, Kimmel characterizes masculinity as a cultural negotiation, a fluid state that enables cultures to mold gender as a way of seeking or maintaining power. Kimmel's more recent books, *Guyland* and *Misframing Men* continue this project well into the twenty-first century. Similarly, British feminist Lynne Segal traces shifting masculinities in the United Kingdom in her work *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. Segal demonstrates a hegemonic masculinity that developed in the Victorian Age as a way of reinforcing the militaristic ideology necessary to maintain an empire, and how that hegemony evolved into the masculine performances required for a contemporary, global marketplace. Segal and Kimmel are far from the only scholars of masculinity to demonstrate that the characteristics defining masculinity shift and change over time. The increasingly expansive fields of gender studies in general and masculinity studies in particular overwhelmingly support de Beauvoir and Butler's assertions that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon.

Both Moraru and Butler operate in large theoretical conversations about intertextuality and gender. Moraru's *Rewriting* and Butler's *Gender Trouble* are two useful tools to demonstrate my principle argument in this essay: Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* is a rewriting of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, and Pynchon's characterization of Doc Sportello is an ideological renegotiation of the hegemonic masculinity demonstrated by Chandler's Philip Marlowe.

2. Rewriting Marlowe

In *Rewriting*, Moraru observes, "There are highly canonical, widely popular fictions that capture, even give birth to key myths of certain communities. At the same time, they acquire in the long run a communally 'mythic' weight through successive editing, teaching, reading, and related institutionalizing acts" (3). While Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* may not be the most canonical text, the text is instrumental in constructing the myth of the rugged, individualistic American man who is guided

by nothing more than his own moral compass. Chandler's novel has been edited and rewritten in numerous and diverse ways, from Haruki Murakami's re-imagining of the novel in *A Wild Sheep Chase* to Robert Altman's adaptation of *The Long Goodbye* (which relocates the novel in the 1970s). One of the most well-known rewritings of *The Long Goodbye* is the Coens' film *The Big Lebowski*.⁴ The most evident feature connecting the three aforementioned rewritings of *The Long Goodbye* is the works' negotiations with masculinity.

One of the fundamental criteria for rewriting, as Moraru describes it, is an engagement with cultural mythology. Moraru asserts the texts that are rewritten "are our mythic stories since they 'explain' to us—they represent our *legends*, literally, the founding texts that, etymologically, we are to *read*. They literally *tell* us. They tell (us) who we are and how we have come to be what we are" (8). *The Long Goodbye* and Chandler's other Philip Marlowe novels have become mythological. Philip Marlowe is a legend. He tells men what it means to be a man. We read masculinity in Marlowe. He tells us who men are and how men have come to be that way. Moraru goes on to state, "Thus, re-telling (re-writing) them is serious business" (8). The serious business that Murakami, Altman, and the Coens engage in by rewriting *The Long Goodbye* is the business of reconstructing cultural definitions of masculinity. For Murakami, this engagement takes place in Japan during the boom economy of the 1970s. His unnamed narrator rejects the hegemonic Japanese masculinity myth of the salary-man. He chooses instead independence from any large company, running his own small company and even walking away from that. Like Marlowe, Murakami's narrator launches into an investigation that leads him through the darker side of society, where larger forces of money and corruption act with impunity. Unlike Marlowe, the narrator has little interest in the mystery he is tasked with solving or in issues of

⁴ *The Big Lebowski* is a pastiche of two Chandler novels, *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Sleep*. The Coens allude to *The Big Sleep* specifically with regard to the presentation of Jeffrey Lebowski as a war veteran confined to a wheelchair as an homage to General Sternwood in the novel, as well as Carmen Sternwood's involvement in pornography to support a drug habit, which shows up again in *Bunny Lebowski*. This essay focuses on *The Long Goodbye* because it has more in common with both *The Big Lebowski* and *Inherent Vice*.

justice. He would rather spend time with his girlfriend and play with his cat. Similarly, Altman renegotiates the Marlowe myth by casting Elliott Gould to play Marlowe as more nebbish than tough guy.⁵ Like Murakami's narrator, Gould's Marlowe is reluctant to investigate the mystery and prefers spending time with his cat. Altman and Gould's Marlowe deviates so strongly from Chandler's texts and Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* that it can be read as a polemic against that specific performance of masculinity.

While *Inherent Vice*, as a rewriting of the Marlowe myth, covers some common ground with both *A Wild Sheep Chase* and Robert Altman's adaptation of *The Long Goodbye*, the similarities are relatively minor. Pynchon's noticeable and compelling rewriting seems to come in his engagement with *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Lebowski*. Placing Pynchon's novel in conversation with these texts helps to elucidate the ways in which Pynchon incorporates postmodern rewriting to approach constructions of masculinity.

In his essay "The Synoptic Chandler," Frederic Jameson tells a story about film director Howard Hawks and actor Humphrey Bogart drinking at a bar, arguing about the fate of a character from Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. They could not agree whether the character's death had been a murder, suicide, or some third thing. They called Chandler to ask him, and he could not remember, either. Jameson tells this story to suggest that, in a Raymond Chandler novel, the solution to the mystery is less compelling than the characters and episodes leading up to it. The Coens utilize a similar resolution in *The Big Lebowski*. When the protagonist, the Dude, finally solves the mystery of the kidnapped girl, he calls his friend Walter to help him confront the criminal. The Dude explains his solution and, unlike the dramatic, denouement scenes from Hercule Poirot novels, Walter acknowledges that the Dude has, in fact, solved the mystery, then asks, "But how does all this add up to an emergency?" Further, once Walter and the Dude confront the criminal, he shrugs them off, saying, "You have your story. I have mine." In both cases, the anticlimactic nature of the

⁵ See Charles Gregory's review of the film in *Film Quarterly* 26.4, in which he explicates Gould's portrayal of Marlowe and refers to the character as a "nebbish."

solution is highlighted. Likewise, a reader of *Inherent Vice* can very easily forget that Doc is investigating the murder of Glen Charlock. She can forget who killed Charlock. She can even feel satisfied in her continued reading when Mickey Wolfmann, the character whose disappearance catalyzes the events of the novel, is found more than a hundred pages prior to the end. In all three cases, Chandler, the Coens, and Pynchon poignantly suggest that the solution of a single crime is never really the point. The works are always more about those deeper, unsolved mysteries.

Further comparisons of *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Lebowski* help to clarify what Pynchon is doing with his rewriting in *Inherent Vice*. In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe finds himself in over his head, swept up in the currents of the wealthy and corrupt. The events of the novel are set in motion by dissolution of a marriage coupled with the disappearance of a trophy spouse. As Marlowe investigates the case, he stands rigorously by his own self-created morality. Marlowe further refuses payment for his investigations and has no visible means of financial support. The city of Los Angeles figures so prominently in the novel that it goes beyond a mere setting and becomes almost a character. As the events unfold, Marlowe confronts the real puppet master of the novel, the man who holds the power and controls the bulk of the events Marlowe is swept up in: media mogul Harlan Potter. The man discovered to be the criminal in the end uses Marlowe's own morality against him, duping Marlowe into becoming an unwilling and unwitting accomplice. Finally, Marlowe is left a little worse off at the end of the novel than he was at the beginning.

In his book *The Big Lebowski: The Making of the Coen Brothers Film*, William Preston Robertson quotes Joel Coen as saying, "*The Big Lebowski* is just kind of informed by Chandler around the edges" (43). These edges that inform *The Big Lebowski* are large. Like Marlowe, the Dude is a prototypical American male. The film's narrator describes him as "the man for his time and place. He fits right in there." The Dude is literally in over his head in one of the opening scenes when he is forced head-first into a toilet bowl. He is figuratively in over his head when he is swept up in the current of wealthy and corrupt characters like Maude Lebowski, Jeffrey Lebowski, and Jackie Treehorn. The events of the novel are catalyzed by the disappearance of Jeffrey

Lebowski's trophy wife, Bunny. The Dude stands rigorously by his own self-created morality through the novel. He does not refuse payment for his services, but no one pays him (even so much as what they promise to pay him) and he has no visible means of support. Once again, the city of Los Angeles features so prominently it feels like a character. Robertson quotes Ethan Coen stating, "You wouldn't see [characters like the Dude and Walter] in New York. I mean, you would, but they'd be different in New York" (41). In other words, like Marlowe and Doc Sportello, the Dude seems to be a construct of Los Angeles culture. The Dude confronts Jeffrey Lebowski, who is the real puppet master of the novel, in Pasadena, in nearly the same geographical location where Marlowe confronts Potter. Like Marlowe, the Dude sleeps with the puppet master's daughter. The man discovered to be the criminal in the end uses the Dude's own morality against him, duping him into becoming an unwilling and unwitting accomplice. Finally, the Dude is left a little worse off in the end.

Comparing the novel and the movie side by side, it becomes clear that *The Big Lebowski* shares too many key plot elements of *The Long Goodbye* to be merely "informed by Chandler around the edges." The film, instead, can be viewed as a rewriting of the novel. In both cases, the writers confront images of masculinity. Through Marlowe, Chandler constructs a mythological American male, one who is able to journey into the darkest recesses of society, confront crime, corruption, violence, and temptation, and emerge from it all unscathed. Marlowe represents the man that so many soldiers returning from World War II hoped to become: a man able to shake off the horrors of the world and end up clean (and perhaps sleep with a gorgeous woman, while he's at it). The Coens' reworking of the novel allows them to rewrite this image of masculinity for the 1990s. The Dude sallies forth into a world of corruption and violence with a sense of humor. He is able to recognize that the world he lives in is at times absurd and vacuous, beset on all sides by pop culture, pornography, and a cruel scramble for diminishing resources. This recognition leads him to search for a way to simply abide. Rather than solving the mystery presented at the beginning of the novel (who really killed Sylvia Lennox) and the film (who kidnapped Bunny Lebowski),

the overriding point of both works is to illustrate a man who, in the words of Raymond Chandler in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder," is "the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world" (18). Consistently for Chandler and typically for the Coens, artistic explorations focus primarily on character development.

Inherent Vice mirrors many of these conventions. Doc is swept up in the currents of the wealthy and corrupt. Events are catalyzed by a disappearing spouse. Doc stands rigorously by his self-created morality. He has no visible means of support. Los Angeles figures so prominently in the novel that it becomes almost a character. Doc confronts a puppet master (from Palos Verdes, not Pasadena, though the move seems to be one more of geographical convenience than salient difference). Pynchon's use of these conventions, coupled with his longhaired, perpetually stoned, Dude-like protagonist, invites questions regarding the author's choice to move away from certain conventions. For example, if Marlowe is a representation of idealized forties masculinity and the Dude is a representation of compromised nineties masculinity, what is Doc? In what ways is Pynchon playing with the construction of gender, particularly masculinity, with Doc? And what time period is he supposed to represent? Is he a sixties (or, more specifically, March of 1970) masculinity? Is that masculinity idealized, compromised, or something else? Or, building from Linda Hutcheon's notion in *The Politics of Postmodernism* that "we can likely only know the past through our present" (73), is Doc some form of twenty-first century masculinity? And why does Doc, who makes frequent mention and frequent use of his frequent erections, not follow Marlowe and the Dude's example and sleep with the puppet master's daughter? Further, is Doc worse off at the end of the novel? While characters like Bigfoot Bjornsen and Crocker Fenway manipulate Doc's morality, is he really an unwilling or unwitting accomplice, or does his awareness of his own complicity (an awareness that Marlowe and the Dude do not share) place him in a different situation? Pynchon's deviations from the formula established by Chandler invite an exploration into the gender renegotiations of the novel.

3. The Best Man of His Time

The construction of masculinity raises compelling issues. Clearly, this construction is a key element of Raymond Chandler's work. In "The Simple Art of Murder," Chandler claims, "the gradual elucidation of character... is all the detective story has any right to be about" (17). Chandler expands upon this notion by focusing on one overriding characteristic that he seeks to elucidate: masculinity. For Chandler, the detective novel is about investigating what it means to be a man. When he uses the term "man" in "The Simple Art of Murder," he is clearly discussing men, not using an awkward metonym for humans. After stating that the hero of detective fiction "must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world," (18) Chandler defines this best man in typically masculine terms. The best man is the type to "seduce a duchess" but not "spoil a virgin." He is neither "eunuch" nor "satyr." He is a "man of honor... in all things." He "talks as a man of his age talks—that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness." In other words, he is "a man fit for adventure" (18). Philip Marlowe is just this sort of man. These characteristics make him a masculine icon in America. In his rewriting of *The Long Goodbye*, Robert Altman has one character repeatedly and intentionally conflate "Marlowe" and "Marlboro" as a way of highlighting Philip Marlowe and the Marlboro Man's shared role as an icon for a ruggedly individual, hyper-masculine man Chandler describes as "the best man in his world" (18).

The Big Lebowski is equally concerned with the construction of masculinity. In one pivotal scene, the two characters named Jeffrey Lebowski (the Big Lebowski and the Dude) meet to discuss Bunny Lebowski's kidnapping. The Big Lebowski asks the Dude, "What makes a man?" The Dude does not answer, and the Big Lebowski describes the characteristics of a man, much as Chandler does. According to the Big Lebowski, a man is constructed out of a series of "challenges met" and "competitors bested." He is a veteran of active combat, perhaps wounded (or, in the Big Lebowski's case, partially paralyzed) in warfare but nonetheless able to "achieve." A man is, above all, able "to do the right thing, whatever the cost." A strong man may cry, as the Big Lebowski does, but the permission to cry comes from a lifetime of satisfying the

criteria of masculinity, and it must be done in a dignified way (a few reluctant tears glimmering in the light of a fireplace in the west wing of a Pasadena mansion). The Dude rejects many of the values presented by the Big Lebowski. Much of the remainder of the film traces the Dude's negotiation of his own constructed masculinity.

Perhaps Louis Menand is the first to observe the construction of masculinity in *Inherent Vice*. Menand titles his *New Yorker* review of the book "Soft-Boiled," suggesting a deflated masculinity for Doc Sportello. Menand further claims, "Philip Marlowe ... would have eaten [Doc Sportello] for breakfast" (75). This is a questionable assessment. A closer examination of Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* reveals a character who typically takes a punch without throwing a punch in return, who guzzles a bottle of whiskey to make himself pass out so that he can resist the temptation of the *femme fatale* in the upstairs bedroom, and who is tossed about in a storm created by people more wealthy, powerful, and corrupt than him. One of the ways Chandler reclaimed Philip Marlowe from Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of him in *The Big Sleep* was to show a Marlowe in *The Long Goodbye* whose strength comes from his ability to be tough and withstand a great deal of physical and emotional pain, yet be the bigger man and reject the aggression. He is not the type to eat men for breakfast.

Doc Sportello, on the other hand, engages in acts of aggression that overpower anything Marlowe does in *The Long Goodbye*. While Marlowe's unwitting complicity in that novel does directly lead to Roger Wade's murder and Eileen Wade's suicide, Marlowe himself kills no one. Doc, however, kills two men. When confronted with Puck Beaverton—a murderer and a hitman's bodyguard; a brutal man who has just confessed to beating his wife to the point of her hospitalization—Doc beats him to death by slamming his swastika-tattooed head onto a concrete floor, then stands over Puck's dying body, cooks up a fatal amount of heroin, loads a needle, and jabs it into Puck's neck. After essentially killing Puck twice, Doc rushes into a shootout with Adrian Prussia. Prussia is both the hitman whom the LAPD send out to eliminate particularly dangerous characters and the most violent man in a violent novel. Doc demonstrates no fear as he confronts and kills Adrian.

I do not wish to suggest that Doc's double homicide makes him more masculine. If anything, Doc's performance of masculinity during this scene retains too many

characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. This scene is a site where theme and plot clash. On a basic plot level, Doc has to kill both Puck and Adrian or they will kill him. From a narrative standpoint, Doc does not have the option that, for example, the Dude has when he confronts the Big Lebowski. The Dude could stay home. His confrontation and its flawed performance of masculinity—climaxing when his friend Walter yanks the paraplegic Big Lebowski out of his wheelchair and drops him on the floor—is totally unnecessary. Doc, however, must confront Adrian and Puck. From a narrative standpoint, he must kill them. From a thematic standpoint, it is troubling. Twenty-first century constructions of masculinity need to move beyond viewing violence as a chief characteristic of what it means to be a man. Pynchon himself rejects this notion many times throughout his oeuvre. The double homicide is Doc's lowest point in the novel. It saves his life, but also stands as an act he must seek redemption for.

Strangely, while there is no murder at the end of the Chandler novel, the murder at the end of *Inherent Vice* has precedent in two previous rewritings of *The Long Goodbye*. At the end of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the narrator rigs a clock with a bomb in it. He sends the wealthy, sinister puppet master of the novel into the room with the time bomb. The narrator walks away from the scene. The explosion and murder of the puppet master reverberate in the distance. Similarly, at the end of Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, the nebbish Marlowe goes to Mexico, kills Terry Lennox in cold blood, and dances down the street in celebration of his act of vengeance while the credits roll. Both of these murders are necessary from either a plot or marketing standpoint. If the narrator does not kill the puppet master at the end of *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the supernatural evil that the puppet master seeks will be perpetuated. The puppet master, to maintain his power, will have to kill the narrator. The murder is the only way for the narrator to escape the corruption he has been drawn into. The murder Marlowe commits at the end of *The Long Goodbye* is frivolous. He could have let Terry Lennox live (as he does in the novel). The murder does provide a Hollywood ending. It ties together the story lines in the film that Chandler leaves dangling in the novel. Neither act, however, delves deeply into negotiations with masculinity.

As I mention above, Doc's murders are similarly necessitated by the plot. More to the point, the murders speak deeply about masculinity. Adrian, for one, demonstrates

many of the typical characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. He is aggressive, inherently violent, and seeks to dominate the men around him. His portrayal harks back to two texts on masculinity from the time of when the novel is set, George Gilder's *Sexual Suicide* (1973) and *Naked Nomads* (1974). Sociologist Michael Kimmel summarizes these texts in *Manhood in America*, stating, "Men, Gilder argued, were biologically driven toward aggression, competition, and violence, naturally 'disposed' to crime, drugs, and violence" (181). Kimmel utilizes Gilder's arguments as a demonstration of the backlash against feminism. He goes on to summarize Gilder's assertions,

[I]f women followed feminist ideals, they would abandon their traditional role as moralistic constraints on men's antisocial natures, and all hell would break loose. Since men were untamable, except in their traditionally responsible roles as father, husband, and breadwinner . . . women's liberation would result in an anarchistic uprising among men, who would run rampant in an orgy of violence and aggression. (181)

Adrian is this unhinged man, running rampant in an orgy of violence and aggression. Though Doc kills Adrian, Doc does so regrettably, offering Adrian every chance to live, even calling an ambulance for him. Adrian, it seems, would rather die violently than live through an act of kindness. This scene raises questions about masculinity. It casts doubt on the assertions that Adrian is this way "naturally" and that it is his "biological drive" as a man. Adrian's behavior is an outlier for the men in the book. Even the most sinister characters, like Crocker Fenway perched near the top of the Golden Fang network, prefer peaceful settlements to violent ones.

Adrian's behavior takes on another level of meaning when read against Kimmel's examination of seventies masculinity. Kimmel argues that, as a result of the women's liberation movement of the early seventies, many men (like the aforementioned Gilder) sought a retrenchment of hegemonic masculinity. With respect to *Inherent Vice*, this retrenchment can be seen as a return to the Adrian Prussia model. Doc's murder of Adrian speaks to feminism. While Chandler's Marlowe resists any hints of feminism, views women predominately as fatal or damsels in distress, and shows

real discomfort at women's sexuality—evidenced by his reaction to Eileen Wade's advances, when Marlowe fears he cannot control himself and resist the fatal Eileen, so he drinks straight whiskey until it knocks him out—and the Dude seems uneasy around the feminist Maude Lebowski, choking and stuttering when she uses terms like “vagina” and “beaver pictures,” Doc welcomes liberated women. He demonstrates no fear or judgment upon women's sexuality, supporting Trillium Fortnight in her pursuit of Puck, honoring Shasta Fay Hepworth's relationship with Mickey Wolfmann, engaging in an open relationship with Penny Kimball, and acting generally groovy toward Clancy Charlock's affinity for threesomes. He finds no damsels in distress and sees no women as fatal. He is unthreatened by feminism and participates in women's liberation in perhaps the most important way a man can: by treating women as his equals. With this in mind, his murder of Adrian can be read as a murder, also, of retrenched hegemonic masculinity.

4. Doc's Performance

Nonetheless, Louis Menand's summarization of Doc as a fairly goofy, frequently-stoned deviation from the tough-guy private eye is mostly accurate. While Doc demonstrates only a healthy amount of fear for his personal safety, he also has the courage to confront difficult and dangerous situations. But, for Doc, the question seems to be less one of how masculinity should be (or is) constructed and more about how to become a human in the twenty-first century. His rejection of hegemonic masculinity echoes Judith Butler's investigations in *Gender Trouble*. In response to feminist calls for a new and uniform construction of femininity, Butler argues, “[T]he premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category” (7). The problem with a stable subject, for Butler, lies in the exclusions it creates, and the power that lies behind such exclusions. Butler explains that

juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not “show” once the juridical structures of politics has been established. In other words, the political construction of the subject

proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation. (5)

Thus, when members of a gender fail to satisfy the criteria of the stable subject, they are marginalized from mainstream society, disempowered through this marginalization, and this exclusion is justified as the natural or legitimate process.⁶ For Butler, “the task is to formulate within this constituted frame a critique of the categories of identity that contemporary juridical structures engender, naturalize, and immobilize” (8). Butler, of course, was discussing the characteristics of what it means to be a woman. Critiquing any criteria creating a stable subject affords feminism a more inclusive means of reconstructing the power structure, in Butler’s view. In many ways, Butler’s project has been a fairly successful one. In the twenty-first century, the answer to “What does it mean to be a woman?” has come to be, “Whatever a woman wants it to mean.” Yet twenty-first century men have yet to make such gender trouble. Masculinity continues to be defined by fairly narrow criteria.

Hegemonic masculinity seeks to create a stable subject of masculinity characterized by a dominance, aggression, independence, emotional invulnerability, physical strength and toughness, heterosexuality, wealth, and a propensity for violence. A text like *The Long Goodbye* perpetuates this hegemonic masculinity. Marlowe more or less demonstrates all of the above-mentioned characteristics. The characteristic he may be excluded from is wealth. However, if one reads Chandler’s entire Marlowe oeuvre, one finds that Marlowe has had several cases that resulted in real and significant money. This affords Marlowe a certain amount of independence. It enables him to have no boss and ostensibly no one to whom he must answer for his actions. In this way, he has enough wealth to satisfy the criteria of masculinity, i.e., he has money to buy autonomy.

⁶ In a sense, this is what reviewers and readers like Menand are doing when they classify Doc as a wimp. They are marginalizing him for not being more stoic, more violent, more angry, more hegemonically masculine. In other words, these classifications reify toxic masculinity.

The closest parallel to Marlowe in *Inherent Vice* is Doc's friend and nemesis, Bigfoot Bjornson. Like Marlowe, Bigfoot operates independently. He has no partner, and though he is part of the LAPD, he operates with little-to-no oversight. His income from his television work affords him several cars and enough disposable income to collect antique barbed wire. This suggests he has wealth enough to buy some autonomy. Like Marlowe, Bigfoot seeks dominance in every interaction he has. While Doc tries to open himself emotionally to Bigfoot, Bigfoot responds by keeping their relationship out of the emotional realm. The only emotion Bigfoot allows himself is the one emotion hegemonic masculinity allows men: anger. Inherent in anger is the desire for payback. This desire motivates Bigfoot throughout the novel. Bigfoot wants to avenge the murder of his partner. He sets up Doc to kill or be killed by Adrian Prussia and Puck Beaverton, hoping Doc does the former. Adrian and Puck, after all, murdered Bigfoot's partner. Yet when Doc unwittingly avenges the murder for Bigfoot, Bigfoot is unsatisfied. He sets up Doc to find the people further up the line who were complicit in his partner's murder. When Doc extricates himself from Bigfoot's manipulations, Bigfoot remains on the case. Doc watches him drive away, wondering, "How far in this weird twisted cop karma would he have to follow the twenty kilos before it led him to what he thought he needed to know? Which would be what again, exactly?" (350). Doc sees what Bigfoot does not: that vengeance is always unsatisfying. This highlights a fundamental problem with hegemonic masculinity. If one is to shut off all of the emotions that make us human with the exception of anger, then anger should be the most rewarding of all emotions. Instead, because anger is predicated on payback and payback is inevitably unsatisfying, narrowing an emotional life to anger is inherently unfulfilling.

Doc, in contrast, rejects most of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. He shapes his life in a way that moves away from the accumulation of wealth. He envisions his detective agency as trafficking in exchanges outside the traditional marketplace, working "for folks who if they paid him anything it'd be half a lid or a small favor down the line or maybe only just a quick smile, long as it was real" (314).⁷

⁷ For a more complete exploration of Doc's economics, see "*Inherent Vice* and Being in Place" in *Occupy Pynchon: Politics after Gravity's Rainbow*.

He similarly rejects relationships of dominance and submission, preferring instead relationships to be as equitable as possible. Most importantly, he is open emotionally. Unlike Marlowe or Bigfoot, who are only allowed to feel anger, Doc experiences a range of emotions. He allows himself to be sad, to be happy, and to feel love in various ways—familial love, love for friends, love for lovers past and present, and love for his enemies. His rejection of hegemonic masculinity reaches its peak when Doc returns the twenty kilos of heroin to the Golden Fang.

Doc does not meet the Golden Fang alone. We learn, “Doc brought Denis along for, well maybe not muscle, but something like that, some kind of protection he hadn’t realized till lately he needed” (348). In other words, Doc brings Denis to the exchange because he wants a friend with him, someone who can offer emotional support. Additionally, when Doc negotiates the exchange of heroin, he turns down money, negotiating instead for immunity from the Golden Fang for himself and his family and friends. These negotiations include the release of Coy Harlingen from the network of the Golden Fang. Coy is allowed to return to his family. To say he is forgiven for his time as a police informant is too simple. Coy neither asks for forgiveness nor performs any type of penance. Payback is not part of the equation. He instead offers his word that he will be an honest family man henceforth, and he is afforded the opportunity to be one. The key to the entire exchange is a trust between Doc and the Golden Fang. Doc explains his reasons to Denis, saying, “What? I should only trust good people? man, good people get bought and sold every day. Might as well trust somebody evil once in a while, it makes no more or less sense. I mean I wouldn’t give odds either way” (349). Of course, the reader must not forget that Doc’s greatest talent throughout the novel is his ability to win while betting on the long shot.

This exchange takes on a revolutionary perspective when one considers that Pynchon’s crime novel depicts a neoliberal society in which the concerns of the marketplace supersede all other concerns. In this society, one of the most important appendages for maintaining power is a massive carceral state legitimated by a desire for payback. And, in the climax of the novel, Doc forces an exchange that rejects both the neoliberal marketplace and the ideology of payback in the carceral state. This rejection is first predicated on Doc’s rejection of hegemonic masculinity.

However, Doc's rejection is complicated. It is neither ideal nor complete. It can be revolutionary, but the revolutionary potential is unstable.

Judith Butler argues, "[G]ender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence" (33). Doc is aware of the "regulatory practices of gender coherence" and he abides by some of them. Like a hegemonic male, Doc is heterosexual. He is a sports fan. He breaks from his investigation to pursue his heterosexual desires and to watch the NBA playoffs. He complicates this by demonstrating an openness to other sexualities and by breaking the guy code when he skips the playoffs to have a post-coital conversation with Penny. Still, his rejection of hegemonic masculinity is an incomplete negotiation. He abides by certain characteristics and rejects others. Fundamentally, his masculinity is a performance. Doc is not alone in this regard. As mentioned above, Judith Butler questions the notion that a person has a true gender, one that exists independent of juridical processes, regulatory practices, and cultural pressures. Instead, we perform our genders. We do not necessarily have a choice in these performances, nor do we necessarily have an epistemological core below these performances.

Doc is nothing if not performative. He inhabits several disguises and personas throughout the novel. He utilizes aliases. He hands out false business cards. He wears various hairstyles and wigs and outfits that signify distinct roles and socioeconomic standings. He even goes by "Doc," though his name is Lawrence and he holds no doctoral degree. He is able to transform himself according to the spaces he inhabits. He can trade his huaraches and Hawaiian shirt for a John Garfield suit that allows him to pass at an exclusive club where only the wealthy, the powerful, the "in place" dine. Yet his chameleon-like tendencies are outed early in the novel. When Tariq Khalil visits Doc's office, Doc greets the member of the Black Guerilla Family, saying, "Say... what it is, my brother" (14). Tariq responds, "Never mind that shit," then stares "under different circumstances offensively, at Doc's Afro" (14). Immediately, Tariq recognizes a performance and makes Doc aware of the recognition. Doc responds by performing instead as an investigator, asking only the questions he needs answers to, giving only the responses his client needs. Tariq continues his performance of

masculinity by seeking to establish dominance by criticizing Doc's financial state, saying, "Secretary's off today" when Doc starts typing out his own ticket. Tariq continues to try to get the upper hand through a series of smart aleck remarks. Doc does not take the bait. His performance of that particular type of masculinity ended when Tariq asked him to "Never mind that shit." From that point forward, Doc performs an alternate masculinity, one that renegotiates hegemonic masculinity while resisting the impulse to create a new, stable model of masculinity.

Judith Butler observes

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (22)

Doc's performances permanently defer a single or unified masculinity. In response to the power of the Golden Fang specifically and contemporary neoliberal society in general, Doc alternately institutes and relinquishes performances of masculinity as a move toward a more autonomous and egalitarian society. He opens the door for alternate masculinities, multiple convergences and divergences that likewise seek a revolutionary potential. Perhaps this is Pynchon's most significant break in his rewriting of *The Long Goodbye* and *The Big Lebowski*: his rejection of their narrow constructions of masculinity. Doc shrugs off the gendered tropes of detective fiction and dismisses the questions of what it means to be a man. Instead, he searches for ways to be a more fully realized human: how to live with integrity, how to love his enemy as well as his neighbor, how to construct and maintain a community, and how to face the corruption of his world with humor and generosity.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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