

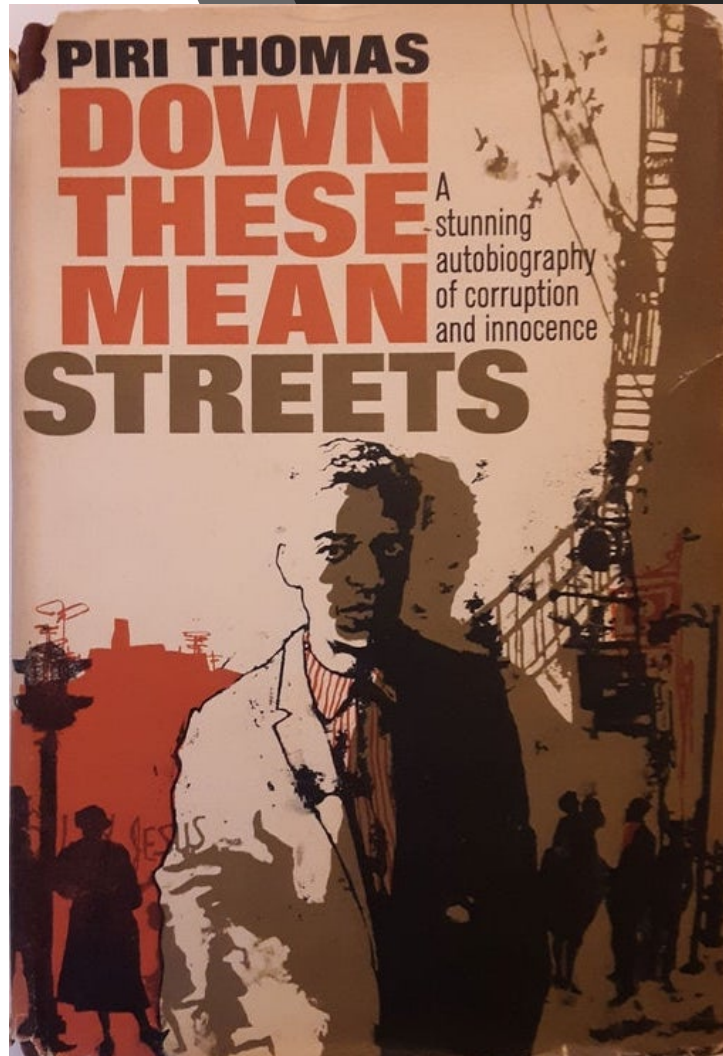


**SPAN322:  
“North of the Río Grande”  
US Latino/Chicano  
Literature**

*Down These Mean Streets IIb*  
February 27, 2020

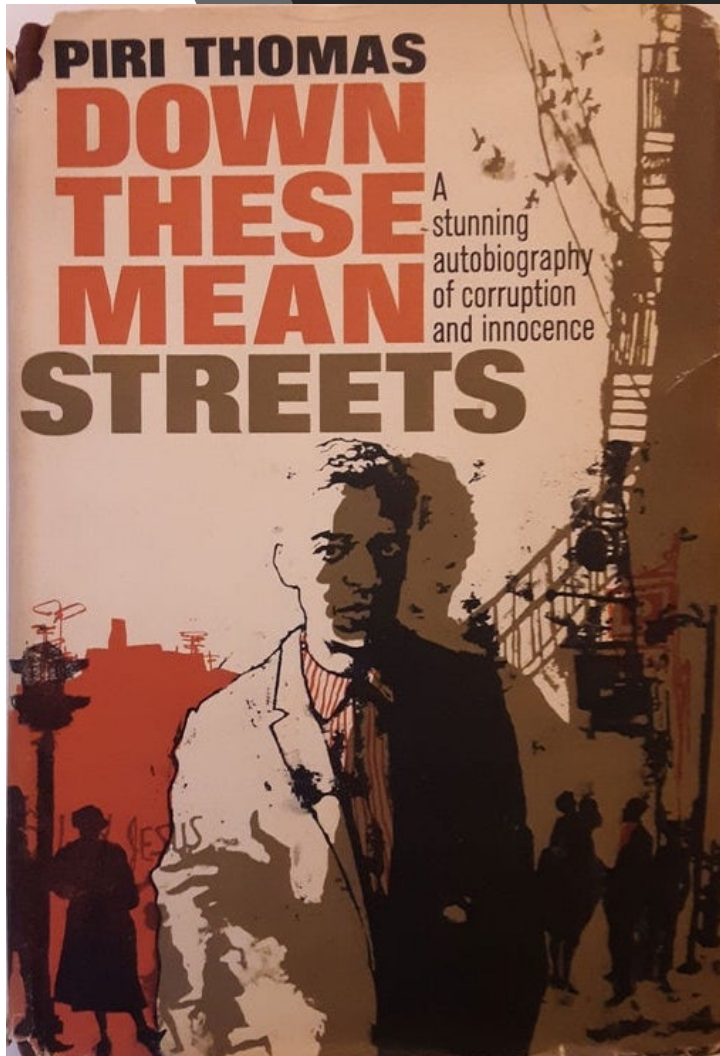
**DOWN THESE MEAN  
STREETS**

# *Down These Mean Streets*



- By Piri Thomas (1928-2011), a key figure in the “Nuyorican” movements of 1960s and 1970s
- A memoir / autobiography, published 1967
- Deals, among other things, with Thomas’s racial ambiguity: perceived as black, he identifies as Latino
- “A classic portrait of ghetto life”

# *Down These Mean Streets*



- What or who is the narrator? How does his sense of identity or belonging change?
- How does the urban setting affect the ways identity is produced and perceived?
- What is the relationship between different minorities? What conflicts or tensions does the book highlight?
- How does the law figure? What is Thomas's relationship to authority or the state?
- What is "heart"? How does affect play out in this book?

# Recognition (OED)

1. Law. A form of inquiry or inquest by jury first introduced to England by the early Norman kings; an instance of this. Also recognition of assize. Now historical.

†2. Knowledge or consciousness; (also) understanding. Obsolete.

3. a. Acknowledgement of something as true, valid, legal, or worthy of consideration; esp. formal acknowledgement conveying approval or sanction of something. Also: an instance of this.

b. Frequently with capital initial. The formal acknowledgement by subjects of (the title of) a monarch, esp. in a British coronation ceremony.

c. International Law. The process by which one state declares that another political entity fulfils the conditions of statehood, and that it is willing to deal with it as a member of the international community.

7. Acknowledgement or admission of an achievement, service, ability, kindness, etc.; appreciation. Also: an expression of this. Now frequently in in recognition of.

# Recognition (OED)

8. a. The action or an act of identifying a person or thing from a previous encounter or knowledge; the mental process of identifying something that has been known before. Also: the fact of being known or identified in this way.
- b. The action or fact of identifying a thing as having a certain character, or as belonging to a certain category; an instance of this.
- d. Psychology. The mental process of identifying or perceiving information as having been previously apprehended, or as belonging to a particular known category; an instance of this. Opposed to recall.
- e. Computing. The action performed by a machine in identifying automatically and responding correctly to a specific feature, object, event, etc.; esp. in optical character recognition
- f. Immunology. The action of cells or molecules of the immune system in discriminating between antigens newly encountered in their environment and ones previously encountered, typically as a function of specific or non-specific receptors. Frequently attributive.

# Recognize (OED)

1. b. transitive. To accept the authority, validity, or legitimacy of; esp. to accept the claim or title of (a person or group of people) to be valid or true. Formerly also with †to.
- c. transitive. To acknowledge, consider, or accept (a person or thing) as or to be something.
- †d. transitive. To accept the validity of (a person's) claim for some position or title. Obsolete. rare.
- e. transitive. To show official appreciation of (a person, achievement, etc.); to reward or honour formally.
- f. transitive. Originally U.S. Of a person presiding at a meeting or debate: to call on (a person) to speak.
3. a. transitive. To acknowledge the existence or truth of; to admit knowledge or awareness of; to confess or avow.
- c. transitive. To perceive clearly; to realize, understand, or apprehend that.
5. a. transitive. To perceive to be the same as something or someone previously known or encountered; to identify (something that has been known before).
- b. transitive. To identify from knowledge of appearance or character, esp. by means of some distinctive feature.
- c. transitive. Computing. Of a machine or computer: to identify automatically and respond correctly to (a specific feature, object, or event).
- d. transitive. Immunology. Of cells or molecules of the immune system: to identify (an antigen) as either newly or previously encountered in the environment; to discriminate between (antigens) on this basis. Cf. recognition n. 8f.
- †6. a. transitive. To gain further knowledge of; to think over again. Cf. later re-cognize v.2 Obsolete. rare—1.
- b. transitive. To mark out or distinguish (a person) again. Obsolete. rare.

# Recognize (Mirriam Webster)

1 : *to acknowledge formally*: such as

a : to admit as being lord or sovereign

b : to admit as being of a particular status

c : to admit as being one entitled to be heard: give the floor to

d : to acknowledge the de facto existence or the independence of

2 : *to acknowledge or take notice of in some definite way*: such as

a : to acknowledge with a show of appreciation

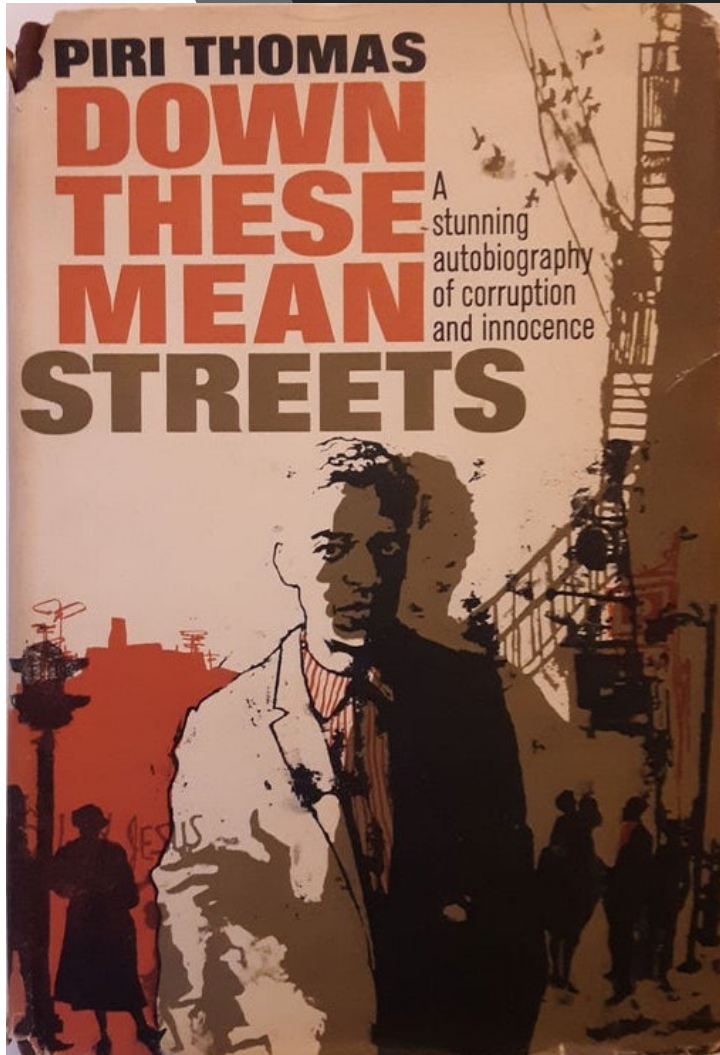
b : to acknowledge acquaintance with recognize a neighbor with a nod

3a : *to perceive to be something or someone previously known*

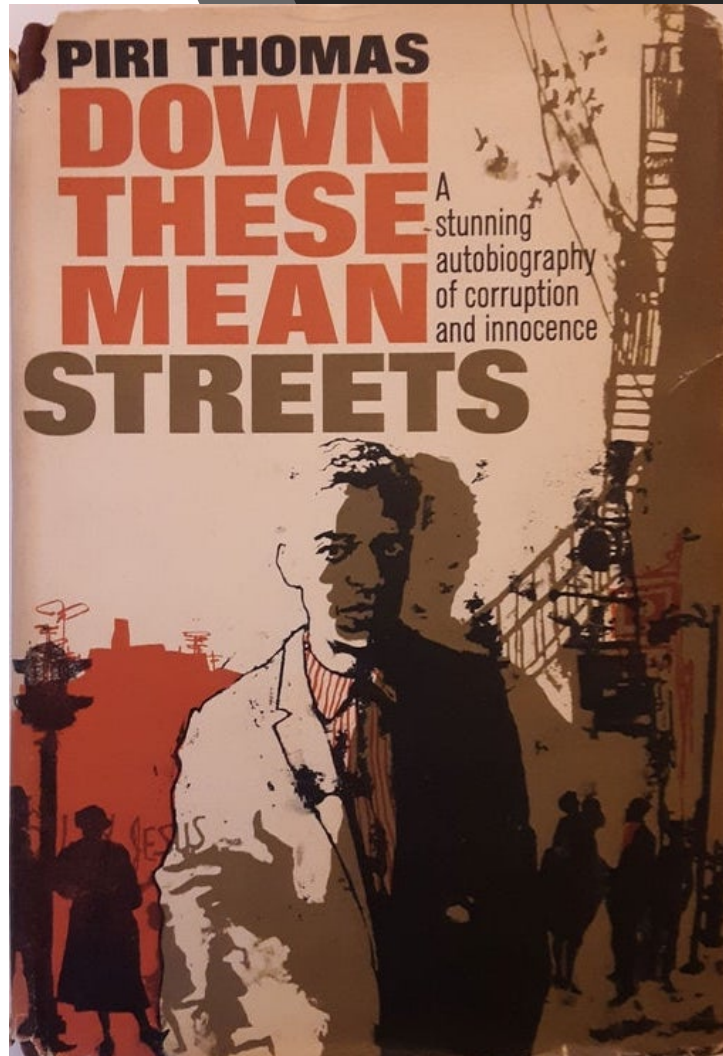
b : *to perceive clearly*: realize



# *Down These Mean Streets*

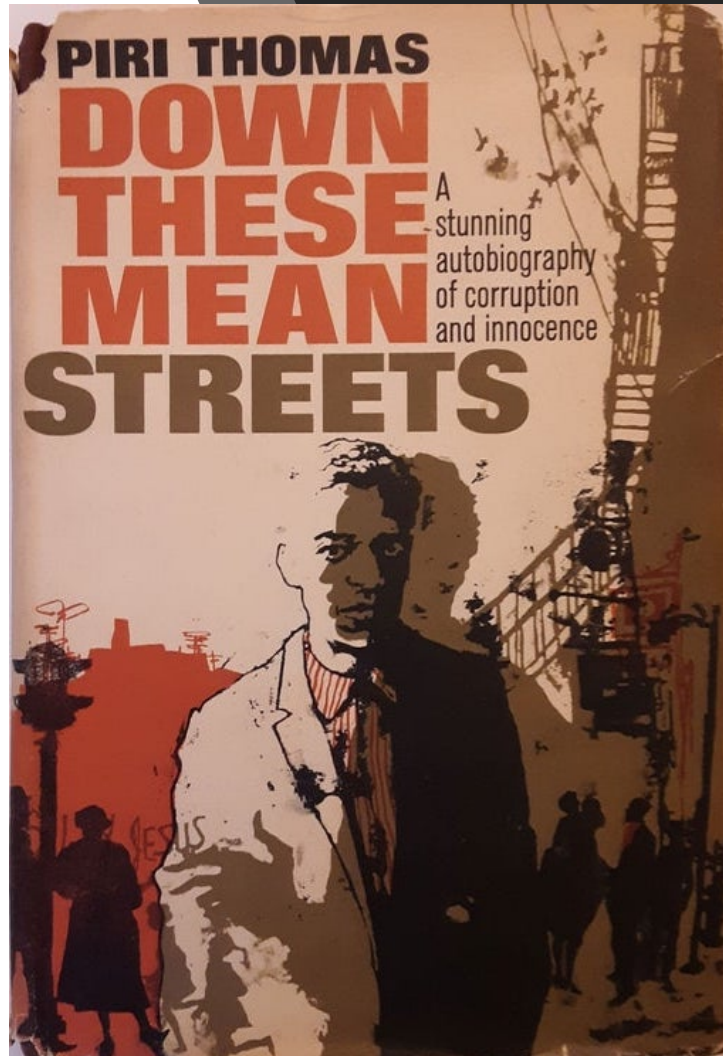


- Who or what is Piri?
- How does ethnicity relate to race here?
- How does gender figure?
- What about religion?
- To what extent is he the agent of his own downfall?
- To what extent is he an agent?



## *Down These Mean Streets*

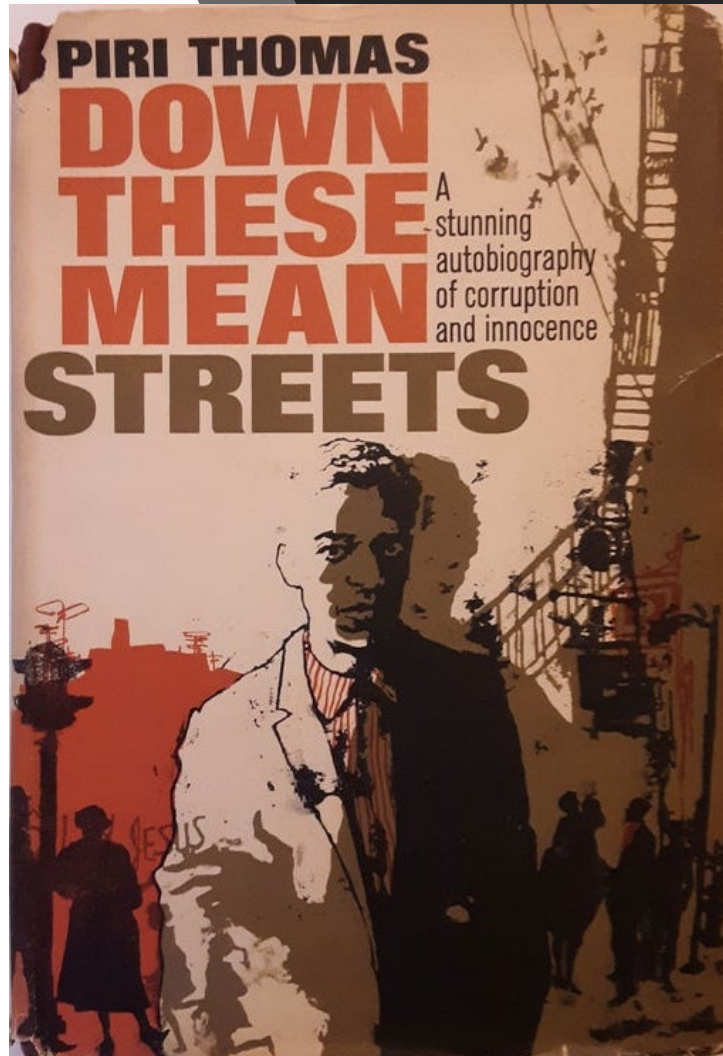
- This is also the story of a community.
- The *picaresque*: the world seen from below.
- A portrait of a society.
- Promises realism, grittiness, honesty.
- An almost poetic interest in language.
- What is Piri's relation to that society?
- What is Piri's appeal to the reader?
- Do we identify with him?
- Would different readers read him differently?



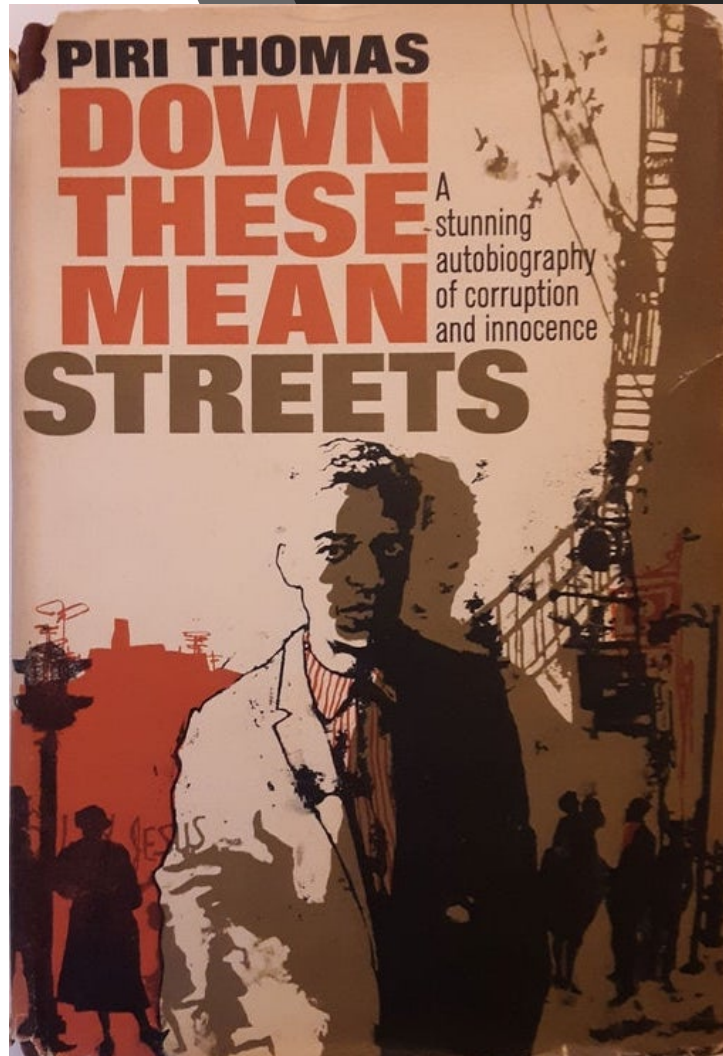
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- What is “heart”? How does affect play out in this book?
- What does Piri *feel*?
- What does the book say about hate? Love?
- What do *readers* feel?
- Is this a sad book?
- What other affects might it provoke?

# *Down These Mean Streets*

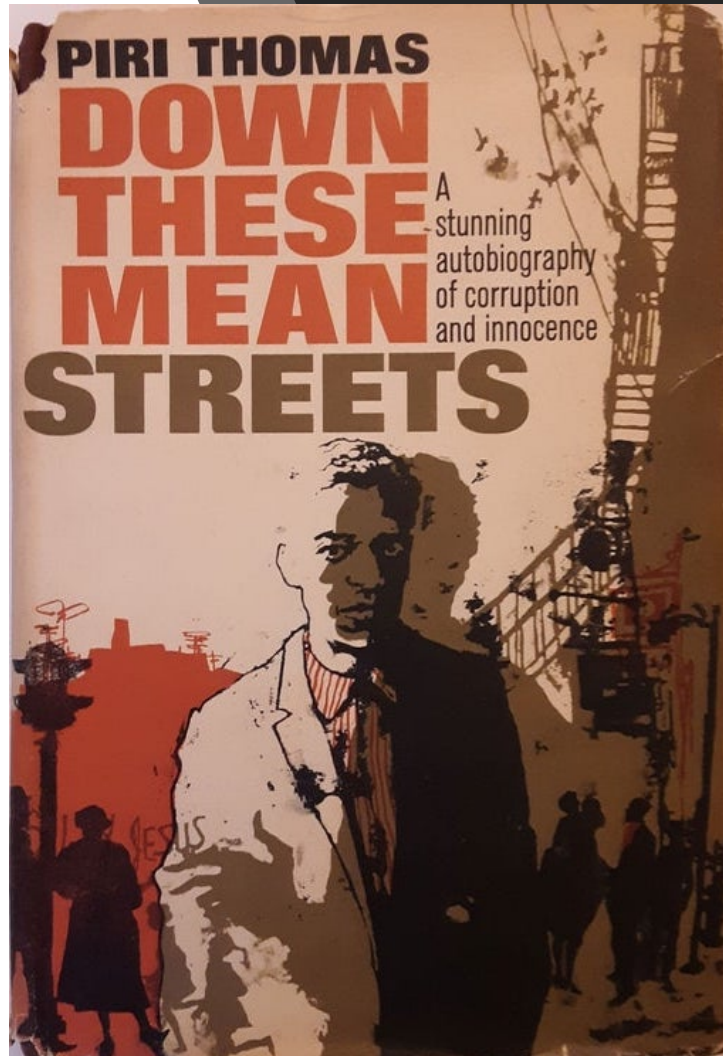


- Agent, actor, subject
- Subject vs object; place and people
- Recognition, cognition, pedagogy
- Identification, value, worth



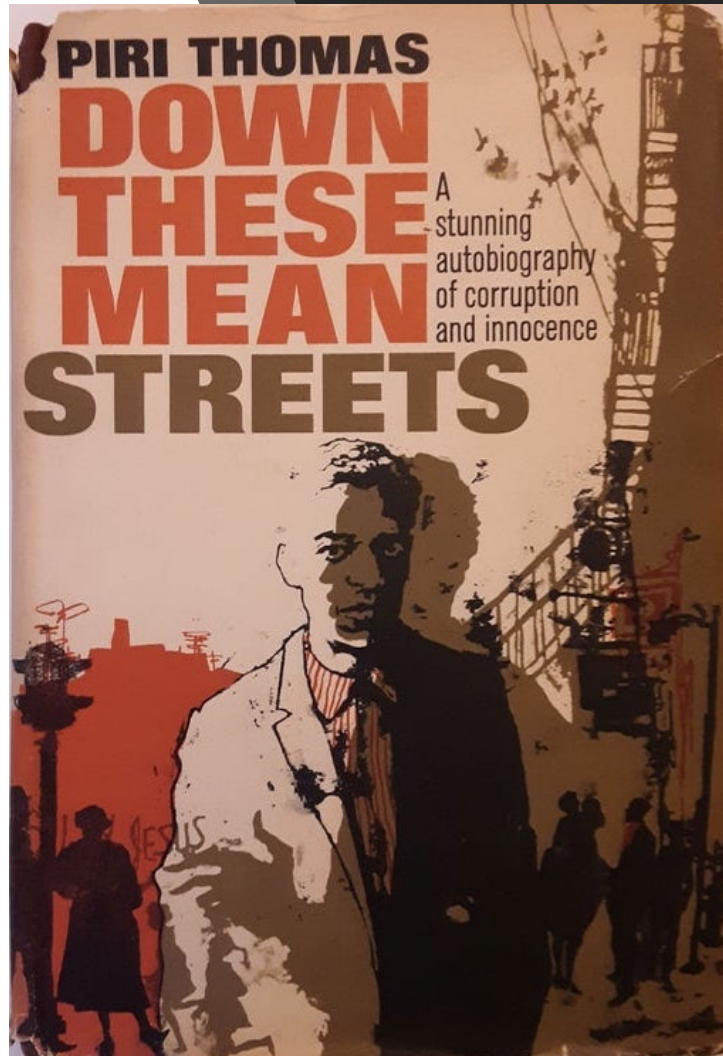
## *Down These Mean Streets*

*“I learned more and more on my trips. Wherever I went—France, Italy, South America, England—it was the same. It was like Brew said: any language you talk, if you’re black, you’re black. My hate grew within me. Dear God, dear God, I thought, I’m going to kill, I’m going to kill somebody—if I don’t kill, I’m going to hurt one of these paddies. I was scared of the whole fucking world. Brew, baby, you were right! I cried. Where the fuck are you, baby? Damn, man, you’re my ace, you’re my one brother.” (191)*



## *Down These Mean Streets*

“I went into the bathroom and looked at myself in the mirror. I couldn’t stand what I saw and I puked. The taste was bad. I wanted to say, ‘I couldn’t help it,’ but I couldn’t; I wanted to lie, but I wouldn’t. I washed and washed, but it was not enough. I made a hard face, a *cara-palo* face, and walked back into the kitchen.” (222)

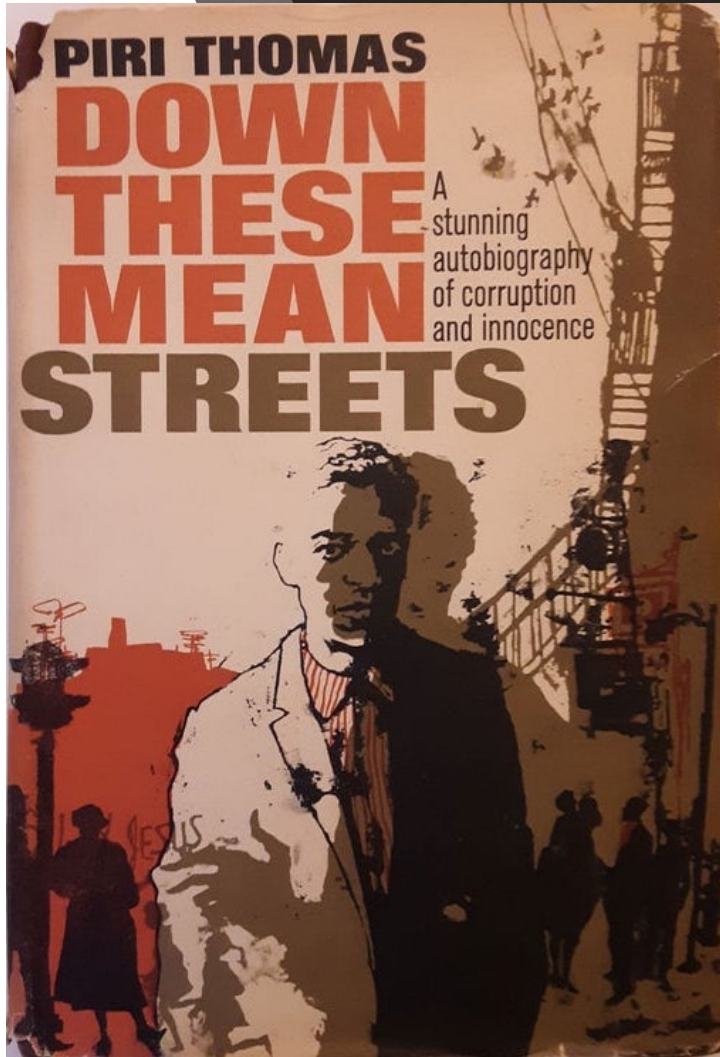


## *Down These Mean Streets*

“The world was getting tighter and tighter to wear. It was like I was outgrowing it. My God, the only thing I could do that the hacks couldn’t stop was think. And I wished I could stop thinking about the free side. *The free side—dig that!* In the beinning I’d said ‘outside’; now I said ‘free side,’ just like a con. Well, wasn’t I a con? I guessed I was.” (254)

# *Down These Mean Streets*

- What are the “kinks” in this book?





**WIKIPEDIA**

# Editing Wikipedia

- Our aim is to have “Featured articles” or at least “Good Articles.”
- Such articles are the minority that have passed a process of peer review from other editors.
- This process can take some time, so we need to get going on getting these articles ready for review.
- Submit them by March 12!



**MID-TERM**

# Mid-Term Concepts

- Community
- Language
- The Law
- Memory
- Territory

# Mid-Term

- In the exam, you will have a choice of three of these concepts, and pick one of them to write an essay about two or more of the texts you have read.
- E.g.: “Analyze the meaning and significance of ‘Community’ in two or more of the texts we have read so far.”
- You may bring in notes (a “cheat sheet”), maximum one side of Letter size paper.

**NEXT STEPS**

# For Tuesday

- Write a blog post (c. 400 words) about two or more of the books we have read in the light of one of the concepts identified for the midterm (Community, Language, The Law, Memory, or Territory), and publish it Monday evening.