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Hard-boiled Detective Fiction Tropes in Thomas Pynchon's Later Novels: A Genre Study

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أساليب روايات الجريمة البوليسية القاسية في روايات توماس بينشون اللاحقة: دراسة في النوع الأدبي

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Abstract

This paper is a critical exploration of Thomas Pynchon's use of the Hard-boiled fiction tropes in his last two novels to date *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013). The existing research on this topic tends to focus exclusively on how Pynchon re-writes these tropes through postmodernist lenses. The paper beats a different track by employing the principles of genre theory to identify the tropes of classic Hard-boiled detective fiction that Pynchon employed in *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*. Since Pynchon is not a genre fiction writer, the paper presupposes that Pynchon adapted the tropes of the Hard-boiled fiction subgenre in ways that suit his postmodernist agenda. So, the paper shall explore this issue from the perspective of genre theory rather than from the perspective of postmodern detective fiction. The paper finds that Pynchon applies the tropes of the Hard-boiled fiction subgenre but put them to different ends in both novels. He benefits from the structure of the Hard-boiled to create a critical space to examine contemporary anxieties of the 21st century America

Keywords: Genre theory; Hard-boiled detective fiction, Postmodernism; Thomas Pynchon.

ملخص

يستجلي هذا البحث بشكل نقدي استخدام توماس بينشون لتقاليد أدب الجريمة في روايتيه الأخيرتين حتى الآن، "الرديلة المتأصلة" (٢٠٠٩) و"الحافة النازفة" (٢٠١٣). تميل الأبحاث الموجودة حول هذا الموضوع إلى التركيز حصرياً على كيفية إعادة صياغة بينشون لهذه التقاليد من خلال مفاهيم ما بعد الحداثة. يسلك هذا البحث مساراً مختلفاً من خلال توظيف مبادئ نظرية الأنواع الأدبية لتحديد تقاليد الادب القصصي البوليسي الكلاسيكي التي استخدمها بينشون في "الرديلة المتأصلة" و"الحافة النازفة". بما أن بينشون ليس كاتباً في أدب الأنواع، تفترض الورقة أن بينشون كيف تقاليد النوع الفرعي لأدب الجريمة بطرق تناسب أجندته ما بعد الحداثية. لذلك، سيستجلي البحث هذه القضية من منظور نظرية الأنواع الأدبية بدلاً من منظور الادب القصصي البوليسي ما بعد الحداثي. يجد البحث أن بينشون يطبق تقاليد النوع الفرعي للأدب البوليسي ولكنه يضعها في غايات مختلفة في كلتا الروايتين بحيث يستفيد من بنية الأدب البوليسي لخلق مساحة نقدية لدراسة المخاوف المعاصرة في أمريكا القرن الحادي والعشرين. الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الأنواع الأدبية؛ الأدب القصصي البوليسي؛ ما بعد الحداثة؛ توماس بينشون.

1. Introduction

Crime fiction has long been a cultural mirror reflecting the tensions, anxieties, and contradictions that characterize contemporary life. Among its many genres, Hard-boiled detective fiction emerged in the early

twentieth century as a distinctly American genre, offering a stark and realistic portrayal of urban corruption, moral ambiguity, and the collapse of institutions. While traditional studies have examined the genre's development through its classic figures, such as Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, contemporary literary studies have gone further, examining how postmodern writers revisit these literary traditions to critique contemporary society under the shadow of late capitalism, surveillance, and the collapse of truth in the digital world. Thomas Pynchon, one of the most enigmatic and influential writers of postmodern American literature, has demonstrated a keen interest in the genre's conventions in his literary works. Although not a traditional writer of the genre, he borrows and reshapes its conventions in his recent novels, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*, to offer a critique of systems of power in twenty-first-century America. These two novels do not reproduce the stereotypical molds of the genre, but rather re-employ the formal elements of the Hard-boiled literature to expose a world governed by hidden forces, where traditional justice is absent, and the role of the detective fades amidst ambiguity and contradictions. Therefore, this study aims to place Pynchon's later novels within the context of genre theory by examining how the elements of the Hard-boiled detective fiction have been reconfigured to serve postmodernist criticism, the study argues that *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* both employ elements of the genre but simultaneously modify them to depict the collapse of meaning and the growing sense of fragmentation in contemporary society. Thus, Pynchon's resulting version of Hard-boiled fiction both honors the tradition of crime fiction on the one hand, and re-questioning and deconstructing it on the other hand to present a version that comes with a postmodern age.

2. Thomas Pynchon's Later Novels in the Context of Hard-boiled Detective Fiction

Hard-boiled detective fiction is a subgenre of crime fiction. It appeared in America in the period between the two world wars. While this subgenre follows the basic pattern of crime fiction, i.e., crime-detection-discovery, it differs greatly from the tradition of detective fiction established by Edgar Allen Poe and the British practice of crime fiction as exemplified by Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie (Mansfield-Kelley and Marchino, 2005). This sort of fiction is highly realistic because it evolved as a reaction against what is so-called the genteel tradition in crime fiction (Tani, 1984). Maureen T. Reddy highlights this aspect of the Hard-boiled detective fiction: "the hard-boiled represents an intensification of the crime novel's commitment to a particular variety of realism that depends heavily on a tough, uncompromising surface verisimilitude" (2003, 193). This is due to the fact that the Hard-boiled detective fiction appeared in response to the increasing corruption of the American society after WWI. However, it is in the 1960s that hard-boiled fiction entered the arena of literary fiction with the rise of postmodernism in American fiction. Postmodernist American novelists, notably Thomas Pynchon, integrated the tropes of this genre in their postmodern fictional trajectories. The generic conventions of hard-boiled detective fiction were installed and subverted to create what came later to be known as the postmodern detective novel or anti-detective novel. The textual paradigm of the genre was used to create allegorical narratives of the postmodern sensibility in the form of paranoid narratives of radical disjuncture and dislocation of meaning (Nicol, 2009, 172). Pynchon's 1964 novel *The Crying of Lot 49* is a key text in this tradition of postmodern detective fiction. Pynchon kept returning, however intermittently, to this tradition in most of his major novels, especially in the California novels. This interest in the hard-boiled detective genre witnessed a resurgence in Pynchon's later novels, especially his last two novels to date *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013). Being written in the 21st century, these two novels show less interest in postmodern experimentation with the received conventions of the hard-boiled detective fiction. They apply the tropes of the genre almost faithfully as if to parody them, but in a postmodern way. It is relatively easy to identify the textual paradigm of the hard-boiled detective genre in these two novels. John Scaggs lists the following generic features that distinguish the hard-boiled detective fiction from classic detective fiction:

1. "The 'hard-boiled' and 'pig-headed' figure of the private investigator around which the sub-genre developed" (2005, 55).
2. "A threatening and alienating urban setting" (2005, 55-56).
3. "Frequent violence" (2005, 560).
4. Fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of 'the streets' (2005, 56).
5. The hard-boiled style is "terse, tough, and cynical, like the hard-boiled detectives it features, and the typical hard-boiled story is one of violence, sex, and betrayal" (2005, 145). The subsequent two sections are going to trace these generic tropes of the hardboiled detective fiction in *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* respectively.

2.1 Hard-boiled Detective Fiction Tropes in *Inherent Vice*

Inherent Vice is essentially a hard-boiled detective novel because it follows the textual paradigm of this subgenre of crime fiction. Critics, like Rob Wilson, agrees that Pynchon in this novel “labors in the time- honored generic trenches of American “hard-boiled fiction” (2010, 218). The novel focuses on a tough, masculine private investigator (Doc Sportello), features a highly urban California setting (Los Angeles) and a corrupt community (LAPD), employs street slang and police jargons, and has a questive structures full with violent crimes and a first-person narration (Scaggs, 2005, 56-59) Doc Sportello is a hard-boiled private investigator type. His detective personality eschews most of the characteristics of the hard-boiled private investigator: “professional; tough; shrewd; at times callous and hard; durable, surviving assault and injury; is often bound by a rigid, if very individual, moral code, and works in a protective capacity” (Worthington, 2011, 159) Although Doc is not a typical professional detective, like Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe in Pynchon’s previous novels, as his style is illogical and relies on luck, intuition, and illogical evidences However, he sticks to his job and solves cases in unconventional ways. Doc also shows strength and psychological resilience to endure the chaos he lives in, such as his clashes with Puck Beaverton and Adrian Prussia, which shows the kind of toughness that a traditional detective has. Doc also shows skill and intelligence, although he lacks focus or a clear methodology, for example when he discovers the Golden Fang deal and its suspicious operations. Although he is not as tough as hard-boiled detectives, he shows an ability to survive, as he survives many dangerous situations, such as the Golden Fang organization, and the foggy shadows that surround Los Angeles. Like other hard-boiled detectives, Doc shows a moral code, such as when he refuses to cooperate with police institutions because they reflect greater corruption. Despite the chaos surrounding him, he remains committed to helping others, such as when he negotiates with Golden Fang agents to return a large amount of drugs in exchange for the release of Coy Harlingen. Despite all this, the concept of the hard-boiled detective is reshaped to fit Pynchon's postmodern style. Moreover, *Inherent Vice* has a typical hard-boiled setting as it is “set within large urban environments that are run by corrupt institutions” (Rollyson, 2008, 2153). *Inherent Vice* is set in 1970s Los Angeles, where the fog of corruption pervades the Golden Fang, the police establishment, and the system itself. Golden Fang represents an organization involved in criminal acts and shady deals. It is not known who is running it as nobody knows “who’s the mob kingpin that owns this?” Doc saw no harm in asking. “Actually, we’ve considered hiring you to find out.” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 81). The Golden Fang is a reflection of the corruption that embraces the environment in which Doc lives. Doc's continuous pursuit of anything that leads him to it is one of the characteristics of the hard-boiled detective. Doc tries to find out whether Mickey is involved in this organization: “As attorney to client, this story you heard—it didn’t happen to include Mickey Wolfmann?” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 83). Doc learns through his investigation that Golden Fang is involved in smuggling operations “she was on some spy mission against Fidel Castro” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 85). Also, she “often took on as cargo abducted local “troublemakers,” who were never seen again” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 85). All of this shows that Doc's society is run by institutions and individuals involved in corrupt operations. Even police institutions are not far from this corruption. Doc's investigation with Mickey's wife into the disappearance of Mickey Wolfmann takes place in an environment dominated by moral corruption, which is illustrated by the world in which Mickey lives and which his wife reveals, as this environment shows shady dealings amidst the presence of the police who are relaxed by the pool and indifferent to the investigation. This reflects the corruption of police institutions “She’s hanging by the pool with all the police and them” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 52). Also, Doc who was “expecting to see homicide-related body parts, was surprised instead to find several hundred frozen chocolate-covered bananas inside” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 124). The corruption of LAPD reflects the corruption within the legal institutions. Instead of implementing justice, the police station becomes a place where exploitation and cooperation with crimes take place. Bigfoot, the authority officer, blackmails the owner of the banana store, Kevin. Instead of stopping the illegal activity of the owner of the kozmik Banana store, Bigfoot blackmails him to obtain frozen bananas: “Bigfoot had been driving around once a week to Kozmik Banana, a frozen-banana shop near the Gordita Beach pier, creeping in by way of the alley in back. It was a classic shakedown” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 124). Bigfoot uses his position as a police officer to exploit Kevin. This shows that the authority in Los Angeles becomes a means of corruption instead of achieving justice. The illegal activity of converting dried banana peels into a drug sold under the name Yellow Haze as a fake drug instead of standing against it and considering it as illegal matter, Bigfoot chooses to cooperate with the owner of the store and share the profits “Bigfoot saw no reason why law enforcement shouldn’t be cut in for a share of the proceeds” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 124). Bigfoot manipulates the law and justifies this by saying that his actions are not illegal because he does not take money, but frozen bananas: “If it’s legal, then so is taking my cut. Especially, see, If It’s in the form of frozen bananas instead of money.”

(*Inherent Vice*, 2009,125). By justifying this, Bigfoot shows how corruption can hide behind tangled legal interpretations to justify their immoral actions. Furthermore, Pynchon exposes the corruption of the LAPD from another perspective and how they deal with crime cases according to their political and financial priorities rather than justice. This is demonstrated through Glenn's sister , who describes to Doc that the police showed no interest in her brother's murder while they were more interested in Mickey's disappearance, because he was a wealthy man: "You talk to the police? More like they talked to me. Some smart-ass named Bjornsen. Can't say it was too encouraging" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 130). Murder is a crime that affects justice but is ignored because Glenn is not important to the system. The lack of trust in legal institutions makes Doc feel on the edge of his seat due to his integration into a world full of mystery and corruption. This is what characterizes the Hard-boiled detectives as they live in environments surrounded by corruption and conflict (Mitchell, 2015, 259), and this is evident in Fritz's speech where he indicates that some of the license plates that Doc provided him with because he "ran those plate numbers you gave me, and it turns out that some of them belong to members of the L.A. 'police reserves.' Seems a lot of those guys joined up during the Watts clambake so they could play run-nigger-run and have it all Be legal" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 170). Where it turns out that the license plates belong to a private militia used by the LAPD to evade responsibility, Doc's investigation reveals the corruption of the system and society as he presents the fact that Mickey is still fine but is being held by the Feds: "Yeah well Mickey seems to be in one piece, the feds have got him on ice. Glen Sherlock is still dead, but hey, who cares about the criminal While Glenn Sherlock has nothing to do with them, element, right?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 224). This shows the disregard of the system and society for such people, which in turn is a mockery of the system that focuses on influential people and ignores Glenn because he is not important to them. LAPD's treatment of Adrian the hitman reflects the corruption of the authorities that represent the city, such as the Vice Squad, which asks him to kill a certain person, the manager of a prostitution ring, not for any justice, but to protect the Governor of California Ronald Reagan from scandal because this person keeps files on a group of politicians linked to a prostitution ring: "The Governor has some great momentum right now, the future of America belongs to him, somebody can be doing American history a big favor here, Adrian" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 280). This is an indication that the authorities responsible for enforcing the law are manipulating him according to their own agenda. Instead of arresting Adrian because he is a criminal, the police negotiate with him and he accepts on condition that he does not go to prison: my only condition is that I shouldn't do any jail time" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 280). This reveals that the police do not care about achieving justice as much as they care about collecting money, even if it is cooperating with a criminal: "Federal money. The amount we get depends on our yearly clearance rate" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 280). The dialogue between Penny and Doc reflects the corrupted system. When Doc asks Penny for Adrian's file, which is locked to the year 2000, Penny responds indifferently, commenting that this happens all the time: "I need to look at somebody's jacket. Ancient history, but it's still under Seal. Like till 2000? "That's it? No big thing, we do that all the time" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 243). Doc is making fun of the system and how its rules are easily broken. This in turn reflects how Doc sees the world as a place full of corruption, Penny's reference to the system being broken all the time meaning that Doc's world is full of moral contradictions. Projected in such a dangerous and corrupt urban milieu, Doc's personality shows the idiocrasies typical of the hard-boiled detectives, who are "typically laconic, understated, and unflappable wisecrackers and their prime virtues are not preternatural powers of deduction and reasoning but single-minded persistence and the toughness to with- stand the stress and violence that may beset them in pursuit of their cases" (Rollyson, 2008, 2153). Like the hard-boiled detectives, Doc is isolated and shows determination to resolve cases when Hope Harlingen provides Doc with a suspicious bank deposit that is linked to Coy's disappearance this makes it a key piece of evidence for Doc to continue his investigation into Coy's disappearance. Hope tells Doc "I don't think Coy is really dead" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 39) to reveal her skepticism of the corrupt institutions that run the city. Doc's determination and persistence in solving Coy's disappearance makes him a hard-boiled detective like Sam Spade. He did not stick with just Hope's evidence, Doc questions several people "about a surf saxophone player named Coy Harlingen who used to play for the Boards?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 42). Doc is told that he overdosed and died, but one of them tells him that he is still alive but has become an untrustworthy person. Doc's interrogation by the FBI shows his indifference as he does not take their investigation seriously. While Agent Borderline hands him a folder, he starts to browse through it and then says, "A federal file? On me? Wow, man! The big time!" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 65). Then, he gets lost in his thoughts until his saliva drips onto the desk. "Only wondering if you had any copies, I always like to carry some pictures around in case people want autographs?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 67) His attitude shows his indifference and mockery of the FBI. When agent

Borderline tells him about his black agent, Tariq Khalil, "Khalil visits your place of business, next day a known prison acquaintance of his is slain, Michael Wolfmann disappears, and you get arrested on suspicion" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 66). "Why don't you just share with us what Mr. Khalil had to say the other day when he visited you," suggested Agent Borderline" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 66). Doc answers him "Because he's a client, so that's privileged conversation" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 67). This shows that Doc is completely independent and works alone, even if he works with the police, "aren't we're all in the same business?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 66) they are same institution, but Doc is completely independent in his work. Doc's isolation from police institutions shows its unreliability "I wish. . . holy shit did he feel tired, just once I could trust them" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 170). This highlights Doc's internal struggle and desire for justice, even though he knows that he is in a society runs by illegal institutions at this point, Doc resembles a hard-boiled detective, choosing isolation and trying to uncover the truth in a world that tries to cover it up. Doc searches for Mickey despite warnings from the FBI agents when they accuse him of following Mickey all the way to Las Vegas. This is symptomatic of isolation from institutions that represent the law. Doc tries to keep his investigation on track "Mickey? No longer even a active case for me, man, fact, I never even made out a ticket on it, 'cause nobody was payin me" and in doing so, Doc hides his true motives so he can continue the operation (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 212). Doc's isolated investigation leads him to information about the cases of Glenn, Golden Fang, Tariq and WAMBAM. Doc learns that Golden Fang is involved in many suspicious cases of drug and gun smuggling and murder, and it is not far from being far from Glenn's murder, and is also involved in broader networks that extend into public life. Doc begins to wonder about Glenn's connection to Golden Fang and why he is in prison. Is he an agent of Golden Fang or is he being deliberately sacrificed? These questions reveal that Golden Fang had a hand in Glenn's death. On the other hand, Doc considers telling the federal authorities about Tariq, but he fears that he will be in danger, this shows his moral code. Even when he decides to tell Bigfoot about the information and conclusions he has obtained, he realizes that the police are not trustworthy. All these questions make Doc feel that he is alone in the face of a world full of corruption. He develops deep paranoia: "I can't trust any of those people?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 257). Doc's confrontation with the Golden Fang entity, though it reveals his weakness, but it also shows his determination to know the truth in a harsh and mysterious world where the Golden Fang is an entity that cannot be predicted or revealed, where fear and ultimate punishment are inevitable: "I am the unthinkable vengeance they turn to when one of them has grown insupportably troublesome, when all other sanctions have failed" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 278). The organization itself fears this entity since "they have named themselves after their worst fear" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 278). Doc's response to this entity reflects his sarcastic character: "Okay if I ask you something?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 278). At this point, Doc shares with Sam Spade the uses of sarcasm to deal with threats. Beside his insistence and isolation, Doc also has a sense of humor in dealing with his cases. Doc's dialogue with Sloane Wolfmann has a sarcastic tone when he tells her "Actually, it's our firm who owe your husband some money" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 51). Also, when Sloane mentions the story of her meeting with Mickey Wolfmann, Duke comments that "she had told the story hundreds of times, but that was all right. "Handsome stone," Doc said" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 53). When Bigfoot arrives at the Wolfmann's house he inquires "Wrong part of town for scoring weed, isn't it, Sportello?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 59). Doc replies to him "What—you mean my mind's been wanderin again?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 53). This comes with his sarcastic and unserious nature. Doc's sense of humor is also evident when he deals with Coy, where the later tells him if he said too much about the Golden Fang, and Doc replies "I can't hear you too good, and how can I talk about what I don't hear?" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 77). Doc's use of humor is to avoid taking the police seriously and expresses contempt for them. When he is accused of killing Dr. Platnoyed, he defends himself with ridiculous excuses, such as saying that he was watching movie *The Good, the Bad, the Ugly*. This shows that Doc is mocking Bigfoot when he interrogates him and does not take him seriously. While Bigfoot talks to him about the murder of Dr. Platnoyed, Doc talks to him about the movie that won an Oscar: "Ah, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, no doubt, a splendid film for which Maggie Smith richly deserves her Oscar for Best Actress" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 178). Another instance of his sense of humor is when he mocks the system when Bigfoot tells him that Miss Hepworth has returned to the hippie community: "Miss Hepworth it seems has rejoined your little community of drug-ravaged misfits" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 225). This shows that Bigfoot considers Doc and his community to be outlaws, and Doc tells him, "Wow, no shit? News to me" This shows his indifference and also shows him as an investigator who is isolated from the system. When Bigfoot asks him about his long absence, he replies "Little R&R. Wish I had your work ethic" (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 225). Doc's terse response reflects the disparity between Doc and Bigfoot is that Bigfoot represents authority and Doc represents freedom and

indifference to the system. Furthermore, *Inherent Vice* is true to the hard-boiled sub-genre in its depiction of Violence. Crimes in the hard-boiled novels are portrayed more realistically and cruelly, so that the investigators themselves use cruelty against criminals, some of whom enjoy it (Rollyson, 2008, 2154). Heather Worthington (2011) explains that “the hard-boiled detective, while paid for his investigations, is alienated from the community and essentially works to satisfy himself and his personal sense of justice”(159). Violence is a means for the traditional investigator to achieve justice. Violence is portrayed in *Inherent Vice* as a means of survival, not a heroic act, but a desperate attempt to escape Slamming him in the head back and forth with the loose handcuff, Smashing his foot into Puck’s knee to bring him down, and then going down after him, giving in to a fury Doc understood would provide the balance he needed to coast through this, grabbing Puck’s head and continuing to beat it almost silently against the marble doorsill till everything was too slippery with blood. (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 285) Although violence is not portrayed as dramatically as Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, it is present only as a form. As for the content, Pynchon's description of violence is different. It becomes silent and this silence reflects how violence is treated coldly, making it an integral part of the world. Violence for Pynchon becomes a representative of corruption, not of achieving justice. For example, when Adrian tells Doc how he hides the bodies of his victims inside concrete pillars with coldness and violence. In this way, it becomes a means of concealing the corruption of the authorities. This proves that the entire system, from the police, politicians, and criminal organizations, is based on violence, but rather is an integral part of it, rather than being a tool to confront corruption. Moreover, *Inherent Vice* incorporates the salient stylistic and narratological features of the hard-boiled sub-genre. The novel is told in the voice of the private investigator himself and the dialogue is characterized by street slang and police and criminal terms. Like the hard-boiled fiction, *Inherent Vice* focuses not on the investigator's personal life but on people involved in the case such as police, agents and criminals (Rollyson, 2008, 2154). The narrative style of the novel is consistent with hard-boiled fiction, with dialogue interspersed with police language and the world of criminality, and the focus on examining agents and criminals. For example, the dialogue between Doc and Bigfoot shows a sarcastic tone when Doc mocks the idea that Dr. Platnoyed was killed by a medium-sized wild animal: “It would sure be ironic, man, is all I’m saying, if it turned out Platnoyed was bit to death by a golden fang. Or even better, like, two golden Fangs” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 187). Doc cleverly links the possibility of Dr. Platnoyed's murder to the Golden Fang organization, then suggests to Bigfoot to “wait, what happened to Locard’s Exchange Principle, every contact leaves traces” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 186). Doc's sarcastic style and clever commentary make his suggestion logical, proving his skills as an unconventional investigator. In addition to these generic attributes of the hard-boiled detective fiction, *Inherent Vice* showcases the character of the femme fatale The lead female character, Shasta Fay, is the model for the femme fatale “essential to the hard-boiled detective novel, providing an erotic element and contributing to the personal and emotional involvement of the detective that is part of the genre” (Worthington, 2008, 162). She is surrounded by mystery and her true intentions are not known. At first, she tells Doc about her involvement with Mickey Wolfmann, but she does not reveal anything else. This makes her motives unclear, and when she gives him a number, she admonishes: “Try to never use it” and “don't ask.” Shasta appears to be hiding information and keeps Doc in a state of suspicion. Shasta shows a contradiction in being a character who needs help and a character who knows how to exploit situations to her advantage: “I was never the sweetest girl in the business, there was no reason for me to waste half a minute on a sick Junkie like Coy” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 272). However, Pynchon recasts the character of Femme Fatale by changing her role from being a source of war and evil to a complex and more human character. Although she is sometimes evasive, she also appears weak and a victim of a system surrounded by corruption and chaos. She is a multi-dimensional character. Sometimes she shows real feelings towards Doc: “You never did let me down, Doc” “You were always true” (*Inherent Vice*, 2009, 9). And sometimes her personality and behavior appear evasive, and this reflects the ambiguity and uncertainty of post-modernity. Instead of making her a source of all destruction, she herself is a victim of a world full of corruption.

2.2 Hard-boiled Detective Fiction Tropes in *Bleeding Edge*

Bleeding Edge is a hard-boiled detective novel because it follows the basic characteristics of the genre with some modifications. Although Maxine, like Doc Sportlow, isn't a professional, relying on intuition and her instincts to identify clues, she represents the genre more than Doc Sportlow. Jennifer Backman (2018) notes “In many ways, *Bleeding Edge*’s Maxine Tarnow is more recognizably hard - boiled than Doc—she has the cynical, knowing tone of a person unsurprised by illegal or immoral behavior” (26) . She demonstrates a strong determination to uncover the truth despite the threats and dangers surrounding her. Despite losing her legal license as a detective, she continues to investigate independently of police agencies in her office, Tail Em and Nail. Although she lacks

the toughness and ruthlessness of hard-boiled detectives, she demonstrates a serious determination to uncover anything that leads her to the Hashslingerz “ I am being followed, now they’re following you? You want to tell me there’s no connection?” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 85). Maxine realizes that Lester is hiding information from her, but he has not revealed it to Maxine out of fear for his life. Maxine's persistence demonstrates her sincerity in getting to the truth, even though she's dealing with a person who is under threat of death. Even after Lester's murder, Maxine continues her investigation, searching for the park and uncovering clues to the crime, despite Windust's threats and the absence of police institutions. “Look, Igor, it’s not as if anybody is paying me to find out who did Lester. You know who did it. So do I.”(*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 355)Also, when Maxine investigates Ice’s house, she encounters a mysterious door and wonders if she's crazy enough to enter it. But, her determination to find out the truth behind drives her enter “She finds a long corridor, swept, austere, track lighting at wide intervals, shadows where they shouldn’t be, leading—unless she’s turned around somehow—toward the abandoned air base with the big radar antenna...Gabriel Ice’s access to it is important enough to be protected by a key code (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013,187). Maxine's persistence comes from the fact that the place she's trying to enter is the heart of the corrupt system she's trying to expose. In addition to her persistence, Maxine possesses a high level of endurance. After witnessing Windust's body being mauled by dogs, she feels nauseous as the body and the smell cause her to vomit. “ She stumbles to the toilet... and kneels on the cold tiles beneath the racket of the fan. She rejoins the silent stiff in the other room... She vomits” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 388). Despite the horrific situation, she returns back to the body and continues the investigation. In addition, Maxine displays a moral code when she mocks Windust's offer to work with him, showing that attempts to persuade her, whether with money or appearance, are futile. “You want to hire me? For money? Or were you planning to rely on charm?” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 109). Maxine treats Windust coldly, demonstrating her refusal to be emotionally or professionally exploited, and her refusal to submit to authority or be seduced. However, Pynchon reimagines the traditional hard-boiled detective character by making her female rather than male “The man of honor becomes in *Bleeding Edge* a woman of honor” (Chandler, as cited in Sandberg, 2020, 137). Also he makes her not isolated from her family and community “Maxine balances the capable, individual work of the hard-boiled detective” (Backman, 2018, 31) . Maxine is a detective, a mother, a wife, and a social activist. Maxine Tarnow is not professional detective like Sam Spade and Marlowe since she depends on intuition “one of Maxine’s more useful sensors is her bladder” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 84). For this reason “Neither Sportlow nor Tarnow could be described as private I” (Sandberg, 2020, 136)*Bleeding Edge* takes place in New York in 2001, before and after 9/11, under a corrupt capitalist system that represents the empire of evil. Corruption in *Bleeding Edge* isn't hidden in the shadows, unlike Pynchon's previous novels, but has become visible and even embodied in the form of people, tools, and mysterious entities that support it. Gabriel Ice, CEO of Hashslingerz, is one of the most important tools the system uses to implement intelligence and espionage schemes. He is portrayed in the novel as a mysterious, cold, and deceitful person, and he is proud of that Dalsgarrrd shows how the later villains in Pynchon's works like Ice is “free of moral scruples and willing to describe their sinister plot (2019, 164). Reg says “According to Eric, a purpose on earth written in code none of us can read. Except maybe for 666, which tends to recur” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 23). The text indicates that the code 666 appears in many of the codes Ice uses. In the Bible, this number symbolizes the Antichrist, so Ice represents false authority, deception, and evil. Ice's actions prove that he acknowledges his corruption and liar, so he doesn't hide it, but rather exposes it publicly because he knows the system supports him. Ice aspires to control and dominate, and this desire is evident in the DeepArcher , and how all powers dream of seizing control of it because it represents a free cyberspace in the hidden world of the internet. That's why he personally attends the Black Hat conference, not just Ice himself, but “ the NSA, the Mossad, terrorist go-betweens, Microsoft, Apple... “Hashslingerz too, I Suppose.” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 210). Therefore, all major powers are pursuing this space because it represents a promising force for controlling the internet. Hashslingerz , run by Gabriel Ice, is not just a cybersecurity company, but an entity in its self, hiding lot of information behind inaccessible digital layers. This entity relies on encrypted codes and data subject to regulated security encryption. Reg tells Maxine that he suspects the company is deliberately hiding data, financial records, and other intimidating information that is fully encrypted and inaccessible even to search engines like Lexis Nexis. The company also uses the media as a cover for its corruption, which Reg explains when the company asks him to film a documentary about it to enhance its image in the internet bubble and make it appear as a successful technology company. “I have this tiny advance the company’s kicking in, plus I’m allowed total access” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 23). The company paid Reg an advance and promised him full access to everything, which aroused his suspicions, as if it were an attempt to

silence him from what he might see. But, the truth is not as he was told. Full access was a lie because he was prevented from viewing the company's files. "Too much I'm not being told." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 21) Another aspect of the company's corruption is its falsification of accounting data. Maxine uncovers fraudulent practices when reviewing the company's files under Benford's Law. The company's exchange numbers do not follow the normal pattern of recurring first digits, proving that the company's records have been tampered with. "The first thing that jumps out is Benford's Law anomaly some of the expenses." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 51). Another evidence of fraud, is the unrealistic sequential invoice numbers used as cover for real invoices. The "hash totals" also do not match, proving that the data has been deliberately tampered with. Furthermore, the security card numbers do not pass through Luhn's verification algorithm, proving that they are invalid, or rather, fake cards are being used "consecutive Invoice Numbers" (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 50) This proves that fraud is systematic in all financial files. Hashslingr's continued payment of large sums to halgaahigh.com, even after it was legally erased, reflects an aspect of its corruption in money laundering: "Prominent among payees of these fishy expenditures is hwgaahwgh.com. What's strange is that after the company is liquidated, the amounts paid to it grow dramatically even more lavish and it all seems to be disappearing someplace offshore" (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 70) Investigating fiber optics is another aspect of money laundering. Eric explained to Maxine that within Hashslingerz, there is a mysterious, fully encrypted company that sells abandoned fiber optics, "dark fiber." The presence of such a company within encrypted files is an indication that the matter is not fair. What would motivate a company to encrypt a sale of optical instruments unless it was a front for dirty operations? "Among the mystery vendors is a Fiber brokerage called Darklinear Solutions." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 144). Also, Maxine asks, "why Hashslingr's payments to Darklinear are being kept hidden" (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 144). This proves that encryption indicates an illegal purpose. Hashslingerz also exploits companies like hawgaahugh.com to pass dirty money, which is then transferred to fake accounts, then cleaned up and incorporated into a legitimate front, thus creating wealth that no one can trace. The corruption of the company itself reflects the corruption of the system that controls such companies. It is unreasonable for money laundering operations to take place without oversight or security agencies. This proves that there is cooperation between the company and the regime: "Hashslingerz is as tight as it gets with the U.S. Security apparatus, an arm of, if you like. Crypto work, countermeasures, heaven knows what-all." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 119). So, the company is not being monitored, but rather protected by the regime as long as it carries out operations such as hacking and espionage. In addition, the complete absence of security and police indicates that it is complicit in corruption. Even when Maxine reports the company, she is met with threats or neglect. "we have a trace on this instrument, we know who you are and where you are and our people will not hesitate to come after you. You have a good day now, you hear?" (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 209). In addition, the company is also involved in terrorist transfers by transferring funds that support organizations. "WTF Fund" is "instrumental in the illegal transfer of millions of \$US to an account in Dubai controlled by the Wahhabi Transreligious Friendship (WTF) Fund, which, according to this anyway, is a known terrorist paymaster." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 250). All of this is done under a technological cover that provides it with protection and a respectable façade. This, in turn, indicates that the system that is supposed to stop such a dangerous operation is either complicit in it or fundamentally corrupt. Eric explains for Maxine that this funding may have been the reason for the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, as every reanalysis of the financial data found that the money transfer was not random, but rather intentional and had a greater purpose. "I couldn't stop going back, over and over it, what if that was helping finance the attack on the Trade Center? Then Ice isn't only just another dotcom douchebag, he's a traitor to his country." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 326). What proves that is the DeepArcher was random from the beginning of its invention, according to Justin's explanation to Maxine, but before the attacks, everything in it became organized. This indicates that hidden forces have laid their hands on it and have begun reshaping the space according to a hidden agenda. A dark side of the company's corruption, is that it creates fake companies to make them a potential attack lure, attracting young hackers. When hackers penetrate them, they are given a choice between imprisonment in Rikers or working for the company. This demonstrates the forced recruitment of talented young people to serve hidden agendas and cyberwar: "hen bust them and threaten legal action. Offer them a choice between Pullin a single over on Rikers or an opportunity to take the next step toward becoming a 'real hacker'" (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 55). Also, they are forced to learn Arabic, not for cultural purposes, but in order to use it as a means to monitor the Arab world: "learn Arabic and how to write Arabic Leet." (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 56). All of this is tied to serving the interests of the US government in the Middle East. This proves that it is not just a company, but an intelligence entity funded to wage cyberwars against its enemies, especially Muslims. "Even Russia, you don't

have to worry so much about it, as our Muslim brothers” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 56). Nicholas Windust, is another tool in the hands of the system, symbolizing the state and oppression. He carries out assassinations, torture, and espionage operations. He is thus the hand through which the system exacts its wrath: “Windust was there when Lester was taken out, and maybe he even did it.” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 244). The text shows that Maxine doesn't rule out the possibility that Windust was Lester's killer because “Lester discovered the invisible underground river of cash diverting a hefty chunk into his own account... diverting a hefty chunk... into some secret account of his own” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 169). That is, Lester stole money belonging to Ice and his company. This proves that Windust is a tool used by capitalists to eliminate their enemies. Windust's death reflects the violence and dark side of the system. He kills in a gruesome manner because he began to feel guilty and tried to atone for his sins. “to believe in a parallel world, somewhere far beneath his feet where another Windust was doing the things he was pretending not to up here.” (*Bleeding Edge* , 2013, 418). His last act was to rescue his wife and bid her farewell with tenderness. This act conveys a sense of guilty and a desire to atone for his actions: “he agreed either to go in for a percentage or, later on, with more leverage, to buy it outright—but he never, the hippie nutcase, cashed anything in” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 112). This indicates that he refuses to profit financially from his crimes, as if he feels the money he has collected is unclean. Windust's sense of guilt and guilt prompted the regime to eliminate him because he had become a threat to the system, which does not tolerate remorse, weakness, or humanity. So, he was existentially erased, even his personal file. Maxine notes that it has been hacked: “There's been new material added” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 403) This proves that his file has been rewritten to suit the regime's interests, maintaining the regime's image of strength and devoid of humanity or weakness. Violence, which is supposed to be used to achieve justice and serve humanity, is used in the world of *Bleeding Edge* to suppress humanity, conceal the truth, and obscure justice Heater Worthington (2011) explains that “the hard-boiled detective, while paid for his investigations, is alienated from the community and essentially works to satisfy himself and his personal sense of justice” (159). Media is also used by the system to obscure the facts, especially after the events of 9/11. “And meantime the only help we get from the media is boo hoo the innocent deep boo fuckin hoo you know What? All the dead are innocent. There's no un innocent dead” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 340). Shown criticizes the American media, which always presents America as a victim and justifies its heinous acts. Media did not provide coverage or investigation for the causes, but rather focused on one aspect to instill a certain feeling of sadness and fear among the people. Therefore, the image of the Twin Towers burning was constantly repeated to the people: “Just the one camera angle, the same news... that's no news, the same morning-show airhead idiocy—”(*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 308). Maxine explains that media had nothing to say except, “Ain't it Awful” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 308). The role of media was limited to preparing people psychologically and justifying wars, espionage, and surveillance under the pretext of defending innocence and claiming that they were innocent, while the East was the real evil. If you read nothing but the Newspaper of Record, you might believe that New York City... has risen to the challenge of global jihadism, joining a righteous crusade Bush's people are now calling the War on terror. If you go to other sources—the Internet, for example—you might get a different picture. (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 311) Thus, *Bleeding Edge* shows that the American media does not report the facts, but rather creates false narratives, and that alternative facts that expose corruption are being erased and destroyed. For example Reg was fired from filming a film about the company since he enters a mysterious room for unknown Arab figures. “My apartment got broken into again, this time trashed, all my footage taken except what I hid.” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 141) . Not only that, but his evidence was erased and his memory confiscated. Reg's position demonstrates that the authorities control what is presented, what is real, and what is fake. Even the Educational system is not away from the system's corruption. Children are being programmed like machines, as March explained to Maxine. “They're sending him to Collegiate. Were fuckin else. They want him seamlessly programmed on into Harvard, law school, Wall Street, the usual Manhattan death march” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 131). This means that Kennedy Ice is not being taught to be a free human being, but rather is being programmed to become part of the corrupt capitalist system. When the elite educates their children this way, it means a new generation will continue the corruption process. A new generation is being groomed to be executives who protect the interests of the corrupt system. Thus, Pynchon depicts an integrated system of corruption and that corruption has reached its ultimate peak in the American system “You could also say, the terminal truth about the U.S. government, worse than anything you can imagine.” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 119). Therefore, the system cannot be controlled or overcome because it is no longer centralized but has become an entity “may be even the CIA's scared of them” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 399). “This “new enemy” transcends simple notions of state power or plutocracy, making identification, let alone representation,

increasingly difficult” (Maguire, 2017, 105) Finally, one of the essential characteristics of hard-boiled fiction is the femme fatale. This trait is traditionally manifested in Tallis Ice, who appears as an elusive character surrounded by mystery, this pushes Maxine and the reader to suspect what she is saying. Does she know the truth? Or is she ignorant of what's going? This is evident when Maxine asks her about Dieter and she replies, “they never shared it with me” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 426) Here, she claims she doesn't know about her husband's partnership with Dieter, but her tone suggests she knows a lot but doesn't speak up. Another aspect that makes Maxine question her credibility is that she's a comptroller in the company and obviously knows about her husband's corruption. This proves that she's either complicit in the corruption, benefits from silence, or is forced not to speak up. “she's the company comptroller at Hashslingerz” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 121). And “How innocent a party can she be in any of this?” (*Bleeding Edge*, 2013, 209). So, Maxine doesn't know whether Tallis is a victim or an accomplice to the corruption, which reflects the femme fatale character. One prominent aspect of the femme fatale's character is seduction and the centrality of evil. Although Tallis is elusive and mysterious, Pynchon strips Tallis of these qualities and projects them onto Nicholas Windust, who “functions as *Bleeding Edge*'s version of the femme fatale” (Backman, 2018, 28). Who is charming and handsome. Therefore, Maxine feels a complex attraction to him, not because of his attractiveness, but because he represents the authority, the state, and the corrupt system that Maxine is trying to expose. This transformation by Pynchon shows that the femme fatale is no longer the center of evil, but rather that the authority that cannot be trusted is the evil itself.

3. Conclusion

Thomas Pynchon's last two novels, *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*, both employ extensively Hard-boiled detective fiction tropes, but they apply and subvert them differently in ways that highlight their unique themes and settings. Thus, in both novels we can identify the major Hard-boiled fiction tropes like the alienated private investigator, the quest to track a missing person, systematic corruption, slang language and street colloquialisms, and the femme . The two novels, however, differ radically in the scope and ends of their adaptation of the Hard-boiled detective fiction tropes. *Inherent Vice* tends predominantly to adapt these tropes for parodic and thematic effects. Doc Sportello is less masculine and aggressive than the average detectives of the classic hard-boiled detective fiction. *Bleeding Edge* beats a different track with these tropes as it tends to adapt them to reflect the contemporary anxieties of the post-digital 9/11 era. In short, *Bleeding Edge* uses the hard boiled tropes to create metanarratives of global conspiracy and paranoia. Yet, in both novels, Pynchon is benefiting from the tight narrative structure of the hard-boiled fiction to explore intricate contemporary anxieties However, both novels tend to experiment with the character of the hard-boiled private eye. Doc and Tarnow are non-heroic figures as they lack the physical competence of the aggressive private detectives of the classic hard-boiled detective fiction. Doc and Tarnow are defeated detectives in a corrupted world beyond redemption. *Bleeding Edge* further this experimentation by using a female detective. This departs radically from the tropes of the classic Hard-boiled detective fiction in which the detective is an aggressive and tough male whereas women are kept in the stereotypical figure of the femme fatale. Furthermore, the urban setting figures prominently in both novels as a character or an influential agent in the detecting plot. The shadowy urban space of Los Angeles and New York is not only corrupted but a noir atmosphere nested in paranoia and conspiracy. The failure of the detective to solve the mystery and the ever complication of the detection endow this corrupted urban setting with the fatality of nemesis. It imparts in the reader a heavy sense of imminent doom. This indicates that Pynchon is using the hard-boiled mode as a critical space to mount a critique of American cultural history.

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