

Introduction to Crime Fiction

Prof. Andrew Goldstone

(andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

April 20, 2023. Mosley (2).

review

- ▶ complex temporality of Mosley's opening ("by 1948")
- ▶ divided language of narration/dialogue
 - ▶ Standard English ("educated")
 - ▶ African American Vernacular English ("natural")
 - ▶ dialects:
 - ▶ every variety has a grammar
 - ▶ no dialect is right or wrong
 - ▶ some dialects have more prestige

land of dreams

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There was still a large stretch of farmland between Los Angeles and Santa Monica in those days. The Japanese farmers grew artichokes, lettuce, and strawberries along the sides of the road. That night the fields were dark under the slight moon and the air was chill but not cold.

I was unhappy about going to meet Mr. Albright because I wasn't used to going into white communities, like Santa Monica, to conduct business. (53)

- ▶ How does the narrative represent the effects of racism?

survival tactics

It was a habit I developed in Texas when I was a boy. Sometimes, when a white man of authority would catch me off guard, I'd empty my head of everything so I was unable to say anything. "The less you know, the less trouble you find," they used to say. I hated myself for it but I also hated white people, and colored people too, for making me that way.
(14)

“that kind of man”

Mouse didn't ever feel bad about anything he'd done. He was just that kind of man. He wasn't confessing to me, he was telling his story....

It was the worst thing I ever did to take that money. (49)

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It was the worst thing I ever did to take that money. (49)

I ran away from Mouse and Texas to go to the army and then later to L.A. I hated myself. I signed up to fight in the war to prove to myself that I was a man. (49)

what is a man?

But I had dreams that didn't have me running in the streets anymore; I was a man of property and I wanted to leave my wild days behind. (50)

“That’s Mr. Rawlins!” I said as I rose to meet him. “You don’t have to give me my job back but you have got to treat me with respect.” (68)

the voice...of masculinity?

“Don’t ask no questions. Either somethin’ is or it ain’t. ‘What if’ is fo’ chirren, Easy. You’s a man.” (99)

- ▶ What is the significance of Easy’s “voice”? Does it speak the truth?

the other side of the binary

I had been old enough to kill men in a war but I wasn't a man yet. At least I wasn't a man the way Coretta was a woman. She straddled me on the couch. (44)

next

- ▶ keep going, through chap. 20