

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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coming up

- ▶ paper 2 exercise: due this Friday
 - ▶ choose a topic, find a source...engage!
- ▶ MLA International Bibliography: subject search
 - ▶ cast a wide net, use your judgment
- ▶ JSTOR: full text search
- ▶ library: free help from experts
- ▶ someone else's bibliography: free help from experts

homology

- ▶ Brainstorm: connect *Petals of Blood* (Evanston–Limuru–Yalta 1977) to *Devil in a Blue Dress* (New York 1990). Give specific examples from Mosley.

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- ▶ themes: police violence, rural-urban migration, political corruption, sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, folk tradition, bars/homes/property
- ▶ form: ellipsis and anachrony; dense character networks
- ▶ context: writing after liberation, but liberation isn't here yet
- ▶ genre: the crime novel; the more-than-one-crime novel; the political novel?

review

- ▶ “more than simply a detective novel”
- ▶ the question of the question of race

people



Walter Mosley

Forget Mike Hammer and Sam Spade. Our man on the case is Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins, the sardonic private eye created by Walter Mosley, who has done for mystery novels what Jackie Robinson did for baseball: give this favorite genre its first Black American hero. Mosley has written five Easy Rawlins Mysteries in five years and last year saw his first book, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, come to life as a film starring Denzel Washington. His vivid portrayals of the reluctant, put-upon detective hit a nerve with all of us who know why it ain't easy being Easy.

(racial) time is a flat circle

When he looked at me I felt a thrill of fear, but that went away quickly because I was used to white people by 1948.

I had spent five years with white men, and women, from Africa to Italy, through Paris, and into the Fatherland itself. I ate with them and slept with them, and I killed enough blue-eyed young men to know that they were just as afraid to die as I was. (1)

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All of them and John and half the people in that crowded room had migrated from Houston after the war, and some before that. California was like heaven for the Southern Negro....Being on the bottom didn't feel so bad if you could come to John's now and then and remember how it felt back home in Texas, dreaming about California. (28)

It was safer for my father in the middle of World War II than it was for him back home in Texas.

Walter Mosley, interview with Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!*, [February 27, 2012](#).

not even past

I hadn't seen Mouse in four years when we ran into each other one night, outside of Myrtle's saloon, in Houston's Fifth Ward. (33)

He had killed his stepfather five years earlier and blamed it on another man. (33)

It was the worst thing I ever did to take that money.... I ran away from Mouse and Texas to go to the army and then later to L.A. (49)

the language of narrative

- ▶ What language is *Devil in a Blue Dress* written in?

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I always tried to speak proper English in my life, the kind of English they taught in school, but I found over the years that I could only truly express myself in the natural, “uneducated” dialect of my upbringing. (10)

Etta's good but she throwed me out. (48)

“You tell him that the next time he better tive me a note because you cain't be lettin' no street niggahs comin' in yo' place wit' no notes!”

I was ready to leave. (15)

ignorance as a survival strategy

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)

true love

I loved her and I was jealous of her and if the bank sent the county marshal to take her from me I might have come at him with a rifle rather than to give her up. (12–13)

- ▶ Who is she?

true love

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► Who is she?

When I got that mortgage I found that I needed more than just friendship. (22)

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. (44)

next

- ▶ onwards to chapter 20