

Introduction to Crime Fiction

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review

- ▶ complex temporality of Mosley's opening ("by 1948")
 - ▶ cf. complex temporality of social context (like *Petals*)
- ▶ divided language of narration/dialogue
 - ▶ Standard English ("educated")
 - ▶ African American Vernacular English ("natural")
 - ▶ dialects:
 - ▶ no dialect is right or wrong, but some have prestige
 - ▶ learning the prestige variety might help to move on up
 - ▶ code-switching might come with a price...

“What’a ya think’s goin’ on! We gotta get out of here and it’s best if we split.”

tu dis quoi là?

“Listen, honey, I don’t even know you...”

“But I need ’elp.” She looked down at the knot of hands and said, “You do not want to be bother by the police. I do not either...” (92)

“What’s goin’ on?” I asked.

“What’a ya think’s goin’ on! We gotta get out of here and it’s best if we split.”

I didn’t have the time to wonder at her loss of accent. (96)

land of dreams

When I finally made it back to to my house, on I I 6th Street, it was another beautiful California day. Big white clouds sailed eastward toward the San Bernadino mountain range. There were still traces of snow on the peaks and there was the lingering scent of burning trash in the air.
(46)

land of dreams

When I finally made it back to my house, on 116th Street, it was another beautiful California day. Big white clouds sailed eastward toward the San Bernadino mountain range. There were still traces of snow on the peaks and there was the lingering scent of burning trash in the air. (46)

He put up a hand and shook his head before I could go on. Then he led me across the wide room to the pair of pink couches that stood in front of his desk. The desk was the size of a grand piano. The great brocade curtains behind the desk were open to a view of the mountains behind Sunset Boulevard.

I remember thinking that it was a long way from vice-president to the top. (117)

white-suit populism

[Albright:] “Shit! The police enforce the law and you know what the law is, don’t you?”

I had my own ideas on the subject but I kept them to myself.

“The law,” he continued, “is made by the rich people so that the poor people can’t get ahead.” (20)

the color line

- ▶ What are some of the different ways race and racism make a difference to the way Mosley is using the crime genre? Look for variety.

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)

oh that goofy Inspector Lestrangle

I was worried because they didn't follow the routine....It's hard acting innocent when you are but the cops know that you aren't. (71)

Mason sneered at me and then followed Miller out of the cell door. He was starting to remind me of a trained mutt. (74)

“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)

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)

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 worst?

It was the worst kind of racism. The fact that he didn't even recognize our difference showed that he didn't care one damn about me. But I didn't have the time to worry about it. I just watched him move his lips about lost love until, finally, I began to see him as some strange being. (122)

► Why is it the worst?

on the other hand...

It was those two days more than any other time that made me a detective.

I felt a secret glee when I went into a bar and ordered a beer with money someone else had paid me. I'd ask the bartender his name and talk about anything, but, really, behind my friendly talk, I was working to find something. Nobody knew what I was up to and that made me sort of *invisible*; people that they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn't real. (131)

invisible man

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.....

I am not complaining, nor am I protesting either. It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves. Then too, you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision....It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time.

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1952), 3–4.

“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?

next

- ▶ finish the novel