DEPARTAMENT DE FILOLOGIA ANGLESA

THE CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE SUBJECTIVITY IN WALTER MOSLEY'S DETECTIVE NOVELS

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Presentada por
Agustín Reyes Torres

Dirigida por
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Valencia, 2008

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A mi padre, que tanto creyó en mí,
y a mi madre, que ciertamente merece mucho más,
por su enorme e incansable espíritu luchador

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THE CREATION OF AN ALTERNATIVE SUBJECTIVITY IN WALTER MOSLEY'S DETECTIVE NOVELS

Short-Title List

In this study I have used the following abbreviations to refer to Walter Mosley's novels in the Easy Rawlins series:

DBD:	*Devil in a Blue Dress.*
RD:	*A Red Death*
WB:	*White Butterfly*
BB:	*Black Betty*
LYD:	*A Little Yellow Dog*
GF:	*Gone Fishin'*
BBBB:	*Bad Boy Brawly Brown*
SEP:	*Six Easy Pieces: Easy Rawlins Stories*
LS:	*Little Scarlet*
CK:	*Cinnamon Kiss*

Introduction

I suspect I must have been born somewhere and at some time.

Booker T. Washington

Man must transform the world in which he is not recognized into a world in which this recognition takes place.

G.W.F. Hegel

Black American subjectivity emerges from a particular historical consciousness and experience(s). This subjectivity rests on bridges between the past and the present, slavery and freedom, the feeling of being both an insider and an outsider. Racial discrimination, need for recognition, social inequality, tensions, contradictions, hatred, and violence mark black mentality and the post-colonial reality in which most African Americans live in the United States. This study is based on the representation of the black hero's subjectivity that Walter Mosley portrays in his Easy Rawlins series. My particular interest is to analyze the figure of Easy Rawlins as an individual that reflects a post-colonial mentality and a fluid hybrid identity: Easy lives on the edge between different worlds and different cultures, and endeavours to reinvent himself by constructing a space in which he can achieve respect and recognition.

I have chosen to work with the Rawlins novels for two main reasons. First, they cover a period of more than twenty-five years, from 1939 to 1966, in which it is possible to observe how the protagonist's black identity evolves and is subject to constant change. Second, this period coincides with a crucial time in history when a new black consciousness emerged as a result of World War II, the migratory flow of thousands of black southerners to the cities and the civil rights movements. I will explore Easy's gradual formation of identity throughout the ten

novels he appears from when he is nineteen in *Gone Fishin'* (1997) until he is forty six years old in *Cinammon Kiss* (2005). Evidently, his development is affected by the different personal situations he has to go through, and the historical time that he happens to live as a black man through the 50s and 60s. The subject is culturally and socially constructed, and Easy is no exception. Although cultural codes are shared and human beings live together, every individual is an independent self with a unique perspective and a single first-person ontology. In Easy's case, I will argue that there are three main aspects that shape the character's subjectivity: his role as a detective, his post-colonial consciousness as a black man raised in a society dominated by whites, and finally, his attachment and defense of a strong African American culture.

From a literary point of view, there is no doubt that Easy Rawlins responds to what E. M. Forster called a "round character," one who is fully characterized and complex, and sometimes even contradictory. It is also evident that he changes over the course of the stories. His black identity is not given and stable but constantly under construction. As a first person narrator, Easy often lets the reader know what his thoughts and emotions are, yet he is still unpredictable. Above all, we will find that although there is a strong influence of his role as a detective, it is his blackness that determines his way of thinking.

In my study, I will devote Chapter 1 to the analysis and review of the most relevant criticism of Mosley's work related to Easy Rawlins. I will highlight and compare the critics' contributions and discuss their different perspectives. Previous academic works have examined a wide range of topics such as Mosley's interest in denouncing the discrimination and marginalization of American society (M. Wesley, A. Goeller), his emphasis on the heterogeneity that exists within the black identity (N. King, A. Pepper), or his approach to the meaning of blackness (H. Lock, L. Kennedy). Likewise, other relevant subjects addressed are Easy's double consciousness and role as a trickster (M. Young, J. Bryant), and whether or not Mosley follows the hardboiled detective conventions (R. Berger, S. Bunyan), or if he is just interested in portraying the lifestyle of the black community including specific aspects of African American folklore (S. Coale, A. Mills). Interestingly, while some of these critics address different topics and

sometimes some of their ideas even overlap, none have ever presented a study of the entire series and the evolution of the main character. They focus on particular novels or areas of study but do not look at it as a whole as I aim to do.

In Chapter 2, I will introduce the theoretical framework I use to analyze Easy's subjectivity. As mentioned before, I establish three main lines of analysis. Firstly, it is crucial to focus on how Mosley reappropriates the detective conventions to create a black private eye whose profile mirrors that of his white counterparts but also subverts it. Throughout my discussion, I analyze Raymond Chandler's canonical work "The Simple Art of Murder" and establish those traits that characterize Easy. Likewise, I compare Mosley and Chester Himes' black detective heroes and highlight the traits that they have in common. Secondly, focusing on the perspective on identity, consciousness, and subjectivity of black scholars such as Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and W.E.B. Du Bois, along with the post-colonial approach of critics such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Robert Young, and Homi Bhabha among others, I provide the necessary concepts to discuss Easy's profile from a post-colonial angle. Although the term postcolonial, as Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge indicate, is not a consistent one and cannot be considered "a homogeneous category either across all postcolonial societies or even within a single one" (289), one could say that African American subjectivity can be regarded as postcolonial in the sense that black people in the U.S. have been "marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power" (284). Similarly, as Stuart Hall argues identity has to be re-thought. He advocates the logic of the emergence of a new self that has adapted to modernity and new cultural circumstances. Individual and collective social identities are not homogenous and cannot be approached under the old stereotypes (1991: 41). Finally, my third line of discussion will argue how the presence of a strong African American culture in Easy's life determines his perspective and his understanding of the world. I will study the meaning of culture according to Gerry Philipsen and Dennis Carbaugh, and then will revise Stephen Soitos' concept of the black vernaculars as well as Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of Signifyin(g).

Next, in Chapters Three, Four and Five, my aim is to study the evolution of Easy Rawlins focusing on the chronological development of the hero's subjectivity throughout the novels. Mosley deconstructs the traditional stereotypes of blackness as he portrays a black character that breaks mainstream expectations and displays an agency that not only takes him to reinvent himself but also to relocate himself in society. As a result of his personal experiences and the different historical times he goes through during the ten novels, I aim to show that the series can be divided into three different groups. In Chapter Three, I analyze *Gone Fishin',* the first novel in which Easy appears when he still lives in Texas and goes on a road trip with Mouse down South to Pariah. The events that take place in this journey will change him drastically and haunt him through the rest of his life. In this way, *Gone Fishin'* represents a classic bildungsroman novel in which Easy experiences a series of shocking events. In this novel, he is initiated into adulthood through the dropping of preconceptions and the acquisition of new knowledge. In fact, not only does he decide to learn how to read and write but also to look for new ways to enhance himself, for example by joining the army. In Chapter Four I have grouped *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), *A Red Death* (1991), *White Butterfly* (1992), and *Black Betty* (1994). These novels constitute Easy's first period in the city of Los Angeles, and the time setting extends from 1948 to 1961. After Easy's participation in World War II, he decides to move to L.A. hoping for a better future. However, the social and economic conditions for all the new arrivals are harsh. Mosley portrays how the African American migratory movement is massive and they must go through a period of adaptation in which discrimination soon establishes clear racial boundaries within the city. Easy loses his job in what is his first of many personal battles to demand respect. Soon after, however, he accepts a job as a detective in order to be able to pay the mortgage of his treasured house. This moment constitutes the beginning of a new life for him. For this reason, I will organize the study of the construction of Easy's subjectivity according to his profile as a conventional, as a black and as a post-colonial detective. As will be shown, Easy develops the typical tough sleuth's personality but, unlike other white detectives, his power and autonomy will be narrowed by his blackness and his constant troubles with the L.A. authorities. At the same

time, we see how he learns to cross the different cultural and social borders of the city and exhibits a double consciousness that grants him success as a private eye. In the end, however, unhappy with street life and disappointed with his personal attempt to reach the American dream as a businessman, Easy decides to leave the streets and live a more sedentary life.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I analyze Easy's attempt to redefine himself between 1963 and 1966. In *A Little Yellow Dog* (1996), *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* (2002)*, Six Easy Pieces* (2003), *Little Scarlet* (2004), and *Cinnamon Kiss,* he goes through a series of stages in his personal life. Now forty-three, we see how he obtains a new job as supervising custodian of a high school in Watts and how he aspires to establish a new identity. His main goals are to gain social recognition and fulfill his role as a family man with responsibility, even considering marriage. Always demanding respect and highly concerned with his reputation, we see how he is totally reluctant to intervene in new investigations. However, he eventually feels obliged to do it to prove he has not committed any crime. The structure of the chapter will be divided based on Easy's role as a head custodian, as a family man, and as a blues detective. We will see how Easy alternates his jobs and his multiple identities, and most importantly, how he is in charge of the different spaces he frequents. At Sojourner Truth School, he becomes a trustworthy supervisor whom employees look upon with consideration and even teachers and students ask for help. As a father, he fulfills his own notion of black manhood as a family head who provides all the material and affective needs for his two adopted children. Finally, as a blues detective, Easy represents a hybrid detective figure that knows how to take advantage of his blackness to obtain a recognized position in American society. He surprisingly procures himself an office as a private eye in downtown Los Angeles. Moreover, after assisting the LAPD with a case directly related to the racial tension and the riots of 1965 he is given an official badge as an investigator. This acknowledgment constitutes a symbolic improvement in his career and also denotes that he has reached a professional status similar to other white detectives. Easy reverses the system. In a way, society needs him now to maintain the order. He definitely demonstrates self-actualization and fluidity in his identity as a black man.

In conclusion, Easy's trajectory and attempt to redefine himself echoes Du Bois' philosophy that considers that "the history of the American Negro is the history of his strife. […] He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face" (5). This is also Easy's desire. His perspective is reflected through his critical comments and behavior. Throughout the fifties, he tries to reach success in American society; he does not accept at any moment any kind of subjugation and demands respect and equal treatment. Later, however, more mature and aware of the impossibilities to rise above racial boundaries, he attempts to lead a life establishing a space for himself that does not clash with white society. While Easy knows that he is inevitably connected to his black skin, he tries not to live in terms of racial difference but instead by integrating the cultural diversity that American society produces. As quoted by Jerry Bryant in *Born in a Mighty Bad Land*, Mosley himself states that "if people respect Easy […] it is because he has taken on a tough job in the real world: he's trying to define himself in spite of the world, to live by his own system of values… The genre may be mystery, but the underlying questions are moral and ethical, even existential" (150). In most cases, Easy's approach to life will be an alternative one; generally subversive, but always socially and culturally immersed in the United States. Following the hardboiled standards, Walter Mosley creates a black detective that represents a particular African American subjectivity, one that results from his blackness in relation to American society and American culture.

Chapter 1

Analyzing and Reviewing Walter Mosley

I went in finally, feeling like a shadow, stalking himself into light.
Walter Mosley, *White Butterfly*

Among the many articles written about Walter Mosley and his literary work it is common to find many remarks about Mosley's exploration of American culture and American social order from the late1930s to more recent times. As an African American author, Mosley represents in his novels a society in which the black community is the central figure and in which his characters voice moral and racial issues from an African American perspective. In this respect, most critics also agree to highlight the vivid portrayal that Mosley makes of black cultural traditions such as the inclusion of figures like the trickster or the storyteller which are very popular within the black mythology and folklore.

Unwilling to be labeled just as a mystery or detective novel writer, Mosley gained recognition first and foremost through the so called Easy Rawlins mysteries. Aware of the difficulties for black writers to establish themselves and prove there was an audience interested in their writing, Mosley used popular hardboiled detective fiction as a frame for his sociohistorical stories in which the main characters are always black and are set in black neighborhoods where the action takes place. Using this form of writing, Mosley could address in his plots all levels of society: the marginalized, the middle classes or even the upper ranks,

where it is possible to find people with money and power. Evidently, he had to adhere to the hardboiled conventions—where there is normally a crime and it has to be resolved, but while that is happening the writer has an opportunity to deal with issues such as racism, justice, morality, political corruption, etc. In this way, the Easy Rawlins novels present a picture of a particular social conscience with African American characters that are not just involved in a mystery but in the struggle itself that implies being black and making a life in post-World War II white America.

In this chapter, my aim is to analyze the most important reviews and criticism of Walter Mosley's work written so far by other scholars. I am especially interested in the study they present of the Easy Rawlins series from a chronological perspective. Mosley, born in 1952, started his writing career in his mid thirties, and has already published a total of twenty eight books. His work includes other literary genres such as essays, plays, science fiction, screenplays or novels for young readers. His first published novel was *The Devil in a Blue Dress* in 1990.

One of the earliest critical responses that this work received came out very soon after the novel appeared. In 1990 the critic D.J.R Bruckner drew attention at once to the idea that Mosley's work could not be merely considered as a mystery novel in "Mystery Stories Are Novelist's Route to Moral Questions." He emphasized those aspects in Mosley's first novel that made his plot different; those same characteristics which would define his later works. For instance, the portrayal of Easy Rawlins, the black main character with no job that lives in Los Angeles and feels forced to accept for economic reasons a job as a detective. This protagonist takes the reader through the unknown and dangerous black areas of L.A in 1948. Using a first person narrator, Mosley creates a hero who sounds so real that it is possible for all type of readers to believe in him and to listen to the moral questions he raises. In this sense, although for whites, *The Devil in a Blue Dress* can function simply as an exotic story that incidentally has a black man as a central feature and shows the black streets of the city to which they have no access; for blacks, however, the novel cuts to the heart, as Mosley imbues his

characters with discrimination problems and dilemmas that constitute a part of the everyday African American life.

Bruckner's critique, brought out in The New York Times, has been repeatedly referred to and quoted by most scholars when studying Mosley's work for being both, the first article to promote Mosley's novel as a new product in the literary market, and also one in which the black author expressed his views on his narrative. It is also true, however, that at times Bruckner seems to be serving Mosley's promotional interest more than reviewing him in a literary way. Certainly, there are parts when Bruckner gives the impression of just writing out Mosley's own perspective of his work.

This being so, apart from learning about Mosley's romanticized first steps to becoming a published writer, it is interesting to read how the author not only had already planned at that point to write a whole series using Easy Rawlins as the central character, but also intended to incorporate some unusual elements in his detective novels to make them innovative and raise matters beyond the unraveling of the mystery itself. In the interview Mosley stated: "Easy has to get old and people have to get sick and die. […] In most detective series the main characters don't change. But I want mine to change. It gives me a chance to explore a lot of things, including how things changed for blacks from the 50's on" (Bruckner 13). In a straightforward way, Mosley established what the content of his next novels would be. Furthermore, he also acknowledged the influence in his books of the stories he had heard as a child from his own father and other black adults at the time to give life to his characters and to come up with some of the subplots for his writing. One must say that after reading the ten books that make-up to date the whole Easy Rawlins saga, Mosley has remained faithful to his initial words and ideas.

In 1992 the scholar Theodore O. Mason, Jr. wrote a more worthy piece of criticism on *The Devil in a Blue Dress*. Under the title "Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins: The Detective and Afro-American Fiction," Mason focused on the different transgressions that Mosley represented in his novel. The first type of transgression could be identified through the hero/detective that lives in a world in

which the border between races and cultures is constantly shifting. The reader can clearly grasp how white characters are intruders in the black areas that Easy frequents, and on the contrary how he becomes the trespasser when crossing into white territory. In both cases, Mason points out how a negotiation of racial protocol is needed based on a basic cultural and racial knowledge on the part of the characters. We can see an example of these underlying conflicts in the very use of language. Mason explains:

> Grammatical English is a site of convention, of stability, of safety. Identified with formal education, it can readily be seen as Easy's entry into a realm previously denied in him and those like him. But here the fit is imperfect, for proper English is not the dialect of Easy's personal history, nor is it represented in the novel as the dialect of his culture or race. (179-180)

Similarly, another transgression is Easy's interest in reaching middle-class respectability and making sure he can keep up with the mortgage payments of his precious house. According to Mason, these are signs of stability that not only clash with cultural and social expectations but also with the hardboiled standards in which the detective figure does not pursue or conform to a conventional lifestyle.

Mason insists that Mosley's "emphasis on transgression moves the detective fiction closer to the center of the novelistic tradition" (174). Basing his thoughts on the theories of Georg Lukacs's *Theory of the Novel* and M.M. Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel," Mason argues for a reading of Mosley's African American detective fiction more within the realm of Afro-American literary tradition. In this respect, he uses Bakhtin's idea of the novel's incompleteness and quotes the Russian theorist affirming that "one of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the hero's inadequacy to his fate or situation" (177). This theme will be made totally clear as the series progresses as it is possible to see how the hero keeps transgressing throughout his life and keeps finding new situations and obstacles. The lack of totality in Easy Rawlins' life is part of the reality that the novelistic world portrays as it is also part of living to be always in constant process. For this reason, it seems right to conclude that

Mosley's concern depicting the experience of transgression fits indeed with the general trajectory of the African American fiction.

In a later article, "The Ethnic Vision in Walter Mosley's Crime Fiction" (1994), Thomas Michael Stein also includes an analysis of the two subsequent Easy Rawlins titles, *A Red Death* (1991) and *White Butterfly* (1992). He focuses on the notion of ethnicity that Mosley presents in his work. Using on the one hand, Jurgen Donnerstag's idea of the ethnic protagonist—that type of character that as a rule "negotiates a double vision alternating between demands of the ethnic culture and those of the 'American' cultures as he sees it" (quoted in Stein 197)—, and on the other hand, on the study of African American crime fiction done by Peter Freese on Chester Himes, Harry Kemelman and Tony Hillerman called *The Ethnic Detective*, Stein assigns Easy Rawlins the function of a "cultural mediator." He claims that "Easy thinks neither 'black 'nor 'white' but like an American" (203). Easy's ambition to achieve professional and financial success can be seen as part of Mosley's ethnic vision that advocates social integration and addresses the hero's goals as (presumably) shared by all Americans (202). In the same way, Stein considers that Mosley's protagonist responds to a way of thinking that the black intellectual W.E.B. Dubois called "the double self," since Easy can be defined as a man who can think both as a black and as an American man (208).

Certainly, we can see some similarities between Stein's perspective and Mason's previous discussion on transgression, only that Stein sees Rawlins more as a hero who "seeks a comprehensive humanitarian universality transcending" what he calls "ethnic restrictions" (197). In other words, and that is Stein's main point on Mosley's ethnic vision, "humanity transcends color;" the American Dream is within the reach for whites as much as it is for black people. This is an aspect of Mosley's work that according to these critics turns his fiction again into mainstream literature.

On the subject of Walter Mosley's representation of American society, the scholar Gilber H. Muller was particularly interested in the city of Los Angeles as the social urban setting where the Easy Rawlins series occur. In his "Double

Agent: The Los Angeles Crime Cycle of Walter Mosley," he emphasizes in 1995, as Thomas Stein had done one year before, Easy Rawlins' figure as a double agent and his mobility between black and white culture. He also includes Mosley's depiction of the role of L.A. during and after World War II when it became the destination for millions of African Americans that migrated mostly from Georgia, Louisiana and Texas into Southern California. The city received an unmistakable influence of this migratory flow, which is represented through Easy himself, born in Houston, and through all the rest of relevant characters in the series. Mosley reconstructs the impact of the historical moment and also recreates the tales that the migrants told in their journeys, most of which dealt very often with the conflict between black people and American social justice; this type of conflict far from being eradicated upon their arrival at their new home would actually become embedded in their lives. According to Muller, "Mosley appropriates the genre of detective fiction to create a graphic and kaleidoscopic portrayal of the violent, contradictory elements in Los Angeles culture" (289). In a way, the city becomes an emblematic picture of the whole nation and the coexistence between black and white people. Aware of it, Mosley explores through the series the black urban experience as well as the gradual sociohistorical evolution of the city of Los Angeles in the 50s and 60s.

In the same manner, Muller points out that there is a significant influence of Chester Himes on Mosley. Using New York and Los Angeles respectively, both black writers create in their detective fiction stories a world in which white hegemony is central and their main characters confront it. In fact, another critic, Robert Crooks, in his article "From the far side of the urban frontier: the detective fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley" (1995) considers that the two authors' detective novels can be read as narratives representing ideological resistance. Crooks states that Himes and Mosley "agree in affirming the need for African-American opposition to oppression and in rejecting the privilege of white supremacist ideology to diagnose and prescribe remedies for the situation of African Americans" (6). Easy Rawlins' detective work itself in this respect could be seen as a good example of this subversion. In the first place, he does not have an official license as a private investigator. He will eventually obtain one but not

until 1965 after more than seventeen years negotiating his own path of justice among his community and helping occasionally the L.A. police department to get to the bottom of many crimes. Secondly, Mosley has Easy introduce himself on several occasions as a "confidential agent" in the business of favors that helped black people who "had serious trouble but couldn't go to the police" (*RD* 5). In many of these cases, as a result of this confidentiality, Easy will find himself in extreme situations with white cops that don't know who he is or simply mistrust him. Mosley takes advantage of these moments to present the different ways his detective is treated when taken to the police station. Although innocent, he will be beaten up and verbally abused repeatedly when being interrogated. Finally, when the crimes are solved not only do we see that it is Easy and not the police, who works the mystery out but also that the version of the truth that Easy gives to them will always be his own. He will manipulate the facts in the way he considers best for him or his "clients." In this sense, Mosley always lets the reader know what actually happens and how much information does Easy choose to give to the authorities. Easy's ideological resistance is clear; he does not commit to white justice and white laws.

The discussion of whether Mosley's Easy Rawlins series can be regarded as subversive or resistant texts within the traditional detective formula is also the focus of Roger A. Berger in his essay: "The Black Dick': Race, Sexuality, and Discourse in the L.A. novels of Walter Mosley" (1997). Unlike previous critics, Berger will argue that although Mosley's ambivalence could take any critic to firmly believe that his novels break the detective canon, he has actually reproduced the most conservative and traditional aspects of it in the first four novels of the series, including *Black Betty* (1994).

Thus, when talking for instance about the figure of the lonely hero/detective as discussed before, Berger explains that this figure of the tough-guy who struggles against a society dominated by evil also appears in the work of renowned detective fiction authors like Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett and that it is possible to find in all of them the same characteristics: "experience, durability, isolation, a sense of justice, a warrior mentality, a populist individualism, and a self-reliance that characterizes a mythic (often white-male)

American self" (Berger 282). Furthermore, all these detectives, like Mosley's Easy Rawlins, usually "defend the lives of ordinary people against both the supposed agents of order (the police, businessman, and politicians) and the agents of chaos (gangsters, the immoral rich, psychotic murderers, and the like)" (Berger 282). Berger points out that these are all elements that can be easily recognized in Mosley's novels but should not be read as subversive ideological signs since they totally conform to the detective genre.

Also, based on the work of Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (1981), Berger highlights as well the inclusion of a traditional moral code in the Rawlins series. This moral code is of great relevance because in those cases when the representatives of law fail or are corrupt, the moral code is what remains underneath and helps the characters as well as the readers to judge individual actions and even to establish the difference between good and evil, justice or injustice. Ultimately, this abstract moral that is portrayed somewhat subliminally in all detective novels is what sustains the Western discourse by which human beings come to believe and accept the necessity of a given social order.

Above all, Berger considers that the politics and poetics of the detective fiction is an overwhelmingly white male genre and Mosley cannot fully disentangle from it. He affirms that "ironically, the tough-guy detective narrative would seem to resemble the black narrative of resistance or opposition, yet the traditional detective never operates on behalf of blacks" (283). The question Berger asks then is whether Mosley can make the genre black or on the contrary, the genre will "whiten" him. Moreover, he ponders if the ambivalence of Mosley's detective writing is the literary equivalent of "passing," and criticizes Mosley strongly in the following observation:

> Mosley has clearly made a name for himself in detective fiction, but, like his fictional creation Easy Rawlins, Mosley needs to check his valuables when returning to the community of black discourse. Indeed, one gets the distinct sense that Mosley fully recognizes that part of his success is attributable to a market strategy that exploits race to sell his 'exotic' detective novels. (292)

According to Berger, Mosley was just interested in gaining literary recognition when he decided to write detective fiction. The fact that his very first written book, *Gone Fishing*, was initially rejected and not published until 1997, and that he included the same characters in his new literary attempt triggered reactions like this. Obviously, Berger could not know that Mosley would actually prove to be years later a very prolific writer and would also obtain recognition for his other literary work.

As for his comment above on the black discourse, it would be a complex matter to define what exactly can be defined as black writing, but it seems fair to point out that there is not one single novel in which it is not possible to find various types of discourse. A novel in fact can be regarded as a multivoice text and can always be studied from different perspectives. Last of all, most scholars that have analyzed the Rawlins series have probably not missed out that these novels reflect a great deal of the traditional values of the hardboiled detective fiction, but they just have concentrated on the aspects that distinguish Mosley's novels from other authors', an element that defines him as a unique contemporary African American writer.

Following the same line of discussion, Mary Young would indirectly come very close to contradict to Berger's comments in her work "Walter Mosley, Detective Fiction and Black Culture." In her essay, brought out in 1998, a year later than Berger's, Young manifests that:

> Mosley does more than create protagonists in the hard-boiled tradition. Through exploration of his cultural identity, he has created a unique hero from an African-American perspective. […] Therefore, it is difficult not to conclude that Mosley has not only adapted and reconceived the genre of the detective novel into a vehicle for the continuation of African-American cultural traditions but he has also reshaped the genre by exploring and extending it into African-American literary traditions. (150)

Young explains how Mosley's two heroic characters, Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins and his best friend, Raymond "Mouse" Navrochet, are drawn directly from African-American folklore. Despite being enclosed within the hard-boiled detective fiction conventions, they are different from their private investigator counterparts since they are actually adapted from traditional black culture by using aspects of the

oral tradition and the slave narrative. In this respect, Easy Rawlins is depicted as the trickster and Mouse Navrochet as the bad black man. According to Lawrence Levine in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1978) these two figures, the trickster and the bad black man, are heroes in the black culture that "symbolized the strength, dignity, and courage many African-Americans were able to manifest in spite of their confined situation" (quoted in Young 143). These traits are undoubtedly portrayed through Mosley's characters. Similarly, paying attention to the trickster's way of life as indicated by Levine: "The trickster could improve his situation through careful deception, but at no time was he really in complete control; the rewards he could win were limited by the realities of the system within which he existed, and the dangers he faced were great" (quoted in Young 143).

Having been influenced by traditional black culture Mosley conceived his idea of the detective character Easy Rawlins. In this way, Rawlins' everyday life reflects the tactics of deception and deceit that the trickster normally uses. Mosley often presents him lying about his job, his wealth, his education and his knowledge on particular issues. On top of this, the reader can also deduce the hero's satisfaction when outsmarting and deceiving black or white superiors, his enemies and even his friends. These are the small rewards the trickster gets which are in turn often used later in his stories or "lies." Finally, regarding Levine's reference to the trickster's lack of control of the world that surrounds him, this idea can also be compared to Bakhtin's concept as discussed above of the unresolved attempts of the hero to adapt to his reality. This is also an important part of the Rawlins series.

As for the figure of the bad black man represented by Easy's friend, Mouse Navrochet, Young bases her comments on H.C. Brearly's *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (1939). She points out that "in Negro folk literature the 'bad' man plays a role hardly secondary to that of the trickster" (149). In fact, Mouse's presence in the novels is constant, especially in the key moments. His role as a remorseless and brutal killer definitely fits the description of the traditional black bad man as violent and irrational. In his portrayal of Mouse, Mosley presents at some point Easy Rawlins himself saying explicitly: "To Mouse death was as

natural as rain. He might have been insane but any Negro who dared to believe in his own freedom in America had to be mad" (*WB* 138). Mouse's irrational acts and behavior accompany him all the way through the novels. For this reason, Young concludes that everything in this character, even his nickname which is also deceptive and also conceals the true nature of his personality, comes from traditional black folklore.

Later articles on Mosley's novels will also address the question of whether the Easy Rawlins series respond to hardboiled standards, or they are texts that have contributed new dimensions to the mystery form reflecting traditional aspects of the African American culture. Recognized literary scholars such as Kathleen Gregory Klein and Samuel Coale will regard this matter in their respective books *Diversity and Detective Fiction* (1999), and *The Mystery of Mysteries: Cultural Differences and Designs* (2000). On the one hand, Klein edited a collection of essays that examine the many ways in which diversity is posited by contemporary mystery writers exploring multicultural social concerns. She highlights how all the changes and social movements of the last three decades—issues of cultural interaction, race, class, gender, ethnicity, and more—can be examined using detective fiction texts.[1] In her book there are two articles that study Mosley's work in contrasting ways: "Black Noir: Race and Urban Space in Walter Mosley's Detective Fiction" (1999) by Liam Kennedy, and "Bridges and Boundaries: Race, Ethnicity, and the Contemporary American Crime Novel" (1999) by Andrew Pepper. Kennedy's focus is on how whiteness has traditionally functioned as the invisible norm in the detective genre, and for this reason, it normally includes as well general features of blackness as the "other" in terms of voicing prejudices and fears about those racially different. She argues that Mosley, in contrast, appropriates hardboiled conventions in order to write a "noir" story of urban black life. Pepper's article, in turn, analyzes the portrait of the nature of relationships between different ethnic and racial groups in

[1] *Diversity and Detective Fiction* represents the first collection of essays to articulate the pedagogical stategies of using detective fiction texts to investigate the politics of difference. Curiously, according to some statistical surveys that Kathleen G. Klein refers to in the introduction of her book, of all the books sold in the United States 20 to 22 percent are some form of mystery or detective fiction.

Easy Rawlins' Los Angeles. For Pepper, Mosley's detective novels depict society in all its diversity.

On the other hand, Sam Coale in *Mystery of Mysteries* explores the work of Walter Mosley and three other American mystery writers, Tony Hillerman, Amanda Cross, and James Lee Burke. Using black critical theory and feminism as well as literary genre theory, he investigates how these authors have reshaped the mystery form and brought new and controversial themes into popular literature. Coale's book contains an interview with Mosley and an article entitled "Race, Region, and Rites in Mosley's Mysteries" (2000).

Going back to Liam Kennedy's essay, she states how it has been frequently overlooked that hardboiled fiction has reinforced racial stereotypes, privileging the white subject and devaluing blackness. She indicates that "this devaluation is also important as a sign of the white detective's dependency upon racial others. Race functions as a source of psychological and social fantasy for many hardboiled writers, with blackness often signifying an otherness within the white subject which requires control and mastery" (226). According to Kennedy, Mosley reverses this practice and explores in the Rawlins series the meanings of racial difference and identity. He depicts a social world in which whiteness is clearly infused with issues of power but in this case, he does it from a black perspective. Mosley foregrounds the distinctly black point of view of his first person narrator. Kennedy explains that Easy "is caught up in webs of racist social control and coercion from which he cannot easily extract himself. Mosley's depiction of this dilemma is subtly handled and reflects his intention to portray both external and internal factors which mediate the meanings of autonomy and self-sufficiency for a black subject" (235).

Above all, Mosley emphasizes the strong racist prohibitions of the white system that his black characters have to face in their search for self-invention. Kennedy ends by saying that Mosley's detective fiction is much more than a critical parody of earlier white writers. He has used black noir to produce a critical perspective on the development of racial relations and power in Los Angeles.

By the same token, Andrew Pepper observes in his article the significant representation of the interaction of two or more cultures in the world portrayed by Mosley. Pepper, however, does not pay so much attention to the complicated racial tension between whites and blacks, and concentrates more on Mosley's illustration of the notion of diversity and identity. Similarly to the above-mentioned opinions expressed by Thomas Stein on Easy Rawlins as cultural mediator, Pepper considers that Easy is in fact a result of the blending of the different cultures he is influenced by, and so his character denotes the kind of fractured subjectivity that frames African American culture in adaptable and fragmented terms. What Mosley presents, Pepper argues, "is a model for boundary formation that is flexible and sophisticated enough to accept that borders, like skin color, exist and have real meaning but that doesn't merely categorize terms like white or black as homogeneous, unitary entities where no kind of interaction takes place" (1999: 248). Pepper praises Mosley's vision of the black race as something not fixed but in constant process. Although Easy himself is proud of his cultural heritage, his sense of "self" is not simply constructed from that which is specifically black.

Pepper, similarly, acknowledges that in spite of the inevitable racial divisions that are given in the series, there is some kind of development from the first to fourth novel, which is from the temporal setting of 1948 to 1961. Moreover, the cultural and social events like the election of President J.F. Kennedy and the rise of the Civil Rights that take place later seem to weaken the tendency to see American society in simplistic black/white terms. In Pepper's opinion, this links Mosley's work with recent postmodernist theories which "dismiss the idea that races are simple expressions of biological or cultural sameness" (1999: 251).

With regards to Sam Coale's book, he is mainly interested in the use that Mosley makes of what he calls the "mystery formula," one considered predominantly white, to present a vision of racism, of social separation and distinction, of superiors and inferiors. Like Kennedy, Coale starts off by recognizing that hardboiled conventions apart from being structured around whiteness are also particularly based on otherness, as it is for instance the mere

confrontation of the hero and the villain. His question then is: What happens when the typical villain becomes the hero? If Mosley swaps the traditional roles, how much will he have to change the mystery formula itself? What is more, in Coale's own words: "If, as Mosley suggests, race is socially constructed and erected in many ways as an artificial barrier between people, are there ways through or beyond this position that he can exploit in terms of creating his narrative voice?" (176). Throughout his essay then, that also includes references to the fifth novel in the series, *A Little Yellow Dog* (1996), Coale points out what he considers are Mosley's innovations as a black mystery writer. Initially, he refers to Easy's mobility between the borders of the white and black societies discussed in previous essays, and also to the strong sense of loyalty to the black community that prevails in the books. Likewise, he highlights the oral traditional features included and, in particular, the extraordinary use of black dialect which in his opinion extends and subverts the mystery form. In this way, Coale emphasizes that "Mosley's mysteries are an excellent example of a pluralistic culture, the kind that Gates and Toni Morrison describe that is both dynamic and porous and not at all narrowly ethnocentric, not grounded only in a kind of disciplinary essentialism" (184). Coale, like Andrew Pepper, agrees that Mosley has been successful portraying in his novels the different cultural influences black life is subject to in the United States but also, and this is Coale's most important critical contribution, expanding the very mystery formula he works with by elaborating labyrinthine plots. These are "themselves a periodic, inverse spin on the typical white-rational and analytical formula" (196). Finally, the critic remarks that Mosley, like many other black writers, has used detective fiction to examine racism and social injustices in American society but he has done it in another way: "Mosley's mysteries repeat the form but with a difference; they signify the many wounds and effects of racism that such a white formula by its very nature usually avoids" (186).

In another vein, Alice Mills in her essay "Warring Ideals in dark Bodies: Cultural Allegiances in the work of Walter Mosley" (2000) will also offer arguments in favor of a reading of Mosley's work as novels that include key aspects of African American culture. In her work, Mills analyses in detail a

significant number of contradictions regarding behavior, sense of responsibility, and way of thinking on many different levels that are given in the character of Easy Rawlins and that conform to the cultural traditions of the black community. Some of these contradictions are for example his loyalty or hatred to America, his admiration for totally opposite people, the random use of his first name or nickname, his feelings sometimes of shame / sometimes of pride when lying, his ambiguous job and social status, and his language switching. Mills indicates that "the incongruity of [Rawlins'] position is frequently difficult to discern because related elements of a given subject seems to be randomly scattered throughout several chapters of the same book and even from one novel to the next" (25).

This ambiguity that could be very misleading when defining Mosley's style or trying to understand his purpose at the time of inventing his main character's personality is however part of the African tradition. In short, in Mill's opinion, Easy's ambiguity is evidence of allegiance to African mythology. She explains: "Although the paradoxes exemplified by Easy Rawlins can be read as signifiers of social dissonance for African Americans, they should not be interpreted solely as character flaws. Ambiguity, when seen as part of African tradition, is a powerful tool for survival, wisdom and joy" (29). Seemingly, Mosley's aim is not other than to reinforce the figure of his hero/detective as the trickster that with startling frequency recurs in black mythology. This curious trickster is called Esu-Elegbara, though he can appear under other names in different countries and cultural groups around Africa, the Caribbean, and South America. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in his work "A Myth of Origins: Esu-Elegbara and the Signifying Monkey" (1988) clarifies some of the characteristics that Esu possesses: "indeterminacy, open-endedness, disruption and reconciliation, betrayal and loyalty, closure and disclosure, encasement and rupture, etc." (3). Without a doubt, Easy Rawlins reflects all of them. Taken together, in fact, they present an idea of the complexity of this classic figure of mediation and of the unity of opposed forces.

On the other hand, Mills also emphasizes African American oral tradition as another African aspect in Mosley's novels which in this case is portrayed especially through the character of Mouse who is indeed a master of words. Lying

and telling stories is part of his personality, which is in turn an essential function of the badman's social and spiritual being in the African folklore: "[T]he best liar is also the best storyteller, and his community appreciates him as such" (31). Mouse enjoys having an audience to listen to his stories as much as he enjoys bringing them to mind.

To sum up, it is evident for Mills that Mosley's portrayal of Rawlins' different allegiances mirrors African cultural traditions. This in addition to the detective's growth of several significant relationships with people from diverse origins (his two adopted children, Jesus and Feather, and his partner Bonnie) can be seen as a symbol of the different discourses that Mosley includes in the development of the series.

One more article, "Invisible Detection: The Case of Walter Mosley" (2001) by Helen Lock, supports as well the idea that Mosley uses the hardboiled genre to convey an African American perception of society. Lock argues that "the world of the hard-boiled detective story, popularized in the 1930s and 40s by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, is essentially one of urban societal corruption and moral ambiguity" (78). For this reason, she believes it is perfectly designed to represent the circumstances under which most black people lived at the time when the system and the laws in general did not protect them adequately.

Like previous critics, Lock refers to Du Bois' concept of double consciousness to describe Easy Rawlins' position and ambiguous attitude towards life and the cases he investigates. She points out firstly, Rawlins's awareness of the struggle between the interests of his own community and those of the white society, and secondly, how Rawlins must define his own moral position to carry out his work as a detective which ironically aims to establish some type of social order. According to Lock, the question that Mosley seems to be asking is: "What constitutes criminal behavior in a society governed by moral chaos?" (78). Rawlins' perception of himself and the world that surrounds him is therefore portrayed as inevitably undetermined.

In the same way, although in her essay Lock strongly agrees with Mary Young and Alice Mills' arguments that Rawlins' ambivalence defines him as a

trickster figure, she in addition highlights that it is this ambivalence what also makes him invisible enough to have the freedom to investigate crimes and decipher clues that are unseen to others. In her opinion, regarding the theme of invisibility, it is possible to see in Mosley's work the literary influence of two significant authors: Edgar Allan Poe and Ralph Ellison. The first one, father of the detective fiction, already used in "The Purloined Letter" (1844), what he called "the manipulation of perception" to point out the invisibility of what is too obvious and self-evident. On the other hand, Ellison in the *Invisible Man* (1952) illustrates how the old social and cultural stereotypes set on African Americans can develop unexpectedly a subversive liminal black figure that can move invisibly in border areas.

In this respect, Mosley's Easy Rawlins exploits the human tendency of overlooking that which is too clear and plain to one's eyes. Lock explains that: "Many possibilities become available when a reductive sign is made to signify subversively and when human ambiguities position themselves, of their own volition, behind the misleading mask" (85). Throughout the series, Easy manipulates to his advantage the way he is perceived, and whenever he needs to, he disappears behind the stereotype of a marginal uneducated and poor black man. Thus, he becomes invisible and is able to cross social and racial borders, and furthermore to fool most of the people most of the time.

Lock finishes off by stating that Mosley has accomplished a great task in his novelistic work by taking Poe and Ellison's concept of the working of invisibility in the detection process. Based on Poe's theoretical model and Ellison's sociological approach, Mosley has constructed a new narrative that connotes a peculiar African American variant within the mystery or detective genre.

Alternatively, in 2001 Helen M. Whall presented a new study of the Rawlins novels based on Mosley's use of biblical sources to push the hardboiled tradition all the way back to the Bible. In her article "Walter Mosley and the Books of Ezekiel," Whall draws attention to the numerous biblical aspects that can be found throughout the series. In the first place, she points out that Easy

Rawlins' first name, Ezekiel, is in fact the name of a prophet from the Old Testament. Mosley's character, in this sense, parallels the biblical Ezekiel in many ways. Using the *New Oxford Annotated Bible* as his main source, Whall tracks down how both figures dare to voice their peculiar discernment of their life among God's people and take up pronounced and often unpopular positions in the conflicts of their community (194). Easy's job as a detective is in fact one that often places him in situations in which he can either be the good or the bad guy among his people.

At the same time, Whall considers that Mosley's choice of his hero's name reflects another aspect of the African American culture and the influence of Christianity in their lives. She explains how many African slaves were affected and inspired by Christian beliefs, and identified themselves as the "lost tribe" of Israel naming their children after Old Testament prominent idols. In Whall's opinion, Mosley's detective "carries the weight of American history and African slavery" (192).

In the second place, Whall highlights in her essay some more significant similarities that can be found between the Book of Ezekiel and Mosley's series. She explains:

> Walter Mosley makes the Bible, especially the Book of Ezekiel, a story to tell as if it were his own. He replaces Hebrews and Babylonians, Egyptians and Samarians with the friends Easy makes in Los Angeles and the friends who join him in exile from Houston. The Houston characters in particular—Mouse, Junior, John, Dupree and others—form a parallel to the community the Biblical prophet served. Babylon becomes Easy's South L.A. ghetto while the idolatrous Jerusalem Ezekiel railed against comes to life as the decadent world of white Angelinos, America's fallen angels. (200)

Mosley conveys in his novels the tension that many African Americans had to endure when they arrived in Los Angeles. Far from being the melting pot and the land of opportunities that they expected, L.A. turned out to be a city of unremitting deprivation and racial segregation under which, life for the black subject became an issue of survival. In addition, the following lines from the Book of Ezekiel "…the land is full of bloody crimes; / The city is full of violence" (Ezekiel 7: 23) serve to reinforce Whall's point on the influence of the Bible in

the representation Mosley makes of Easy Rawlins' underworld. Los Angeles is in fact depicted as a city of corruption where law-breaking happens regularly, only that that law operates also unequally and the system of justice is problematic.

"Power and Knowledge in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*" by Marilyn C. Wesley was also published in 2001. Here Wesley considers that novels of detection in general are an interesting examination of the practical function of power in society. This scholar makes a reading of Mosley's series paying particular attention to the way he portrays the gradual acquisition of knowledge as a crucial tool for Easy Rawlins to become more "powerful" in terms of making a living and keeping up with the harshness of the city. Taking into account the maxim "knowledge is power," Wesley explains how the dominant white system has always sought to restrict blacks the access to wisdom and education. In this respect, she points out that "the violation of this restriction is certainly one of the major appeals of the black detective novel" (104). Mosley, in particular, brings up in his Rawlins novels new ways in which his hero/detective uses his progressive experience and knowledge to construct or redefine alternative relations of power.

Although Easy Rawlins is initially portrayed as a conventionally moral man, his past as a war soldier overseas and his discovery of the questionable nature of power and law as they are applied to black citizens, make him soon realize that his desire for respect and freedom could only be defended with violence. Walter Mosley's plots take Rawlins to experience a series of situations that shape his understanding of the white system and how it operates. Thus, his participation in the World War II gave him a decisive insight into the connection between violence and power: it was the violence of war, after all, which initiated new possibilities for new types of power. In the same way, in his role as a detective his frequent encounters with white "mentors," or even with the police, will make him learn quickly what the outcomes are of the use of violent practice. He is also empowered through his role as a black detective as he is able to obtain precious information that a white man has no access to.

Ultimately, Wesley highlights how Mosley's novels explore in his novels the opportunities of empowerment for black manhood in the second half of the

twentieth century. Likewise, he questions whether or not respect and equality between blacks and whites can be earned through the exercise of violence that the white ideology often advocates. Using the perspective given by Michael Foucault in his collection *Power/ Knowledge*, Wesley affirms that:

> Traditional relations descend from a system of social authority invested in a sovereign ruler to Enlightenment principles of rights enforced through a structure of laws. But during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries another complex of power relations evolved based on the diverse negotiations of everyday life. To discover this kind of power without political center is a good definition of the practice of the black detection of Easy Rawlins. (112)

Mosley's Easy Rawlins realizes that power is a result of circumstances and that this was historically imposed through violence upon the African Americans. For this reason, he works out that in the same way that the history of the world is a history of shifting power relations, the white dominant system could be some day similarly overpowered.

Wesley points out precisely that Mosley does not give accurate solutions to the complex issues his plots raise but in fact that is not the objective of his detective fiction. Mosley's aim is not to resolve but to represent the reality of the American society where Easy Rawlins dwells. In this regard, Wesley concludes that "articulating the full, complex power relations which Easy uncovers as issues of white and black violence and enacts through ambivalence is the special accomplishment of the Rawlins series" (114). The identification of conflicted and contradictory relationships inherent to human existence are revealed as being attached to specific power structures that are no longer considered invariable. The access to knowledge in this sense threatens traditional frameworks of power and open up the black individual psyche and the mystery genre to newer visions of restoration, order, and harmony.

On the subject of knowledge promoting a new awakening within the African American community, it is similarly important to indicate how this also brought intra-racial class difference between black people. In the essay "'You think like you white': Questioning Race and Racial Community through the Lens of Middle-Class Desire(s)" published in 2002, Nicole King studies the existence

of heterogeneity within the black community in Mosley's work. Concurring with Andrew Pepper's previous article on how black American identity has historically been represented as wholly unified and stable, King argues that racial unity is also in tension with the disparities of cultural regional backgrounds, time, and social and economic class position given among the black community. Based on the novels of Andrea Lee's *Sarah Phillips* (1984), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), and using a postmodern[2] approach, King shows how these three authors offer "new insights into the intertwined histories of racial uplift and individualism on the one hand, and black American identity on the other" (211). Unlike the grand narratives of race that represented black people as a group responding to some type of cultural nostalgia, these literary texts portray the access of African Americans to self-improvement through the acquisition of wealth or education. Certainly, this implies a challenge to the notion of homogenous black identity and community, and what's more, a new direction in the notion of race and class politics.

Focusing particularly in Mosley's work, King considers that it is possible to find two different types of narratives in *The Devil in a Blue Dress*: the mystery narrative and the racial uplift narrative which conveys the ethnic specificity of the American Dream, that is, Easy Rawlins' class aspirations, interests and attitudes. Thus, although the main plot of the story deals with locating and then discovering the true identity of one Daphne Monet, the thousands of dollars that Easy will make for his work, grant him the opportunity of reaching his personal goals: he wants to be his own boss and pay the mortgage of his house so he can be a homeowner. To illustrate this idea, Mosley depicts Easy saying at some point in the book: "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" *(DBD* 48). These expectations, King highlights, not only reveal that Rawlins attempts to distinguish himself from other black people but also that he "is seduced by the possibility of achieving the American Dream the way white people do" (219).

[2] Postmodern here is defined as the critical tension inherent in the "modern" and rational institutions. This tension triggers a reflection on African American fiction and revises the ways that blackness has been historically constructed.

In contrast, Mosley presents also the other side of the coin. He portrays Mouse—Easy's dark twin—expressing his disagreement and anxiety about his friends' class aspirations. In this case, Mouse articulates the idea that it is in fact a question of money and class status what elevates whiteness above blackness in the American society in which they are immersed. As a black man whose way of life is regularly based on illegal means and for whom life brings every day dangerous and violent social confrontations, it is hard to believe that there is one dream for all Americans. According to King, this vision reflects a more traditional way of thinking, and ironically connects Mouse with the dominant racist majority and capitalist ideologies that conspire to keep most African Americans on the lowest economic and social levels.

By showing both perspectives, King affirms that Mosley reveals "the danger inherent in ideologies of blackness that discern racial 'authenticity' or 'inauthenticity' based upon a subject's perceived, desired, or actual class position" (223). Easy's social ambition disrupts Mouse's understanding of what it means to be black and to live under black life expectations. In view of that, King brings to a close his argument emphasizing that the concept of race and blackness should not be identified with a fixed or traditional perception. Terms like black or African American should no longer be theorized as self-evident but rather as entities whose essential character is in fact fluid. Novelistic discourses like Mosley's show that different factors of which, class is a crucially important one, not only shape new definitions of the black identity but also imply differences within the black population that offer promising possibilities of improvement among some of them.

From a completely different angle, the critic Scott Bunyan will examine Mosley's work concentrating on those aspects of his detective fiction that relate him or not to Raymond Chandler. In his essay "No Order from Chaos: the Absence of Chandler's Extra-legal Space in the Detective Fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley" (2003), Bunyan analyses what features in these writers' works make their novels different as a result of having a black and not a white detective.

In fact, Bunyan's article is at certain points more an acclaim of Chandler's detective, Philip Marlowe, than a study of Mosley's and Himes' work. Whereas Marlowe appears as a super hero, Rawlins and Himes' detectives, Digger and Ed, are just poor copies of him. Bunyan notes for example: "Marlowe is invisible, to all intents and purposes, and therefore self-sufficient. Easy is not invisible: his mistaken belief in his own 'invisibility' is due to naivete" (344). Similarly, he indicates: "Marlowe is always 'his own man.' Such a code is not an option for Easy" (346); or "Easy's morality, unlike Marlowe's, is flexible, bribable, and susceptible to intimidation" (349). Furthermore, when talking about Easy's affair and relationship with Daphne Monet, the "white"[3] woman he was hired to find, Bunyan writes:

> Through her power over Easy, both legal and sexual, Daphne underlines how disempowered Easy is in comparison with the secure, extra-legal, hard-boiled masculine Chandlerian hero. Marlowe's independence from women is presented by Chandler as a necessary part of Marlowe's authority as an extra-legal knight errant imposing his own partial justice. (347)

Certainly, Bunyan's comments are harsh and severe. He even implies that Mosley's detective writing only aims to demonstrate that Chandler's model of extra-legal space depends on the racial empowerment of the white man. That is indeed Bunyan's main conclusion: "racial empowerment forms the basis of the white detective's successes" (356). For this reason, black detectives can never be totally triumphant. They are bound to fail in their different enterprises since they can never be absolutely free and they are always subject to the power of others. In this respect, Bunyan explains:

> Phillip Marlowe is a moral force only because he inhabits extra-legal space, but Mosley's and Himes's protagonists are forced to function in liminal spaces. These spaces are disempowering and marginalizing because, unlike Marlowe's extra-legal space, they do not confer the authority to operate according to a unifying moral. (343)

Bunyan's reading of Mosley compares the central characters Phillip Marlowe and Easy Rawlins focusing repeatedly on those elements that the latter

[3] Easy as well as the reader don't find out that Daphne is actually a black woman (Ruby Hanks) until the end of the novel. The theme of "passing" is a major one in *The Devil in a Blue Dress*.

lacks or on his flaws as a detective. As the title of his essay indicates he pays close attention to the "absences" that he considers appear in general in *The Devil in a Blue Dress*. Thus, always taking Chandler as the ideal model, he analyzes what Mosley's novel is not and not what it is; he pays attention to the ingredients that are lacking in Mosley's novel and disregards the underlying meanings that are being conveyed. This type of deconstructing work goes to the extent of undervaluing also the critical essays of above-mentioned scholars such as Robert Crooks and Mary Young. According to Bunyan, these critics are inadequate in their observations and misinterpret Mosley's detective fiction. He states for instance: "To suggest, as Robert Crooks does, that 'Rawlins is hardly distinguishable from Philip Marlowe' (85), is fundamentally to misread Mosley's text" (356). The similarities and differences between Marlowe and Rawlins could certainly be a topic for a long discussion. As it was shown before, there are specific patterns within the hardboiled conventions that take mystery or detective fiction writers to portray their heroes/detectives with comparable or even the same characteristics. Yet, each character will obviously have a particular idiosyncrasy and profile that would differentiate him or her from their counterparts. In this sense, although every scholar comes up with a distinct critical point of view on the matter, Bunyan's perspective turns out to be too dogmatic, especially because he does not contemplate Easy Rawlins's further development in the rest of the series. Statements such as the following ones can be additional examples of it:

> Easy's inability to resist a woman's charms is common knowledge. His weaknesses for women is compounded by his inability to tough it out with the police, or with underworld figures. (344)
>
> The clueless Easy is so lacking in knowledge and "street-savvy" that he can be attacked in his own home… Mosley's description of Easy's lethal fighting abilities serves only to highlight his helpless disempowerment as a black man in the white community of Santa Monica. (345)
>
> For a character like Easy, who makes so much of "acting like a man," his lack of ability to dominate women sexually represents another form of disempowerment. (347)
>
> Easy is played for a fool by his friends (356)

Bunyan constantly addresses two main subjects in his criticism: Easy's lack of power and Easy's vulnerability. Although at first glance these are

considered negative aspects in the role of a private eye, a different reading could be to see this lack of power and this vulnerability as elements that Mosley has deliberately portrayed to denounce the racism that black characters endure in the hands of white people. If fiction reflects reality, Mosley in this case is conveying the black perspective of it. In this way, another point he is making is that if there was some stronger sense of justice in society, there would not be a need for figures like Easy Rawlins to try to impose some order. As for Chandler's Marlowe, if heroes like him did not symbolize so much white control and male dominance, there would possibly be less opportunities for other whites to oppress those socially inferior, and thus to establish such rigid divisions between U.S. citizens according to political power, economic level, skin color, or cultural background.

All in all, there is no doubt that Walter Mosley had to revise the hardboiled conventions and introduced significant changes for his own purposes. The shift in central consciousness and ideology from Chandler's protagonist to Mosley's signifies a reversal that also signals the white man as the "other." This is one of the subjects of study that Maureen T. Reddy analyses in her book *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* (2003). She points out that in *The Devil in a Blue Dress*: "Whiteness is not desirable or superior, as it is in the traditional hard-boiled novel; instead, whiteness represents confusion, terror, sickness, and death" (87). These notions of whiteness are examined at great length through the characters of Daphne Monet, DeWitt Albright and Todd Carter.

Daphne Monet is the actual "devil in the blue dress" that gives title to the novel. As mentioned above, she is a black woman passing for a white, chameleon and perilous figure that psychologically feels in control of men when they believe that she is white, but is disempowered when her secret identity as Ruby Hanks is revealed. Ironically, however, in the dichotomy Daphne/Ruby it is Ruby who Mosley portrays as the real and spiritual "self"; Daphne is just a masquerade that behaves in a sexually aggressive way with men to obtain what she wants. According to Reddy,

> The linkage of whiteness and aggressive sexuality established through Daphne/Ruby upends racist myths about black women; the stereotypes of black women as wholly sexualized and white women as entirely pure and virginal are neatly reversed […]. In white ideology, the white women represent spirit, the black woman flesh. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, the white woman represents flesh, the black women spirit. (90-91)

Moreover, it is Daphne's game of playing whiteness and running away from her fiancé Todd Carter after taking $30.000 from him what initially sets the plot of the novel. It is after this when Easy Rawlins is hired by Albright to find her because they heard that she frequents black areas and bars where white people are not welcome. In this respect, Easy will jeopardize his life for her. In the 1948 world of Los Angeles, the search for this woman represents then the possibility of danger, including death.

As for DeWitt Albright, although Easy himself asserts that he does not fear whites because he got "used to" them in the war, he knows he is still subject to Albright's rules when he accepts his money. This agreement that some critics have seen in terms of a master/slave relationship is clearly a threat for Easy who learns soon how violent Albright can be. The fact though that in the end, Mosley chooses to have Albright being killed by Mouse, and Easy free of charge keeping some of Daphne's stolen money, can be interpreted again as an outcome in which the good guy is the black guy and he wins, and on the contrary, the bad guy is the white one and he dies.

Lastly, regarding Todd Carter, Reddy considers that he represents those wealthy white people that are not even aware of the racist issues that take place around them. Reddy indicates:

> Carter's position toward the top of the U.S race/class hierarchy completely protects him from having to see across the color line at all; indeed, he can happily live in the delusion that no color line exists. Easy does not exist for Carter as a fellow human being, which of course is a kind of metaphoric death, and thus bolsters the novel's theme that whiteness equals death. (93)

On top of that, it is not only Carter's white skin and money, and neither is his attitude, that makes him in a way pitiful but also that he is a depraved pederast and a child abuser from whom Daphne has to rescue a little Mexican boy. In fact,

it will be this child, Jesus, who Easy Rawlins will adopt as his son later. On the whole, whiteness itself is thus emphasized again as the villain of the novel representing immorality and decadence. Reddy concludes that Mosley has reversed the traditional roles and the binary opposition associated with whiteness and blackness. For her, Mosley's work implies that "the meaning of black culture, of blackness itself, is to be found in its not-whiteness" (91).

In a different article, Alison D. Goeller draws attention also to the strategies that are used in what she calls "ethnic detective fiction" like Mosley's to expose all the social and economic disparities that the minorities face in America. In her essay "The Mystery of Identity: The Private Eye (I) in the Detective Fiction of Walter Mosley and Tony Hillerman" (2003), Goeller considers that Mosley's series goes beyond mere entertainment. The treatment of marginalization and discrimination in the life of his characters turn his detective fiction into ethnic literature, one in which many academics show interest nowadays.

Goeller's distinctive remark in her essay is the way in which Easy Rawlins has to make a living dealing with the white society. She sees his job as a sleuth as a metaphor for his life because the "minor crimes" that he has to detect are in fact less important than trying to solve his own personal mystery, which is who and where he wants to be in a society that treats him as second-class citizen. Goeller explains: "[Easy's] personal identity, which is constantly being negotiated, constantly being challenged, is, then, the biggest mystery of all, and cracking that mystery becomes the most intriguing aspect of the novels" (177). In light of Easy's ambiguous personality and shifting of identities in the first five novels of the series—his different jobs as a property owner and later as a head custodian, his abilities as a trickster, his invisibility, his desire to be a family man but also his attraction to the night, the cheap bars and the alcohol; his capacity for violence, his middle class aspirations, his failure in marriage, etc—Goeller considers that the question for Mosley's hero is "Who am I?" Therefore, although the crime mystery in each novel is always solved, Easy's identity and personal dilemmas remain confusing. That is after all, the critic concludes, why Mosley's novels engage the reader as they do.

By 2003, already famous by his Easy Rawlins saga, not only had Walter Mosley written one more book in the series, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* (2002), but he had as well published other type of novels. The fact that in 1994 Bill Clinton informed the press that he was reading Mosley's novels was an endorsement that definitely boosted his reputation as a writer. However, he had to demonstrate with his work that he could keep up with the expectations, and he did. By 1998 he had entered the realm of science fiction with *Blue Light*, and explored further ethical and moral questions in *RL's Dream* (1995) and *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* (1998). Moreover, by 2001, Mosley had started an additional mystery series with *Fearless Jones* and his new detective Paris Minton. Finally, regarding his non-fiction writing, he had written two monographs on America's race history and the dehumanizing effects of capitalism: *Working on the Chain Gang: Shaking Off the Dead Hand of History* (2000) and *What Next, A Memoir Toward World Peace* (2003).

Understandably, then, other articles and reviews were written about him. Out of all of them, the most extensive one is *Walter Mosley: A Critical Companion* by Charles E. Wilson Jr. published in 2003. It is a book-length study that includes an analysis of eight of Mosley's novels covering comprehensive plot synopsis, character portraits, and thematic discussions for each work. Additionally, historical contexts are considered and there is a selected bibliography citing previous works of criticism, interviews, reviews and biographical sources.

Charles E. Wilson Jr. starts off by looking into Mosley's biography and commenting on some meaningful statements that he made in interviews with other critics. He mentions for example Mosley's interest in Marvel comic books as a child because according to Mosley, there is a parallelism between the comic fictional characters and the black boys: the former had to perform really hard to accomplish a task and the latter to gain some little recognition. Similarly, Wilson points out the author's vision of the novelists as philosophers. Wilson quotes Mosley when the latter affirms:

> Anyone who knows my work and has paid any attention to it knows what to expect. They know there is going to be a black man at the center of this story, and he's going to be struggling for identity, for redemption, for some kind of comprehension of who he is in a world which doesn't really care about that. (Quoted in Wilson 19)

In this respect, it is significant that not only Mosley considers himself a philosopher, his male heroes characters do too; what is more, they also struggle for respect and acknowledgment.

In another chapter entitled "Literary Heritage," Wilson refers to those writers that Mosley admits have influenced his work; for instance, Ralph Ellison and his *Invisible Man*. Mosley himself has suggested that Easy Rawlins, like Ellison's narrator, represent the black male's experience facing the harsh reality. Besides, as a black detective he is also rendered invisible, in this case because the dominant society cannot equate Easy's qualities and second intentions with black male identity. Wilson, like Helen Lock did in her article previously discussed, supports that Rawlins transforms invisibility into a source of power.

Regarding the detective genre in particular, Wilson traces Mosley's mystery fiction in the work of black writers such as *Black Sleuth* (1908) by John E. Bruce, *The Conjure Man Dies* (1932) by Rudolph Fisher, and all ten novels published by Chester Himes in the 50's and 60's. However, Wilson highlights that Mosley rejects any type of labels and argues against a comparison between his work and those writers. Likewise, although Mosley praises and recognizes the importance of white writers like Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Ross Macdonald for the development of the genre in the twentieth century, he maintains that "the earlier detective heroes were alienated from many of life's humanizing elements in that they had no families, no friends, no stable home life or jobs" (quoted in Wilson 26). In this sense, Wilson emphasizes that Mosley actually "prefers to compare Easy with the earlier writers instead of their fictional creations. Like Macdonald or Hammett, Easy like to think and philosophize, and he is possessed of a considerable ego that yearns for recognition" (26).

These quotes raise two main subjects. On the one hand, it would be possible to discuss to what extent Easy's lifestyle is alienated or not. Although he

does have a family, some friends, a home and a job, as it was shown before by other critics, ambiguity and recurrent upheavals dominates his life continuously. On the other hand, by comparing Easy with the authors and not with the characters, it is manifested not only Rawlins' need for recognition, but Mosley's himself.

Lastly, the rest of Wilson's work is a detailed literary analysis of some of Mosley's novels[4] and not an exposition on how he is perceived by the critics and the academic world which is the focus of this chapter. For this reason, I will not go further by now into the review of this book.

On a different level, going back to Mosley's portrayal of his black heroes and their refusal to accept the place given by white society, the critic Jerry H Bryant not only understands this response as a sign of heterogeneity within the black community or an indication of their middle class aspirations as Nicole King argued in her article above; he also approaches the subject as a recurring motif in African American novelistic tradition: the representation of the figure of the "bad nigger" or the "bad man," one that defies white rules gaining thus racial pride, and the admiration and respect of his peers. In his book *Born in a Mighty Bad Land: The Violent Man in African American Folklore and Fiction* (2003), Bryant studies the evolution of the "bad nigger" from the oral folk tradition to the most recent eruption of black crime novels, among which Mosley is one of best examples demonstrating that the violent man as a literary figure is still alive in current African American fiction. In this sense, unlike the traditional man of violence who turned his anger and hostility upon whites but also occasionally against the people in his own black community, Mosley represents, according to Bryant, the struggle of his characters with their inclination to violence. Aware of what Ralph Ellison called the "unknown forces within the Negro man" as a result of the repression they were subject to, especially in the white South for so many decades, Mosley shows in his work different angles from which to observe and reflect on the

[4] Wilson's book includes a study of eight of Mosley's novels from which only four belong to the Rawlins series: *The Devil in a Blue Dress*, *Black Betty*, *A Little Yellow Dog*, and *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*.

character of the "bad man." For this aim, he divides the "bad nigger's" mind into two fictional people: Easy Rawlins and Mouse Nevrochet.

In this respect, Bryant considers that "the conflict projected in the brotherhood of Easy and Mouse is an attraction-repulsion dialectic" (150). Mouse is the incarnation of Easy's dark side, what James Baldwin defined as "a 'shadow' dwelling deep in the black psyche: a 'dark and dangerous and unloved stranger,' a permanence that every African American must accept as 'part of himself forever'" (quoted in Bryant 4). For this reason, Easy not only worries about the morality of his actions but also about Mouse's tendency to violence. As Bryant puts it, "he feels relief when Mouse appears as his savior, but apprehensiveness about his friend's proclivity for murder (148). Easy is conscious of the "darkness" within themselves, moreover he actually sees it as a problem that raises moral questions.

However, Mosley's depiction of violence throughout the series does not incriminate his characters. On the one hand, he makes sure that Mouse's victims are never likeable for the reader. If they are killed, it is because somewhat they partly deserve it, and the reader "approves" their elimination. On the other hand, Bryant points out that Mouse "is a philosophical badman who has taken the measure of black identity in a white world. He proclaims that "a poor man" cannot "live wit'out blood." This is the logic of the street man. When it comes to living or dying, Mouse has only one code: survival, whatever it takes" (146).

Mosley presents violence as an existential dilemma between killing or being killed. Moreover, he avoids placing his characters, especially Easy, in situations that might bring them dishonor. In this sense, Easy is shaped by a middle-class morality. He tries to do good in a corrupted world. Mosley thus shows that Easy despite everything makes a choice for decency and is willing to live according to mainstream values. Bryant finishes off by highlighting that "Mosley brings out the latent aspects of the African American man of violence, a longing for calm, order, and stability, a sense that this man contains not only badness but a potential for less social disruptive behavior as well" (153). These characteristics, initially unthinkable in the traditional "bad man," reflect the

current black novel writer's concern with finding violence a behavior to be reformed and corrected.

Last of all, another essay on Mosley's Rawlins series is "Hard-Boiled Black Easy: Genre Conventions in *A Red Death*" by W. Russel Gray. Published in 2004 in the *African American Review*, it deals, as the titles reads, with those conventions of the detective novel that according to Gray, not only Mosley masters but also enriches with his novels. Based specifically on *A Red Death,* the second novel of the series, Gray's essay highlights some of the techniques that Mosley uses whilst comparing him with the most prominent writers of the hardboiled genre. Thus, he contrasts, for instance, John D. Macdonald's detective, Travis McGee, with Easy Rawlins and points out how both of them mask themselves repeatedly throughout the plot and employ different tricks to defeat their adversaries. Certainly, Gray agrees with previous critics that "Rawlins' repertoire of trickery accords with the African American tradition of quick-witted practicality" (491). In the same way, regarding the hero's need to break laws for a just cause, Gray comments on how there are numerous cases of extra legality within the hardboiled conventions. Writers such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Hammett or Himes had their detectives breaking into houses or intimidating other characters exactly as Easy Rawlins does. Furthermore, regarding the protagonist's interaction and rapport with oppressed and marginalized people, Gray considers that Chandlers' Phillip Marlowe and Rawlins show similar psychological intuition as well as social skills to make acquaintance with individuals from different races and backgrounds. Finally, Gray emphasizes one more element that all these detective novelists have in common: "the artful use of poetic justice." In his opinion, very often after having revealed the problematic system of justice under which the characters have to live in modern society, the authors convey how their heroes still manage to establish effectively some type of even-handedness at the end of the novel. In fact, as it was shown before, this is what other critics like Roger A. Berger referred to as the moral code present in most hardboiled novels. To conclude, Gray emphasizes once again that Mosley's novels are just "masterful." He remarks that "in them generic conventions resonate with the realities of black urban life, past and present" (497).

For him there is no doubt that Mosley succeeds adapting the detective formulas for his own means.

In a different section now, having revised already the most relevant articles to date related with Mosley's Rawlins series, I would like to refer to those dissertations that have included the novels of Easy Rawlins novels as their subject of study. Analyzing Mosley's texts from different perspectives on ethnicity, gender, class, urban space and the like, these dissertations are above all an evidence of the growing recognition of Mosley's detective genre as a form that keeps alive important themes related with black culture in the United States.

The first one of them dates from 1997. With the title "'What they Really saw was an Illusion of me': Walter Mosley's Vision(s) of the African American Detective," Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu studies Mosley's first five books in the series plus *Gone Fishin'*,[5] and concentrates especially on the representation of race, gender and masculinity throughout the novels. Shiu draws attention to the middle ground that Mosley's novels occupy for being both part of the African American tradition and the popular detective genre. He considers that the author has developed a type of narrative which includes the discourse of race and explores the meaning of blackness within the mystery genre.

For this purpose, Mosley creates a hero who is both black and a detective but who interestingly goes through a process of discovering his true identity in which he explores the nature of being black in America and also gradually learns his new trade as a private investigator. This process is portrayed in such a way that the reader becomes the witness of the whole identity negotiation, gaining thus full awareness of the racial issues Easy Rawlins encounters in his personal racial odyssey.

Based on the detective formula and its certain ways of presenting problems through the standardization of themes and characters, Shiu points out, how Mosley reconfigures the work of his predecessors like Hammett or Chandler to

[5] Although not a mystery novel but a bildungsroman, *Gone Fishin'* serves as a good view of Easy and Mouse's lives when they lived in Texas and were just nineteen years old. Chapter 3 will be devoted to the analysis of it.

rewrite history and introduce new contents through the series like Rawlins' fatherhood or the position and symbolism of women. Shiu notes:

> Mosley uses the characters or Phillip Marlowe and Sam Spade as models on which he bases his Easy Rawlins character. But Mosley goes further than that. […] *Devil in a Blue Dress* takes specific scenes from *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* and signifies upon them, changing the context to one that addresses the concerns of an African American "sensibility." (28)

Mosley's work creates an African American awareness within the detective genre bringing in also important modifications. Firstly, by portraying Easy's desire to establish a family; this is interpreted by Shiu as a sign of Easy's aim to create a black home apart from the white world in which he lives, and secondly, by the way women in the novels "allow Easy to solve murder cases at their own expense: they serve to serve the detective" (31). In both cases, Easy presents new ways of thinking, that of establishing himself as a potential patriarch; and another of the detective constructing his own narrative at the expense of others, particularly women. In this sense, it is possible to trace a line of relationships that Rawlins has with women that shifts and moves according to his needs (42).

Finally, Shiu also highlights the relevance of the figure of Mouse as one that apart from offering Easy "masculine" advice also reminds him, or even clarifies for him, the racist world they live in. Using Du Bois' concept of double consciousness and "the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others," Shiu concludes that Mouse serves as one of the two "selves" in Easy's conscience; Mouse is a reference for Easy's definition of blackness and masculinity (45). Paradoxically, this confidence that Mouse displays is rooted in his power as a violent man. According to Shiu, only after Easy understands his position as a black male and his own capacity for violence, which in *The Devil in a Blue Dress* are still unresolved and keep developing in the following novels, does Easy lose his vulnerability and starts constructing his own identity.

With regards to Mosley's revision of history within the plots of his detective novels, Angela Johanna Flury, sustains that "few works of fiction have as aggressively made black characters the center stage of immediate post-war history as Walter Mosley's detective series" (71). In her dissertation "Pink and

Others: Postwar Culture, Color, and Clothing" (2000), she includes among other things, an analysis of the way Mosley inscribes the past with previously omitted historical realities. Although constrained by white dominant ideologies and conventions, Mosley produces a discourse that "redresses" and "colorizes" the past, showing cultural and racial representations that are different from the mainstream ones.

According to Flury, "Mosley's novels are characterized by a hyperchromatic attention to surface descriptions that include the color of clothing as much as the color of skin pigmentation" (viii). In his project of revisioning history, Mosley sets his novels in a colorful, visually eye-catching Los Angeles going beyond the traditional mere black and white stereotype of the detective genre. He pays close attention to colors and uses them, descriptively and thematically, to depict a broadly inclusive world for his characters, defining each of them with matchless individuality. Thus, he uses color to construct heterogeneity within the black community.

Similarly, on the subject of the cultural perception of color, Flury emphasizes Mosley's representation of the traditional surface versus depth dichotomy. Although it is a recurrent theme frequently used in all types of literature, Mosley makes use of it to criticize the color blindness trend established in the second half of the twentieth century. That skin color as surface is inherently meaningless and that the real human potential lies beneath is patently obvious and yet, the history of racism in the United States strikes for the lack of consideration of this maxim. In Flury's words: "Mosley's inventiveness lies in employing this traditional surface versus depth binary without assigning to the surface the mere illusion of importance while at the same time using it to create a diverse social and political spectrum" (96). Within the segregated world of L.A., Mosley draws a picture through a visual lens of the often disregarded black diversity, and on the other hand, of the white mainstream homogeneous perception of it. In post-war culture in the U. S., race and color were a social and political reality. In this sense, Flury considers that because Mosley writes in the 1990s, his views reflect the influence of the 1980s, a decade in which color became a high concept in popular culture.

Finally, it is also relevant Flury's observation about the character of Daphne Monet in *The Devil in a Blue Dress* concerning her inadequacy to any racial category. Due to the impossibility of defining her in terms of black or white, Mosley portrays her as blue, "as though no racial category could make her more recognizable than her favorite and trademark color of clothing" (Flury 99). Much like in the tradition of adding colors to old photos, Mosley adds his personal touch of color to the hardboiled conventions and the reality he illustrates.

Another thesis addressing Mosley's work was "Black Metropolis: African American Urban Narrative in the Twentieth Century" by Elisabeth Venetta Ford. Defended at Harvard University in 2002 and having the very same Henry Louis Gates, Jr. as a member of the committee, this piece of work focuses on the way that the African American community has gradually established itself in the cities to which it was displaced for economic or social reasons during the past century. Ford argues that black literature apart from reflecting how that marginal relocation took place, it also helps the African Americans to read and redefine themselves, and more significantly, to have the opportunity of recognizing their own metropolitan space in the vast America.

Focusing on different types of writing such as the migration genre, the non-fiction prison narratives, and on what she calls the "noir" novels, Ford examines Mosley's work because of her interest on the portrayal of the social and racial urban underworld constructed by the noir hero in the Easy Rawlins novels. For her, "Mosley's novels fit into an established contemporary genre of public-policy critique that might be called post-*noir*" (17). That means that Mosley's African American version of noir represents social signs which are specifically racial ones. His noir narrative refigures the values of the stark world of classical noir by using new tropes to depict a more complex reality in which racial implications are as important as the political and sexual dimensions of the traditional noir iconography.

In the same way, Ford considers that if Mosley's novels present a radical perspective it is not only because he challenges established conventions, but also because he "represents a hero who is always already 'marked,' by race and by the

intimacy of first-person narrator; for the reader, the experience of accompanying him throughout L.A. is an experience of geographical and cultural boundaries drawn along racial and economic lines" (169). Obviously, Mosley is not the only writer to depict the racial reality of the boundaries but he uses a narrator that first belongs to his neighborhood, and secondly, is a witness of the "urban" weaknesses that black people face on a daily basis.

Ultimately, Ford indicates that Mosley's narrative is a discourse that illustrates the city's overwhelmingly physical limits which are in turn a symbol indeed of the representation of the white political and racial power. Thus, for instance, in spite of Easy's aim for autonomy, he is always in fact in the service of more powerful others. In conclusion, as Ford puts it, "Mosley makes Easy a tool of urban commentary; the borderworld he inhabits are not those of fantastic criminal syndicates but of the everyday negotiations of those who live on the urban margins" (178).

The latest doctoral dissertation so far on the Easy Rawlins' novels was also defended in 2002. Under the title "The Dynamic Detective: Special Interest and Seriality in Contemporary Detective Series," Karin Molander Danielsson examines how the detective fiction conventions are being expanded and regenerated by contemporary authors. In this way, it is possible to find a change in the characterization of a more dynamic detective hero, and also in the type of life he or she leads, which is normally represented throughout an interconnected on-going detective series that Danielsson refers to as "seriality." Making clear, first of all, that a large number of recent detective novels today feature a world of diversity, Danielsson argues that new special interests in political, ethnic, regional, religious, or professional particular aspects constitute an integral part of the new detective fiction. This growing tendency represents a variation in the genre that demands new attention and triggers questions like: "How is the special interest material related to a detective plot? What does it mean when a novel in a popular genre such as detective fiction seems to select its reader, for example, through the use of highly specialized and non-glossed technical language, or an outspoken political message?" (14).

In the same way, due to the general fascination with private lives today in popular culture, many pages of the plot or subplot in the stories are related to personal concerns. The traditional "cardboard" detective of the past is out-of-date. Now the detective figure lives a more "real" life and has personal problems. Consequently, the detective novels have developed from a narrative of crime to a private life story portrayed in episodes; there is a shift in emphasis from the specific investigation to the story of the life of the detective hero.

To this end, Danielsson uses Walter Mosley's Rawlins series as an example in which the protagonist is followed from one adventure to the next but also from one relationship to the next, and through stages of personal development. There is a stress on narrative order within the series; cause in one novel is followed by effect in the next. Furthermore, modern series detectives like Easy typically have to react to authentic events such as the murder of JFK at the end of the fifth novel in the series, *A Little Yellow Dog*. Danielsson explains:

> Mosley's novels about Easy Rawlins are diachronically connected, through the life of the protagonist and other characters, or through the results of actions that carry over into the following books. There, as in most contemporary detective series, every new solved case denotes not so much a stability that can be repeated, as a fragile equilibrium, soon to be ruptured. (145)

As the series progresses, Easy learns that order and stability are always relative for a black man since there is often someone in his community that needs his help or disrupts the little order he can establish; the solution to a case therefore is understood to be just a temporary measure.

In this way, although according to detective fiction conventions, the resolution or clarification to a problem must not be disclosed until the end, closure in the present-day detective series novel is far from final. The classic pattern of the single novel is reformed to create some type of suspense or expectation to be narrated in the next book, signifying thus that, although the case may be over, the hero's life, for better or worse, goes on.

Regarding other strategies of the detective fiction seriality, Danielsson highlights Mosley's use of a large cast of recurring characters with recurring

problems and long memories. This is of significance because there is not only the consistent presence of Easy Rawlins, the main protagonist and narrator, but also of a list of minor characters whose actions may affect the hero or even have consequences in his future. As a result, another element pertinent to seriality is the repetition of redundant information, that will refer to matters like Easy's personal life in the past or the recapitulation of central events from previous books.

Ultimately, Danielsson also points out the presence of constant subplots in Mosley's novels. He considers that these are in fact "too valuable, narratively speaking, to be solved and disposed of as quickly as the murder mystery" (159). In this sense, some of these subplots are the ones that include the writer's other special interests as mentioned before, which in Mosley's case are the representation of racial issues or Easy's upheavals as a property owner among others. To finish off, Danielsson concludes that because of its seriality, intertwined subplots, and the development of a main dynamic hero and other minor characters, the Rawlins novels represent nowadays a new trend in contemporary detective series.

On the whole, after a full analysis of Mosley's series, it is easy to understand that it is no coincidence that he has entered the scope of the most acclaimed current writers in the U.S. Walter Mosley, who found it difficult to publish his first novel, has earned in the last decade an important reputation and his literary work is highly recognized at all levels. In this respect, the epigraph I chose to begin this chapter with: "I went in finally, feeling like a shadow, stalking himself into light," symbolizes the development of Mosley's career from the anonymity to the stardom. As Stephen F. Soitos points out in his work *The Blues Detective: A Study of African American Detective Fiction* (1996), Mosley is among those black authors that have entered the detective landscape through a rear service door (x). Unknown as he was at first, he has become today a prime example for future generations of novelists.

On the other hand, and going back again to the epigraph, I find it possible to trace a similar type of development in the figure of Mosley's protagonist, Easy Rawlins. From his arrival to L.A. in 1948—"feeling like a shadow"—through his

different jobs as a estate agent or as a head custodian in the school—"stalking himself into light"—until his attainment of a higher education, and a detective license in 1965, there is a remarkable growth in the hero's conscience and subjectivity as an African American man. Easy's gradual adaptation to the city and subsequent accumulation of personal experiences through the years produce a peculiar hybrid identity and a growing awareness of the world that take him to reflect on the society he lives in and the position he occupies.

Chapter 2

The Construction of Subjectivity in Easy Rawlins' Character

It is not because of their skins that they are Black in their heads.

Stuart Hall

Every historical and social moment has been portrayed through fiction in one way or another. Detective fiction in the United States, as Stephen F. Soitos highlights, "has proven itself to be a dynamic literary device for the implementation of cultural worldviews. Its continuous popularity supports this contention, as does the frequency of experimentation with the form" (26). Once a preeminent white Euro-American literary convention, detective fiction has been subverted by African American writers like Walter Mosley to create a narrative of resistance that challenges old notions of African American identity and African American culture. Mosley represents a reality in which the black detective still maintains some of the traditional private eye's character traits but who is directly connected to the black community and reflects a series of concerns mainly related to different social and political issues of discrimination, marginalization and subjugation.

In this new type of detective novel, Walter Mosley illustrates the construction of African American subjectivity by deconstructing the foundations that have segregated and singularized for centuries the black community in the

United States. His struggle in this case concurs with Stuart Hall's critique of the "degree of fetishization, objectification and negative figuration which are so much a feature of the representation of the black subject" (1995: 223). Subjectivity here, following bell hooks' perspective, must be understood therefore "as an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enable creative, expansive self-actualization" (hooks 1990: 15). Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins as well as other African American characters in the series, who speak, command reasons, and demonstrate agency, and that before were frequently rendered voiceless and helpless by the dominant American society. According to Cornel West this exclusion that any member of a socially marginalized group like the black community experienced formed an "unrelenting attack on black humanity," producing the "fundamental condition of black culture—that of black invisibility and namelessness" (West 1999: 80). Reconfiguring knowledge and subjectivity, Mosley reconstitutes blackness outside of essentialist traditions which historically have identified African Americans with the figure of the Other and have defined it disapprovingly. As explained by Stuart Hall, the concept of "blackness" was created as a political category in a certain historical time. It became a negative factor that connoted inferiority and denial. Mosley, in his representation of Easy Rawlins as a literary black character, depicts the change of consciousness that arose among many African Americans in the second half of the 20th Century. This change of consciousness symbolizes "a change of self-recognition, a new process of identification, the emergence into visibility of a new subject" (Hall 1991: 54).

In this line of argument, as Samuel Coale indicates many critics have seen in Mosley's Easy Rawlins the representation of a black consciousness. However, as Walter Mosley himself inquires, what does "black consciousness" mean? In an interview with Coale, he responds to this question when being asked if his detective should be regarded as symbolizing a global black consciousness:

> What does black consciousness mean? Easy is a black man, and he sees the world from the point of view of a black man. The world sees him as a black man. Because of this, a lot of people will see a world either that they never suspected existed or that they have experienced their whole lives but never seen in literature.

> In that, it is a black consciousness. Not *the* black conscience or consciousness, not the only way to see the world, but a way to see the world which comes from the other side. (205)

The perspective that Mosley offers through Easy Rawlins is clearly one that differs from the standard views established by the Western canon on many general cultural and social aspects. However, Easy's perspectives far from being extreme turn out to be sensible and understandable. Mosley, as other novelists do, puts his hero at the center of interest and tries to win our sympathy. His perspectives therefore do not seem far-fetched.

Based on the portrayal of the American reality that Mosley presents in the Easy Rawlins series from the early 1940's until the late 1960's, I aim to study the African American subjectivity of his main character taking into account his development as an individual throughout the ten novels in which he appears. In this chapter, I will present how Walter Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins whose subjectivity is shaped by three main factors: his role as a detective, his understanding of a new concept of identity related to the formation of a subversive consciousness as an African American, and his strong attachment to the presence of an African American culture within the U.S.

Regarding the concept of subjectivity, I will start by explaining the major elements that have a major impact on the construction of it. Secondly, I will present an array of common characteristics used by well-known detective writers such as Raymond Chandler and Chester Himes in their respective portrayals of the figure of the private eye. The critic Edward Margolies observes that the detective genre, almost by definition, implies predetermined plot structures, character types, and stylistic techniques that can be considered under the broad rubric of formula: "There are formulas for war stories and popular romance as well as formulas for detective fiction" (2). Margolies considers that there might be slight adaptations but these do not alter the formula per se: "It will vary from one period to the next as historical circumstance and social attitudes change. But, as a rule, such change is slow, giving works in the popular culture a remarkable consistency" (2). In this way, we will see that Easy Rawlins presents a hybrid subjectivity that includes both types of traits, those that have been categorized traditionally as the profile of

the "classic" detective, and those others that belong to a more modern version labeled as "hardboiled." In additional to these, as we will see, Easy Rawlins also has some other characteristics of his own that as a sleuth make him unique and distinguishable from the rest. Among these characteristics, his blackness, his double consciousness and his sense of community and fatherhood are the more significant ones.

Next, I will examine Mosley's hero using Stuart Hall's notion of the process of formation of both individual and collective social identities, and the changes that the self inevitably undertakes in such a process. Furthermore, I will explore Easy Rawlins' subjectivity from a post-colonial perspective. Based on Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin's concept of post-colonialism, I will argue that Easy's first-person recounting of events represents a narrative of resistance and reconstruction in which his consciousness reflects the subjugation that African Americans have historically endured in the U.S. Also, according to current theories of *ethnic identity*, any member of a minority group is largely influenced by relationships and external forces. Jean Phinney's definition of *ethnic identity* is reviewed in my work as well as her research on the process of *identity* formation that any individual subject to the influence of a larger and overpowering culture undertakes.

Finally, I will discuss Easy Rawlins's connection with deep African American values and beliefs that evidences the existence of a black culture and a strong tradition within the African American community. There are, of course, many different black cultures in various parts of the world but in this case, I use the term "black culture" with an African-American paradigm in mind to discuss the presence of specific black cultural elements such as the black vernaculars in the detective fiction represented by Walter Mosley. In the same way, I also approach the definition of "culture" in an anthropologic sense to refer to the social behavior, form of life, customs, attitudes and assumptions that characterize the black community in the United States. Undoubtedly, the influence of such a black culture plays an important part in the shaping of Easy's subjectivity and lifestyle.

For a clear understanding of the term "subjectivity," I want to start by replacing the idea of "individual" with that of the "subject." According to the media critic John Fiske, "the individual is produced by nature, the subject by culture. […] The subject, therefore, is a social construction, not a natural one" (quoted in Rivkin 238). Similarly, the feminist critic Teresa Ebert, considers that any subjectivity is constituted by "the organization of material signifying practices [that] produce the lived relations by which subjects are connected—whether in hegemonic or oppositional ways—to the dominant relations of production and distribution of power… in a specific social formation at a given historical moment" (22).

For a further development of the concept of subjectivity, I will focus on the specific perspectives established by famous scholars on the matter such as Ronald De Sousa, J.R. Searle, and Charles Taylor. In this way, what is important to add to Ebert's definition is that although many individuals are constituted as a subject under a similar culture and under similar practices, as the critic Ronald De Sousa explains in his work "Twelve Varieties of Subjectivity," a person differs from all other things and everyone else due to the fact that the way that he or she experiences life is definitely specific and individual". Although our cultural identities, as Stuart Hall indicates, "reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history […] there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened—'what we have become'" (1991: 43).

Accordingly, De Sousa observes that this theme of subjectivity has become common among those philosophers that attempt to capture something about every human being that is "essentially subjective." He states:

> An individual is *somewhere in space-time*, and not somewhere else. […] Every individual has a point of view, a perspective, and apprehends the world, so far as it can apprehend the world, from somewhere and not nowhere. If taken in isolation, the feature of being somewhere in particular affects all kinds of individuals, not just humans. But only those individuals that can *view* something can presumably have a *point of view*.

Thus, to talk about subjectivity is to recognize and come to terms with the fact that the ontology of the mental, the nature of being, is an irreducibly first-person ontology of the here and now, of the there and then. According to J.R. Searle, "subjectivity has the further consequence that all of my conscious forms of intentionality that give me information about the world independent of myself are always from a special point of view. The world itself has no point of view, but my access to the world through my conscious states is always perspectival" (82). Our perception depends, then, on the interaction between the external world and our sense-organs. In this way, De Sousa also points out that perspective might itself be of two kinds: temporal and spatial. As we are living individuals, our subjectivity is also affected by time and space. Furthermore, although perspective is sometimes equated with subjectivity, subjectivity is also straightforwardly associated with the self. Yet, changes in perspective, especially those in temporal perspective can be problematic since these can alter our way of valuing the world around us. In this sense, De Sousa then poses the following questions: "Where such changes occur, which perspective is the right one, that is, truly *mine*? Are there as many individual selves as there are perspectives? According to the scholars Galen Strawson and Derek Parfit the answer would be affirmative. "Each of us is many brief, material, successive selves strung like pearls on a string" points out Strawson (quoted in De Sousa). This being so, it is accepted that there is a process of development in our subjectivity. Such development in the character of Easy Rawlins is shown in the series from 1939 to 1966 and is the focus of my study.

Other aspects closely related that will need to be contemplated in order to understand how subjectivity is constructed are the influence of factors such as agency, the sense of titularity or ownership, the proprioceptive sense that designates the awareness we have of our bodies, and finally, the interaction of emotions with others which is called the subjectivity in intersubjectivity.

By "agency," Charles Taylor in his work *Sources of the Self* refers to the human capacity to choose and act. "The fact of being an agent is a form of subjectivity in the precise sense that I, the subject, and I alone can decide what I will do, although […] all sorts of circumstances can determine what I in fact end

up deciding" (quoted in De Sousa). As individuals, every person does in fact experience himself or herself as deciding. This initial apparent freedom of will can in fact be ultimately affected by previous experiences or even one's genes but the self is not conscious of it. For this reason, regardless of the origins of the grounds for making a choice, the subject "I" feels in charge of coming to a decision. This circumstance is clearly shown in Easy Rawlins who often appears reflecting at the moment of making a final choice. Walter Mosley's use of a first person narrator allows the reader to know, not always but in many occasions, what is in the character's mind and how he sees himself responsible for his own decisions.

Regarding the sense of "titularity or ownership," De Sousa labels "titularity" as the fact that "every mental state necessarily belongs to whoever it belongs to and not anyone else" (De Sousa). Each individual considers that his or her mental attributes are his or her own in a unique sense of ownership. Thus, time and again not only do we find Easy Rawlins bragging about all the different types of work he does but also about his capacity to think quickly or even outwit the police. At these moments, his sense of being smarter is something that pleases him remarkably. Without any doubt, he feels proud of himself and values his mental capacity. Similarly, he also depicts his friend Jackson Blue as an unrivalled genius. Easy highlights the intelligence that Blue "owns" above all the traits that distinguish him.

With respect to the "proprioceptive sense," De Sousa explains that this aspect of our subjectivity is related to the development of a sense of self we acquire through our awareness of the position of our limbs. In this sense, this scholar considers that our body is also among the things we own and that there is a "special proprioceptive consciousness of one's own face [that] seems to form a distinct class by itself" (De Sousa). In a way, not only do we recognize our own bodies as a part of our "self," we also create in our minds an idea of our appearance.

Last of all, with regard to the "subjectivity in intersubjectivity," De Sousa affirms that "it is causally constituted by my being able to gauge the state of my mind, and particularly my own emotions, in interaction with others" (De Sousa).

Similarly, the sociologist George Herbert Mead indicates that every human being develops his or her identity in relation with the others and not in isolation. He explains: "[The self] is what he is in so far as he is a member of his community, and the raw materials out of which this particular individual is born would not be a self but for his relationship to others in the community of which he is a part" (200). Accordingly, Easy's subjectivity is strongly influenced by the people around him and the fact is that he realizes it. Besides, we often see him talking about the different emotions he feels when he is with his adopted daughter, his wife, or a close friend, doing business or in jail. According to De Sousa, "expressing emotions contributes crucially to the determination of the emotion" (De Sousa). In this way, as significant as it is to recognize one's own emotions it is also to understand that these emotions are triggered by some subjective side involved in an interpersonal or inter-subjective transaction.

Most importantly, regarding the development of Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins' inter-subjectivity, it is essential to bear in mind as mentioned before that the character's personality and identity are marked by his blackness. Mosley has often declared that he created his character using those psychological traits that he saw in other black people around him: "I'm trying to reflect life in America. I'm talking about black life as if it were human life in America, taking the point of view that black people are insiders rather than standing on the outside looking in" *(Publishers Week* 1994*)*. Easy's subjectivity for this reason is above all determined by his skin color, something the white society made him aware of since he was a child. Therefore, he is not just a detective, he is a black detective. Most of the actions in which he gets involved and by which he is affected illustrate questions of racism and the hero's reflection on it.

On a different level, I would like to point out that Mosley's series fits under the category of psychological narratives because it is character-centered and often stresses Easy's way of thinking, his mental responses and concerns, his strengths and his weaknesses. This type of narrative is characterized by the relation between character and event. That both are intertwined together is evident. Whereas Henry James questioned: "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?"

(quoted in Chatman 113), in Mosley's novels the chief interest is definitely the character; the contemplation of the hero and his development clearly predominate. Easy's actions are portrayed as "expressions" or even "symptoms" of his personality, often including as well his reflections before and after the event takes place. Unquestionably, this aspect of the series is essential for a complete study of the hero's development as a character.

With Easy as the focus of attention, and having access to his consciousness, Mosley grants the reader the opportunity to analyze his subjectivity and the personality traits that distinguish him. In this way, we can follow the development of his subjectivity throughout the novels from when he is nineteen until he is forty-six. It is possible to establish what aspects of the character remain the same and what others change. One way or the other, what is clear is that his subjectivity as well as his self-understanding is not fixed but in constant growth or expansion. Likewise, in many occasions, Easy, like a real person, finds learning who he is and making sense of his life troublesome.

This element in the novels constitutes, in fact, one of the major appeals for the reader. As Seymour Chatman states in *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*: "What gives the modern fictional character the particular kind of illusion acceptable to modern taste is precisely the heterogeneity or even scatter in his personality" (112). Considered a "round" character in narrative terms because he functions as an open construct, Easy Rawlins possesses a variety of characteristics that often make him subject to further insight. "The ineffability of round characters," Chatman says, "results in part from the large range and diversity or even discrepancy among traits" (133). For that matter, it turns out that as difficult as it is for Easy Rawlins to get to know himself, it is for the reader to describe what the character is exactly like. In every novel he continually changes and surprises us.

2. 1. Easy Rawlins' subjectivity as a detective

…and Sherlock Holmes after all is mostly an attitude
and a few dozen lines of unforgettable dialogue.

Raymond Chandler

Like other African American intellectuals, Mosley has endeavored, in his work, to find narrative and theoretical alternatives which would allow for the creation of an African American subject through which to articulate their experience, their history and the development of a subversive conscience that asserts the belief that African Americans conceive themselves as a self, and more importantly, as a thinking subject. In this way, hardboiled detective fiction provides Mosley with a formula that fits his purpose. As Edward Margolies highlights in his *Which Way Did He Go? The Private Eye in Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Chester Himes, and Ross Macdonald*, "the hardboiled genre is a peculiar mix, celebrating American individualism while at the same time denigrating the corruption of American society" (2). Mosley does both things throughout the series: he creates a self-reliant black hero that delivers security, certainty and protection to his community, and at the same time presents a harsh picture of the reality he sees and experiences. In this sense, although there are some fundamentals in the genre that he cannot alter, as a successful writer Mosley makes variations within his detective narrative and it is part of his skill not to make the formula too obvious. For this reason, Easy Rawlins' subjectivity is bound to include a number of characteristics and moral values that, as will be shown, clearly carry on the traditions of both the classic and the hardboiled conventions, especially the latter.

In any event, the detective genre functions as an ideal narrative framework for Mosley to create an urban hero that sees and criticizes the world from the perspective of the average black citizen. But Easy is much more than a regular black citizen, he is a private eye that understands, acts and overcomes obstacles and triumphs. Like other detectives, he shares physical toughness, protects good people from bad people, ignores rules and conventions of behavior, and overall experiences an empowered sense of personal subjectivity. As

indicated by the critic William Marling, in the usual articulation of these detective heroes, it became a ritual that among other things the protagonists of these novels:

> Met challenges, trials, and temporary defeats—were kidnapped, beaten, shot, knifed, snubbed, humiliated, and dismissed as inferiors. They had to pass out, either from a beating or drugs. The symbolic meaning of this—the hero's passage into the underworld—is clear from the classics. Often, in the narratives of Hammett and sometimes Chandler and Macdonald, the hero has significant dreams that relate to the theme. Hard-boiled protagonists who lose consciousness regain it with greater strength or clarity or ability, and thereby solve the case. The hard-boiled hero or heroine also carries on the tradition of verbal prowess: he or she can use language against opponents and is conscious of words and their effects.

All these "hardboiled" characteristics can indeed be found in Mosley's Easy Rawlins. Throughout the series what Mosley does is to depict a black detective that not only resembles any other white heroes but also challenges the old stereotypes of blackness. This contestation can be seen under Stuart Hall's perspective that refers to the strategies that developed around the "relations of representation." Based on Hall's theory, Mosley's work can be seen as "the contestation of the marginality, the stereotypical quality and the fetishized nature of images of blacks, by the counter-position of a 'positive' black imagery" (Hall 1995: 224).

Furthermore, Mosley's detective novels in this sense are part of what Soitos calls a tradition of "Black detection" extended over the twentieth century. He considers that African American writers apart from taking detective formulas and making them into new creations" (xiii), "attempted from the very beginning to define a new approach to popular fiction that used detective conventions as a vehicle in which express social critique of mainstream attitudes towards race, class, and gender" (52). In short, according to Soitos, there are two main traits that turn black detectives like Easy Rawlins into what he calls the blues detective: First, that they "delineate the color line as primary in any case or social relation," and second, that they always apply African American consciousness in solving a case (31).

As it normally happens then in the hardboiled detective novels, Easy's investigations become an excuse to show us the confusing and dangerous

environment in which he lives (Margolies 6). However, in this case, and still more important, the investigation serves the purpose of illustrating that the black detective has a set of priorities that are closely related to the black community and its cultural values (Soitos 31). Mosley takes advantage of the detective formula to portray and develop the unique personality of a hero who on the one hand is deeply committed to exploring the meaning of blackness in the text, but on the other presents a profile closely connected to the particular trademark of the old and traditional detective figure. Here, we can identify some similarity between Easy and the detectives that belong to the so-called "classic" detective novel. We find that Easy is enigmatic like Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin, arrogant like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Homes, and peculiar like Agatha Christie's Hércules Poirot. They all are intuitive, almost poetic (Soitos 53). Moreover, they are strange and smart in their own manner and react in unexpected ways, which brings up a great deal of fascination and curiosity in the reader. According to the Spanish critic Manuel González de la Aleja Barberán:

> El atractivo de las novelas de detectives clásicas radica, no tanto en el misterio del crimen, sino en el misterio de la personalidad del investigador. Esas cualidades y contradicciones que le asemejan a un héroe-villano gótico son las que los hacen ir más allá de su tiempo y sus aventuras. Y es en este sentido en el que el moderno detective de la serie negra se convierte en su heredero [...] A través de una narración en primera persona más dada a la acción que a la meditación vamos adivinando esa personalidad que nos ofrece una fascinante panorámica de un mundo confuso y sin rumbo aparente. El detective asume su papel de vigilante de la justicia pero está constantemente a punto de pasar al otro lado del espejo. (27)

The resolution of the crime at the end of each novel is actually not so relevant in Mosley's work either. That is not the main focus of interest. Instead, it is on how Easy Rawlins constructs his own personality against a system that is trying to "tame" him and make him like everyone else. This clash between the hero and the world constitutes, as Gonzaléz de la Aleja Barberán points out, one of the most important innovations in the hero of the new "hardboiled" detective novels. For that reason, although Easy resembles his "classic" ancestors in that they all are lonely isolated figures and manage to anesthetize their feelings confronting crime and death (Margolies 5), the French Monsieur Dupin, the British Homes or the

Belgian Poirot, as the critic Ernest Mandel observes, represent a defense of the white and European bourgeois law and order (10) that are far away from Easy Rawlins' aim of interest. According to Margolies, the former detectives "are gentlemen who rarely question the social conditions that produce criminals" (5), and certainly, Easy Rawlins's criticism of society is constant all the way through the series.

Similarly, if for Dupin or Holmes the crime was just a question of scientific study and all they needed to use were their powers of deduction, for new hardboiled detectives like Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlowe or Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade, some type of physical personal involvement in the case is almost inevitable. As Margolies highlights: "What the genteel detective did intellectually, the hardboiled-action detective will have to do physically, transmuting violent fantasies into reality" (5). This is the situation also in the Easy Rawlins series. As González de la Aleja Barberán explains:

> Estas obras juegan no tanto con la idea de la solución del enigma, sino concretamente con los conceptos del mal y la corrupción en la sociedad moderna. Su preocupación fundamental es la recreación de la personalidad heroica de un personaje al que se contraponen continuamente situaciones de peligro físico y sobre todo moral que él tiene que superar a través del ejercicio sin concesiones de la violencia pero, especialmente, de un férreo código ético. (25-26)

In a few words this is the type of reality and the type of detective that Mosley portrays. There is only one central difference; as pointed out before Easy is black. Therefore, in most cases his sense of morality and his ethics become a demand for the recognition of African American rights.

Walter Mosley reappropriates the hardboiled detective formula to his own ends, taking it outside the literary practice of the Western traditions. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. indicates this is in fact a common practice among African American intellectuals:"Black writers, like critics of black literature, learn to write by reading literature, especially the canonical texts of the Western tradition. Consequently, black texts resemble other, Western texts. These black texts

employ many of the conventions of literacy form that comprise the Western tradition" (1988: xxii).

This is actually what many critics consider Walter Mosley does when depicting the figure of his detective. According to the critic John Cullen Gruesser, he "repeats the dominant white American detective story with a black difference, illustrating Gate's theory of Signifyin(g)" (1999: 240). As will be discussed later, this theory in short is a uniquely black rhetorical concept which maintains that black texts signify upon other texts including a second statement or figure that repeats or reverses the first (Gruesser 1999: 239). Indeed, there is no doubt that Mosley was well acquainted with the novels of previous white detective writers such as Raymond Chandler when he started to write his own. What he would do later is to imbue his characters with an African American sensibility and add specific social and cultural perspectives that among other things refuted assertions of black inferiority.

If we look for example at the description of the private eye that Chandler establishes in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (1950), we can see that Easy's subjectivity as a detective responds in many ways to the characteristics the former stated. With this, I do not aim to open the debate about whether Phillip Marlow and Easy Rawlins are similar or not, I only point out that there is evidence of the influence of previous canonical writers like Chandler in Mosley's detective novels. Chandler specifies for instance:

> …down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. (78)

Reading this quote closely and applying it to Easy Rawlins, there is no doubt that he, like Marlow in Chandler's, is "everything" in Mosley's stories. He is the main protagonist and the hero. That is the reason why the whole series has been identified with his name and appears on most covers of the books: they read "An Easy Rawlins novel." In the same way, Mosley frequently conveys the idea that

his detective is a “complete” man in many aspects of his life: he is independent, able to carry out any task in any field regardless of its difficulty.

In addition, he is presented as a “common” but an “unusual” man. This contrast is clearly given in his personality. On the one hand, he is humble and considers himself one more black person in his community; one more that emigrated from Texas to Los Angeles. On the other hand, his wit and his outlook of the world make him somehow different from the rest, and his lifestyle does not entirely conform to the norm. He is therefore “unusual.” As for his “honor,” he definitely commits to the word he gives and has a reputation for being fair and doing justice. For this reason, he is considered in the black community as a man you can count on and many of its members go to him asking for “favors.” This is, in fact, how his job as an amateur detective starts. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to say that “he is a good enough man for any world” (Chandler 78).

On top of this, it is also possible to find some more similarities in the following list of characteristics that Chandler includes in his description of the hardboiled detective:

1. “He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all” (Chandler 78). Very often, Easy presents himself as poor. It is true that this is why he accepts to work as a detective in almost all the cases, especially in his first years in L.A. However, there will other times that he will do it just for friendship. This is in fact one of the aspects that changes throughout the novels as he grows older.

2. “He is a common man or he could not go among common people” (Chandler 78). The fact that he is “common” is what gives him access to any place in the black parts of the city but also what makes him “invisible” under the white perspective since they would never expect a black man to be a detective.

3. “He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job” (Chandler 78). As the series progresses, we can see how Easy gains confidence to the extent of not accepting a job unless a number of conditions are agreed on his “client.” Also, he gets used to dealing with many different types of people and he is always

assertive and communicates what he needs despite the consequences on whether it is good or bad news.

4. “He will take no man’s money dishonestly and no man’s insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge” (Chandler 78). Part of the empathy that the reader develops towards Easy is due to his good intentions and fairness when resolving a crime. Mosley’s interest in creating a good image of his hero brings him not to accept money that he thinks he has not earned. On the other hand, he does claim respect at any moment and when he does not get it, especially when dealing with white people, he takes it as a personal insult. In this way, we also see that Easy, like Philip Marlowe, finds it difficult to be bossed around by a superior. According to Edward Margolies, Marlowe “works for himself because he is too much of an individualist to take orders from others” (33). Certainly, Easy is exactly the same. In fact, in *Devil in a Blue Dress* he would not be rehired in his old job at Champion Aircraft for not rendering himself to apologize to his boss in the factory. Likewise, in *Cinnamon Kiss*, he will not accept to investigate a case unless the person that hires him accepts his demands. These and other cases will be further analyzed in the next chapters.

In addition, there are also other characteristics that make Easy Rawlins a repetition of Marlowe but with a black difference. Mosley appropriates the white detective novel genre and instills it with the flavors of a black detective genre that is being developed simultaneously. In Henry Louis Gates’ terms, Easy would be a detective that “signifies” Marlowe’s role. As John Cullen Gruesser correctly observes, for Easy, “deception is the rule rather than the exception and the role of a detective is much more of a consciously chosen pose than an expression of his true nature. […] Marlowe is only “something of a pretender,” not a consistent signifier like Easy” (1999: 241).

Easy recurrently uses his strategies of deception in his relations with both whites and blacks. Gruesser remarks that he “is a trickster who employs signifying methods common in African American folk tradition” (1999: 241). With regard to the idea of consciously choosing a pose, this one fits with Chandler’s quote mentioned in the epigraph “…and Sherlock Holmes after all is

mostly an attitude and a few dozen lines of unforgettable dialogue." They both refer to the relevance for every detective to "invent" a particular appearance to hide their inner self. Becoming a detective implies the need for creating an image and an attitude. Walter Mosley illustrates this idea remarkably in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, when Easy is taking his first steps as a private eye. The young amateur detective comments:

> 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 thought they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn't real. (*DBD* 128)

Easy's words are clear in this extract. His ability to masquerade is a trait that distinguishes him. Besides, as we can see, he is totally conscious of it. Easy presents and develops this ability in every novel of the series. Gruesser points out that "in a world where appearance rarely reflects reality, Easy creates masks for himself more consistently and consciously than his hard-boiled predecessors like Marlowe in order to deceive others and find the truth. [He] deliberately makes himself invisible in the black world as well as the white" (1999: 244). This is an important trait that defines Easy's subjectivity. It will actually be so assimilated in his everyday life that it will turn out problematic in his personal relationships to the extent of destroying his marriage.

On a different level, another important archetype in hardboiled detective fiction that is necessary to study when discussing the character's construction of Easy Rawlins as a private eye is the work of Chester Himes. As an African American detective writer, the portrayal he made of his two black detective heroes represents a significant model for Mosley in his characterization of Easy. Although also influenced by Chandler according to the critic Frankie Y. Bailey, Himes' detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, have above all much in common with the "badmen" of black folklore (64). As seen in a topic already discussed in chapter 1 in the work of Jerry H. Bryan or Alice Mills, it becomes evident that an important number of critics agree that Mosley, as well as

Himes, saw in the black folktale a fantastic source for the creation of their detectives.

In Himes's case, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are both portrayed as members of the New York City police force. They are assigned to the special night shift because of their explosive tempers and their reputation for being tough (Bailey 64). In this sense, Stephen Soitos considers that Himes's representation of their extreme behavior, "is predicated on the simple but serious fact that racism completely controls their lives" (126). Himes' characters, like Easy, become social and critical commentators of the racism that exists in the community in which they live. As Soitos explain, Himes's two detectives "fully understand the social injustice and poverty that lie at the root of Harlem's problems" (126). In his study of Himes' fiction, Edward Margolies points out that

> like their white predecessors, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are skeptical that things can remain clear very long. But whereas white detectives often blame society's failures on the moral lapses of individuals, Himes' cops vent their social outrage. Exploitation and racism lie at the very heart of the system, they say, and the violent and absurd crimes blacks inflict upon one another are simply a microcosm of what goes on in the larger white world. (65-66)

Mosley, like Himes, represents this particular social perspective which to a certain extent shapes the gradual formation of a particular consciousness in the character of their detectives.

In addition, and this is another feature that Rawlins also shares with Himes' two heroes, "when it comes to getting the job done Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are much more effective than any of the other detectives on the Harlem force" (Bailey 65). Himes, like Mosley, makes sure that his readers clearly understand this idea. Their black characters are often portrayed as more competent, resourceful and smarter than the average. In actual fact, it is not by chance that in his novel Himes presents Lieutenant Anderson, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's white supervisor, admiring their work. This recognition is similar to the one that Easy receives by other relevant authorities from the Los Angeles Police Department, and it constitutes without a doubt a main trait in the formation of his self-esteem and subjectivity.

According to Soitos, Himes "was the first black detective novelist to attempt a portrayal in detail of the desperate and deadly side of the African American community" (135). Thus, his fiction altered the pattern of the conventions initiated by Chandler or Hammett. In this sense, the critic Robert E. Skinner remarks that, "in spite of many imitators and disciples that Marlowe spawned, there was still one characteristic that this detective had not had, and that was to be black" (quoted in Soitos 143). For this reason, and as it happens with Easy Rawlins, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger can function in a world that the white officers fear approaching, which brings them in turn a reputation in their respective neighborhoods. In the same way, Soitos considers that Himes's detectives become "the essence of some primitive system of justice that mediates between an unjust white world and a desperate black one. They are the mightiest might in the lawless city of the Harlem night—but even in this role they are handicapped by an oppressive white judicial system" (144).

The ambiguity of these detectives' role contained in the above statement is also highlighted by Edward Margolies. He indicates that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger "were torn […] between their desire to protect Harlem's exploited citizenry and their feelings that the white power structure for whom they worked was the real enemy" (53). These characteristics reveal another aspect that distinguishes Easy's figure. He is self-conscious that although he is fighting crime in the black world, he can never overcome the white authorities' establishment of law. At times, he will come up with his own solutions outside of the system doing what *he* thinks is right but always being aware that it is impossible to bridge the gap between the American justice and the black community.

One more element that Himes' detective fiction presents through his characters is the rich theme of double-consciousness introduced by Du Bois. In this way, Soitos considers that "Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are double conscious detectives in the sense that they themselves are trickster figures who bridge the white and black worlds, using both to their advantage. Their blackness gives them a special insight into black behavior in Harlem that is relied on by their white superiors" (150). Walter Mosley, as indicated by numerous critics discussed in Chapter 1, also incorporated this use of double-consciousness in Easy Rawlins.

This aspect truly distinguishes the black detective and becomes essential in the development of his subjectivity.

Finally, the last of the features that differentiates Himes's heroes from other detectives, and that will also be used by Mosley, is their creative use of language. Their ironic style and their particular black speech pattern (Soitos 160) are part of what Gates calls the black vernaculars that constitute a distinctive aspect of the African American culture in the United States. This point will be analyzed later at the end of this chapter because as Soitos points out, "black vernaculars such as music, dance, and food are shown to be important cultural restoratives, creatively complex and indigenous African American creations" (162). They have an undeniable influence in the perception of the world.

On the whole, and after studying the main traits that integrate the formation of the detective's personality in general and the hardboiled and African American one in particular, I would like to conclude with Manuel Gonzalez de la Aleja Barberán's reflection that remarks how

> Las novelas de detectives americanas lo que intentan es resolver ansiedades nacidas en un país incapaz de resolver el dilema constante entre el individuo y las fuerzas sociales. Trasplantada la figura del detective a un país y un momento histórico determinado ésta se metamorfosea para hacerse familiar con esa realidad y, al mismo tiempo, "resolver" sus problemas concretos. (30-31)

While Mosley's Easy Rawlins presents some of the conventional traits of the legendary detectives, he also displays other features that show his adaptation to the particular social, political, and cultural circumstances that African Americans experience in the U.S.

2. 2. Easy Rawlins' subjectivity as a result of a new understanding of identity and an African American subversive consciousness

> Fundamental to the process of decentering the oppressive other and claiming our right to subjectivity is the insistence that we must determine how we will be and not rely on colonizing responses to determine our legitimacy.
>
> bell hooks

Walter Mosley's representation of the black community constitutes the conception of a new discourse and a replacement of the old narratives. He reappropriates the detective genre to depict the African American lifestyle and the social changes that took place in the American society in the 50s and 60s. In addition, not only does Mosley create a new type of detective novel that expands in many aspects the traditional hardboiled conventions as we have just seen, he also depicts a local black community that is heterogeneous and struggles for a new identification and recognition. Thus, through his writing Mosley contributes to establish new models of the local African American individual discarding the traditional and biased stereotypes.

Regarding those traditional stereotypes of the African Americans and the notion of a "continuous self" advocated by the old logics of identity, the scholar Stuart Hall expresses his total opposition to these ideas in his essay "Old and New identities, Old and New Ethnicities". He raises the following questions: "If there are new globals and new locals at work, who are the new subjects of this politics of position? What conceivable identities could they appear in? Can identity itself be re-thought and re-lived, in and through difference?" (1991: 41). Just as history is subject to constant and unpredictable alterations, Hall finds it incongruous to believe that the self goes on being the same. And this happens too with the general concept of the great collective social identities that were formed by long historical processes produced by the modern world.

> [Collective social identities] were staged and stabilized by industrialization, by capitalism, by urbanization, by the formation of the world market, by the social and the sexual division of labor, by the great punctuation of civil and social life into the public and the private; by the dominance of the nation state, and by the identification between Westernization and the notion of modernity itself. (1991: 45)

However, these collective social identities cannot be approached any longer in the same homogenous way. They cannot be used as a reference to define someone's identity as it happened in the past, especially because identities, Hall argues, are never complete, "[t]hey are always, as subjectivity itself is, in process" (1991: 47). They do not operate like totalities. In the same way, the African American characters in Mosley's series are individuals in constant development whose identity is subject to change depending on the circumstances and the company with whom they find themselves interacting.

For Hall the notion of identity is in part a narrative, a kind of representation. In fact, the view that others have of you will also affect and define the way you see yourself. Considering that Easy Rawlins, like every individual, is immersed in a community, and is therefore open to the influence, opinions and expectations of his social group, in order to study another important aspect of his subjectivity, it will also be necessary to explore how he is regarded by his family, friends, colleagues and other acquaintances. As Chantal Mouffe indicates:

> Within every society, each social agent is inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations—not only social relations of production but also the social relations, among others, of sex, race, nationality and vicinity. All these social relations determine positionalities of subject positions and every social agent is therefore the locus of many subject positions and cannot be reduced to only one. Thus, someone inscribed in the relations of production as a worker is also a man or a woman, white or black, Catholic or Protestant, French or German, and so on. A person's subjectivity is not constructed only on the basis of his or her position in the relations of production. Furthermore, each social position, each subject position, is itself the locus of multiple possible constructions, according to the different discourses that can construct that position. Thus, the subjectivity of a given social agent is always precariously and provisionally fixed or, to use the Lacanian term, sutured at the intersection of various discourses. (89)

The discourses that shape Easy's subjectivity and conscience are closely related to all the different strings that form the world around him. This is what Ronald De

Sousa, discussed above, referred to as "subjectivity in intersubjectivity." Easy's different roles as a father, as a husband, as a lover, as a businessman, as head custodian or as a detective form a subject position always in constant change. This is a conception that recognizes that all of us are composed of multiple social identities, not of one. As Stuart Hall puts it, "We are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these may have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, but which do not yet operate on us in exactly the same way" (1991: 57).

Walter Mosley presents this idea through the way Easy always seems to be aware of the way he has to behave depending on where or with whom he is. In his interaction with others, he knows what the others expect of him in the same way that he also has social expectations upon them. Furthermore, Easy's insight allows him to figure out the way other characters read him. Mosley shows how Easy cares about the way he is perceived by others. In fact, this affects his reactions and general conduct. According to Hegel, it is through the others that we get to understand ourselves." He points out that "[h]uman beings acquire identity or self-consciousness only through the recognition of others" (quoted in Gandhi 16). We know about ourselves because we see ourselves reflected in people's reactions. Although Easy at times thinks that he can manipulate people's perception, there are other times when he just cannot avoid being regarded as one more black person among many other African Americans. When this happens, Mosley is illustrating how black people have historically embodied the figure of the "Other." Easy is in this case one of many African Americans that responds to the traditional Western concept of "otherness."

If in the process of formation of identity, as Hall claims, there is a need of recognizing those who are the same as us, there is also a need of setting apart those who are different. Identification is thus also constructed through splitting: "Splitting between that which one is, and that which is the other" (1991: 48). In this necessity of the other to the self, we see that Mosley is telling us that his African American characters are in fact those so-called "Others," traditionally constructed and dishonored by the white discourse.

How it feels to grow up and live your life being the Other, being denied, and discriminated is what Easy Rawlins often expresses in his daily routine. At any moment of the day, whether he is at home, at work, driving, talking to a friend or investigating a new case, the racially prejudiced world in which he lives is present in his mind. Questions that need to be approached then are: When and how does Easy come to realize his self-identity as problematic? How does this realization affect his subjectivity? Furthermore, how is the process of developing his identity affected by being told and making him feel that his race is inferior? How does adopting black consciousness change his concept of himself? What biographical factors are seen as being important prior to the protagonist becoming black conscious?

To think in terms of difference triggers the creation of a black consciousness to help make sense of experiences of isolation, discrimination, oppression and to provide a mode of engaging practically with these issues. In this way, although, W.E.B. Du Bois' social philosophy for the betterment of his race argued for the presence of a rational, coherent and homogeneous subject which certainly clashes with the theoretical framework presented here, it is still relevant that in his work *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), he expressed similar concerns about the black "self" developing as being racially segregated:

> Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question: […] How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word. And yet, being a problem is a strange experience—peculiar even for one who has never been anything else. […] It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. (3-4)

Such a black consciousness approach would be irrelevant in a colorless and non-exploitative egalitarian society. In every book of the series, however, Mosley makes sure to emphasize that the contrary is what African Americans encounter. His narrative becomes in a way a counter-discourse in which the people from the margins of society come to representation. The creation of a particular conscience is reconstructed to understand early experiences that were initially unintelligible. After all, as the epigraph of this chapter reads, "it is not because of their skins that

they are Black in their heads" (Hall 1991: 53). By this statement, Halls understands and argues that the concept of "blackness" was socially and politically created as a sign that through the centuries connoted hopelessness and inadequacy. "Black is not a question of pigmentation," Hall states, "[t]heir histories are in the past, inscribed in their skins" (1991: 53). Black was a negative factor "articulated in religious discourse, in ethnographic discourse, in literary discourse, in visual discourse" (1991: 54). Nevertheless, in spite of this, Halls affirms that a change of consciousness emerged "in the wake of the Civil Rights, in the wake of the de-colonization and nationalistic struggle. […] I want to pluck the term out of its articulation and rearticulate it in a new way" (1991: 54). This reappropriation of the term black and the rearticulation of its meaning is what Mosley endeavors to develop in his series through the figure of Easy Rawlins. As Hall explains:

> What is at issue here is the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'; that is, the recognition that 'black' is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in Nature. What this brings into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects. (1995: 225)

Mosley's detective fiction for this reason can be regarded as post-colonial since it represents a black community still subject to evident forms of neo-colonial domination that is struggling for a change of identification and the recognition of its heterogeneity. Hall considers that, "the way in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation" (1991: 43). The colonizer, in this way, formed African Americans to see and experience themselves as the "Other."

In this way, Mosley's discourse is part of what post-colonialist theorists categorize as "a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 2). It is a discourse of opposition concerned with issues of self-recognition, segregation and marginalization. By post-colonial, in this case, I want

to follow the definition that Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, the editors of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader,* sustain. They argue that the term does not mean "post-independence," or "after colonialism." Instead, it refers to "the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterize the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonization to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies" (2006: xv). The Easy Rawlins series can be seen therefore as Mosley's attempt to represent the colonized people.

Post-colonial theory is not a coherent body of writing or theorization. At the most basic level it represents the elaboration of theoretical structures that contest the previous dominant western ways of seeing things. As Robert Young puts it, "it threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures" (2003: 7). Taken literally, the term "post-colonial literature" would seem to label literature written by *colonized* people who have endured a situation of social and political subordination, and a position of economic inequality (Young 2003: 4). However, the field of postcolonial studies has become so heterogeneous that there is a great debate among critics on whether it should be named using the unbroken term *postcolonialism* or the hyphenated form *post-colonialism*. While on one hand, some critics see the single word "postcolonialism" as designating an amorphous set of discursive practices akin to poststructuralism and postmodernism, others (Ashcroft et al.) see the hyphenated "post-colonialism" as designating a more specific set of cultural strategies inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation. Both terms have expanded and grown more complex with time, to the extent that their meanings sometimes overlap. Regardless of the specific terminology selected, such a differentiation is not the current purpose of my study. I will use more often the word "post-colonial" to be consistent, but I might also use the non hyphenated term when citing authors that support this view. Above all, I am interested in the critical claims that the whole paradigm presents. Generally, postcolonial theory involves "a conceptual reorientation towards the perspectives of knowledge, as

well as needs, developed […] by the subaltern, that is, subordinated classes and peoples" (Young 2003: 6).

Literary critics like Robert Crooks consider that Mosley, following a pattern initiated by Chester Himes, constructs a complex picture of America in which the reality of crime and detection portrayed can be seen as a negotiation of cultural needs and values operating within the African American subculture as a critique of white racial ideologies. Crooks states: "Referring repeatedly and explicitly to the complex politics of race and class in the U.S., [Mosley and Himes] seek to disentangle justice and morality from white hegemony, fighting exploitation and violence within black communities while also attacking a social system that engenders crime" (6).

Moreover, since post-colonial theory, as the critics postulate, is characterized by "a discussion about experiences of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses…" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 2), Mosley's texts can certainly be read as post-colonial because they include all these aspects. As a matter of fact, other African American literary works such as the poetry of Langston Hughes or the novels of Toni Morrison have been considered post-colonial for seeking to make sense of their history and their continuing experience of racism. In a way, they are seen as a part of a literary tradition of its own to which the former slave population of displaced Africans has given rise in the United States. As we will see, Easy's references to racism and discrimination are also constant throughout the series. Mosley's discourse portrays and condemns racial practices and institutions. As many critics have noted, his narrative thus becomes a reinterpretation of racial history. The scholar Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu highlights, "Mosley's works present a 'racialized' literature, one where the main character is aware of his blackness being a determining factor in his social relations, professional viability, and family life" (1). Likewise, Angela Johanna Flury considers that "Mosley's books are all circumscribed by the central history of race relations in the United States, and in the ways in which black Americans experience everyday life, skin color as surface is inherently meaningful, and remains so regardless of other developments" (96).

In addition, he depicts the atmosphere of social, political and cultural change that characterized the ideological transformations of the 1960s.

Although the term "race" is totally problematic, and it is not the aim of my work to enter in a discussion of its meaning, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's remark in their second edition of the *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (2006), "it is hard to think of a significant debate within the field of post-colonial cultural studies in the last century that has not felt the impact of this term" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 211). Also, as shown before, and especially in Chapter 1, there are a considerable number of critics that actually makes use of it when writing about specific perspectives in Mosley's narrative. In this sense, I completely agree with the approach of Ashcroft et al. when they point out that

> It is now beyond contest that race, as it was conceived in the high period of imperialism—as a set of irreducible differences within the human species—is a scientific fallacy. But as a social phenomenon its continuing force resides not in its existence as a meaningful scientific taxonomy but in its undoubted effects on behavior and on policy in many societies. (2006: 211)

In the course of my posterior analysis on Mosley's series I will occasionally refer to it always using the notion above as the right paradigm, and also bearing in mind that categories such as race and ethnicity, despite their different referents in various aspects still overlap in practice.

Alternatively, there are other elements in the Rawlins series such as the oral aspects that can also be read from a post-colonial perspective: the way Easy addresses the reader, the colorful and lyrical street talk of Los Angeles black neighborhoods, the emphasis on the importance of being a good story-teller, or the admiration and respect that this story-teller receives among the black community are clear examples of it. These all will be further analyzed later. As Ashcroft et al. indicate, "in many post-colonial societies oral, performative events may be the principal present and modern means of continuity for the pre-colonial culture and may also be the tools by which the dominant social institutions and discourses can be subverted or repositioned" (2006: 322).

One common feature among post-colonial texts is to record the continuing presence of an oral discourse as a sign of subversion against the predominantly

written discourse of the colonizer. Certainly, the paradox here is that despite the prevailing presence of oral discourse in the Easy Rawlins series, the novels constitute per se a written text. Samuel Coale in his interview with Walter Mosley asked him about the meaning of orality in his work, and he affirmed that it pursued the intention of reflecting and recuperating an important part of the black traditions. As the quote below illustrates, Mosley aims to convey a story that could be written as well as spoken. Mosley affirms:

> In writing these books, I'm sitting on a train, telling a story to someone who's from my father's generation. Let's say I tell him, 'Well, then they arrested Mouse.' And he says, 'Really?' He's concerned because he knows Mouse—or someone else a lot like him. And I say, 'Yeah, they chained Mouse up, and they were beating the shit out of him inside the jail." And as I tell the story, there are people sitting behind us who are leaning forward and they're listening to every word. They're the people who read my books. They're completely convinced by the story, because it has a real relationship to somebody else. (Quoted in Shiu 1)

Furthermore, when asked if his work was in some way subverting the traditional mystery form, Mosley replied:

> …when you have a country that denies its genesis and denies its roots, you have a country that's based on successful genocide. You have a country that's built on the concept of slave labor. And it's still going on today. It denies the black blood in its veins, the black and the red and the brown and the impoverished labor that built it. Then if you make a hero like Easy Rawlins, to some degree and at some level, that's subversive. I feel like I'm telling the truth, and it's hard for me to call the truth subversive. (Coale 203)

In my opinion the importance of this response goes beyond the actual question already resolved above of whether or not his novels subvert the mystery canon. Instead, I would like to highlight Mosley's statement concentrating on the type of country and reality in which he states Americans live. His perspective is definitely one that condemns the destruction of a vast wealth of indigenous cultures beneath the weight and subjugation of imperial control. In the same way, his words can be interpreted as the typical expression that connotes the tension and experience of the "colonized" people. In this sense, according to Ashcroft et al, post-colonial theory came into being once the colonized subject realized about the subordinated world they happened to live in and began to reflect on his or her experiences (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 1). This is what Walter Mosley does in his

writing; he observes the American society where the African Americans live and writes about it disapprovingly. He states in his interview with Coale: "I see myself as the kind of person who opens dialogue. I think that's what novelists are. We open dialogue. If we do it right, the dialogues continue. People read about them, consider them, think about them. Either they talk about them or they write about them or they make music about them. But it goes on" (207). To this aim, Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins who keeps bringing up different social and racial issues in every new novel of the series. As the world around him keeps moving he also keeps developing as a result of his experiences. Thus, among many other things, Easy occasionally denounces a historical past of oppression showing his own awareness of the matter: "Black people know how to be free. People who had been denied for as many centuries as we had knew how to let their hair down and dance like there was no tomorrow" (*BBBB* 85). Easy's mind is one always concerned with the inequality and lack of respect that African Americans have traditionally received in the U.S.

His subjectivity in this way bears aspects that can be addressed as post-colonial for two main reasons. Firstly, because of his understanding and discernment of the African American position. And secondly, because of the obvious and inescapable fact of him being black. As Ashcroft et al. indicate: "Bodily presence and awareness in one sense or another is one of the features which is central to post-colonial rejections of the Eurocentric and logocentric emphasis on 'absence'" (2006: 321). Easy's previous quote on black people being "denied" represents the idea of "non-existence" which the white discourse has traditionally held. Likewise, this leads to what most critics have also highlighted as an important recurrent element in Mosley's work: Easy's "invisibility." For better or worse, to the hero's convenience or inconvenience in his life and in his work as a detective, Easy's feelings about himself being invisible are numerous and these link him to other black heroes in the African American literature like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man.*

Additionally, Easy's constant awareness through the series that it is actually their blackness which the white society rejects constitutes an important post-colonial implication. As Ashcroft points out, "The 'difference' of the post-

colonial subject by which s/he can be 'othered' is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body and voice (skin color, eye shape, hair texture, body shape, language, dialect or accent) are read as indelible signs of the 'natural' inferiority of their possessors" (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 321). All the black physical features are especially emphasized by Easy in his introduction of every new character he meets. The voice and the accent of the speaker are too. Certainly, under Easy's perspective, these aspects are not necessarily a sign that denotes inferiority like the white ideology makes them believe; instead they are an example of the heterogeneity of the black race. However, one way or the other, what it also reveals to Easy is that their black bodies become inescapably a visible sign for "otherness," and in this case, for discrimination. Their bodies are in fact the main sign of difference in their lives, that which set them apart before anything else. It is the first thing that white people perceive when they look at them, and in turn, the first thing that black people are self-aware of when the occasion arises to meet the white man's eyes. Their bodies, consequently, represent a crucial factor in their development of self-consciousness and self-identity.

Accordingly, it goes without saying that Easy Rawlins learns what being black means in a society governed and operated predominantly by whites: "[a] black man or woman in America, with American parents, knew that innocence was a term for white people. We were born in sin" (*LYD* 176). In this random comment Easy's mind is very expressive: it is as if African Americans were to blame just for being born. They were made to feel guilty for being black. "Innocence" is a term that cannot be applied to them, or at least that is what they have been "taught." This is one of many examples in Mosley's work that reflects how the African American conscience was affected by a discourse that always place them in a marginal and disdainful position. More to the point, in an interview made by Bob McCullough with Walter Mosley for *Publishers Weekly* in 1994, the author commented:

> [Easy] doesn't believe in justice, and he doesn't believe that the black man is ever going to get a fair shake, so he knows he's going to have to do more to overcome that. I think that Easy's attitude reflects the conditions in the neighborhood [South

> Central] even today. It's gotten better in some ways, but it's also gotten worse, and I believe that overall it's worse there than it ever was. (McCullough 67)

Mosley's vision reflects a particular way of thinking about life in America which is strongly defined by racism. As you would have thought, this is consequently what his characters also reveal and express throughout the novels. Further examples of it will be analyzed in the next chapters.

On the other hand, Easy and his friends also appear involved by nature in traditions and practices that identify their own particular culture and give birth to a site of resistance. In this way, their marginality, as bell hooks indicates, turns into "a site of transformation where liberatory black subjectivity can fully emerge" (1990: 22). Mosley's series constitutes an innovation in the sense that his black characters not only represent a rejection of static notions of black identity, they also rely on their own culture for relocation. hooks argues that "there is a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structure and that marginality one chooses […] as location of radical openness and possibility" (hooks 1990: 22). That means, as the epigraph that I have used to start this particular section illustrates, that they attempt to define themselves disregarding the hegemonic white discourse. Easy Rawlins symbolizes a change in his willingness to engage with a black culture that nourishes and reassures who he is. This change can be considered as a part of his ethnic identity development. According to sociologists Jean Phinney and Linda Alipuria, the *ethnic identity* can be defined as "[the] individual's sense of self as a member of an *ethnic* group and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense" (36). They further state that *ethnic identity development* is a process that goes "from an unexamined *ethnic identity* through a period of exploration, to arrive at an achieved *ethnic identity*" (38), which is the case that Easy represents in the novels. According to M. Sotomayor, *ethnic* identification refers to identification or feeling of membership with others regarding the character, the spirit of a culture or the cultural ethos based on a sense of commonality of origin, beliefs, values, customs or practices of a specific group of people. Thus, unlike the concept of race, which pertains to specific physical traits, the concept of ethnicity connotes cultural group membership.

In her work "*Ethnic Identity* in adolescents and adults" (1990), Jean Phinney describes the process of identity formation according to a sequence of conflicts that the individual must resolve. She views the process as a progression through four separate phases: 1- The initial stage when the *ethnic identity* is not yet explored; 2- "Foreclosure-commitment" is based on parental or friends' values and not made independently; 3- "Moratorium", the individual is exploring his or her *ethnic identity* but is not yet settled or committed to one; and 4- "Achieved identity", the individual has explored his or her *identity* and is firmly committed (502). Throughout the novels, Easy's references to his Southern background are continuous. This is what he instinctively identifies himself with, and that is also his first standard of measurement; a "template" to weigh all his experiences. However, it is also true that he undergoes some other moments when he finds his own culture conflictive. In the end, although Easy develops a hybrid *identity* that selects elements from both cultural groups, his predilection is unquestionable. As he grows older, his attachment to black culture becomes more evident. When he listens to Jazz music for instance, his fondness of it is something so deep that it takes him to say: "That horn spoke the language of my history; traveled me back to times that I could no longer remember clearly—maybe even times that were older than I; traveling, in my blood, back to some forgotten home" (*LYD* 176). Here Mosley is alluding to his African American ancestors, tracing their roots to somewhere on the African continent. This is a theme that he touches upon repeatedly throughout the series as if there was some type of black soul that is still indiscernibly attached to his African American culture.

2. 3. Easy Rawlins and black culture

> The manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it.
>
> Pierre Bourdieu

The presence of African American cultural aspects in Mosley's detective fiction constitutes the last of the three areas of analysis in my work for the study of Easy Rawlins' subjectivity. As indicated in the essay "Detecting the Detective" by John G Cawelti, the adaptation of detective conventions forms to define and represent a particular culture has become a common practice in the last decades.

> Whatever may be the reasons for the detective story's remarkable popularity since Poe created it over a hundred years ago, one of the genre's central features is the kind of light it sheds on particular cultures. The criminal act disrupts the social fabric, and the detective must use his unique investigative skills to sew it back together again. In the process, the skillful writer can reveal certain aspects of a culture that otherwise remain hidden, and this may be one reason the genre has increasingly proliferated into the representation of different national, regional, and ethnic cultures.

The concept of culture has been studied and discussed from many perspectives. Culture has been conceptualized as a code (Philipsen 1987), that is, as a system of meanings and ideals. Philipsen defines culture as "a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings, premises, routines, procedures, and rules [that] is *suis generis*" (1989: 260). In the same line as Philipsen, Carbaugh (1990) characterizes culture on the basis of four assumptions. The first assumption contends "culture is a system of symbols, symbolic forms, and meanings" (1990: 19). It is not words and meanings that constitute culture; rather, culture is constituted by particular systems or clusters of symbols, symbolic forms and meanings.

The second assumption about culture explains "culture systems have integrative and transformative potential" (Carbaugh 1990: 19). Culture is

integrative in the sense that it enables a certain group of people to generate shared meaning. As B. J. Hall explicates,

> [culture allows people to] participate in the emotive world of a community, and coordinate potentially diverse lines of action by integrating named entities into a recognizable whole. Culture is also integrative in that it binds generations together (future and past), not through forced stagnancy, but through a continual, yet cohesive change (55).

New meanings are created on the basis of the already existing system, thus leading the culture in a certain direction.

The third assumption poses "the culture system is mutually intelligible, commonly accessible, and deeply felt" (Carbaugh 1990: 20). A particular cultural pattern is mutually intelligible only if the members of the concrete cultural group deem it to be meaningful. A cultural pattern has to be easily accessible to the members of the culture. However, that does not mean that everybody uses the pattern, it is simply that it has to be available to them. Hence, once a cultural pattern is found to be intelligible and accessible to the members of the group, the last requirement is that the members feel it intensely. This cultural pattern has to hold a deep symbolic meaning (Carbaugh 1988). The fourth and last assumption explains how "culture is historically grounded" (Carbaugh 1990: 20). Culture is not the history of a symbol, but it is grounded in historical symbolic forms and their meanings.

Stephen F. Soitos argues for the evidence of a distinct African American culture based on the work of black detective writers such as Pauline Hopkins, J.E. Bruce, Rudolph Fisher, Chester Himes, Ishmael Reed and Clarence Major (3). In this case, what these authors have in common is the inclusion of cultural patterns in their detective novels that not only reflect the existence of a strong African American culture in the United States; they also reveal the deep influence of such a culture in the formation of the African American detectives and their outlook of the world.

Having been for many years a question of controversy whether or not African Americans have a culture of their own, renowned black critics (African

and African Americans) such as Melville Herskovits, Robert Blauner, Ralph Ellison and Henry Louis Gates Jr. have found that African American traditions differ widely from white American ones. Also, that certain African heritage can indeed be traced to current African American culture. The anthropologist Herskovits in his work *The New World Negro* (1966) affirms: "Music, folklore, magic, and religion on the whole, have retained more of their African character than economic life, or technology, or art, while language and social structures based on kinship and free association tend to vary through all the degrees of intensity that are noted" (quoted in Soitos 7). Herskovits considers that this result was accomplished through a process of reinterpretation and syncretism that included "the interpretation of white cultural patterns according to African principles, [and] the amalgamation of African and American cultural patterns and sign systems" (quoted in Soitos 7).

Likewise, Robert Blauner in his essay "Black Culture: Myth or Reality? argues that the development of a distinctive African American culture began with slavery itself. At that time, the black population went through a process of resistance and assimilation that later on would be expressed through language, music and dance. (Soitos 8). In this line of argument, Ralph Ellison also pointed the way toward a multidisciplinary cultural approach:

> "American Negro culture" is expressed in a body of folklore, in the musical forms of the spirituals, the blues and the jazz; and idiomatic versions of American speech (especially in the Southern United States); a cuisine; a body of dance forms and even a dramaturgy which is generally unrecognized as such because still tied to the more folkish Negro churches. (Quoted in Soitos 8)

There is no question that all these elements can be found in the Rawlins series. Mosley created an Easy Rawlins who grew up in Texas and once in L.A. could quickly recognize who was or who was not a black Southerner based on his manners, his accent, or his speech.

Lastly, according to Henry Louis Gates in his work *The Signifying Monkey,* language was transformed by African Americans into a unique art through "Signifyin(g)." Black difference is manifested in specific language use, incorporating oral traditions and establishing specific linguistic conventions.

(Gates xxii). Gates considers this a non-Western rhetorical strategy that distinguishes the work of many African American writers. For Stephen Soitos, "Signifying is an African American language act whose characteristics include irony, humor, and circumlocution. Above all, it is a language act with a message" (159). At the same time, as the critic John Cullen Gruesser highlights, Gates rejects "both a purely discursive and a strictly political and/or essential definition of African American writing in favor of one that combines both of these elements" (1999: 237). This type of language made into art is known as "black vernacular" which is also, as Soitos indicates, "closely connected in cultural context to the general term 'folklore'" (Soitos 11). In fact, Gates argues that his theory of Signifyin(g) is rooted in the black vernacular tradition. According to Gruesser: "It is a counterdiscursive strategy associated with the African American trickster figure […], which ultimately derives from the Yoruba trickster and messenger of gods, Esu-Elegbara" (1999: 238). In the same way, Gates considers that one of the best definitions is that of Roger D. Abrahams. For him, "the name "Signifying Monkey" shows the hero to be a trickster, "signifying" being the language of trickery, that set of words or gestures which arrives at "direction through indirection" (quoted in Gates 1988: 74).

Another critic in turn, Tommy L. Lott, labels Signifyin(g) as the black vernacular that "refers primarily to the oral and paralinguistic activity of the speakers of a black dialect" (85). This black dialect (also called black English) is a definite cultural attribute used by black writers to differentiate their texts (Soitos 39).

Moreover, I find that the existence of this alternative use of language in the Easy Rawlins novels can be studied under the linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf's theory which claims that "the world can't be separated from the language used to talk about it" (quoted in Agar 66). This means that the speaker's language shape the way he or she sees reality. Edward Sapir, who was Whorf's teacher and research collaborator, explains:

> Human beings are very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of

> communication or reflection. The fact of the matter is that the "real world" is to a large extent unconsciously built up on the language habits as a group… We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (Quoted in Agar 66)

Consequently, if the black dialect is considered to be part of the black culture, and it is language which instinctively constructs the individual's way of thinking, it is evident then the crucial role that the black vernaculars play in the formation of African American subjectivity.

Additionally, Soitos points out that there are other types of African American cultural expressions that can also be regarded as black vernacular:

> Black vernaculars in detective fiction are major factors in differentiating black detective texts from other detective texts. By black vernaculars I mean specific expressive arts of black Americans that form part of their culture and are derived from the folk tradition. The vernaculars most common to detective fiction are music/dance, black language, and black cuisine. (Soitos 37)

As I will show in the following chapters, Mosley illustrates his portrayal of the black community in L.A. with black vernaculars such as blues and jazz, language use, food and the presence of hoodoo practice and hoodoo tradition. All these elements contribute to the formation of specific cultural worldviews in Easy Rawlins' that obviously affect his subjectivity. In fact, they are part of his development as the assimilation of a particular ideology. By ideology, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan refer to the "process of cultural signification and personal formation that cannot be summed up merely as 'ruling ideas.' It also consists of training in certain practices or certain modes of self-identification" (237). If the subject is constructed by culture as I quoted earlier in this chapter, the black vernaculars constitute a form of life and cultural expression that show, as Walter Mosley depicts in his series, the way by which African Americans, and Easy Rawlins specifically, are unconsciously determined by his cultural background.

On the other hand, the word "culture" also acquires in this case a broader sense related to an anthropological perspective. In my opinion, this is the other

way Mosley illustrates the meaning of culture when representing the African American community throughout his novels. Using Rivkin and Ryan's definition, this concept refers to:

> The way people behave while eating, talking with each other, becoming sexual partners, interacting at work, engaging in ritualized social behavior such as family gatherings, and the like. […] This broader definition of the term includes language and the arts, but it also includes the regularities, procedures, and rituals of human life in communities. (1025)

Like Pierre Bourdieu indicates, "the manner in which culture has been acquired lives on in the manner of using it" (1028). The weight of home background and other cultural practices learned within the community distinguish the black individual and have a decisive influence on his or her approach to society. In this sense, the idea of community represents what Thomas Bender defines as "a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds" (quoted in Johnson 9). In other words, community turns out to be an experience rather than a place.

In conclusion, and going back to Stephen Soitos' association between black culture and black detective fiction, in my study of the Easy Rawlins' series, I will attempt to show how Mosley strives in his work for a deeper understanding of integral aspects of the African American culture in the hero's life; first, in his growth towards adulthood, and then, in the upbringing of his own children. One way or the other, Rawlins constitutes a new type of detective whose community is not the traditional one as his cultural experiences demonstrate. As indicated by Peter Freese in his work *The Ethnic Detective,* when the detective belongs to "a community whose history, values, and way of life differ from those of the so-called mainstream, his or her story inadvertently turns into […] a comment on the challenges of everyday life in a 'multicultural' society" (9-10). In consequence, Easy represents not only a black detective but a cultural mediator that guides the reader throughout the novels.

Chapter 3

Easy Rawlins' Coming of Age

Every step could mean death to a black man like me.
Walter Mosley, *Gone Fishin*'

When reading the Easy Rawlins' novels, it is a common imprecision to refer to *The Devil in a Blue Dress* as the first book in which Easy appears. However, this is an erroneous claim. As already noted in Chapter 1, there is another novel, *Gone Fishin',* in which we find Easy when he was nineteen years old and was still living in Texas. Although this novel is not part of the later detective series, it is an essential text for the analysis of the development of Easy's subjectivity. According to Ralf Schneider, "the first information presented about a character must be understood to be of prime importance for the dynamics of character-reception, because further inferences and hypotheses will be guided by the set-up of the initial model" (617). In *Gone Fishin'* we find Easy's first characterization and first reflections on who he is and the life he leads. Likewise, we see how particular experiences at this time of his life impact him and shape his understanding of the world. In fact, throughout his later development as an African American character in the rest of the detective series, Easy makes constant references to specific episodes of his early life narrated in this novel.

These memories and experiences are not only central for his cultural and social growth towards adulthood, fatherhood and maturity, but also provide coherence to the hero's progress and evolution. In this sense, we see that Easy's early life and adolescence, apart from fitting with the person that he later becomes, determines considerably his later critical approach to life and his understanding of the social position that he happens to occupy as a member of the black community in an American society dominated by whites.

Following Ronald De Sousa's concept of subjectivity already discussed in Chapter 2, every individual apprehends the world from somewhere in space and time. Walter Mosley in *Gone Fishin'* introduces the reader to an Easy Rawlins whose main conflict in the novel is precisely that of "apprehending" all that is happening around him as a young black man in America in 1939. Widely recognized by the critics as a coming of age novel, Helen M. Whall, among others, agrees that *Gone Fishin'* "provides a key to opening up the world of Ezekiel Rawlins" (197). In effect, this novel constitutes an obligatory reading for the study of Easy's formation of his subjectivity since it shows Easy's change from innocence to adulthood.

My objective in this chapter is to study what primary factors and experiences contribute to this shift in the hero's consciousness and how it gradually happens. It is of note that in the closing pages of *Gone Fishin'*, Easy appears writing down his memories and thinking on those events that so much impacted him. The historical context is right after the end of World War II and Easy is in Paris among the military elite after having fought in the war and having saved a white major's life. At this point, it is striking that he wants to write not about the war but about what happened during his trip to Pariah with Mouse six years before. Why is that his choice? In the excerpt below Easy clearly expresses how it was at that time when he went through *his real war.*

> …I got a room here because I saved a white major's ass in the front lines and so he thinks I'm a hero.
>
> I got tired of all the white soldiers calling me a coward for working behind the lines. So when the call came up for any soldier, black or white, to volunteer for Patton's push I raised my hand. Maybe I thought I could make up for my failure in Pariah.

> But being a white man's hero doesn't make any difference to me. Maybe that's why I've spent the last two weeks remembering what happened in Pariah, and looking at the Eiffel Tower, rather than thinking about this white man's war.
>
> Maybe, if I have a son one day, and he asks me about the war, I'll tell him about the time I had in Pariah. I'll tell him that that was my real war. (*GF* 242)

Easy, twenty-five at the time, appears reflecting over his *awakening* experiences from his trip to Pariah, Texas. He refers to that time as a turning point in his life that affected him more than having taken part in World War II. In the following pages, I aim to explore how during this trip Easy confronts for the first time a world of evilness and immorality that he had never encountered before. I will analyze in first place the strong influence that Mouse exerts on Easy and how it is the former who introduces him in the world of evil. Accepting Mouse's terms will turn extremely difficult for Easy to the point of changing Easy's concept of him as well as their relationship. Second, I will examine Easy's responses when dealing with other specific characters and their actions: Momma Jo, her son Domaque, Mouse's stepfather—Reese—, Miss Dixon (an old white lady), and Clifford (a hitchhiker they picked up on the road). Finally, I will look at the representation that Mosley makes of Easy's difficulty in getting over the loss of his father and his struggle to accept that logic and justice do not govern life. By the end of *Gone Fishin'*, Easy has changed. He realizes that life is nothing but a question of survival for a black man like him and decides to start his personal struggle to overcome poverty and make something of himself.

Always aiming to deconstruct the old stereotypes and reject the demeaning ideas about African Americans produced traditionally by the white discourse, Walter Mosley like other black scholars such as Cornel West, Stuart Hall or bell hooks, creates through this novel as well as in all his writing in general a counter-discourse. In this case, this means the portrayal of a black protagonist who breaks long-established dehumanizing labels that predicated that all African Americans are the same. Mosley carefully represents in his work the diverse nature of the black community and how Easy's personality, in particular, differs from the others. To begin with, Easy is presented in *Gone Fishin'* as a young black man in a personal, and therefore singular, process of growth that all human beings

inexorably undergo. Moreover, the initial traits in his character, still unsettled, are those of a moralist and a truth-seeker in contrast with his best friend and other members in the community. Lastly, Easy's major interest in life as an individual will be to learn how to read and write; "I was going to learn how to read and write. That was all I knew; in that I guess I was lucky" (*GF* 153). He does not conform to be just a poor illiterate black man. Easy has nothing in life, he is an orphan since he was ten and he is poor and uneducated. However, he has ambition and believes that he can improve himself in the future. As Andrew Pepper explains, "while [Easy] can see from his own experiences that black and white America are hopelessly segregated and divided by massive inequalities in wealth and opportunity, he refuses to be ghettoized or isolated simply as a black man who has already been cast in the role of loser" (Pepper 1999: 248). In this way, his first goal to become literate is accomplished by the fact that it is he who six years after the trip to Pariah is writing down the story we are reading about the disturbing experiences that took place when he went with Mouse down South of Texas.

Throughout his writing, Easy displays different aspects of his subjectivity and his growing maturity. At this point in his life, what becomes clear in his mind is the mutual rejection between blacks and whites that he will to have to endure all his life regardless if he is a U.S. soldier at war or a regular civilian in Texas. As Neil A. Wynn indicates, "the war had a significant effect on African Americans, as both a personal and a general level. Wartime social and economic changes certainly helped to shape the growing black consciousness and white awareness of the racial issue" (x). Moreover, Easy understands that in order to obtain respect as a black man fighting, malice and violence might be necessary in some cases. After the war, Easy realizes that one way for human beings to obtain more power is fighting one another. The postcolonial writer Samuel P. Hungtington, in his critique on the topic of the Western wars, asserts the allies won the conflict not by the superiority of their ideas or values or religion but rather by their superiority in applying organized violence (quoted in Robert Young 1995: 32). I suggest that Easy also seems to understand it like that. In this sense, Marilyn C. Wesley concurs that "Easy's education is focused on one key issue: the meaning of

violence. It is, after all, the violence of war that introduced new access to power, but Easy, despite his ironic nickname, understands the connection between violence and power as a difficult concept" (107). Although initially reluctant, Easy gradually becomes more and more part of a world that makes him aggressive in order to survive and pave his own way in society. That is why he volunteered to take part in the battle. Rather than quietly suffer violence and humiliation, he fought back. However, once he demonstrated to the other American white soldiers that he is not a coward, he indicates how he has no other concern in a "white war," and even makes clear that the events he went through in Pariah when he was nineteen were more distressing and affected him more on a personal level.[1]

Simultaneously, another aspect of Easy's subjectivity which is reflected here but also later in many other moments throughout the novel is his human capacity to choose and act. In Charles Taylor's terms, as we have seen in Chapter 2, this represents the factor of "agency." Easy is an agent, full aware of the choices he makes. He raised his hand to volunteer for the battle totally conscious of his decision but also aware that he had an extra motivation for it. In fact, as he explains later, it was an attempt to make peace with himself. As it will be analyzed, Easy's guilt for Clifton's death is constantly chasing him."I had risked my life to save Clifton only to fail" (*GF* 219). As *Gone Fishin'* progresses, Mosley shows us that Easy is trying to figure out what is good and what is evil. This idea is developed through the series and is even more emphasized through the contrast between Easy and Mouse's personalities. Whereas Easy usually maintains a series of principles and a strong moral code, murder and death are to a certain extent intrinsic to Mouse's nature[2]. Thus, although crime would actually become later a part of Easy's everyday life in his job as a detective, he will still find troublesome the killing of any individual deliberately. Moreover, his aim will always be to establish justice to the extent the circumstances allow it.

[1] In subsequent novels in the series, Mosley will make more references to Easy's experiences as a black soldier in the World War II suggesting that his participation in active combat also gave him further insights on black male respect and freedom.

[2] Since *Gone Fishin'* is a bildungsroman and both characters are still developing their personality, it is not possible to establish in a rigid way any characteristics to define them. Otherwise, they would become card-board characters leaving no space for subjectivity or identity formation.

A case in point, I will start analyzing now the way the different experiences Easy went through in Pariah shaped his subjectivity. Walter Mosley presents two main conflicts in *Gone Fishin'*. The first plot of the story deals with Mouse's plan to go down South to Pariah, where he is from, to ask Reese, his stepfather, for some money for his wedding with EttaMae. The conflict here is that Reese and Mouse not only hate each other but also blame one another for Mouse's mom's illness and eventual death. Therefore, when Mouse is talking to Easy about *asking* Reese for part of the little funds that he considers belong to him because his mom left those for him, Easy infers that the encounter will be somewhat problematic.

> 'How you gonna do that?'
>
> 'I don't know, Easy. All I can tell ya is that I ain't gonna hesitate one minute.' (*GF* 14)

Easy is the first one that fears Mouse's temper and aggressive manners. He openly admits that he is afraid of him. "For all my size that small man scared me" (*GF* 7). However, at the same time, Easy acknowledges Mouse as his only close friend and the one that saved his life once in the past when he got into a bar fight over a girl. Thus, although at first he is hesitant to accept Mouse's proposal, he finally gives in to drive him in exchange for 15 dollars which is more than what he could earn in three weeks in his current work as a gardener.

> I wanted to go. I knew it from the minute he yelled in my door. I was a young man then, barely nineteen years old, and alone in the world. Mouse was my only real friend, and even though he was crazy and wild I knew he cared for me—in his way. He made me mad sometimes but that's what good friends and family do. (*GF* 17)

Easy's friendship with Mouse affects his life profoundly. Regardless if Mouse is physically present or not, he is a constant reference for Easy all the way through each novel in the series. Easy's concept of him will often be a mix between admiration and denial. While in the quote above he justifies their differences, on other occasions like at the end of *Gone Fishin'*, he will condemn his actions and be willing to take Mouse out of his life. In my opinion, by putting both characters

together, Mosley illustrates the necessity for poor African American men to find a balance between what Easy symbolizes through his search for morality and honesty and what Mouse personifies with his display of evil and violence.

Mosley is well known for his interest in philosophy. In this respect, I suggest that he is using Aristotle's ethics and the concept of virtue to convey through Easy and Mouse what the right balance should be. Virtue is a middle ground between two extremes. Aristotle claimed that the wise person steers clear of the excesses of extreme positions. In all things, virtue represents a middle ground between too much and too little. The proportionate balance produces good while the excess produces bad just as the person who fears everything and flees is a coward and a person who fears nothing becomes rash. (Aristotle, "Ethics and Virtue" online). To put it briefly, Mosley portrays how Easy and Mouse need one another in order to find a mode of survival in America. Mouse is a constant reminder for Easy of how a significant number of African Americans think and act violently in order to make a living in a white society that oppress them and does not grant any opportunities for black people. The American system has generated unbearable conditions for them to overcome poverty and improve their lives.

Also, as pointed out by many critics, it is important to remember that the figure of Mouse is based on the typical "bad man," a common and celebrated character within African American culture and folklore. This peculiar characterization is already present in *Gone Fishin'* where we see how he cunningly manipulates people and devises a plan in order to reach his means. Mosley makes Mouse's traits more obvious through Easy's statements when he observes that his friend is a different type of man in all aspects of life: "Mouse never took an order unless that's what he wanted to do. Mouse wasn't the only man I knew who'd stand up for what he believed, but he was different in one way: Most men who stood up for themselves would rather die than be slaves; Mouse would've rather killed" (*GF* 51). These characteristics keep growing and appearing later in the series.

Regarding the initial contrast between both characters, this will fade away slightly in the future as a result of their personal experiences and will be a topic further analyzed in the next chapters; as the years go by, Easy will harden and become more perspicacious and streetwise, and on the contrary, Mouse will be less fierce and more civilized. In fact, this is another example of Mosley's intention to show a development in both characters' personalities. However, at the beginning of *Gone Fishin'* the portrayal of their opposite natures is evident in every random incident as for instance in Easy's exasperation with the mosquitoes:

> 'It's them bugs,' I said. 'Just one mosquito in a room will bite me twenty times and every bite swells up into a bump on my skin, and every hump itches me until I scratch it hard enough to draw blood. I hate bugs.'
>
> 'You just too sweet an' sensitive,' Mouse said. 'All I gotta do is wave my hand in front'a my face once or twice and the bugs leave me be. An' if anything bite me he ain't never gonna bite nuthin' else.' (*GF* 40)

Once again, Mosley depicts both friends as totally different and yet somehow complementary.

On the other hand, the second conflict in the novel originates as a result of the trip down South to rural and deep Texas. In this journey, Easy will face the typical issues related with a process of personal growth or coming of age. This trip also symbolizes a trip into his self. Certainly, although it would be inaccurate to describe Easy as naïve since he has been on his own since he was ten and knows quite well how to take care of himself, there were some evil aspects of life that he would experience during those few days that shocked him enormously. As Helen M. Whall puts it:

> In helping Mouse hunt down his father in Pariah, […] Easy for the first time confronts evil. That evil is far more complex than any found in the absolutist world of European romance. Pariah is compounded of typical Western greed and powerful African voodoo; those who cross the line between white and black magic include both heroes and villains. Along the way to determining which side of the line he prefers, the illiterate Ezekiel accepts as a gift from the white world both the desire to read and a need to understand his nominal ancestry. (198)

The experiences of those days—in particular Mouse's violent way of resolving his business—will clearly affect Easy's subjectivity and his way of thinking about his friend and about the world in general. Pariah thus represents a land of

confrontation in which Easy's inwardness comes to light. Not only does he resolve that he does not want to be caught in that world, he also comes to terms with the loss of his father.

Consequently, the Easy who left Houston and the one who returned will not be the same. Mosley emphasizes Easy's positive attitude at the start of the trip: "When we drove off it was still way before dawn. […] I wanted to sing but I didn't because Mouse wouldn't have understood my feelings about magic and the morning. So I just drove quietly, happy on that flat Texas road" (*GF* 21). He feels cheerful. In a way, Easy celebrates the opportunity to leave Houston and explore new places: "To me it was like the world was growing and I was happy to be on that road" (*GF* 23). At the bottom of his heart, he likes spending time with Mouse in spite of his peculiar mind and his violent and unexpected reactions. He truly admires him:

> Mouse knew how to tell you a story. It was like he was singing a song and the words were notes going up and down the scales, even rhyming when it was right. He'd turn phrases that I wanted to use myself but it seemed that I couldn't ever get the timing right. Sometimes what he said fit so perfectly I couldn't ever find the right time to say it again. (*GF* 24)

By describing in so much detail Easy's high regard for Mouse, Mosley creates a contradictory effect when Easy has to face Mouse's twisted wicked actions and behavior. As a result, we can understand without difficulty Easy's subsequent disappointment and disenchantment with his friend. Easy's initial good humor will turn sour on his way back. On a different level, it is also important to point out that the quote above illustrates clearly the characterization of Mouse as a story-teller, which is another relevant aspect of African-American culture. This feature in Mouse will remain in the whole series.

In many ways, Mosley's portrayal of Mouse in the end turns out to be a close metaphorical representation of the whole African American community and Easy's relation to it. He embodies the figure of the bad man through his behavior, his way of thinking and also through his interactions with other people, both white and black. Besides, he is illiterate and reflects the oral folklore through his talent for telling stories. As time goes by, and he moves to the city, he will then become

an example of the black urban individual living in the ghetto that maintains complex relations with the white world around him. As we will see, this would be how Easy also perceives it. Consequently, Mouse becomes a principal reference in Easy's life; he symbolizes Easy's own attachment to the African American world, fluctuating in intensity throughout the novels.

With regard to the events that occurred during the trip and caused Easy to change his way of looking at life, it is possible to discern that all of them have one thing in common: they escape Easy's rational way of thinking and the way he had been brought up: "That's how life was back then. You listened to older folks and did what you were told. Even if you knew better you'd follow the rules because that's how we were raised" (*GF* 51). But down in Pariah things will be different and Easy's use of reason will not help him make sense out of what he sees and comes across. Thus, on their first stop upon their arrival, he shows his astonishment at the figure of Momma Jo, a witch in her forties and an old friend of Mouse, who lives near the swamps surrounded by vines, bamboos, trees, gnats and cicadas. She knows the secrets of voodoo and keeps her lover's skull on the ledge over a fireplace in her house. "The house was a shock, but it was the woman standing there that scared me. […] For the first time in my life I felt the roots of my hair tingle" (*GF* 42). Still stranger and more shocking, however, will be that he would fall victim to her bizarre charms and magical powders and have sex with her. He would express later: "I closed my eyes, wishing my mind back home" (*GF* 59). Although willing to have sex, Easy felt dominated by her, as if he was being raped. He finds Momma Jo repulsive: "I wanted to tear off my skin" (*GF* 67). His first reaction is to go away. He cannot understand how he can have done something against his own will. This experience will be so traumatic that later when he gets sick he refuses to go return to her place.

Metaphorically, Easy becomes ill indeed after this incident and will not recover until a few days after his return to Houston. It is as if from this moment on, the process of confronting the next series of new and unpleasant experiences affects him physically as much as mentally. Both his body and his mind react to them negatively. In this way, the next event that Easy will find irrational and evil will be Domaque—Momma Jo's son—and Mouse's absurd way of fishing for

hundreds of different types of fish by making them unconscious feeding them first and then firing his pistol into the water. “It was like a bad dream to see all those fish quivering and half dead. I don’t mind catching a fish or wringing a hen’s neck, but that slaughter left me sick” (*GF* 79). Apart from starting to get really sick with fever, Easy will also be in a horrible mood. As a result, his first reaction will be to manifest to Mouse his intention of going back home. “I ain’t got no mo’ time fo’this mess” (*GF* 82). However, because Mouse explains to Easy that he needs him to go to visit Reese, Easy feels the obligation to help him. After all, that is the main reason why they made the trip down there. In this way, Mosley highlights Easy’s sense of responsibility and duty. He is portrayed as always making use of his common sense. For this reason, it will be Easy himself who ironically would encourage Mouse to go ahead with his plan when he wants to drop it at the last minute after they had already walked all the way to Reese’s house.:

> ‘What we waitin’ fo’?’
>
> His eyes were colder than all winter long.
>
> ‘I’m scared, Easy.’
>
> ‘We cain’t turn back.’
>
> ‘Why not?’ he asked like a child might.
>
> ‘What kinda fool you gonna feel like if you come all the way out here an’then you don’t even ask? You cain’t tell, you know, he might reach in his pocket an’ come out wit’ the bread.’ (*GF* 92)

Unlike Mouse, Easy’s inexperience makes him fearless. Easy is not scared only because first, he does not know how bitter and spiteful Reese can be; and second, because the consequences of this confrontation between Mouse and Reese are beyond the scope of his mind. Had he known how much he would regret later the sequence of events that this incident triggered, he would have not for sure advised Mouse to carry on with his initial objective. As a matter of fact, he would express this idea not too long after meeting Reese: “I was sorry I talked Mouse into coming” (*GF* 96).

Mouse had good reasons to be scared and Easy soon realizes why. After the tense conversation took place, and they were rudely informed that not only

was there no money that Reese could give to Mouse, but also that they were not even welcome in the house, Mouse reacted by shooting Reese's dogs. In consequence, Easy started shouting: "Let it go, man! You cain't get nuthin' like this. Let it go" (*GF* 99). The final outcome of this first encounter with Reese was indeed more like Mouse had imagined than what Easy had expected. Just before running away, Mouse would shoot again, this time over Reese's head as a sign of threat and intimidation. Finally, on their way out, Mouse took out a baby doll that Domaque had given him and hang it from a branch over the center of the road in order to scare Reese off: "Some men believe in evil. They've seen so much of it in the world and in themselves that it becomes a part of what they know as truth" (*GF* 157), Easy explains. He can hardly believe that so much evil and hatred is possible. Likewise, he cannot believe that the use of this voodoo practice was to be so effective. When Reese saw the doll, dressed like him, as representing himself, he got very scared because he did believe in black magic. This doll

> had been burned and mutilated. It had once been a white baby doll but the hard-rubber skin was now burnt black and the clothes it wore were the overalls that a farmer wore. The brown hair was clipped short and the arms were straight out as if it were being crucified on an invisible cross. The eyes were painted over as the wide white eyes you see on a man when he's frightened and trying to see everything coming his way. (*GF* 87)

The use of voodoo is considered by the critic Stephen Soitos as a part of the black vernaculars. Walter Mosley's portrayal of this practice through the figure of Momma Jo and her son illustrates his interest in representing in his writing peculiar aspects of the African American culture. The use of Momma Jo's secret magic will actually appear again later in the series with Easy, Mouse and Momma Jo living in Los Angeles.

After this incident, Easy felt once more physically sick. In this case, his state of mind is represented, as mentioned before, through his physical illness which is gradually getting worse. "When we were running I'd started coughing and it wouldn't go away. I was feverish and dizzy and I wanted my bed and my room in Houston more than anything" (*GF* 100). As Easy tries to assimilate this shocking experience he longs for home. Symbolically, however, given the lack of

chances to find a place to sleep for the night, they had no other option than to look for shelter in the woods. Easy is an orphan. He is all alone in life and his only *family* is Mouse. They both are somewhat *homeless*. "We laid side by side in that tent of leaves and baling wire. The grippe came full on me" (*GF* 101). Interestingly, under these circumstances, Easy's first question for Mouse is only about the dogs:

> 'Wh-what you kill them dogs fo'?'
>
> […] 'Shhh, Easy, you sick. Git some sleep and in the mo'ing you be fine.'
>
> 'I-I-I just wanna know why. Why you kill them dogs?'
>
> I felt like a cranky baby half napping on a Sunday afternoon.
>
> 'I was mad, that's all, Ease." Mouse whispered. ¨Reese talk 'bout my momma like that an'I'm like to kill'im.'
>
> 'But them dogs didn't hurt you.'
>
> 'Go t'sleep now, Easy. Shh.'
>
> I never knew Mouse to be so gentle. He held me all night and kept me warm as much as he could. Who knows? Maybe I would've died out there in Pariah if Mouse hadn't held me to his black heart. (*GF* 101-102)

Easy has a hard time dealing out with the whole episode. As another indication of his integrity and good intentions, his first thoughts are not about the money or about Reese's nasty reception. Instead, Mosley here depicts Easy showing his perplexity about the vile act of killing the dogs. Nevertheless, far from being upset with Mouse at this moment for his reaction, it is significant that he praises his "black heart" now for taking care of him and giving him comfort.

The deaths of these dogs make Easy reflect about his own life; about the vulnerability of his own existence, about cruelty, and about how a near death experience can be for any living being, human or animal:

> No matter what I tried to think of my mind went back to those dogs. I could see them jerk around as the bullets tore through their skinny bodies. Just a quick jerk and they hit the ground, dead. I had seen death before and not long after that I was in the world war where death came by the thousands and the tens of thousands; but I never felt so close to death as when I saw those dogs die. Just a twitch in the air and then they fell to earth, one by one, heavier than life can ever be.
>
> I'd close my eyes but then I'd start awake thinking about what must've crossed before their dogs eyes as they died; I was so upset that I couldn't sleep. I was

> afraid to sleep; afraid because I had seen death in a way where it was real for me and I worried that I'd never wake up. (*GF* 132-133)

These thoughts reveal how Easy's conscience evolves as he begins to lose his childish perspective on how death was something that could not happen to him: "Death had always been a part of my life. He lived in my neighborhood, in my apartment building, right next door to me. But I'd never worried about him coming knocking. I was innocent and I knew that I would live forever" (*GF* 218). Little by little, he realizes all the dangers that surround him and threaten his life. He feels insecure and confused. At this point, he longs for his father to look after him. "I wanted him to come back and protect me from death" (*GF* 133).

Easy's loss of his father is a crucial incident in his childhood that also determines his subjectivity. In fact, his absence and the memory of the night he had to escape continuously haunts Easy. His father left and never came back. As a result, he will often appear in his daily thoughts and even in his dreams. Mosley presents this conflict in Easy's mind in the form of short flashbacks that appear interspersed with the rest of the incidents in the novel.

One of the events for instance that triggers the memory of his father was Mouse and Domaque's slaughter of the fish because they went to a slaughter house the last time that they were together. His father had some business with the foreman, a tall white man with great arms that tried to cheat him:

> My father stood up straight and said, 'You said it was seventeen dollars an'this here is only 'bout half that.'
>
> 'I ain't got time t'talk to you, boy. You take what you can git."
>
> My father stood up taller as if he was trying to get to be as tall as that white man; I got behind him and grabbed onto his pants.
>
> 'You made me a deal, Mr. Mischew, and I want what's mines.'
>
> 'Niggah?' the white man exclaimed as he slapped the flat of the blade on his apron. You want sumpin'? 'Cause you know I'm just the man give it to ya.' (*GF* 81)

While Easy's father experiences racism and abuse in this incident, Easy learns from him to stand up and request what is right. The metaphor of his father "standing up taller to get to be as tall as the white man" symbolizes how his father

did not feel inferior for being black. He made an effort and acted as if they were equal. In addition, the use of the terms "boy" or "niggah" show some verbal abuse and discrimination African Americans were subject to. This matter is in fact part of what the post-colonial theorists denounce as a Western ideology that "portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves and requiring the paternal rule of the West for their own best interests" (Robert Young 2003: 2). Mosley will represent this type of treatment in every single novel of the series.

In this incident in particular, Easy and his father will have to run away because his father did not consent to be humiliated in front of his son and knocked out the offensive white man:

> If that white man did much business with my father he must've known that he was always soft-spoken and respectful. But when you cheat a man and call him nigger—and his boy is standing there too? Well, that was why Mr. Mischew looked so surprised when he found himself flat on his back on the bloody floor. (*GF* 82)

Easy's tone describing the event is of pride. He believes his father did the right thing. However, things got very complicated for both of them afterwards. Much later in the novel when Easy is in bed with high fevers almost on the edge of dying, Mosley presents him again evoking in his dreams the final part of this episode:

> We were running out of the slaughter-house and everybody was yelling. One man grabbed my father but he sent that man to the floor. Another came up and he went down too. I noticed then that the rest yelled but they kept their distance.
>
> […] My father had picked me up into his arms and he was running fast. You could see the fear in his face, and that fear is what I remember most. A scared little colored man with a child in his arms; the world shaking up and down like it was about to break apart…
>
> […] My father was breathing so hard that his throat sang.
>
> 'You gotta run up home, Ezekiel,' he said to me.
>
> […] 'Where you be?'
>
> 'I gotta run right now, son. I don't know where I end up but I tell ya when I get there.'
>
> 'You gonna come get us?' (*GF* 176-177)

This time Easy's tone is of panic and alarm. He spent the rest of his childhood waiting for his father to return some day but he never did. He never saw him again. In other dreams later in the novel, he would appear asking his mother about him:

> 'Where's Daddy, Momma?' I asked.
> 'I don't know, honey,' she said. She was smiling at me with so much love…
> 'But I wanna know where he gone. He said he gonna come get us.' (*GF* 178)

Easy's father was a symbol of protection for him. His absence in turn made him feel abandoned, as if he was lacking something and there was nobody to guide him through life. In those moments during the trip, when he was sick and afraid of death, his father is the first person that comes to his mind: "I wanted my father again; wanted him for the thousandth time since we ran out of that slaughter house and he ran out of my life forever" (*GF* 133). Easy's distress reveals the oppression under which African Americans lived. From it, he will learn that running away is not the right solution. Shouldn't it have been better if his father had accepted his place and fight back the white men using some other way? In the subsequent novels, Easy shows his determination to confront injustice and discrimination.

It is then, at that same instant when he is feeling sorry for himself and is grieving for his father's abandonment, when he has an epiphany (Whall 198): "That's when I decided to learn how to read and write" (*GF* 133). Easy realizes that what he needs in order to be his own man is to learn how to read and write:

> I looked at those papers and thought that if I could read what was in them I wouldn't have to think about those dogs; I thought that if I could read I wouldn't have to hang around people like Mouse to tell me stories, I could just read stories myself. And if I didn't like the stories I read then I could just change them… (*GF* 133)

By becoming literate Easy pictures that he could become a knowledgeable person and that this could be his best protection. Not only would it make him independent, it would also give him the opportunity to aspire for a better life. He will write and create his own counter-narrative. Mosley's representation of Easy's

conscience here introduces the notion of change, which in Stuart Hall's terms constitutes the emergence of a new subject and thus a "change of self-recognition, a new process of identification" (1991: 54). This change in Easy's consciousness will be still more apparent after his return from Pariah. Mosley then represents an Easy whose identity and goals, as I will further analyze later, start to differ from the old homogenous and unified collective identities under which the African American community has traditionally been described (Hall 1991: 44). Also, in this case, the southern black community that Easy has experienced and still surrounds him is marked by an extremely low class status.

As for the rest of the events that Easy went through in those few days, there are two more incidents that affected him deeply and need to be analyzed: Easy's stay for twenty-four hours at Miss Dixon's house, a rich old white lady; and on the other hand, Easy's distress and anxiety in view of how Mouse was maliciously manipulating and lying to Clifton, a younger black man they met by chance on the road.

Walter Mosley will use Easy's episode with Miss Dixon to portray and make more evident some of the social and cultural differences between blacks and whites that were common in the American society of the Southern states at that period. After spending the night hiding from Reese in the woods, Mouse brought Easy to Miss Dixon's house trusting that she might have pity on his friend and might take him in, seeing as he was coming down with the flu. As it turned out, Easy's time with this white lady was not as upsetting as his previous experiences in Pariah. Whereas he would say that it was still unpleasant, we can see how in the end Easy has mixed feelings about the way Miss Dixon treats him and the things she says. In fact, she introduces him into a realm of life he had never seen or experienced. He initially states: "I was very uncomfortable. I wasn't used to spending much time with white people and I knew that colored people are always in danger of doing the wrong thing when they have to deal with whites" (*GF* 116). I suggest that these first impressions that Easy shows are not totally his own. They are triggered by the social and segregated context in which he was raised. By and large, apart from his interaction with whites for work reasons, Easy is not used to spending any personal time with them and still less accustomed to receiving

attention or being taken care of by a white old lady: "The only time I had ever spent around white people was when I was working, and then how I was to act was clear because whites were always the boss. That was easy because all I ever said was 'yes' and 'no'; but mainly 'yes'" (*GF* 116).

Easy's experience with whites prior to going to Pariah has taught him that African Americans' position in society does not allow them many chances to assert themselves. Above all, what he is is fearful. "It was nice that she took me in but it was strange too. I felt in danger whenever she looked at me" (*GF* 121). In the same way, Easy knows there are certain established expectations within the social ladder and that black people happen to occupy the inferior position. However, to Easy's surprise, while Miss Dixon will maintain and make true these differences,

> 'You know I cain't sit at the same table with you, Ezekiel,' she said as she put a bowl of beef stew in front of me. 'You know it's not proper for white and colored to sit together. I mean it'd be as much an insult to your people as mine if we were to forget our place.' (*GF* 114)

she would also provide Easy with special care that would allow him to acknowledge things such as: "That was the finest living that I had ever experienced up to that time" (*GF* 113), or "Miss Dixon laughed. It was a nice laugh and she almost seemed like a normal person to me" (*GF* 118). Easy enjoys the pleasure of having a hot bath, being dressed with clean clothes and being properly fed.

As a consequence of this encounter, and after a few hours of sleep and recovering a little, he becomes aware that his opinion of her is changing: "A lot of people might not like how I acted with that white woman. They might ask: Why didn't he get mad? (*GF* 119). Then, Easy carries on with his reflection and admits:

> There's a reason I wasn't angry then, why I'm still not angry […]
>
> Miss Dixon lived alone out in a colored community that hated her because she owned everything, even the roads they walked on. But Miss Dixon, and every other white person, was, to that colored community, like the cow is to those Hindus over in India. […] Miss Dixon was our sacred cow. She had money and land and she could read and go to fine events at the governor's house. But most of all she was white and being white was like another step to heaven…

> Killing her would have been worse than killing our children; killing her, or even thinking of it, would be like killing the only dream we had. (*GF* 120)

Easy uses both the past and the present tense in the first sentence of this quote. Being twenty five as he is when he is writing down these reflections about the trip, he demonstrates that he has dreams for himself that are related to his future and to the lifestyle Miss Dixon represents. He has expectations to become someone and to reach a higher status in society. Ironically, it is Miss Dixon, a white person, who not only inspired Easy into some of these thoughts but who would also motivate him to learn how to read: "Reading is one of the few things that separates us from the animals, Ezekiel. You'd know all about the man they named you for if you could read" (*GF* 115). In this case, reading, apart from symbolizing knowledge, signifies power. Miss Dixon, in this sense, is empowering Easy. She replaces for some hours the paternal and maternal figures that his parents left vacant. Through her, Easy realizes that he is eager to learn and to give up his life as a poor black man. As it turns out, this represents also a separation to a certain extent from the low class and the illiteracy that his black community represents. At the time of leaving, he comments: "She waved goodbye from the front porch like a mother sending her kids off to school" (*GF* 124). In his subconscious, there is no doubt that Easy would have liked to have had a mother who sent him to school every morning.

In addition, Mosley portrays again in a symbolic way that Easy is changing and wants a new life when he objects to the idea of putting on his old clothes: "I was hoping that she'd let me keep her uncle's suit but she didn't. My clothes smelled all the worse for the few hours of cleanliness that I'd been given" (*GF* 123). His new attire had coincided with his new aim in life and his new "clean" thoughts about himself. In turn, his old clothes represented going back to the same reality from which he came and that had troubled him so much recently. Nevertheless, his mind was a different one than the one he had entered that house with. Although, Miss Dixon didn't give him the nice suit, she gave him the arms to become a new man, that is, the initiative and the inspiration to learn how to read and write. On a different note but also significant, it is that we can see how

Easy's illness improves. This, however, will soon change when he finds out what Mouse is plotting. He has to struggle again with his morality and his conscience. Then, the symptoms will get much worse again.

Easy discovers that Mouse is manipulating Clifton by making his life impossible. Mouse lies to Clifton with the purpose of using his help to go and rob Reese. This is not well received by Easy. He condemns Mouse's behavior and repudiates him. However, at the same time, he feels torn between committing to his moral principles and betraying his friend:

> I knew that I should tell [Clifton] everything I knew about Mouse; what a rotten man he was and how he messed with other people's lives. Even if Clifton didn't believe me I should have told him and then my conscience would've been clean. I should have taken that boy in the car and gone back home to Houston, but I was sick and tired. Even when he told me Mouse's plan I stayed quiet. (*GF* 150)

Easy's decision not to tell Clifton anything would be a burden he will carry with him for many years:

> I wake up nights remembering Clifton sitting there with his hands stretched out. I had the answers but I didn't give them to him because Mouse was my friend and you don't cross your friends.
>
> Or maybe I just didn't care. Maybe that's what was wrong with us back then. Life was so hard that we were too tired from just living to lend a hand. (*GF* 151)

As Easy is writing down his memories years later, he still does not seem totally sure about why he reacted the way he did. It could have been out of friendship but it could have also been just indifference. One way or the other, at this point we see how logic and rational thinking do not guide Easy's mind anymore.

On the other hand, another possible argument for these thoughts is that he is just making up excuses in an attempt to comfort himself because Easy did ultimately try to save Clifton. On the night he found out that Clifton and Mouse were going to rob Reese at his house, Easy woke up after being under a trance with high fevers for almost two days and went over to Reese's too. At this point, as all the incidents from the previous days and from his childhood in Louisiana came together, he started to arrive at some conclusions:

> I made it out the slim passage through the woods thinking about all the steps I'd taken to bring me to that path. It came to me that it all started when my father ran away from that butcher and out of my life. He never called for us. One day I came home from school and our neighbor was waiting there for me. When she told me that my mother had some kind of stroke I wasn't surprised. I had expected her to leave too. (*GF* 194-195)

Easy's parents abandoned him and he could never get over that loss. Now he is not going to abandon his friend. He feels like he is not a scared child anymore. Life implies action and taking risks. He is not going to be waiting any longer for anyone to protect him:

> I've been counting my steps from that day to this one. From Louisiana to Texas; from childhood to being a man.
>
> I wasn't quite yet a man as I walked down that country path. But I was headed for maturity. I had driven Mouse out there and anything he did was a reflection on me.
>
> It was the noble thought of a fool. (*GF* 195)

Easy is aware of the fact that he is starting to think in a different way. He is losing his innocence. He cannot change society (what Miss Dixon represents) but he can react against his own people. He feels responsible for Mouse's actions because he had taken him there and for some reason he is hopeful that he can still do something: "I honestly believed that I could calm Mouse down and bring Reese around to reason" (*GF* 197). Nevertheless, years later looking at the past and thinking about that decision, Easy acknowledges that his attempt was somewhat ridiculous. Now he knows he was stupid for thinking he could reason with Mouse: nothing could have changed his friend's mind or stopped him from what he intended to do.

In the end, Reese killed Clifford; he almost killed Mouse too but Easy ran into him and hit him at the last second, giving time to Mouse to grab the pistol and shoot him dead. This moment constitutes the climax to the first conflict in the story. The experience would remain in Easy's conscience for a long time:

> I was a part of the murder of a man's father. Me, Ezekiel Rawlins, the man who worried after his own father for years. It's not that I cared for Reese but murder is a sin that burns your soul.
>
> And to help a man murder his father… (*GF* 221).

Mosley presents a devastated Easy here who is not able to finish his sentence. This illustrates the guilt he felt and his internal struggle regarding the use of violence. On the one hand, it is important to remember here how he could not even think of using any type of aggression against Miss Dixon. On the other hand, he has helped to kill a black man who had the position of a *father*. Symbolically, this represents the conflict he begins to have with his community and with his origin (his own father). Reese's murder triggers Easy's consideration of separating from Mouse and finding new routes to live his life.

At this moment, once in the car on the return to Houston Easy is upset with himself but also with Mouse. He shows his irritation and rejection by being evasive in accepting the three hundred dollars he was giving him and confronting his friend for the first time in his life:

> Here ya go, Ease, maybe this brighten up yo' face.' Mouse put a fat envelope, folded from a sheet of newspaper, on the dashboard in front of me.
>
> 'What's that?'
>
> […] 'I cain't read but I can count to three hundred in my sleep.'
>
> I didn't say a word. I wouldn't even look at the envelope.
>
> 'What's wrong wichyou, man?' he asked me
>
> 'Ain't nuthin wrong.'
>
> 'Then why you cain't even talk?'
>
> 'Ain't got nuthin t'say, that's all.'
>
> 'Yeah. I know.' He stared at me for a moment, then went on, 'Easy, I want you t'take that money. It's yours an' it would be an insult t'me if you leave it lyin' there. […]' (*GF* 213-214)

Easy realizes that Mouse has no remorse at all for what had happened. That was the way he was. "He really believed that he hadn't done anything wrong" (*GF* 216). All the same, Easy recognized he had changed and there were things now that he was not willing to put up with. If Mouse had chosen this way of life, Easy

had other plans for himself. He was determined to make his own decisions and Mouse was not going to tell him how to handle his own life. He was becoming his own man. Also, Easy's refusal to accept the money is his way of saying to his friend that he could not forget that he (or they) had killed Reese. This confrontation brings up the climax of the second conflict in this coming of age novel. Mouse spoke clearly:

> 'An that's why I need ya t'take this here money, Ease.' He pointed at the envelope again. 'Because you the on'y one got my confidence. You the on'y one know why I come down here an' you the on'y one know what happened. If you don't take that money then I know you against me.' […] His voice was the whisper of death, the slither of a snake over the nape of my neck.
>
> […] At that moment I realized that the wrong words would cut my life down to seconds or, at the most, just a few days. And I also knew that whatever I said would be my first words as a man in this world. (*GF* 218)

Easy's process of personal development comes to an end here. He realizes that Mouse is not joking, and that his life depends on his response. They were not kids playing games. It was the moment to act like a man and not like an upset boy:

> I reached out for the bundle and said, 'Thanks, Ray.'
>
> Mouse laughed and slapped my knee.
>
> I had survived again. I had risked my life to save Clifton only to fail. But I had survived that failure. I was following in my father's fleet footsteps: standing up when I couldn't take any more and then running to fight another day. (*GF* 218-219)

Easy had stood up at first as his father did that day in the slaughter house. Then he felt obliged to take the money for the same reason as his father had to run: to survive. Easy understood it was the only way he could save his life but he also felt shame for it. "I was unworthy. In my misery I told myself that was why my own father never came back for me" (*GF* 222). Easy realizes that his father probably felt a similar type of dishonor.

However, in his later reflections trying to find peace with himself, he also becomes aware that in one way or another there is nothing else he could have done:

> For the first time I thought about God. I wondered if he'd forgive me like Reverend Peters said. But I didn't see how he could. I wasn't going to the law, I wasn't going to give myself up. I loved freedom and life and the only thing that would come from confessing was prison and death.
>
> I took Mouse's money. It's true I was afraid not to take it but I didn't throw it away. I could have found a worthy cause and given up my loot for that but I didn't, and I wasn't intending to do it. (*GF* 223)

Easy comes to terms with reality and understands that justice does not actually govern society.

On the whole, all the experiences during the trip to Pariah affected Easy's subjectivity and way of thinking profoundly, especially the sudden revelation that life was more a question of survival than a question of morality and finding the truth. "For a moment there I thought that the truth was more important than the need to survive" (*GF* 217). Now he understands he was wrong. Easy realizes that there are moments in life when it will not be possible to commit to his principles. "I understood I was alone and there was no one there to help me. Reese was dead, Clifton was dead, but I was alive. There was nothing more I could do; I was just a man" (*GF* 228). Easy's notion of survival derives from his new experiences and his new insights; as he gains knowledge he loses innocence. If before he thought that his innocence made him somehow immortal, now he realizes, as the epigraph of this chapter reads, that "every step could mean death for a black man like [him]" (243).

Easy's writing in the hotel in Paris constitutes a moral reflection on everything that happened. Most importantly, it establishes Easy as another story-teller but he, unlike Mouse, does it by writing down what he has to tell. This symbolizes that Easy is a new type of story-teller, one who has appropriated the writing from the white culture and situates himself on the edge of both worlds to confront them and reflect about them[3]. In this way, Easy's reflections in Paris are part of a final struggle with his conscience, a final process of assimilation not only to overcome his feelings of guilt and remorse, but also to understand that he is no

[3] This is the way Mosley portrays Easy as a narrator all the way through the series. Easy appears looking at the past and reflecting and telling stories from his past.

one to criticize Mouse's actions and his way of life given the world they have to live in. At some point, he comments:

> It wasn't until years later, after the war that I understood about Mouse; long after I learned to read and write I came across the meaning of the word that described him: inspiration. Raymond wasn't smarter than the next man; he didn't do anything new in the world. But he created lead from gold. He created his revenge on Reese from his love to Etta Mae [his wife] or maybe he found that revenge in her love of him. He changed the world to fit his twisted feelings.
>
> Raymond was an artist. He always said that a poor man has got to work with flesh and blood. 'Po' man ain't got time t'be worryin'bout finery, Ease; po' man cain't even watch his own ass, 'cause you know if you so much as flinch down here that's all she wrote fo' you'. (*GF* 175)

Easy learns from Mouse's pragmatism that there is no room for his dreams and ideals being poor and black and living in Texas. That is why after Mouse's and Etta Mae's wedding, he decides to leave.

> I didn't have a thing, just like everybody around me; all the money I had was in my pocket and all the clothes I had were on my back. That's how life was back then. You couldn't hold me responsible for anything because I didn't have anything. And, realizing that, it was time for me to go. (*GF* 237)

Easy makes up his mind not to accept the type of life that most African Americans around him in Texas seem destined to live:

> I needed a place where life was a little easier and where nobody knew me. I knew that if I could be alone I could make it. All the people around me dancing, having a good time; they were just holding me back, wanting me to be the same old poor Easy—not a nickel in my pocket or a dream in my head. (*GF* 237)

Easy has changed. His perspectives are different. Now, he knows there is another lifestyle to be pursued.

Mosley's portrayal of Easy's decision to leave can be analyzed under Stuart Hall's concept of the "fragmentation and erosion of the collective social identities" (1991: 45). In this way, Hall argues that the old logics of identity are finished (1991: 43). The collective social identities "are not already-produced stabilities and totalities in the world. […] They do not give [black people] the code of identity they did in the past" (1991: 46). Hall believes in "the politics of living identity through difference" (1991: 57), and this is how Mosley seems to

understand it too throughout the Rawlins series. In this novel, one of the secondary characters, William, the guitar player, makes this idea explicit in the following quote:

> In the city they all wear the same clothes and they get t'be like each other 'cause they live so close together. It's like trees; when they real close they all grow straight up to get they li'l bit'a sun. But out here you got room t'spread out. They ain't no two trees in a field look the same way. (*GF* 136)

From the perspective of a country person, this is the distinction between urban and rural people. Easy comprehends that not all African Americans are the same or live as each other and he doesn't have to be like other African Americans. This thought is further emphasized and demonstrated through his decision to leave Houston. It represents his desire to look for other chances in life outside his community and to be different. Now he wants to put distance between himself and Mouse: "I could be dead; Mouse could have shot me for refusing his gift and who would have known? […] I was the only one who cared about my leaving. No mother or father to wonder where I was" (*GF* 238). Easy feels alone in the world and is determined to do something with his life other than stay. As a result, although difficult, it is also comforting to leave: "I was too busy feeling the sweet pain of leaving" (*GF* 239).

Similarly, another point that Mosley and Stuart Hall have in common is their notion of identity as something which is never completed. While Hall theorizes that "identity is always in the process of formation" (1991: 47), Mosley creates a hero whose identity is subject to constant change depending on every moment of his life and the historical time he is going through. In this sense, we can follow Easy's development of his identity all the way from the moment he leaves Houston in 1939 at nineteen until the latest novel so far in the series, *Cinnamon Kiss*, contextualized in 1966 when he lives in Los Angeles and is forty-six years old.

Always portraying the African American culture in the background, Walter Mosley develops a body of writing that illustrates the African American lifestyle and the way they feel, behave, and relate with one another. In *Gone*

Fishin' we can see how Easy's perception of black men playing cards in a bar shows Rivkin and Ryan's definition of the anthropological meaning of culture we saw in Chapter 2: "The men talked about everything: gardens and women and white people. It felt good to listen to them laugh and trade lies" (*GF* 142). To begin with, it is interesting how talking about white people constitutes a normal thing for them. Secondly, it is not without significance that Mosley here includes the term "lies" to refer to the "stories" they told each other. The use of this term is very common among African Americans. Lastly, and still more significant is Easy's next comment: "I remember every story they told but, for the most part, they didn't have anything to do with me" (*GF* 143). Easy not only makes clear that the alternative use of "lies" and "stories" means the same thing, but also he manifests, as noted before, that he is beginning to feel slightly alienated from this way of life. He does not totally identify himself with it, at least at that moment.

Alternatively, Mosley also depicts another cultural aspect of the black community through Easy's feelings about the blues: "I've always loved blues music; when you hear it there's something that happens in your body. Your heart and stomach and liver start to move to the music" (*GF* 135). According to Stephen Soitos, as was also indicated in the previous chapter, the blues are considered as a part of what he identifies as the black vernaculars. In many of the novels later, Mosley will portray Easy making a similar type of statement.

To sum up, *Gone Fishin'* is Mosley's very first novel and it also constitutes the first book in which the author presents an Easy Rawlins who along with his best friend Mouse Navrochet, are setting out in life. Portrayed as a bildungsroman, we find several aspects in Easy's young life that certainly make it rough and difficult. Indeed, there are specific episodes that clearly affect the formation of his subjectivity. Some experiences appear in the novel as dreams from his childhood and others as memories that the protagonist recalls now as he puts them together on paper. The fact that he chooses to write about his trip to Pariah with Mouse and not about his time in World War II which just finished, emphasizes the idea that the disturbing experiences in Pariah opened his eyes to

the world. That was, as he puts it, "his real war." It was the first time he confronted evil, death and murder. Likewise, it was when he understood that life was a struggle; the main goal being survival and not pursuing truth or integrity. As a black person, Easy realized that he was bound to be poor all his life unless he went away and sought new horizons.

Mosley thus establishes a new portrayal of African American individual: one that does not accept the social and economic conditions the black community has suffered for decades. Figuratively speaking, Easy's initial separation from his community is depicted through his unintentional contribution in the murder of Mouse's stepfather, a black predecessor. Given that Mouse is represented as a principal example of the southern black community through his violent behavior and his perspectives on life, Easy's negative response to his deeds signifies a rejection of his friend—a person that would pull him into a type of life that he is unwilling to accept. Thus, by rejecting Mouse, he is in turn rejecting his community, at least at this moment in his life when he is willing to improve his status in society.

On the other hand, it is symbolic that Easy is "writing" his memories when only six years ago he was completely illiterate. As advised by Miss Dixon, he has made the word his own. He makes writing his own. He writes his own stories. This helps him to reflect on his experiences and make sense of life. The irony here is that it was a white person who motivated him to become well-read. In the same way, it is also significant that the act of writing not only brought about the conditions for Easy to find himself but also to come to terms with the loss of his father, the man who gave him a lesson once about dignity and respect but who later, afraid of white men and feeling piteous, never returned.

Mosley portrays Easy therefore as both a thinking subject and a story-teller. He appears reflecting on his past after having reappropriated the writing from the whites to use it for his own ends. Now, once the war has finished, and on his return to the United States, he has no definite plans: "Why worry about the destination when the road is full of vipers?" (*GF* 243) Aware of the dangers of life, he knows the future is open and he is ready for whatever it brings. As he

remarks in the closing lines of the novel: “There is no way for me to tell the future from this room in Paris. All I can do is follow my footsteps, not at all like my father, and go back home” (*GF* 244). His father stood up for dignity and respect but he lost that battle and could not go back home. However, Easy will do it. He will go back. His footsteps guide him home to his community and to his culture, only this time his new outlook on life provides him with a double conscience. This will allow him to situate himself on the borderline between both worlds, white and black, negotiating positions whenever necessary and demanding the dignity and the respect his father instilled in him.

Chapter 4

Easy Rawlins' (De)Formation of Identity through the Fifties

My life had dire consequences; there were reminders of it all over Los Angeles.
Walter Mosley, *White Butterfly*

I felt that I was just as good as any white man.
Easy Rawlins, *Devil in a Blue Dress*

The first noticeable difference between *Gone Fishin'* and the initial pages of *Devil in a Blue Dress* is the more mature perspective of society and life that Easy presents in the latter. Unlike the first novel, we do not know when he is writing down his memories, although it is evident that many years have passed. His experience in World War II as well as the sum of the things that have happened to him together with the events during his trip down to Pariah with Mouse, have influenced his subjectivity profoundly. Still, the references to his past as a soldier represent a turning point in his life. His outlook of the world and his sense of self changed from that point on, just as it did for other African American men who took part in World War II. Easy's references to the war will remain constant throughout the other eight novels in which he appears and form to date the entire Rawlins series. This is evident in *Devil in a Blue Dress, A Red Death, White Butterfly* and *Black Betty,* where as a result of his military experience he possesses the "training" to establish himself as some type of investigator within the black community. Likewise, other significant changes that

come to light in these four novels are the progress he makes in his formal education, his prosperity as a real estate agent, his aspirations to reach a middle class status, his role as a father of two adopted children, and finally, his development of a suspicious mind and watchful attitude concerning the world that surrounds him.

These four novels correspond to the first stage of Easy's life in Los Angeles lasting from 1948 to 1961. According to his development as a detective, his struggle to reach success as a businessman, and his understanding of the position he occupies as an African American in his prejudiced society, 1961 represents the conclusion of a period and the beginning of a new one. The end of *Black Betty,* the last novel in this group, constitutes the ending of a cycle for Easy for three reasons: his acceptance of money from friends to carry out his job as a detective, his resolution not to pursue a future as a businessman, and finally, and most importantly, his decision to look for a new and steady job that provides him with a different and more stable lifestyle.

Regarding his development as a detective, towards the end of *Black Betty,* Easy takes money for the first time from his friends to carry out his investigations and his work: "Taking that twenty-dollar bill was a changing point in my life. Up until that moment I used what talents I had to trade favors with my neighbors and friends. It was rare that I would take cash from one of my peers—especially from a close friend like John" *BBBB* 191). This is significant because earlier, his "trading of favors," as he said in *A Red Death,* did not imply an exchange of money: "It was a real country way of doing business" (*RD* 5). Next, it is also in *Black Betty*, that he stops thinking about the American dream. In Easy's case, the American Dream means making money and being a successful business man in order to achieve equality and demonstrate white people that he is as good as them. As shown in the epigraph of this chapter—"I felt I was just as good as any white man" (*DBD* 9)—this idea appears at the beginning of *Devil in a Blue Dress* and haunts Easy throughout all four novels. In Black Betty, however, he realizes that this dream is not within his reach:

> I had reached out for the white man's brass ring and got caught up short, that's all. They taught me when I was a boy to stay in my place. I was a fool for forgetting that lesson, and now all I was doing was paying for that foolishness.
>
> Deep inside I knew that the world wasn't going to let me be an upright businessman. It was just that I had worked so hard. Since I was a child I worked the daylight hours; sweeping, gardening, delivering. I'd done every kind of low job, and I wanted my success. I wanted it—violently. (*BB* 59)

But it will not happen. The loss of his properties as a result of the city's decision to foreclose the development of the area to build a sewage treatment plant (*BB* 58) means the end of his possibilities to become a rich man. While achieving the American dream, making money, and owning a house and several apartments represented Easy's attempt to obtain equality and respect in society; the loss of them signify a failure and the need to redefine his goals. As I will discuss later, Mosley points out the effect of ownership on the construction of African American subjectivity by depicting Easy's evident obsession with owning property. Consequently, as he loses them, a change in his conscience occurs and he feels obligated to relocate himself in the subsequent novels which I analyze in Chapter 5. Finally, in the last pages of *Black Betty,* Easy remarks on his decision to obtain a different kind of job, the third aspect that defines this period of his life: "My money problems weren't solved yet but I had some hope. And I was definitely sure that I'd never enter work that didn't have a paycheck and benefits involved. I was through with the streets. That was a younger man's game" (*BB* 253). Easy is weary and unhappy. He feels discouraged to carry on his work as a detective.

In the next novel, *A Little Yellow Dog*, he will have a new job as the head janitor at Sojourner Truth Junior High School in Watts. This type of work will constitute a significant change in his lifestyle as well as a change in his mentality and his goals. For more than two years, he does not get involved with any type of job as a private eye, and when he finally does, it will just be to prove that he is innocent of the crimes that occurred in the high school.

Walter Mosley sets the beginning of *Devil in a Blue Dress, A Red Death, White Butterfly* and *Black Betty* in a historical context marked by the westward migration movement that takes place in the U.S. during and after the war. As

many critics agree, the effects of World War II on society were numerous; indeed, "it was one of the major forces in shaping mid-twentieth century America" (Wynn 12). American historian Neil A. Wynn points out that by opening up employment opportunities the war encouraged large-scale migrations of people, both black and white (62). The black population in cities such as San Diego, Los Angeles, Denver or San Francisco increased by over one hundred per cent during those years:

> The influx of these newcomers, most of them from the South […] had an effect which could only be described as disruptive. State and federal bodies, still attempting to cope with the problems of Depression, were incapable of dealing with this added burden. Overcrowding in poor homes, racial conflict over housing, employment and recreational facilities, plus the anger of blacks at the continued insults their men suffered in the armed services, raised tempers to fever pitch. (Wynn 60)

In *Devil in a Blue Dress,* the time setting is 1948 and Easy now lives in Los Angeles. Like many other African Americans from below the Mason-Dixon line, he has moved to California looking for a better life. Mosley portrays those tensions and difficulties which Wynn describes above, and uses this historical context as a frame of reference for the mindset of the period that Easy as well as other black characters in the novel reflect through their comments:

> I had been hearing Lips and Willie and Flattop since I was a boy in Houston. All of them and John and half the people in that crowded room had migrated from Houston after the war, and some more before that. California was like heaven for the southern Negro. People told stories of how you could eat fruit right off the trees and get enough work to retire one day. The stories were true for the most part but the truth wasn't like the dream. Life was still hard in L.A. and if you worked every day you still found yourself on the bottom. (*DBD* 27)

Although California offered opportunities absent in the Southern communities from which blacks had migrated, it was far from the sunny "promised land" that many had sought (Sides 236). As Peter Gottlieb explains, "arriving in Los Angeles with high expectations, African Americans quickly found themselves not just on the lowest rungs of the job ladders with no chance of rising but easily disposable as surplus labor whenever industrial production slackened (709).

As a new arrival, Easy discovers right away that the economic and social discrimination against African Americans contradicts the utopic stories his southern friends told him. In fact, as Wynn explains, "as more and more blacks entered the cities the ghettos became increasingly congested and run down, affecting morals, health and race relations" (63). Furthermore, due to their low economic status and racial discrimination, it was extremely difficult for African Americans to move out of the ghetto once they were settled. This fact, although unpleasant, as Wynn indicates, "led to an increased sense of community and awareness" (73). Excluded from the labor movements and lacking government programs to assist their assimilation, the newcomers had only their meager family and community resources to fall back on (Gottlieb 709). They shared common problems and helped each other, thus establishing a close network of contacts and social bonds that passed any information on jobs to one another as well as any news of racial incidents (Wynn 73). According to Joe W. Trotter, "black kin and friendship networks helped the rural resident to resettle in the city" (83). The raise of black migrants in L.A. constituted the growth of a black urban population. In these novels, Mosley presents clearly how a sense of black community emerged from these circumstances.

> Likewise, Mosley presents the social and racial challenges that Easy faces when living in the new urban space that Los Angeles represents. By and large, this is another historical circumstance that brought changes for Southern African Americans who had to adapt themselves to the empirical and psychological effects of life in the city. As Elisabeth Ford argues, the newly arrived must go through the experience of learning how to read the city:
>
> During this time, then, any general African American notion of the "local" is radically redefined. Local overwhelmingly comes to mean urban, and a socially marginal population to occupy the very centers that define America as a metropolitan society; the suburbs, the literal "margins" of the city, expand to receive fleeing whites. (Ford 32)

For this new urban black population, migration, according to historian Nicholas Lemann, "meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America and finding a new one" (quoted in Ford 32). Furthermore, Ford adds, migration represented "a loss of language, perhaps even a loss of self, and it is the task of the newly awakened self to describe the past in its new vocabulary" (37). Easy Rawlins' writing is an example of this. When putting his memories together

and reflecting on his life, he often finds himself making comparisons between his years in the South and his new experiences in L.A. In this way, we see how he not only learns how to adapt his language and speak as a white person when he needs to, but also how he feels the need to reinvent himself in order to cope with his new circumstances.

As we will see, here the acquisition of a language or a dialect, as M. Bakhtin argues, is parallel to the acquisition of a world view (271). Mosley portrays how his black hero goes through a period of (de)formation losing, or just changing, part of who he was in Texas by developing a new dialect, a new mind and a new identity after arriving in the city. Some of these changes are partly noticed by his friend Mouse when he says in *Devil in a Blue Dress*: "Easy, you changed. […] You use' t'be kinda scared of everything. Take them little nigger jobs like gardenin' and cleanin' up. Now you got this nice house and you fuckin' some white man's girl" (*DBD* 152).

Simultaneously, Mosley's novels now adopt the hardboiled detective fiction conventions to present a picture of society from the African American perspective. Thus, in these four novels of the series he introduces the reader to an Easy Rawlins whose subjectivity keeps developing as a result of his experiences and the historical events that surround him, and also as a result of his new profile as a detective, a role he gradually adopts through each of the novels as witnessed by the reader. This profile develops from the traditional private eye widely represented in the detective fiction of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

According to the critic Andrew Pepper, Mosley has changed the Anglo detective into an investigator who is part of a socially marginalized group and is perceived as a positive figure by most members of his community (1999: 242). "This does not mean," Pepper explains, "that he functions like some kind of morally pure state-sponsored henchman, but simply that in his refusal to capitulate to authority and in his dogged determination to uncover what has really happened, he usually comes across as an attractive figure" (1999: 242). In this case, Easy unlike other white detectives such as Phillip Marlowe or Sam Spade, will not be entirely in control of his actions because as a black man during a period of strong

social discrimination he bore the burden of class inferiority. As an African American, Easy plays the role of the underdog. As explained by Robert Hopper, he is an example of the development of intergroup attitudes and the differences in social privilege that were present in the American society of the time (8). The law and the whole justice system were biased. Thus, living in a society dominated by whites, Easy's "status as an African American means that he is constantly torn between what he must do in order to survive and what he feels might be in the best interest of his specific community" (Pepper 1999: 246). Walter Mosley imbues his protagonist with all the characteristics that any other detective might have with the crucial difference that, as a private black "eye," he "sees" the world from the perspective of a marginalized African American.

For this reason, in order to study the formation of Easy's subjectivity in these four novels I will first study what aspects of his personality fit in with the conventional detective formula. Secondly, I will identify and discuss other traits that respond to his specific condition as a black detective. Since Easy is ethnically rooted in a growing migrant African American community in Los Angeles, its culture influences him and shapes his way of thinking and making decisions. Lastly, it is also necessary to look at how he develops a subversive black conscience, which can be addressed as post-colonial. In this respect, Easy could also be defined as a post-colonial detective. This means that his thoughts reflect a perspective that presents a strong criticism of the white world and a clear refusal to remain a part of the collective identity that African Americans were arbitrarily assigned. All together, as I study the previous aspects of Easy's identity, I incorporate the historical context in which he is steeped. In these novels, the historical time from the late 40's and the whole decade of the 50's that Mosley represents is inextricably connected to the stages of Easy's evolution. In fact, it constitutes a central element to consider throughout the whole series since it influences Easy's experiences and growth. Without a doubt, if Easy Rawlins is a new type of private detective, it is due to all of the above reasons, in addition to his personal ability to constantly adapt his identity according to the world in which he finds himself. Easy develops various identities simultaneously and faces their different tensions and struggle.

4. 1. Easy Rawlins' development and the conventional hard-boiled detective

> I smiled and finished my drink. Before ordering another one I lit a Camel and inhaled deeply. I didn't have a plan. I wasn't a policeman. I didn't have a notepad.
>
> Walter Mosley, *White Butterfly*

To understand Easy as a hard-boiled detective it is first necessary to understand the characteristics of the hard-boiled setting (also known as noir) in which the novels are depicted. Elisabeth Ford explains in her work on the so-called "dark side" of the American urban narrative how the French term "noir" has been generally used to refer to films and novels that present "nightmare versions of the modern American city." The "noir" is therefore lionized with the portrayal of conflictive or devastating forms of sociology (95). Similarly, another critic, Nicholas Christopher, affirms that the "noir" is:

> The dark mirror reflecting the dark underside of American urban life—the subterranean city—from which much crime, high and low culture, raw sexual energy and deviations, and other elemental, ambiguous forces that fuel the greater society often springs. Reflecting the infernal, complex, lower depths of American life, which is composed in shifting parts of blood and cement, nightmares and iron. (Quoted in Ford 95)

This term "noir" was created by French critics to refer to a body of work that was produced in the United States during World War II and is today regarded as "hardboiled" in English. Be it noir or hardboiled, there is no actual distinction between the two, but one of the main factors that characterizes this type of fiction is the presence of a detective hero who exerts absolute control over the narrative flow. As Ford remarks, "when he isn't narrating no one is" (149).

As a result, a central aspect of the noir narratives, according to Ford, is that they "demand an exaggerated identification with the narrator, because it is only in this identification that the narrative can instruct the reader to 'see him seeing,' to make the reader see through the narrative as through a prosthetic and ideologically defined set of eyes" (111). Undoubtedly, in Mosley's novels, Easy constitutes this

"set of eyes." Mosley utilizes this characteristic of the hardboiled conventions to show us the way that his African American detective perceives and experiences life. In this line of argument, as M.M. Bakhtin argues:

> The speaking person and his discourse […] is what makes a novel a novel, the thing responsible for the uniqueness of the genre. But in a novel, of course, the speaking person is not all is represented, and people themselves need not be represented only as speakers. No less than a person in drama or in epic, the person in a novel may *act*—but such action is always highlighted by ideology, is always harnessed to the character's discourse (even if that discourse is as yet only a potential discourse), is associated with an ideological motif and occupies a definite ideological position. (333-334)

Easy is the black eye that shows the reader the world as he sees it. His perspective, his understanding and his actions are determined by his blackness. In this sense, Anthony Shiu considers that "blackness and the detective identity are always already intertwined in the detective's psyche" (8). His ideological position is always demarcated. Ford points out that, "the black detective is always a member of a group, his identity never radically socially detaches in the manner of a Sam Spade or a Phillip Marlowe" (119).

Still, although his perspective is different—because it comes from the margins—his profile as a hardboiled detective is inescapably attached to the usual hardboiled formula fully established by Raymond Chandler in his work "The Simple Art of Murder," already analyzed in Chapter 2. "The noir detective," Ford explains, "must rely on a certain amount of predictability in human behavior, a certain identifiable sameness of motive in order to crack the code of the plot" (131). For all these reasons, as Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* and the subsequent novels progress, we can observe particular traits in Easy's actions and reflections that reveal his condition as a typical hardboiled private eye; a condition which he keeps developing throughout the rest of the series. In this way, while the development is unusual for detectives, it is crucial in the Rawlins series as a means of portraying the influence of the historical context in his black hero's subjectivity.

To begin with, it is important to observe how Easy becomes a detective. Apart from the difficult economic circumstances that cause him to accept his first

job, (he has lost his post at Champions Aircraft and needs money to pay the mortgage on his house), Mosley also draws a personal profile for him that makes this change plausible. Easy responds to a number of initial conditions which are basic to becoming a sleuth. He is young, 28 years old, single and sort of a loner; he is streetwise and acquainted with the nightlife of the city; he takes pleasure in drinking alcohol and has an obsessive attraction to women. Besides, just from reading the first few pages of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, we can notice that he is extremely observant and he analyzes people quickly. He is also confident, has army experience, knows what he wants, and he considers himself knowledgeable. Some of these characteristics are only implied in the text but others are emphasized and made more evident for the reader. We can see this for instance, when Joppy, the black bartender of the bar he frequents, introduces Easy to Dewitt Albright, the white man (sort of a gangster) who "hires" him to find a woman who spends a lot of her time in the black neighborhoods. In their first conversation of the novel, Joppy informs: "'Mr. Albright lookin' for a man to do lil job, Easy. I told him you outta work an' got a mortgage t'pay too'" (*DBD* 4). And then soon after, but addressing Albright this time, Joppy explains the reasons why Easy can fit with the type of person he needs:

> 'And you know Easy always tryin' t'be better. He just got his high school papers from night school and he been threatenin' on some college.' […] 'And he's a war hero, Mr. Albright. Easy went in with Patton. Volunteered! You know he seen him some blood.' (*DBD* 4)

Joppy's description contributes significantly to the identification of certain aspects of Easy's personality: he shows initiative to improve himself and "be better," has proven his courage by volunteering in the war front, and he is also smart; he wants to attend college and achieve a higher education. These facts make him a candidate for the kind of detective work that Albright will ask of him. Interestingly, however, when Easy finally accepts the job the word "detective" has not been mentioned yet in the novel.

Indeed it is not until later in this novel that Easy learns that he is becoming a private eye. As the old Easy in the position of a narrator is looking back at the past and writing down the story, he realizes how it happened. Above all, he

emphasizes how he liked the feeling of freedom and being his own boss: "I had a feeling of great joy as I walked away from Ricardo's. I don't know how to say it, exactly. It was as if for the first time in my life I was doing something on my own terms. Nobody was telling me what to do. I was acting on my own" (*DBD* 124). Easy welcomes both the challenge and the opportunity of being able to decide where to go and how to search for clues in order to find Daphne Monet, the mysterious *white* woman who was frequently seen in the company of blacks and had suddenly disappeared. After a few days working on the case, he explains:

> 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 thought that they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me, something that wasn't real. (*DBD* 128).

Easy has an epiphany. It is then when his identity as a detective becomes clearer for him. At this point in time, he will start to think more consciously like a private eye. On the other hand, the other significant thing that this quote indicates is how Easy quickly learns how to disguise himself. When looking for information he frequently hides his real intentions.

The third important moment in Easy's process of becoming a detective is at the close of *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Once Daphne Monet has been found and the case solved, Easy reveals to Odell, an old friend of his, that he now has a new type of work. This is an important moment that also shows how thoughts come into existence through language. Individuals use words to construct their ideas. Easy really becomes a detective when he thinks about it, discovers he is one, and then says it. Asked by Odell about his current job, Easy replies that he has two. With the money he obtained from Daphne Monet and the different investigations, he has bought a house and now he is renting it. Therefore, he is a landlord. (Of course, he does not reveal to his friend how he got the money). Regarding the second job, Easy states: "I do it when I need a few dollars. Private investigations" (*DBD* 214). Here we see that Easy has at this time a new concept of himself, one which is certainly very different from the start of the novel. It is the beginning of a

new life for him. Now he is a detective. Also, he has become a property-owner, a role he will perform along with his investigations in the next three novels.

By the same token, there are other specific scenes throughout this book in which we can clearly see certain traits in Easy's behavior that respond to the typical figure of the detective established in Chandler or Hammet's hardboiled novels. We can observe for example, Easy's ability to think about two or three things at the same time, and quickly. While finding himself in an uncomfortable racist situation with a group of white teenagers who try to bully him, he maintains his calm and replies politely. Even after being called: Black Boy! (*DBD* 53) and being shouted at: "We don't need ya talking to our women" (*DBD* 53), Easy does not lose his temper. Instead, he examines the situation carefully while he conceals a very aggressive mind:

> I could have broken his neck. I could have put out his eyes or broken all of his fingers. But instead I held my breath.
>
> Five of his friends were headed towards us. While they were coming on, not yet organized or together, I could have killed all of them too. What did they know about violence? I could have crushed their windpipes one by one and they couldn't have done a thing to stop me. They couldn't even run fast enough to escape me. I was still a killing machine. (*DBD* 53-54)

Easy's background as a soldier often surfaces in extreme situations like this. It bestows to him self-assurance and makes him feel superior to the others. However, in spite of his advantage, after weighing his chances and measuring everybody's strengths, he still responds rationally.

> I noticed that a couple of the others had picked up sticks. They moved in around me, forcing me back against the rail.
>
> 'I don't want any problem, man,' I said. I could smell the liquor on the tall one's breath.
>
> 'You already got a problem, boy.' […]
>
> I was trying to remember how far down the beach was. By then I knew I had to get out of there before there were two or three dead bodies, one of them being mine. (*DBD* 54)

Like Phillip Marlowe, Easy can be doing one thing and yet be thinking about something else to the extent of even considering minute details in a matter of seconds. In the above cited situation, Mosley not only shows us some

representative racial conflicts of the time but also Easy's natural instinct acting as a detective. He does not want to get involved in a fight when it is totally unnecessary. As a general rule, Easy avoids getting in trouble for minor matters. Also, this reaction can be interpreted as the behavior necessary to have in order to comply with the hardboiled conventions. In this sense, he is trapped in a role initially constructed to fit the white detective.

Moreover, Easy's profile as a private eye becomes evident in his way of not being easily surprised by new circumstances and in his attention to minute, arguably irrelevant, details that others might fail to notice. Thus, when he meets Daphne for the first time and she asks him to take her to Richard McGee's house to get her suitcases, he again reacts calmly when they discover Richard's dead body with a knife in his chest. Although initially Easy feels disgusted by the corpse, he composes himself quickly. He then explains how he got used to seeing dead people in the war.

> The next thing I knew I was down on one knee but I kept myself from being sick. […] I'd seen open-eyed corpses like this man Richard and corpses that had no heads at all. Death wasn't new to me and I was to be damned if I'd let one more dead white man break me down. (*DBD* 93-94)

While slightly shaken, Easy does not allow himself to feel anything, especially for whites. He knows he has to be tough and indifferent. Through the ambivalence between his reactions and his thoughts, Mosley is gradually building Easy's image as a sensitive but also strong detective. The author has a white audience to impress and thus he keeps being oppressed by the implicit canon. This definitely influences his protagonist's reactions.

On the other hand, in the same scene, we also see Easy's perceptive eye for gathering clues: "While I was down there, on my knees, I noticed something. I bent down and smelled it and then I picked it up and wrapped it in my handkerchief" (*DBD* 94). Interestingly, Easy does not tell the reader what he has found, and this clue will actually be the one that gives away who Richard's murderer is.[1] Later in the story, he refers to it again while still keeping the

[1] According to the conventions of the hardboiled genre, the writer must always bear in mind that the detective and the reader should have the same information. The idea is that the reader should

information to himself. Talking with Joppy about the deaths that have taken place as a result of Daphne's disappearance, Easy affirms:

> '…the cops think it might be a maniac. And maybe it was with Coretta and Howard but I know who killed that Richard McGee.'
>
> 'Who?'
>
> 'I can't see where it helps either of us for me to tell you. Best t'keep that to myself.' (*DBD* 146)

Easy quickly realizes that the knowledge he has gathered is a powerful tool he might later use to negotiate or achieve further results in his investigation. For this reason, he will treat it cautiously and even use it later in exchange for money. After all, he soon understands he is paid by Albright to investigate and seek out information. Knowledge is power but in this case it also means money. As the critic Marilyn Wesley indicates, "in the violent world Easy has entered, knowledge has utility value as both a means of self-protection and as saleable information" (107).

While Easy learns how to do business in his new trade, five years later in *A Red Death*, we see how his role as a detective is fully assimilated to his life. Mosley's interest in framing his novels under a particular historical moment becomes evident in the main plot of this second novel. The time setting is 1953 and Easy finds himself involved in a case directly connected with the ideological conflict which came to dominate life in the United States in the 50s. The Cold War and America's self-proclaimed role as the world's guarantor of democracy brought the U.S. government into an era in which its biggest goal was to prevent the dangers of Communist infiltration in the country (Rosenberg 197). The most visible public face at this time was Joseph McCarthy whose intense anti-Communism campaign fostered the use of unfair investigations and allowed him to accuse many people of political disloyalty. In this context, Walter Mosley depicts how Easy Rawlins is chosen by the FBI to investigate the work of Chaim

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have the chance to figure out the resolution of the crime as the detective does. In this sense, many critics might argue that Mosley is not doing that here. In this particular case, what Easy finds is the butt of a brand of cigarette which very few people smoke. Consequently, he thinks of Junior, the bouncer of the black night club where he had been recently looking for information.

Wenzler, a white Jewish man, at the First African Baptist Church and Day School located in the black neighborhood.

As before, Mosley offers the reasons why Easy's profile fits with the type of person FBI Agent Craxton requires for the investigations he has to do. In this way, Easy's portrayal as a literary character fulfills again a list of characteristics that make him an innate hardboiled detective and the perfect one for Craxton's purpose:

> I knew we'd understand each other, Easy. Soon as I saw your police file I knew you were the kind of man for us. [A] man who wants to serve his country. [A] man who knows what it is to fight and maybe take a couple of chances. [A] man who doesn't give in to some foreign power saying that they have a better deal. (*RD* 48)

Easy has already developed a record among the LA police in Watts, South of Los Angeles. Besides, from Craxton point of view Easy has war experience and should understand the notion of being *patriotic*. Easy jumps at the chance to cooperate with Craxton, especially because this means his troubles with taxes disappear. However, he will also demand specific information about the task. He will not accept the job before asking some astute questions which show his shrewdness as a detective and his quick mind: "How could I do that and the whole FBI cain't do it?" (*RD* 49) or "If the FBI wants something on him why don't you just make it up? I still don't see why you need me" (*RD* 52).[2]

In *A Red Death* Mosley imbues his hero with an insight of himself that makes him aware of his own characteristics as a sleuth. He even brags about it. In this way, we see Easy' s observation: "It was my habit to size up people quickly. I liked to think I had an advantage on them if I had an insight into their private lives" (*RD* 30). Easy can read people and then use this extra information to decide his next move. As the critic Helen Lock highlights, "like all hardboiled detectives, [Easy's] superior perception into the psychology of those he investigates is a key weapon" (79). Also, as previously mentioned, Easy can focus on multiple tasks at once. Only this time, he explicitly says so. Being at a meeting in which the lecturer was explaining some of the W.E.B. Du Bois' theories on how all African

[2] This question and subsequent comment appear in reverse order in the novel. I have shifted it for clarity's sake.

Americans had the same origin, Easy comments: "The speaker was talking about home, Africa. A place where everybody looked like the people in that room. […] I was moved to hear her" (*RD* 186). But then his next sentence is: "But not so moved that I didn't keep an eye on the deacon" (*RD* 186). Easy went to that meeting to investigate what was happening in those conferences closely associated with religious and political issues. He knew that there were Negroes there who were "friends" with reverend Towne who had been murdered under strange circumstances in the First African Baptist Church. By coincidence, Towne and Chaim Wenzler worked together at that church and both of them ended up dead. Here, Easy shows how in spite of concentrating on the speech's content, he can still carry on with his investigation and also detect what other people are doing in the room.

Furthermore, in *A Red Death,* Easy keeps developing his tactics of disguising his intentions. When he becomes close friends with Chaim Wenzler, he does it to investigate if there are other Communist leaders or if there is some type of plot underneath the volunteer work the Jewish man does. At some point, however, Easy's principles and morality will make him feel remorseful. Like other hardboiled detectives, Easy's more human side appears here and we can see that he feels guilty for *betraying* his new friend. Easy gets drunk and even starts crying. He shows then his inner feelings of regret for the kind of work he is doing. When he sees Wenzler he expresses his guilt and speaks out:

> You be better off wit' somebody else helpin' you anyways, man. […]
>
> I ain't no friend'a yours, man. Uh-uh. Th'ew her outta her own place. Th'ew her out an' now she's dead. You cain't trust no niggah like me, Chaim. You do better jus't t'shine on me. (*RD* 128)

Almost unconscious of his words, Easy apologizes to Wenzler. Because of the alcohol his speech is unclear and he in fact mixes different events and ideas that trouble him. Above all, what Mosley is portraying here is a detective who feels distressed by the case he is involved in and the need to lie to a person who is in return honest and fair to him. This characteristic is in accordance with Marilyn Wesley's observation, who points out that, "unlike the cool and remote classic

detective, the hardboiled variant is understandably human in his confusion and disappointments" (103).

As we see once again, Easy's subjectivity is affected by the circumstances that surround him. While this aspect is emphasized by Mosley in every novel of the series, it is possible at the same time to appreciate growth and change in Easy's profile as a detective in the subsequent books. In this sense, the novel that follows chronologically, *White Butterfly*, set in 1956, presents an Easy Rawlins who is married, an unconventional state according to the hardboiled genre. Meaningfully, however, his married life will not last long. As if Mosley were playing with the detective formula, he shows how Easy's job as a detective clashes with the figure of a married man, and at the end of the novel his wife abandons him as a result of his double life:

> All of what I had and all I had done was had and done in secret. Nobody knew the real me. […] The thought of telling her all about me brought out a cold sweat; the kind of sweat you get when your life is in mortal danger. (*WB* 204)

In this respect, as Allison D. Goeller and some other critics have suggested "perhaps the reason Easy is so secretive is that Mosley is caught in the hardboiled tradition where the sleuth must necessarily be a loner, be secretive" (179). Indeed, it is a question of sticking to the regular noir detective profile and also of Mosley's interest in developing further his hero's character. Easy's flaws and incapacity to communicate are part of the author's narrative technique, first to make unworkable any possibility of reconciliation with his wife, and second to create more uncertainty about the hero's unpredictable future.

In this case, Easy's detective use of disguising his identity and concealing important information brings him to a strong conjugal problem when he also does this to his wife: "There were so many secrets I carried and so many broken lives I'd shared. Regina and Edna had no part of that, and I swore to myself that they never would" (*WB* 67). In *A Red Death*, as the critic W. Russel Gray points out, "Rawlins' putative janitorial status protects him from danger within his Watts/South Central community [because] concealing his real estate holdings is prudent in an environment where "a poor man will kill you over a dime" (*RD* 108,

Gray 490). However, in *White Butterfly*, this situation plus the fact that Regina is not acquainted with Easy's role as a detective result in the failure of their relationship. Thus, after Easy returns home after being gone with Sergeant Quinten, Regina expresses her irritation and wonder: "You been down to the police station? […] I still don't see why a policeman would come here to ask you about [a crime]. I mean, unless he thought you had something with it" (*WB* 68-69). Easy is aware of the need to tell his wife about what he does but at the same time he is unable to do it. Here he presents an introspective reflection of himself and his life:

> Regina always wanted to know why. Why did people call me for favors? Why did I feel I had to help certain people when they were in trouble? She never did know how I got her cousin out of jail.
>
> I had lived a life of hiding before I met Regina. Nobody knew about me. They didn't know about my property. They didn't know about my relationship to the police. I felt safe in my secrets. I kept telling myself that Regina was my wife, my partner in life. I planned to tell her about what I'd done over the years. I planned to tell her that Mofas really worked for me and that I had plenty of money in bank accounts around town. But I had to get at it slowly, in my own time. (*WB* 70)

In his attempt to become part of the middle class, Easy has gradually accumulated more property by working as a detective, and now married tries to lead a double life. However, his many secrets and mixing of identities do not provide him with the stability he ironically desires. According to Allison Goeller, Easy's personal identity, "which is constantly being negotiated, constantly being challenged, is, then, the biggest mystery of all, and cracking that mystery becomes the most intriguing aspect of the novels" (177).

Thus, even though in this novel, Easy initially characterizes himself by his refusal to help the police to solve what seem to be the crimes of a serial killer, he ends up cooperating, getting to the bottom of the case and finding the murderers. Three black women had been raped and killed in similar conditions. Officer Quinten is interested in Easy's opinion and still more so in his involvement in the investigation. "We need you on this one, Easy. This one is bad" (*WB* 51). Easy likes the fact that the police ask him to lend them a hand, somehow this makes him feel valued and respected. However, Easy displays now an attitude that

reflects his eight years of experience working as a private eye. He feels distant from the situation Quinten presents him with, especially because he believes Quinten is just using him for his own benefit.

> Quinten Naylor got his promotion because the cops thought that he had his thumb on the pulse of the black community. But all he really had was me. Me and a few other Negroes who didn't mind playing dice with their lives.
>
> [But] I wasn't a stool for the cops anymore. (*WB* 52)

As we can see, Easy displays very strong self-esteem at this point in his life. In *White Butterfly* he responds in the typical detective fashion through his attitude, his confidence, his addiction to the alcohol, and his knowledge of the streets and the bars which are his recurrent sources where to obtain the key information for his investigations.

The different approaches and tactics that he uses as well as his behavior parallel Chandler's Phillipe Marlowe in many ways. If the former, as Scott Bunyan highlights, "manages to stay one step ahead of the police, holding his ground against them, often doling out information in order to direct their inquiries along the course that he chooses" (339), Easy does this too. It happens, for instance, when he goes to the police station after having found out relevant information related to the fourth victim, this time a white girl called Robin Garnett, who had a secret life as a stripper under a phony identity, Cindy Starr. In his discussion with Sergeant Quinten, Easy shows how he amuses himself by telling him what the policemen could not discover on their own:

> 'You look half dead, Q-man,' I said, coining the nickname that was to follow him the rest of his life.
>
> 'And you are drunk,' was his reply. 'It's a hard world out there, brother. A little booze keeps ya from sinkin' to the bottom of the barrel.'
>
> 'What do you want?'
>
> 'I' m feeling generous, officer. I've come to share what I know with you-
>
> all.' I took a seat in a chair set by the door. (*WB* 144)

In view of the clues Easy has gathered, he figures out that there is no connection between the killing of the three black women and the white one.

> '…I don't think you got it all. You see, this li'l darlin' got kilt wasn't all so pure as some might wanna think.'
>
> 'What's that mean?'
>
> I threw down one of Cyndi's stripper photographs.
>
> Naylor studied it for a minute.
>
> 'Why didn't anybody show me this?'
>
> 'Nobody knew, man. That picture in the *Times* an' *Examiner* didn't look nuthin' like the stripper. […]
>
> 'Where'd you get this?' Maybe he was going to throw *me* in the slam.
>
> 'At her pad, man. You know the Hollywood Row, right?'
>
> 'How'd you know where to go, Easy?'
>
> 'Listen.' I held up my palm for him to admire. 'I got my secrets. That's why you need me.' (*WB* 145)

In this extract, not only does Mosley depict an Easy Rawlins who feels superior to the police but most importantly, he shows that his instincts provide them with the right hints that lead them to carry on the investigation.

> 'Why don't we drive on down to where that girl's parents are at? You know, just for some questions. We could bring that picture down there an' see what they got to say.' I didn't mention the box of belongings I had out in the car.
>
> 'Why'
>
> 'It just don't smell right, Quinten. Why she get killed two days after the other one when they gettin' murdered ev'ry two weeks or more 'fore that? How come this is a white one an' all the rest' a them is black? An' how come they kill this coed an' they killin' B-girls all before this? (*WB* 145)

Easy's capacity of deduction is without a doubt one of the reasons his work as a detective is so valuable for the police. This characteristic grows stronger in every novel as well as his attitude as a tough one. The laidback way of acting sometimes when investigating and his random comments present an unmistakable picture of this identity:

> I smiled and finished my drink. Before ordering another one I lit a Camel and inhaled deeply. I didn't have a plan. I wasn't a policeman. I didn't have a notepad. Maybe we'd talk about the night that Juliette LeRoi was murdered. Maybe not. (*WB* 100)

Finally, the fourth novel to discuss in this analysis of Easy's hardboiled traits is *Black Betty*. This novel follows the same structure as the previous ones regarding the detective formula that Mosley uses as a frame to characterize his hero and to develop the story's plot. As Marilyn Wesley observes, each of these novels adheres to the same pattern: "It begins with the introduction of the detective, then sets him into action in pursuit of a mystery which turns into a crime, trails him through a convoluted investigation, and concludes with the solution of the crime" (103).

Black Betty is exactly like that. At the start, we see how a white detective, Saul Lynx, goes to Easy's house and asks him for help looking for a black woman called Elisabeth Eady, also known as Black Betty by her friends. Lynx acknowledges Easy's reputation: "You are known for finding people in the colored part of town" (*BB* 15), "You are famous, Mr. Rawlins" (*BB* 16). Easy accepts the compliment but is still more interested in the two hundred dollars that Lynx gives him up front: "It was more money than I had in the bank" (*BB* 15). Actually, while in the previous novel, Easy's attitude was conceited because of his business prosperity, in this one since he has lost everything, he appears much more modest on all levels. In his comments he identifies himself with the poor and makes constant references to his lack of money: "One of the reasons that I was broke is that I gave my money away to friends who had less than I did. That's a poor man's insurance. Give when you got it and hope that they remember and give back when you're in need" (*BB* 65). Easy appears now as the imprudent detective who does not manage his personal budget properly but is still concerned about helping the people he cares about.

As for the other instances in the novel that portray his traits as a hard-boiled detective, we see that he is smart and defiant with his words (*BB* 59); he has the ability to read people quickly (*BB* 84); he is put once again in jail and beaten by the police (*BB* 77); he exhibits his army training and background as a soldier (*BB* 176); he is in serious danger and gravely stabbed (*BB* 139); he pays a prostitute to nurse him and take care of his wound (*BB* 160). Most interestingly, this time we will also witness how Easy goes above the law to carry out his detective work, another very common feature of the private eye in many

hardboiled stories. Like his white predecessors, Easy has no remorse, and even finds necessary, to resort to non-legal procedures to complete his investigations. In this case, he does it with the assistance of Alamo Weir, a white man he once met in jail:

> When I had to work in the white world, Alamo was the perfect tool. He was crazy and naturally criminal. He would have hated Negroes if it wasn't for World War One. He felt that all those white generals and politicians had set up the poor white trash the same way black folks were set up. (*BB* 37)

Apart from indicating the way African Americans and poor whites were treated by the government in World War I, Easy highlights his connection with the criminal world and how it is as a result of this that he has the ability to solve the mystery.

He and Alamo will break into the office of a lawyer to find important documents and clues that demonstrated that a white policeman, Commander Styles, was corrupt and was behind all the murders that were taking place. With this information, Easy would go to talk to Detective Arno Lewis, a black cop from the LAPD. At this point, Mosley depicts the traditional noir environment of the detective novels in which the difference between right and wrong is not easily discernible:

> Lewis knew that the law is just the other side of the coin from crime, that they're both the same and interchangeable. Criminals were just a bunch of thugs living off what honest people and rich people made. The cops were thugs too; paid by the owners of property to keep the other thugs down. (*BB* 197)

Mosley brings to light the existence of corruption among the policeman and other high hierarchies such as politicians, judges or bankers ruling the country. Similarly, he criticizes how cops are paid not to eradicate crime, but to maintain it, though only a low level. Easy stands out as a detective figure who thinks and acts against social corruption.

It is important to emphasize how it is in this process of solving each case that we see how Easy develops his identity as a hardboiled detective. In the course of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death, White Butterfly* and *Black Betty* we witness his formation through his behavior, his thoughts and his experiences

skillfully articulated in his writing as a first person narrator. Walter Mosley's African American version of the hardboiled novel is in this sense characterized by a black hero whose subjectivity is first determined by the conventional traits that might distinguish any regular detective. Parts of his profile responds to the typical private eye whose investigations take place in the noir atmosphere of the urban America's underworld. It is therefore unquestionable that in many ways he thinks and acts according to the standard formula that makes any detective recognizable.

In spite of it, Easy's character is underneath much more complex than that. He is a detective that not only reflects on the crimes he is investigating but also on the historical context, the social tensions, and the personal circumstances that surround him. In fact, from his first steps as a private eye in 1948 until the latest ones in 1961, we see how Easy constantly offers his critical perspective on the corruption, discrimination and racism of America from his neighborhood of Los Angeles. Likewise, other relevant events in American history such as the impact of World War II, the migratory movement of hundreds of thousands of African Americans to the cities, and the prelude to the Civil Rights movement also shape his understanding of the world and his reactions to it.

Yet, if Easy as a detective resembles his white counterparts in attitude, toughness, analytical reasoning and all the other significant characteristics that are indispensable in order to be one, his blackness makes him different from all of them. It is only because he is black that he is given the first case in *Devil in a Blue Dress* and this is also why he is of great help for the police in consecutive different crimes that occur in the black part of the city. Furthermore, it is his blackness what brings him into situations that white detectives do not go through. Last of all, it is his condition as a black man that makes him see society from a different point of view. In the following section I focus on those traits that set Easy Rawlins apart as an African American detective.

4. 2. Easy Rawlins' emerging characteristics as a black detective

If it wasn't for bad luck I wouldn't have no luck at all…

Old blues refrain

African American culture is widely depicted throughout the Rawlins series. The old blues refrain above is in fact the epigraph that Walter Mosley uses at the beginning of *A Red Death.* Blues, black vernacular, and specific aspects of black traditional folklore such as the representation of the figures of the trickster and the storyteller provide a cultural frame for Easy's life in the black urban community. All together they establish a firm reference for him to evaluate and comprehend the world, and constitute therefore a crucial factor in the development of Easy's formation as a black detective.

Indeed, some of the critics reviewed in Chapter 2, such as Mary Young, Alice Mills, Thomas Stein, and Samuel Coale concur that Mosley's Easy Rawlins series is an example of the reappropriation of the detective conventions to display singular aspects of ethnicity related with the black community in the United States. According to Mary Young, Mosley "has created a unique hero from an African American perspective through his exploration of Black culture" (141); Mills points out that Easy, as a narrator, "raises complex questions about a person's duties towards his cultural community and country" (23). Moreover, Stein considers that "the ethnic vision negotiated in the Mosley novels presents a pluralistic picture of American culture" (197). Lastly, Coale affirms that "within the confines of the traditional formula, Mosley creates his labyrinthine and loyalty-bound black community" (179). As the novels progress, Easy's allusions to his African American community either when he was in Texas or later, when a great part of it migrated to Los Angeles, are constant. Through them, Walter Mosley enables us to see Easy's cultural attachment to a group of people to which he often refers as "my people." He shares with them concrete cultural patterns that

bind current and past cultural traditions together and, in addition, hold underneath a deep symbolic meaning of origin and belonging (Carbaugh 1988). "I always talk about down home like it really was home" (*BB* 109). By far, Easy's outlook and perspectives are shaped by this cultural background.

In this section, I will start by exploring first what characteristics in these four novels differentiate him as a black private eye. Secondly, I aim to explore the influence of the black culture in Easy's character from an anthropological perspective—the way he relates and interacts with his friends or other black people in his black community in L.A. Finally, I will study the representation that Mosley makes of the black vernaculars (language and black folklore) as a key factor in Easy's consciousness as an African American.

In contrast to the accepted conventions from classical and hardboiled traditions, African American authors have challenged and altered those conventions to create their own version of the detective persona. Easy, like other black private eyes such as PaPa LaBas in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo,* or Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones in Chester Hime's detective series, is portrayed as having some peculiar traits that distinguish him from the typical hardboiled sleuth. Thus, not only does he have a different set of priorities but also shares a sense of community and family that the mainstream white detective does not have. Moreover, he applies his African American double consciousness in solving any investigation and always delineates the color line as a primary issue in any case or social relation (Soitos 31). In this sense, Easy's blackness is both an integral ingredient for the success of his investigations, and also a sign that causes suspicion among whites and frequently make him look inferior.

In this line of argument, we see how in his early stages as a detective, Easy often finds that he is considered a suspect by the police due to his proximity to the crime scenes. White police do not trust him and as we will see later, they will even put him in jail and beat him on some occasions just for being black. As a black detective, Easy has to endure situations that his white counterparts certainly never encounter. A white person will never have to worry about somebody questioning their honesty on the basis of his or her skin color. In fact, for these

reasons and for the racial tensions manifested themselves in the increased police brutality against the black community, Easy's relationship with the police and the law that they represent will always be combative. In this respect, as Josh Sides explains:

> Black civic leaders, editors of black newspapers, sympathetic whites, members of the local NAACP chapter, and the American Civil Liberties Union all agreed that there was a noticeable and 'dangerous' rise in police violence toward blacks. These observations were largely corroborated by a 1949 survey of African Americans in Watts, the heart of the new migrant community. Well over half of those surveyed testified to having been lined up on the sidewalk and frisked for no apparent reason; 54 percent had been 'slapped, kicked, etc.' by the police, and 47 percent maintained that police had entered their homes without warrants and without explanation. (238)

By portraying throughout the series these circumstances and the way the police disregarded criminal issues within the black community, Walter Mosley demonstrates how Easy is always conscious of the racism and social injustice that African Americans were subject to in the 40s and 50s.

Easy's marginal perspective becomes clear when large sections of the text are devoted to exploring these issues and express a consistent African American worldview. In *Devil in a Blue Dress* for example, he expresses his awareness about the discriminatory way the Los Angeles police treat him as well as how they resolve cases concerning black suspects. Having been taken to the police station by two white policemen, Miller and Mason, for a round of questions regarding the murder of Richard McGee, Easy comments:

> They took me back down to the station for the finger-printing, then they sent the prints downtown to be compared against the one found on the knife. […] I knew that I hadn't touched the knife but I didn't know what the police were up to. If they really wanted to catch who did the killing then they'd be fair and check my prints against the knife's and let me go. But maybe they needed a culprit. Maybe they just wanted to close the books because their record hadn't been so good over the year. You could never tell when it came to the cops and a colored neighborhood. The police didn't care about crime among Negroes. […] The papers hardly ever even reported a colored murder. And when they did it was way in the back pages. (*DBD* 160)

Rather than focusing simply on the crime and capture of the suspect Easy reflects on the way they operate and in the racial prejudice that defines the social and political atmosphere.

As a result, Mosley justifies in the Rawlins series why the black community elevates Easy's status to a revered and trusted figure in their neighborhood where one can go to solve problems instead of going to the police. In *A Red Death,* Easy explains at the very beginning of the novel:

> People would come to me if they had serious trouble but couldn't go to the police. Maybe somebody stole their money or their illegally registered car. Maybe they worried about their daughter's company or a wayward son. I settled disputes that would have otherwise come to bloodshed. I had a reputation for fairness and the strength of my convictions among the poor. Ninety-nine out of a hundred black folk were poor back then, so my reputation went quite a way. (*RD* 5)

Likewise, in White Butterfly, he comments: "I had slipped into the role of a confidential agent who represented people when the law broke down. And the law broke down often enough to keep me busy. It broke down for the cops sometimes" (*WB* 51). After several years living in L.A. Easy's role as a black detective is widely recognized within his African American community:

> On top of real estate I was in the business of favors. I'd do something for somebody, like find a missing husband or figure out who' s been breaking into so-and-so's store, and then maybe they could do me a good turn one day. It was a real country way of doing business. At that time almost everybody in my neighborhood had come from the country around southern Texas and Louisiana. (*RD* 5)

Easy explicitly shows how the migration movement of thousands of Negroes to Los Angeles triggered the need to establish some type of order and justice in the black community other than the one the police or the American government provided. In this sense, his job as a black detective is also perpetuated due to specific historical circumstances.

In the same way, in *White Butterfly*, Easy indicates how it is also due to his blackness and his reputation as a black private investigator that the police go to ask him for help. He emphasizes how Detective Quinten, Captain Violette and Horace Voss, the "special liaison between the mayor's office and the police" (*WB* 83), bring themselves all the way to his house to ask his assistance: "You know all

kinds of people in the community. You can go where the police can't go. You can ask questions of people who aren't willing to talk to the law" (*WB* 86). But because Easy is black, his way of looking at the law is different too: "It was wrong for the police to cover up the killings but I couldn't change the world" (*WB* 248), he would say later when the crime is solved. Easy disagrees with the way the white law functions. For that reason, often in his personal pursuit of truth, what he does in many cases is to impart justice in his own way. He will present to the police only part of what he has discovered, and so the reestablishment of order will be done on his own terms, that is, according to what he thinks is just for him or his people.

This can be seen for instance at the end of *White Butterfly* when Easy discovers that Cyndi Starr, known as the White Butterfly in L.A. nightlife, had been killed by her own father because she had dishonored the family for being a prostitute and giving birth to a black girl. Easy calls Detective Quinten then and tells him what he thought the police needed to know to find the murderer. Next, he goes to pick up Cyndi's baby girl, Feather, who was hidden somewhere by a gangster who had also been killed days before. Easy then obtains Feather's birth certificate mistakenly stating that the baby is white, and decides to keep her. Since no one else seems to know that she exists, Easy does not give any explanation to anybody. His sense of responsibility in addition to his desire to reconstruct the family he had lost lead him to adopt this girl. In this respect, Easy, as in many other novels, closes the case as he chooses.

Regarding this second adoption, the critic Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu considers that "Easy sacrifices a normal family life with Regina and Edna and his reconstruction of that family (as well as the one he grew up in) is taken from 'racial' fragments" (43). His first adopted son, Jesus,[3] is of Mexican background and Feather is half white and half black. By doing this, Shiu points out that "Easy establishes the beginning of a patriarchal system of detection that will be played out through the rest of Mosley's series" (33). From this novel on, as a matter of fact, we will witness Easy's development as a detective whose subjectivity is also

[3] Easy had rescued him at the end of *Devil in a Blue Dress* from the hands of Todd Carter, a rich white politician who abused him when Jesus was only four years old.

closely attached to his concern for these adopted children. This is another significant difference between the classical or hardboiled detective and Mosley's Easy Rawlins. If, as Soitos indicates, "the general pattern of the detective's own life, beliefs, and personal attachments is sketchy to nonexistent" (29), Easy as a black one is intimately involved in family relations[4] and connected to his surroundings. Therefore, the protagonist's sensitive and more human side emerges in his profile as a black detective and it is rather absent as a hardboiled (white) one. While the genre's conventions standardize his actions and behavior, and constitute thus a constraint in his development, in his characterization as a black detective Mosley imbues Easy with a more genuine and unique personality.

This becomes evident for instance in the portrayal of Easy's double role as a detective and as father in *Black Betty*. Although, as one could expect, the troubles he gets involved as a result of investigations, interfere with the image of the traditional father figure, he does not hesitate in pursuing his goal of constructing a family. In this respect, we see how in this novel the bond he has with Jesus and Feather and his concern for them begin to build up: "I could have spent a whole life watching my children grow. Even though we didn't share common blood I loved then so much that it hurt sometimes" (*BB* 19). This relationship and the responsibility it engenders will be in Easy's mind at all moments and will grow stronger in the subsequent novels studied in Chapter 5. This trait certainly differentiates him in his role as a detective

On a different level, the use of double-conscious tropes in the Rawlins series is another area in which Mosley not only does he alter the traditional detective formula but also Signifies it and makes it his own. While the concept of Signifyin(g), as I explained in Chapter 2, is a theory of reading that comes from Afro-American culture (Gates), and is directly related to the black vernaculars, here I also apply it using another definition by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.:

> Signifyin(g) is a uniquely black rhetorical concept, entirely textual or linguistic, by which a second statement or figure repeats, or tropes, or reverses the first. Its use as a figure for intertextuality allows us to understand literary revision without resource to thematic, biographical, or Oedipal slaying at the crossroads; rather,

[4] The significance of Easy's fatherhood and role as a family man is further analyzed in Chapter 5.

> critical signification is tropic and rhetorical. Indeed, the very concept of Signifyin(g) can exist only in the realm of the intertextual relation. (1987: 49)

In this case, Easy's profile as a black detective can be seen as a revised figure that Signifies the roles of his white counterparts. Thus, here the question of intertextuality is evident since Mosley uses the previous literary canon to create and Signify his hero's identity. Additionally, he applies the theme of double-consciousness in these novels as another way of Signifyin(g) Easy's role. He does it in two main areas: the association of the trickster figure with the black detective including the disguising aspects of masks and mistaken identities also already discussed in Chapter 2, and the ability of the American Negro to lead a double life (paraphrasing W.E.B. Du Bois) as a Negro and as an American (Du Bois 164). The concept of double consciousness according to Du Bois establishes a significant relationship between blacks and the world around them. He states that:

> [T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this sense of always looking at one' s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one' s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

Ironically, in spite of not being allowed to develop a "true self-consciousness," Du Bois considers that the black person is "gifted with second-sight." In Easy's character, this gift consists of the capacity he displays to understand how a white person thinks about and looks at Negroes. Easy is aware of the negative image the white society has imposed on black people just for being black. He expresses the idea on how African Americans almost felt guilty for existing: "We were hung and burned for just being alive" (*RD* 91). On the other hand, it is also significant how in Easy's case this perspective encourages him in his aim to break the white restraining stereotypes and attain a respected position in society. Having been exposed to mainstream values and expectations we can see a growth in Easy's awareness and as a result of it a change in his attitude towards specific signs of racism. He hates the white prejudice but instead of feeling anger when he is

bullied, he takes action by presenting a defying approach and a fearless stance, something he has learned to do from whites themselves. In *Black Betty*, there is a moment for example when Easy does not feel so distressed as he used to when being called "son" by a white man. We see how he reacts when the Cain's family lawyer, Calvin Hodge, says to him:

> 'Will you give me that check, son?'
>
> 'Do I look like one of your relatives?' I asked him instead of hitting him in the face. (*BB* 73)

While still bothered by the comment, Easy here reacts by confronting the white man in the same way they treat him. He responds with a sharp reply indicating that he does not feel inferior for being black. Similarly, this incident reveals how Easy's sense of manhood has grown. He has overcome the unbearable thought of seeing himself as a subordinate child in the eyes of the white man.

Furthermore, throughout the series, Mosley also depicts Easy's double conscience in the way he knows how to talk or deal with people depending on where he is and depending on if these people are white or black. We see this when he goes to Beverly Hills to visit the white family for whom Black Betty used to work. He explains: "I spoke in a dialect that they would expect. If I gave them what they expected then they wouldn't suspect me of being any kind of real threat" (*BB* 72). On the contrary, when he is investigating Black Betty's brother and goes to Herford's gym, a place where black men practiced to become boxers, he remarks:

> Most days, no matter what I was working on, I would have stopped and talked a while. That' s what made me different from the cops and from other people, black and white, trying to find out something down in black L.A. The people down there were country folks and they liked it when you stopped for a few minutes or so. (*BB* 91)

Easy knows the different expectation that white and black people have. He has learned how to adapt to them and how to move around shifting between the white and the black world as he needs to in his role as a detective. While his profile as a mainstream hardboiled detective oppresses him, as a black sleuth he has the knowledge to adapt to either situation. He has mastered both ways of being and

his black side emerges more clearly. In a different example, when making business arrangements with some white men and realizing they are not willing to offer him a fair deal, he also shows his double consciousness when he says: "Because if you insist on makin' me out a nigger I ain't got no choice but to be one" (*BB* 174). According to Elisabeth Ford, "Easy manages to negotiate these varied spaces with miraculous success" (14).

Similarly, in *A Red Death,* Easy's tactics of disguising his intentions and his true way of thinking come to light. Although he does not agree with Agent Craxton's notion of patriotism and his point of view on the subject of Communism is different, he never said so. Thus, when Craxton state:

> [The Reds] want to take the whole world and enslave it. They don't believe in freedom like Americans do. The Russians have been peasants so long that thas the way they see the whole world—from chains. (*RD* 48)

Easy reacts by thinking:

> It was strange talk, I thought, a white man lecturing me about slavery. […] I had the feeling that Craxton didn't see the man sitting before him, but I'd seen pictures of Leaven-worth in *Life* magazine so I pretended to be the man he described. (*RD* 48)

As a black detective, Easy learns that in order to survive he has to conceal his real thoughts for his own protection. As the series progresses, his double consciousness allows him to understand the white perspective without abandoning his own as an African American man.

His attachment to his community and its black culture is in this sense what keeps him aware of his blackness in relation to white society. My next focus of attention is to discuss Easy's constant references to the black community in L.A. and how this constitutes a clear influence in the formation of his identity. From the very beginning of his narration in *Devil in a Blue Dress,* Easy indicates how he is acquainted with many of its members from when he lived in Texas:

> When I opened the door I was slapped in the face by the force of Lips' alto horn. I had been hearing Lips and Willie and Flattop since I was a boy in Houston. All of them and John and half the people in that crowded room had migrated from Houston after the war, and some before that. (*DBD* 27)

Not only have these people brought their customs and cultural traditions with them such as the music or the telling of stories: "He told me a few stories, the kind of tales that we called 'lies' back home in Texas" (*DBD* 21), but they also represent an important social network of friends and acquaintances that will actually keep appearing through the series. This explains why whenever Easy goes to investigate any place in the black neighborhoods he has contacts everywhere.

In addition, Easy also acknowledges how some of those friends in his community have been like family to him since he was an orphan. In *Black Betty*, he explains: "If it hadn't been for Martin and Odell I would have died when I was a boy. They had taken me into their homes and fed me when there was nothing but cold and hunger outside" (*BB* 52). Likewise, he also comments about John, another one of his old friends, "I'd known John for over twenty-five years, from Texas to L.A.; from speakeasy to legitimate bar" (*BB* 66). Easy recurrently brings up his strong relationship with the black community. Although living in California now, he considers that certain Southern aspects remain exactly the same. In this way, it is noteworthy that in the quote below, Easy uses the term "transplanted" to emphasize the idea of preserving specific African American customs: "As I got to know L.A. over the years I found myself roaming outside my native black community, a community that had been transplanted from southern Texas and Louisiana" (*BB* 37). Likewise, we see here how Easy assumes the existence of other communities in the metropolis. As he explains, for his work sometimes he will have to cross the color lines, that is, the cultural or physical boundaries of the city. Each community is then like a different world and Easy is aware of it. In this regard, as Andrew Pepper indicates, "Mosley seems to be suggesting that African American culture and identity has evolved not simply as a result of interaction between and among African Americans but syncretically, in relation to other influences, other cultures, other communities" (2000: 130). As the novels advance, Easy does realize that there are changes taking place within the community. By 1961, after being in Los Angeles for more than 13 years, he points out for example that "Mofas was from the old days when there was a black community almost completely sealed off from whites" (*BB* 107). This observation

confirms that the community is now more open. Accordingly, Easy's formation is also subject to the multicultural aspects that any of the different ethnic communities brought to L.A.

Yet focusing for now exclusively on those traits that characterize the black community, Mosley presents a series of cultural aspects with which Easy is engaged and are related with the way black men interact and understand a specific system of meanings and symbols. Carbaugh considers that cultural patterns are developed when the members of the culture feel it deeply and follow it almost unconsciously. In this way, Samuel Coale points out that however marginal as it was in comparison with the mainstream white culture, the black community also had "its own rules, cues, customs, and conceits" (Coale 180). We see for instance how when Easy goes to the typical barbershop in the Watts neighborhood, he highlights:

> You had to be tough to be a barber because your place was the center of business for a certain element in the community. Gamblers, numbers runners, and all sorts of other private businessmen met in the barbershop. The barbershop was like a social club. And any social club had to have order to run smoothly. (*DBD* 133)

The way of interacting with one another, the behavior, the tacit understanding of certain rules and certain established social expectations that Easy and the rest of the community members instinctively follow reflect the existence of a strong cultural African American background.

Easy's observations about an African American lifestyle based on Southern customs constitute the recognition of the extraordinary diversity of historical, social and cultural experiences of black subjects. In *A Red Death*, not only does he show, as Coale notes that "black men often congregate in bars and barbershops, in pool rooms and on the streets" (180); he also makes a significant reference to the level of poverty of many of them:

> At central and Ninety-ninth Street a group of men sat around talking—they were halfheartedly waiting for work. It was a habit that some southerners brought with them; they'd just sit outside on a crate somewhere and wait for someone who needed manual labor to come by and shout their name. That way they could spend the afternoon with their friends, drinking from brown paper bags and shooting

> dice. They might even get lucky and pick up a job worth a couple of bucks—and maybe their kids would have meat that night. (*RD* 7)

It is 1953. Culture and poverty come together for many African Americans in Los Angeles. Trades of which the black men had practical control in his Southern home such as a carpenter or a mason are not open to them here. They naturally take their stand among the poor, and in the homes of the poor (Ducas 374). Easy's subjectivity is deeply affected by this image of unemployment and low income among his people. According to historian Ron Eyerman, although "family incomes were increasing generally in the United States in the 1950s, black families continued not only to lag behind whites, but to worsen in comparison. Black families earned 54 percent of the median income of their white counterparts in 1950, and this increased to 57 percent in 1952, only to drop back to 52 percent in 1958" (175).

These conditions coupled with the historical patterns of racial discrimination explain the disproportionate concentration of blacks in the underclass. As Walter R. Allen and Reynolds Farley indicate, in much of the country, "blacks could not attend the same schools, eat at the same restaurants, or stay at the same hotels as whites. Black Americans were also denied opportunities in education and employment and, in Southern states, their voting rights" (278). Throughout the novels, Walter Mosley strongly denounces the social and economic circumstances under which the black community lives in the 50s. Indeed he achieves drawing such an accurate and vivid picture of the African American way of life that we can actually understand how all these different cultural, social, political, economic strings come together in the novels to determine the context that shape Easy's mind. His personality, his fears, his dreams, his obsessions and certainly his existentialist perspective of life are the natural product of the African American environment he has experienced since he was a boy: "Before I found a home in Houston I was a wild boy riding the rails. No mother, no father. Just enough clothes to keep me decent and ten cents less than I needed to survive" (*BB* 18). The continuous indications to his past always

denote the lack of means that so much affected his later decision to leave Texas and live the life he currently has in Los Angeles.

In the same way, two more examples that show Easy's attachment to his community are his thoughts at the close of *Devil in a Blue Dress* and his sense of responsibility towards it in *White Butterfly*. In the first case, Easy appears to be paying attention to what his mature and good friend Odell has to say when he asks him for some advice. Already an aged man, Odell's way of thinking represents a more experienced perspective. Easy listens to him, learns from his words and tries to comfort himself:

> 'Odell?'
>
> 'Yeah, Easy.'
>
> 'If you know a man is wrong, I mean, if you know he did somethin' bad but you don't turn in to the law because he's your friend, do think that' s right?'
>
> 'All you got is your friends, Easy.'
>
> 'But then what if you know somebody else who did something wrong but not so bad as the first man, but you turn this other guy in?
>
> 'I guess you figure that the other guy got a hold of some bad luck.'
>
> We laughed for a long time. (*DBD* 215)

Easy reveals here that he is still distressed about Mouse's killing of his step-father in *Gone Fishin'* nine years before. He didn't turn Mouse into the police and he even accepted some money from him. Now, however, he has actually informed the authorities of Junior killing Richard McGee, a friend of Daphne Monet.

Odell's response symbolizes a way of understanding life that Easy is going to adopt for himself. This represents on a larger scale the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next, a link between both men. Moreover, since the lines above in fact constitute the final ones in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, their link with *Gone Fishin'* is absolute, especially because no reader would understand the meaning of Easy's words unless he or she knew the events that took place in the previous novel.

By linking both books and showing how Easy's past experiences still affect his current reflections, Walter Mosley is setting up the pattern for the rest of

the series. The episodes of one novel will affect the next ones. This vast link between Easy's experiences symbolizes also the connection between Easy and his community; it is a link between the past and the present, between his way of thinking and his cultural background, between the rural African American experiences and the urban current ones.

Mosley gives substantial weight to the Southern roots—in family and community—of Northern and urban African Americans. Although they experienced a significant transformation, as we will see, they still kept their own ways and traditions that tied them together against the backdrop of persistent racial discrimination. As Joe W. Trotter points out, urban blacks "recast their culture in contact with the new rhythms, sounds, sights, and tastes of the city" (83). Most importantly, Trotter continues, they "transformed segregation, a debilitating experience, into "congregation," a culturally and politically empowering experience" (83) Keeping in mind their southern origin but also seeking new strategies of empowerment brought up the appearance in the late 1940s of black organizations such as the Civil Right Congress (CRC) in the Los Angeles African American community. Based on the principle that blacks in L.A. suffered a "dual oppression" by virtue of their racial and class status, the CRC, according to Josh Sides, "launched aggressive campaigns to defend the city's rapidly expanding black working-class population" (233). These campaigns constituted a mentality change within their urban experience as well as another symbolic step in the advance of the black community that would lead to the outburst of the 1965 Watts riots.

On the other hand, *White Butterfly* also illustrates Easy's bond to the community and his sense of duty through his decision to help finding the serial killer who is murdering black women. In this novel, we see how although he initially appears to be indifferent to the murders by refusing to assist the police in finding the criminal, later he cannot get it out of his mind: "The memory of that dead girl hung around me" (*WB* 56). Then he goes to a bar, and Rita, the bar-tender, expresses to him the same concern: "You hear about them girls been getting' killed? […] You know, I'm scared to walk out to my car when I close up at night" (*WB* 63). The community is frightened. Easy is increasingly aware of it

and bears the burden especially because the police had asked him for help. He knows that he could investigate and try to find the criminal. Under these circumstances, he feels the moral obligation to protect his people and he finally does. In a way, Easy turns then into a savior who looks after the community. This idea is also emphasized later in *Black Betty* when he comments: "I used to be fool enough to put myself in the way when somebody down in my community was getting the short end of the stick" (*BB* 136).

Finally, Mosley's use of the hardboiled detective conventions to portray Easy's black way of thinking and a wide range of other cultural aspects related with the black community is a question also widely addressed in the novels. In this respect, Stephen F. Soitos agrees that "in analyzing African American expressive arts as well as the popular cultural field of detective fiction [there is] a number of clues that suggest a connection between the two" (ix). But Soitos takes his approach one step further. According to him, Mosley's portrayal of the African American speech and a particular vocabulary concerned with the portrayal of cultural practices based on African American value systems represent the vernacular tradition in black expressive arts (xii). These vernacular creations are not only limited to language. They also take into consideration other types of art originated in black folklore. Soitos develops a comprehensive explanation of how the combination of the detective formula and the black vernaculars (that includes the black folk culture) produces what he labels "the blues detective." In fact, this is also the title of his book on the study of African American detective fiction.

Basing his arguments on Keith Byerman's definition of black folklore, Soitos offers a view of African American culture that is generally portrayed in the hardboiled detective novels written by black authors: "Black folk culture is used in this study in a very broad sense to mean both the history of the black masses and the primarily oral forms of expression that have developed over that history. These forms comprise blues; jazz; spirituals; sermons, toasts, the dozens; cautionary tales; trickster tales; legends; memorates; rural and urban speech patterns; folk beliefs such as voodoo, conjure, and superstition; [and the presence of] folk characters" (quoted in Soitos 11). As I will show, Mosley's work includes

most of these cultural aspects. In this sense, Byerman's description totally fits with the way I aim to use the concept of black folklore to analyze the influence of it in Easy's daily life. In these four novels in particular, the main cultural aspects that I will explore next are Easy's peculiar way of enacting the black vernaculars (including his own insightful observations on the matter), his appreciation of his friend Mouse's skills as a storyteller, and the symbolic aspects of their friendship.

Almost immediately in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Walter Mosley establishes how the African Americans' speech patterns are different from the white ones. He does it through Easy's awareness and comments on the matter but also portraying repeatedly plenty of dialogues in which the black dialect is easily recognized. Indeed, the speech differences between black and standard dialects are not merely a matter of grammatical structures or particular utterances; they are in addition the result of the distinct spheres of ideological life immersed in the dynamics of language. According to Bakhtin, "the linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments" (281). Linguistic differences carry underneath the connotations of social contrast and racial distinction. Languages are socio-ideological (Bakhtin 272). Thus, as Helen Lock indicates, "despite Easy Rawlins' education, which he values, and his command of standard English, he finds it inadequate as a means of functioning verbally in the world that he inhabits" (79). Having the option to choose between the two variants of English he is acquainted with, Easy picks the black dialect to express himself. His decision signals where he stands ideologically. Easy himself explains: "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" (*DBD* 10). The ways we speak reveal our consciousness and the ways we see reality. Easy's preference symbolizes his subversion and refusal to adopt the language of those who have categorized him as inferior. Moreover, he and the black dialect he chooses to use can be seen as an example of those uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification of language that operate against

the category of what Bakhtin calls the "unitary language" (270)[5]: a system of linguistic norms that unite and centralize verbal-ideological thought. Easy's resistance to adopt such a language represents also his resistance to adopt the mainstream way of thinking. indirectly

On the other hand, the fact that Easy in the earlier quote uses the word "uneducated" to refer to the black Southern way of speaking English denotes how the white discourse has stereotyped what is good and bad English. His own interpretation situates him as the colonized subject that has learned out of experience that the right way of speaking is the white one. As Robert Hopper argues in "Speech Evaluation of Intergroup Dialect Differences: the Shibboleth Schema," "if speakers of a common language [English in this case] experience 'dialect differences,' these frequently become associated with social problems, especially intergroup conflict and discrimination among unequal-power groups" (1). Easy is aware of the connotations that the use of each dialect brings up. The speech differences between white and black Americans reflect both social discrimination and the existence of standard and substandard variants of English. This circumstance, according to Hopper, triggers what he calls "the shibboleth schema," a set of listening habits that is understood and shared by underdogs and favorites that frequently appear in atmospheres of intergroup hostility (4). In such a context, communication becomes the domain for discriminative action. Any utterance is measured and subject to comparison. Hopper further comments how some other scholars before him such as Williams and associates (1976), found in their research that speech seemed more nonstandard to listeners if the speaker was pictured as a black child, rather than a caucasian. He states that "We do not passively listen to someone's voice, we actively construct and reconstruct our impressions of it according to our predispositions" (4). American society has developed a consciousness of the listener, a language attitude, by which African

[5] According to Bakhtin, the unitary language "constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" (270). As an example of this, he mentions the idea of the attempts to create a 'universal grammar,' the victory of one reigning language (dialect) over the others, the canonization of ideological systems (271), etc. By refusing to use such this unitary language and creating their own dialect, African Americans reflect their intention to establish their own and different ideology. Indirectly, they contribute thus to keeping language alive and developing.

Americans' dialect is regarded as inferior. Ironically though, the fact is that, as Hopper explains that "in the USA, twenty years of detailed research in Black and Caucasian dialects has unearthed [that] the difference between US and UK speech are much larger than those between Blacks and Caucasians. Why are US-UK differences a minor social problem? Simply because they are not fanned by polarization or intergroup hostility" (7). Racism emerges as the reason for the establishment of prejudice in the perception of different dialects of English. "It is," Hopper concludes, "a listening-interpretation problem more than a speech difference problem" (8).

In view of that, it is possible to affirm that language socially constructs the individual's subjectivity, his/her way of thinking and his/her attitude towards particular speech patterns. In this respect, as Benjamin Lee Whorf puts it, "a change in language can transform our appreciation of the cosmos" (263). Easy's initial attempt to speak standard English represented thus a much larger change than he could have imagined. Consequently, he soon realized the impossibility of his goal. His attempt clashed with his "natural" way of expressing himself and be himself. Moreover, from that moment on, he will repeatedly point out and condemn those African Americans such as the black police officers or other black people who change their speech pattern when aiming for upper rank positions in society. We can see an example of this when he talks about Sergeant Naylor Quinten in *A Red Death*: "He had an educated way of talking. I could have talked like him if I'd wanted to, but I never did like it when a man stopped using the language of his upbringing. If you were to talk like a white man you might forget who you were" (*RD* 143).

Easy criticizes Quinten's choice because that reveals that Quinten has sacrificed his identity as a black person in order to do his job in the police. According to Lock: "Voice reflects identity, so [Easy] consciously chooses a linguistic persona that aligns him with his 'upbringing,' establishing verbally a loyalty to and continuity with that background" (79). In contrast, Quinten represents the opposite case, and in Easy's view, he has to pay the price for it: "Even though Quinten Naylor was black he didn't have sympathy among the rough crowd in the Watts community" (*WB* 53). In *White Butterfly*, Easy

concludes: “The black people didn’t like him because he talked like a white man and he had a white man’s job. The other policemen kept at a distance too” (*WB* 54). Quinten is in consequence neither accepted as a member of the black community nor among his white counterparts. It is not a real option to change the underdog’s speech pattern. According to Hopper:

> Talk is a good shibboleth precisely because you can only reliably sound like a member of a group by actually being one, in which case you sound like a member quite by accident. The paradox is: if one advises an underdog to speak like a favorite to enter that group, then, assuming compliance, the underdog speaks like a favorite for different motives than the automatically favored member. One is asked to do on purpose something normally by accident. (9)

The consequences are a hostile attitude in the part of the listener and the loss-of-roots for the underdog.

On a different level but also related with the representation of language as a trademark of the African American identity and its connection to the black folklore, is Easy’s admiration for Mouse’s skills as a storyteller. Mosley brings up his own interest to include in the novels the oral aspects of the black tradition that he always saw as a child in his black community. Moreover, as the critics often indicate, the figure of the storyteller, together with the trickster or the badman, belong unmistakably to black folklore. In this way, Easy and Mouse, as we already studied in Chapter 2, are characters whose abilities to tell stories, trick, or outwit established authority fit in with the concept of the black vernaculars also defined by Byerman before. As the following quote in *A Red Death* reveals, the presence of the storytelling was totally extended among the community and deeply rooted in people’s life as a way of diversion. Easy narrates:

> People from other tables leaned away from their drinks to hear what he had to say. […] Mouse was a master storyteller. […] The men around were all laughing. Most people there were from Texas originally, but many of them didn’t know Mouse. They laughed because they loved a well-told lie. And Raymond didn’t mind, because he liked to make people laugh. (*RD* 56-57)

“Lies” here stand for tales. As explained earlier, for the African American community, the best liar is also the best storyteller. According to Alice Mills,

> The badman of African American folklore takes advantage of the retelling of his exploits in order to embellish them. In this, he resembles most closely the African trickster who above all else is a master of words. Thus, the more the badman's boasting is an obvious transfiguration of reality, the closer he is to the gods and the more his prestige increases in the eyes of his audience. Mouse willingly embraces this tradition and spreads the most incredible stories of his own virility and of the beatings he has inflicted on his rivals in love. Mouse is entirely conscious of his gift for rendering believable the highly improbable and takes lying beyond practical matters in the realm of art, a dazzling show free to all comers. He makes a thoroughly unselfish gift of this art to the community so that others too can dream and laugh. (31)

Easy identifies his friend with the most genuine aspects of the black community. This, however, does not always have a positive connation. In fact, Easy often feels torn between his respect and condemnation for Mouse's actions and personality. We see how his comments are contradictory: "My heart thrilled and quailed at the same time. Mouse was the truest friend I ever had. And if there is such a thing as true evil, he was that too" (*RD* 57). Similarly, in *Black Betty*, he mentions: "I wished that I had some kind of brother at arms to rely on. All I ever had was Mouse, and standing side by side with him was like pressing up against a porcupine" (*BB* 170). On the other hand, in *White Butterfly*, he will make a positive observation: "I knew Mouse would be there when I needed him. He would always be there in my life, smiling and ready to commit mayhem" (*WB* 183). And before, in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he also recognizes: "The only time in my life that I had ever been completely free from fear was when I ran with Mouse. He was so confident that there was no room for fear" (*DBD* 48). One way or the other, Easy's uncertainty here can be interpreted as evidence of Walter Mosley's intention to imbue his characters with traditional aspects of the black folklore. As said by Mills: "Easy's ambiguity is evidence of allegiance to African traditions" (29). Easy's reflections and identity respond to specific characteristics also found in typical and old black folk characters. Furthermore, Mills considers that

> Easy's strategies are in a way reminiscent of the myths of Esu, whose preferred forms of expression are ambiguity and the co-existence of opposites. Throughout Mosley's entire series of detective stories, the more closely Easy's words relate to his intimate feelings, the more they manifest themselves through the process of modified repetition that is considered essential to the African principle of expression. (29)

Mouse represents therefore an essential aspect of Easy's life. Although Mouse is a killer and Easy, at the end of *Gone Fishin'*, decides to leave Texas partly because he does not want to end up like him, it is true that in other moments of his life Mouse represents a source of inspiration and understanding: "He was the only black man I'd ever known who had never been chained, in his mind, by the white man. Mouse was brash and wild and free. He might have been insane, but any Negro who dared to believe in his own freedom in America had to be mad" (*WB* 173).

Also, as we saw in the section before, it was Mouse who reminded Easy that despite his college education, his suburban house and his prosperity in business he was above all a black man. It is then through Mouse's words that Easy realizes that all those factors plus his desire to reach the American dream cannot change his true identity. Mills points out that Mouse plays different roles in Easy's life: "[Mouse] is the detective's instinctive twin and gives expression to those impulses which are socially unacceptable but necessary to survival. In a way, Mouse is Easy's shadow" (29). Easy is able to maintain his physical and moral integrity thanks to Mouse who protects him by diverting threats and my maiming and killing.

To sum up, in this section I have shown the crucial difference on how Easy applies his condition as an African American in his profile as a black detective. His cultural background as well as the presence of a relocated African American community in Los Angeles shape his identity, his way of solving the crimes, and his critical outlook of society. Likewise, this can also be seen in the way of leading his life, his double consciousness and the use of the black vernaculars. Mosley assigns peculiar characteristics to him as a protagonist and to Mouse as his back up and "secret sharer" that are clearly rooted in the figures of the trickster and the bad man in the African American folklore respectively (Bryant 148). More importantly, Mosley illustrates how Easy as a black detective breaks through the white conventions that did not allow him to go beyond the traditional profile before.

4. 3. Easy Rawlins' development as a post-colonial detective

> You all the time hearin' 'bout how free America is, but it ain't.
>
> Walter Mosley, *A Red Death*

After studying the influence of the hardboiled conventions and the cultural aspects that shape Easy as a black detective, my next aim in this section is to analyze Easy's reaction to the world he lives in. I will discuss what traits in the portrayal of Easy's literary character—some of them already shown before—respond to what we could call a subversive postcolonial conscience. As an African American man who is subject to the tensions, discriminations and injustices that were rooted for many decades in American society, Easy's reflections on the reality he confronts coincide with what an important number of critics such as Homi Bhabha, Gayatry Spivak, Robert Young, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin consider is a postcolonial or post-colonial[6] approach.

Alternatively, the other important aspect to study in this section will be Easy's determination to break former stereotypes and accomplish his goals, not conforming himself to be part of a collective African American identity which in many aspects was constructed by the white ideology and imbued with totally derogatory connotations. As Charles W. Thomas indicates in his essay "On Being a Black Man," there is a long list of names assigned to African American men, and in almost every instance the meaning implied is contrary to his being a part of "mankind:" "Little black Sambo," "Black Boy," "Uncle Remus," "Boy," "Nigger," "Uncle," etc. (239). Not only do they refer to a lifetime of being a "boy" to becoming an "uncle" in his old age but also they connote a process which never involves manhood. In the same way, Thomas also explains how the black man was expected to perform every function of beasts of burden:

[6] I briefly establish the distinction that the critics do between both terms in Chapter 2.

> He was bought and sold at the discretion of the master; permitted or forced to breed like any other stallion; fed the kind of food that the master considered ' good' for slaves but unfit for others; and he was violated in every other human-centered way. A very determined social system was developed to destroy the slave as a human being. (239)

These old concepts dehumanized the black man and constrained him with any expectations of development. Furthermore, they reveal how the black man was "tame" by the white discourse. Mosley's series in this sense present a good example of how Easy opposes those traditional views and barriers. Furthermore, he depicts the diverse nature of African American's identity proving right thus, Stuart Hall's theories which indicate that collective social identities cannot be thought of something fixed and homogeneous.

Throughout *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death, White Butterfly* and *Black Betty* it is possible to trace Easy's development as an individual whose subjectivity adopts a more radical African American conscience as he experiences particular incidents and situations in which his condition as a black man is clearly judged as inferior. In the same way, Mosley illustrates through his protagonist and other characters in the series the wide range of individual identities that forms the black community. As Andrew Pepper highlights,

> Mosley does not allow himself to fall into the essentialist trap of representing black America in one-dimensional terms. The sheer variety of different skin colors worn by his various black characters is testament to the falsity of biological definitions of 'race' and racial difference. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, for example, Coretta James has 'cherry brown' skin, Odell Jones is colored like a 'red pecan' and Jackson Blue is 'so black that his skin glinted blue in the full sun'. Meanwhile in *A Red Death,* whereas EttaMae is a "sepia-colored' brown, Mofas is 'dark brown but bright', Mouse is 'dusky pecan', Jackie Orr is more of an 'olive brown' and Andre Lavender has distinctive 'oranged-colored' skin. (2000: 131)

All these distinctions do not but confirm the heterogeneity among African Americans. Logically, these differences are not only evident on the surface, that is, on the character's appearance, but also on their individual subjectivities as a result of their backgrounds, their jobs, their personal experiences and so on.

Focusing firstly on the reflections that Easy presents and which illustrate his approach as a post-colonial detective, it is significant that his first-person

writing, to begin with, constitutes a discourse of resistance and reconstruction. As Pepper indicates,

> In fact it is tempting to consider [Mosley's] novels, first and foremost, as contributions to the ongoing project of re-writing the history of black America using the words and stories of black Americans themselves; as documents of what it was like to be black and living in Los Angeles in the post war years... (2000: 122)

By situating Easy in a specific historical context in every novel, Mosley has the opportunity of representing from an African American point of view a wide list of significant domestic matters that took place in the United States in the fifties and the sixties. Indeed, aspects such as the rural migration of thousands of black people to the cities, the institutionalized racial oppression, the African Americans' day-to-day challenges and the injustices to which they were subject, are a piece of the American history that Mosley brings up through these novels in the Rawlins series. According to Pepper,

> Mosley's crime fiction demonstrates how the ugly imperfections of the past—the legacy of slavery and institutional racism—continue to invade and shape the present, but they also focus upon the various strategies of negotiation and resistance employed by figures like Easy Rawlins in order to achieve even a modicum of control over their lives. This tension—between Rawlins' desire for agency and his inability to transcend the limits imposed on him by white-controlled institutions and their representatives—is played out on both a thematic and formal level throughout the series. (2000: 126)

In his narration, Easy often reflects his struggle challenging the whites' discrimination and demanding a minimum degree of respect and dignity. This type of struggle can be addressed as postcolonial. As Ed Christian points out, the term postcolonial, in its widest sense, "embraces the members of any group—be it national, tribal, ethnic, or otherwise—which has been marginalized or oppressed and is struggling to assert itself" (1). Also, for Homi Bhabha,

> Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. Postcolonial perspectives emerge from the colonial testimony of […] the discourses of 'minorities.' […] They intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples. They formulate their critical revisions around issues

> of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the 'rationalizations' of modernity. (2005: 246)

The tensions and strong emotions that the historical, social and political struggle produced determined a particular relationship between colonizer and colonized (master and slave) which constitutes nowadays a profoundly internalized part of the contemporary African American subjectivity.

Mosley's writing constitutes therefore a counter narrative for its reinterpretation of racial history and its references to race. As Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin highlight in their most recent edition of *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*:

> Race continues to be relevant to post-colonial theory for two reasons: first, because it is so central to the growing power of imperial discourse over the nineteenth century, and second, because it remains a central and unavoidable 'fact' of modern society that race is used as the dominant category of daily discrimination and prejudice. While we may argue that race is a flawed and self-defeating category that traps its users in its biological and essentialist meshes (Appiah 1992), in practical terms race remains a ubiquitous social category that needs to be addressed as a reality in contemporary personal and social relations even when ethnicity might offer a more nuanced understanding of cultural identity. (2006: 5)

Mosley's condemnation of the racial prejudice that Easy or other members of the black community have suffered is clearly portrayed in his novels. This is present in many of the events that Easy recalls from his childhood. In *A Red Death*, for example, he explains:

> I'd seen lynching and burnings, shootings and stonings. I'd seen a man, Jessup Howard, hung for looking at a white woman. And I'd seen two brothers who were lynched from two nooses on the same rope because they complained about the higher prices they were charged at the country store. (*RD* 136)

demonstrate the post-colonial society in which Easy was involved and is still immersed in spite of some social improvements. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that 1952 was the first year since 1881 without a lynching in the U.S. (Eyerman 167).

> What traits in Easy's attitude mirror then a subversive post-colonial mind? First of all, the approach he presents to the American system of justice. Next, the way he relates the idea of power with having money and earning respect. This is in fact what triggers his obsession with owning properties. Lastly, his strong criticism of the type of education that African Americans receive in the United States including his particular defense of the African American culture and language.
>
> At the beginning of the *Devil in a Blue Dress*, he says: "The law is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead" (*DBD* 20). In this quote, he reveals his concept of law but also his perspective of society and how hierarchies are established. Likewise, he will comment later:
>
> I thought it was wrong for a man to be murdered and, in a more perfect world, I felt that the killer should be brought to justice.
>
> But I didn't believe there was justice for Negroes. I thought there might be some justice for a black man if he had the money to grease it. Money isn't a sure bet but it's the closest to God that I've ever seen in this world. (*DBD* 121)

Easy refers to society assuming that there is a criminal side attached to it, and understanding that justice does not exist for African Americans unless they have some money. As Wesley points out: "Although Easy Rawlins would like to be a conventionally moral man, his recognition of the problematic nature of 'law' as it is applied to black citizens separates him from his white counterparts" (112). This problematic nature of law is actually one of the main themes in *A Red Death.* In this novel, Mr. Lawrence, the IRS agent that asks Easy to bring all his tax documents for the last five years, turns out to be corrupt. The irony is that he represents the American government: "'This is the law, mister,' Lawrence said. 'All we have is the law, that's why I'm here. I'm doing my job. And that's what I want from you" (*RD* 115). The fact that at the end of the novel we find out that he is the root of the conflict and the one who has triggered the deaths of several people is a metaphor for what "America" and the "white law" symbolize. Mosley seems to be suggesting that they both are fraudulent as it is also the capitalist system that they generate and support. This idea stands out against the other theme of *A Red Death*: the fear of communism. In my opinion, Mosley is implicitly asking the reader which of the two systems is more unmanageable. Because in fact, we see how Easy feels attracted to both. As Allison D. Goeller indicates, "Easy finds himself seduced by communism's appeal to the working class and by the parallels Wenzler draws between Jews and American blacks, both

economically and socially, particularly when Wenzler reveals to Easy that his own brother had been hanged by the Nazis" (178).

Easy's past makes him relate to the Jewish reality and experiences that Wenzler describes. Nevertheless, throughout these four novels, his objectives will be soon clearly identified with his aim to overcome poverty and reach a middle class status. In this respect, while Jews have been historically marginalized socially, economically they also provide the model for a prosperous capitalist society. Certainly, Easy's mind is trapped by the capitalist system and his dreams of accomplishment. Making money, owning a house and having a successful life become his obsession. As Shelley Taylor points out:

> [T]he normal human mind is oriented toward mental health and… at every turn it construes events in a manner that promotes benign fictions about the self, the world, and the future. The mind is, with some significant exceptions, intrinsically adaptive, oriented toward overcoming rather than succumbing to the adverse events of life… At one level, it constructs beneficent interpretations of threatening events that raise self-esteem and promote motivation; yet at another level, it recognizes the threat or challenge that is posed by these events. (Quoted in Dalton 308)

Due to the racial and social circumstances, Easy relate his goals with equality, respect and empowerment: "The thought of paying my mortgage reminded me of my front yard and the shade of my fruit trees in the summer heat. I felt that I was just as good as any white man, but if I didn't even own my front door then people would look at me like just another poor beggar, with his hand outstretched" (*DBD* 9). At this point in his life, being considered poor and inferior annoy Easy. Likewise, what people "would say of him" is something that troubles his self-esteem. He left Houston because he did not want to be at the bottom of the social ladder. In this way, as the novels progress we see Easy's continued struggle to develop an empowered, agentive sense of self. Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu considers that "Easy's house is much more than just a piece of real estate; owning it is a way for Easy to position himself as the equal of whites" (17).

Walter Mosley emphasizes the effect of ownership on the construction of Easy' s African American subjectivity by steeping *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death, White Butterfly* and *Black Betty* with Easy's desire to own properties. His

craze to own several houses and apartments indicates his desire to acquire something that he believes can be found in ownership. “I was dreaming about the day I’d be able to buy more houses, maybe even a duplex. I always wanted to own enough land that it would pay for itself out of the rent it generated” (*DBD* 52). Mosley indicates that African Americans’ desperate pursuit of ownership and having money is really their desire to declare ownership of themselves. However, such strategy in Easy’s case will end up in failure. According to Shiu, Easy’s “sense of self is based upon illusion due to the politics of white capitalism” (18). From Easy’s perspective, his ideal house surrounded by plants and trees allows him the position of an owner. This is the initial reward to his firm attempt to become someone as well as the first step towards becoming rich.

Being still 28 in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Easy has high expectations: “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” (*DBD* 48). He noticeably contemplates the American dream as an option for himself. However, eight years later, by 1956, Easy starts realizing that such an option is not so attainable. He comments in *White Butterfly*:

> I dreamed about being one of the few black millionaires in America. It was a strange kind of daydream, because whenever I thought of some Beverly Hills shopkeeper smiling at me I also thought that he was lying, that he really hated me. Even in my dreams I was persecuted by race. (*WB* 162)

As a “Southern Negro” he is doomed to failure as a capitalist. Although he was told by his friend Mouse in the past about the impossibility of a black man reaching his goals, Easy will not actually give up on his dream until 1961, at the end of *Black Betty*. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, however, we see that Mouse had already warned him: Nigger cain’t pull his way out the swamp wit’out no help, Easy. You wanna hole on t’this house and git some money and have you some white girls callin’ on the phone? Alright. That’s alright. But, Easy, you gotta have somebody at yo’ back, man. That’s just a lie them white men give ‘bout makin’ it on they own. They always got they backs covered” (*DBD* 153).

Even though Mouse is illiterate and is presented in every novel as a killer, his convictions regarding the racial, social and economic boundaries that separate the white and the black worlds are very obvious for him. As an African American man reared in the streets with no expectations in life other than surviving, he considers Easy's attempt to make a living by shifting worlds and making business with whites as respectable but meaningless if he does not maintain a black conscience: "You learn stuff and you be thinkin' like white men be thinkin'. You be thinkin' that what's right fo' them is right fo' you. […] And a nigger ain't never gonna be happy 'less he accept what he is" (*DBD* 205). Through Easy and Mouse's perspectives, Mosley explicitly criticizes the American Dream, and how this is in fact just propaganda. It is a dream that is not within everybody's reach. The Statue of Liberty's credo—"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."—lines from the famous poem by Emma Lazarus, does not seem to be addressed to African Americans. According to Mosley's view, the American Dream is one more way of manipulating black Americans in order to undermine their attempts to ascend the social ladder. As Stephen Cruz puts it, there is a "glass ceiling" that regardless how much a non-white person works, it cannot really be trespassed. Cruz indicates that the American Dream "is governed not by education, opportunity, and hard work, but by power and fear. The higher up in the organization you go, the more you have to lose. The dream is *not losing*" (351). In these novels, once Easy has managed to buy and rent the apartments, his major concern is not so much increasing his properties as it is not losing the ones that already belong to him. In the same way, *losing* also means succumbing to the inequalitities of the social reality and accepting that hard work and individual merit are not guarantors of success. Harlon L. Dalton, in his book *Racial Healing: Confronting the Fear Between Black and Whites*, criticizes the American Dream, too, and questions Horatio Alger's myth, calling it not only false, but "socially destructive" (304). His main objection is that:

> [I]t serves to maintain the racial pecking order. It does so by mentally bypassing the role of race in American society. And it does so by fostering beliefs that themselves serve to trivialize, if not erase, the social meaning of race. The Alger myth encourages people to blink at the many barriers to racial equality (historical, structural, and institutional) that litter the social landscape. Yes, slavery was built

> on the notion that African Americans were property and not persons; yes, even after the peculiar institution collapsed, it continued to shape the life prospects of those who previously were enslaved; yes, the enforced illiteracy and cultural disruption of slavery, together with the collapse of Reconstruction, virtually assured that the vast majority of 'freedmen' and 'freedwomen' would not be successfully integrated into society: yes, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and a separate and unequal society reality severely undermined the prospects for Black achievement; yes, these and other features of our national life created a racial caste system that persists to this day. (307-308)

In spite of his efforts, Easy's desire to embrace the American Dream reaches a point where his willpower and his efforts are not enough to achieve it. He cannot overcome the limitations of an American white system in the 1950s that saw black economic development as a threat to the existing social order and perpetuated white privilege.

In Easy's obsession to become wealthy, Mosley represents how his protagonist's subjectivity becomes increasingly more distorted as he develops as a man. His concern to hide from everybody what he has, even from his wife, will make him actually feel lost and unable to comprehend why he is acting wrong. However, much of what appears to be confusion can be understood from an examination of the self as the center around which values such as properties, are determined. According to Charles Thomas, "[I]nteractions between the self and values set the stage for conditions of being" (245). As he explains:

> For centuries, the black man was, in a manner of speaking, the child in the family of society. He was made to feel as a child, to think as a child, and to act as a child. The limits of behavior were not only restricting, but also imposed self-defeating activities. During this historical period rebelliousness was sporadic, but the masses were prone to conform to the circumstances of their plight. For the most part, they were obedient and exhibited predictable behavior which could be easily controlled. (244)

In many ways then, World War II constituted a surge of African American men toward manhood adopting a new position in society. In this new role, he becomes aggressive, independent, and at times hostile in dealing with groups or family. Thomas considers that this reaction reveals the black man's attempt to seek ways to enhance his male blackness. "Now it is his moral responsibility as the man to change the social order so that that which a man has to do will be done for

women, children, and old people. Like children who have grown up, the black man has come of age in the best tradition of western civilization" (245). Regarding Easy's case, we see how in his position as a business man and as a husband his behavior reflects some level of uncertainty and confusion. Yet, this confusion is above all about his own worth as a human being. He comments in *White Butterfly*: "The money wasn't apparent in my way of living. So there was no need for [Regina] to be suspicious. I intended to tell her all about it someday. A day when I felt she could accept it, accept me for who I was" (*WB* 70). Having money alters Easy's view of himself. Wanting to be rich, trying to be his own man, and at the same time wanting to be black disturbs him emotionally.

In this novel, Mosley seems to suggest that one can own his *self* by sharing rather than by being rich and owning property. Interestingly, not will only Easy's wife abandon him at the end of *White Butterfly* but five years later in *Black Betty*, we find that he is bankrupt and has moved to a rented house. This represents the end of a stage in his life and a change in his conscience. His dream of owning property comes to an end. Easy feels devastated and pessimistic: "A strip of dawn light showed above the houses across the street. A better day might have been coming, for some people—but not for everyone" (*BB* 12). Once again, Easy will then associate his condition as an African American with the lack of opportunities in life. His perspective will turn at once more political and philosophical:

> And there were the children […] with futures so bleak that it could make you cry just to hear them laugh. Because behind their laughing you knew there was the rattle of chains. Chains we wore for no crime; chains we wore for so long that they melded with our bones. We all carry them but nobody can see it—not even most of us." (*BB* 199)

As always, Walter Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins reflecting on the condition of African Americans in the U.S. In a way, his state of mind mirrors the years before the Civil Right movements when black Americans, tired of having their blackness define such narrow constraints to their life chances, decided to organize themselves to demand equal rights.

On the other hand, apart from the number of peculiarities as we have seen so far that make Easy unique, such as the multiple identities that he adopts and

shifts through the novels (he appears as a detective, as a husband, as a family head, as a businessman, as a prisoner, as a lawbreaker, etc.), the other individual peculiarity that it is necessary to highlight is his interest in reading and attaining a high education. Education, and literary education in particular, is a major theme of controversy in post-colonial literatures. (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 425) This trait of Easy's personality represents Mosley's concern in making his work a site of contesting and proving the inadequacy of the stereotypes traditionally attributed to black people as far as their dehumanization, their illiteracy and their lack of interest in being well-read. For all these reasons and for Easy's role acting as a symbol for the colonized and oppressed, he can be seen as a type of Caliban figure that rejects the idea of accepting the white canon and the white education as the absolute and leading ones. He makes an explicit critique of how mainstream white literature does not, and cannot, represent African American culture.

The figure of Caliban originates in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Initially Caliban was read as a representation of primitive humanity, a degenerated character exhibiting greed, lawlessness and lust. As Paulus Sarwoto points out, "In his development up to the mid 20th century, Caliban symbolized the colonized as imagined by Europe to justify colonialism. Conversely, in [colonized cultures] this character has developed into a positive symbol [because of] the implacable spirit of Caliban against Prospero's subjugation" (1). The most well-known example of this anti-colonial interpretation of the character is the play *Une Tempete* (*A Tempest*) by Négritude poet Aimé Césaire. This play is an adaptation of Shakespeare's work that reinterprets the figure of Caliban to express post-colonial attitudes of the time. In the following lines from Césaire's play, Caliban confronts Prospero, here depicted as the European colonizer:

> For years I bowed my head
> for years I took it, all of it—
> your insults, your ingratitude...
> and worst of all, more degrading than all the rest,
> your condescension.
> But now, it's over!
> Over, do you hear?
> Of course, at the moment you're still stronger than I am.
> But I don't give a damn for your power
> or for your dogs or your police or your inventions!
> [...]

> Prospero, you're a great magician:
> you're an old hand at deception.
> And you lied to me so much,
> about the world, about myself,
> that you ended up imposing on me
> an image of myself:
> underdeveloped, in your words, undercompetent
> that's how you made me see myself!
> And I hate that image...and it's false! (Act 3, Scene 5)

As a figure that draws together particular cultural perspectives, traditions, and political contestations, Caliban has been transformed into a cultural and political vehicle by which, as Sarwoto highlights "writers keep reinterpreting him to serve their own goals" (2). In this manner, what Mosley does is to adapt Caliban's role in Easy's characterization within his African American community. In his profile as a post-colonial detective, Easy mirrors Caliban's attitude and appropriates it as his mode of discourse. Easy represents thus a similar critical and subversive voice against the mainstream American discourse.

Mosley takes this subject further through the critique Easy makes of the fact that black children had no access to learn about their own African American art, literature and music at the local library.

> They would have to forfeit Waller for Mozart and Remus for Puck. They would enter a world where only white people spoke. And no matter how articulate Dickens and Voltaire were, those children wouldn't have their own examples in the house of learning—the library. (*WB* 91)

Moreover, Easy remarks the presence of Mrs. Keaton, the elderly white librarian in *White Butterfly,* as a sign of white society's attempt to acculturate the black community: "They often take the kindest white people to colonize the colored community. But as kind as Mrs. Keaton was, she reflected an alien view to our people" (*WB* 91). Mrs. Keaton's whiteness (not only her white skin but also her white mind) is emphasized as a barrier that impedes her from understanding black culture and black people:

> To her Shakespeare was a god. I didn't mind that, but what did she know about the folk tales and riddles and stories colored folks had been telling for centuries? What did she know about the language we spoke?

> I always heard her correcting children's speech. "Not 'I is,'" she'd say. "It's 'I am.'"
>
> And, of course, she was right. It's just that little colored children listening to that proper white woman would never hear their own cadence in her words. They'd come to believe that they would have to abandon their own language and stories to become a part of her educated world. (*WB* 91)

Easy's comments and opposition to accept the white discourse as the standard one not only mirrors at this point Caliban's resistance but also Ashcroft et al.'s post-colonial theory approach:

> [I]mperial education systems interpellated a colonialist subjectivity not just through syllabus content, or the establishment of libraries within which the colonial could absorb 'the lesson of the master', but through internalizing the English text, and reproducing it before audiences of fellow colonials. Recitation of literary texts thus becomes a ritual act of obedience, often performed by a child before an audience of admiring adults, who, in reciting that English tongue, speaks as if s/he were the imperial speaker/master rather than the subjectified colonial so often represented in English poetry and prose. (Ashcroft et al. 2006: 426)

Both Mosley and Ashcroft et al. refer to the effects of books and education on identity. When reading white books, black people lose their sense of self. They learn that white people are more beautiful and therefore more deserving of love and respect than them. Thus, they are educated to abandon or at least not appreciate their identity. In Easy's quotation above, he refers to the existence of a black folklore but also to how black children might end up not listening to it but to the mainstream narratives when receiving a white education. Likewise, we can also see how Mosley uses the same extract to link language and culture. According to Andrew Pepper, "this particular battle is an important feature of Mosley's work. […] Language, here, is not merely a vehicle for communication; it is also a means of connecting people to their history and culture and the fact that most if not all of Mosley's black characters speak in dialect signals the author's intention to challenge, undermine, and even overturn official values" (1999: 247). Easy's sense of self is closely attached to the pride he has for his cultural heritage and his community. As Stephen Soitos indicates, "his struggle for identity through social, [cultural], and political associations in the black community becomes an

important theme of the novels" (234). This is certainly integral to his formation as a black individual.

In the same vein, another significant factor that contributes to reveal more about Easy's approach to culture and learning is his interest in acquiring a higher education. If by the end of *Gone Fishin'*, Easy had achieved the objective of learning how to read and write and had decided to leave Texas in order to find a new way of life, in these four novels we witness how he keeps progressing in his formal education and is often engaged in the reading of the daily newspapers and some significant and emblematic books written by both white and black authors. Thus, we see that in *Devil in a Blue Dress,* Easy is going to night school, and in *A Red Death* he is at his third English course at LACC reading Shakespeare's sonnets: "I had two part-time years of Los Angeles City College under my belt" (*RD* 104). Likewise, he is told for the first time about W.E.B. Du Bois:

> 'He's a famous Negro, Easy. Almost a hundred years old. He always writin' about getting' back t'Africa. You prob'ly ain't never heard'a him 'cause he's a com'unist. They don't teach ya 'bout com'unists.'
>
> 'So how do you know, if they don't teach it?'
>
> 'Lib'ary got its do' open, man. Ain't nobody tellin' you not to go.'
>
> There aren't too many moments in your life when you really learn something. Jackson taught me something that night in John's, something I'd never forget.' (*BB* 185)

In fact, later on in *White Butterfly* he indeed appears reading Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (*WB* 283), and as will see, he is strongly influenced by it. In this way, it is possible to draw a parallel between some of Easy's views and reactions and Du Bois' ideas. They both share for instance, a strong conviction about the importance of education for the African Americans' social and political advance. Du Bois wrote that "the training of the schools we need to-day more than ever,—the training of deft hands, quick eyes and ears, and above all the broader, deeper, higher culture of gifted minds and pure hearts. […] Freedom, too, the long-sought, we still seek,—the freedom of life and limb, the freedom to work and think,—the freedom to love and aspire" (Du Bois 11).

Without any doubt, one of Easy's strength lies in his aim to improve himself and become an educated person as a way to achieve equality. Furthermore, it is for this reason that he appears engaged in the reading of white authors too. Although he criticizes the white system, he does not reject the content of the white culture or the white classic authors. What Easy condemns about the white canon is the way that it is used and imposed to discriminate against African Americans. Thus, he does not reject the western literature, he makes it his own. Like Du Bois, Easy is supporting the study of both the white and black authors. Du Bois stated that:

> [T]he ideal of fostering and developing the traits and talents of the Negro, not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American republic, in order that some day on American soil two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack. We the darker ones come even now not altogether empty-handed: […] there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folklore are Indian and African; […]. (11)

According to the critic Tommy L. Lott in his article "Du Bois on the Invention of Race," it seems that, for Du Bois, "although African Americans are, perhaps collectively, obligated to resist oppression in the sense that every African American has a *right* not to acculturate into the American mainstream, this does not establish that African Americans have a *duty* to conserve a distinctive culture" (56). Moreover, in further readings, Easy is touched by the hero's death in Plato's "Phaedo:" "I wondered at how it would be to be a white man; a man who felt that he belonged. I tried to imagine how it would feel to give up my life because I love my homeland so much" (*WB* 82). Finally, in *Black Betty*, he says that he "takes up his empty time" (*BB* 18) with Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*: "A few liberal libraries and the school system had wanted to ban the book because of the racist content. Liberal-minded whites and blacks wanted to erase racism from the world. I applauded the idea but my memory of Huckleberry wasn't one of racism. I remembered Jim and Huck as friends out on the river. I could have been either one of them" (*BB* 18).

This is a good example of how Easy does not reject the white canon like some of his peers; what he rejects is the idea that it propagates discrimination and

racism. Also, Easy's perspectives as a Negro and as an American are revealed here again. His comments about *Huckleberry Finn* particularly represent how his condition as an orphan child makes him identify with both characters. At this point, he does not take into consideration the difference between the skin color of Huckleberry and Jim. On the contrary, however, he does bring up the issue of banning those books that support racial prejudice.

To conclude, Easy's experiences of discrimination, injustice and racism in the marginalized society of urban blacks in Los Angeles constitute a crucial factor that triggers his subversive conscience. His challenge of former stereotypes assigned traditionally to African Americans by white discourse and his rejection of the condition of inferiority, that he seems meant to live just for being black, stand for the postcolonial criticism that Mosley includes between the lines of every novel. In contrast, in this section I also have shown how Easy is different from other black men in his personal objectives. He acquires an education and fights continuously for respect and recognition. He has a high concept of dignity and considers himself as good as any white man. In this way, Easy's search for equality and empowerment through his attempt to become a successful businessman, together with his obsession with ownership demonstrate his desperation for owning his own self. Finally, on the subject of Easy's self-motivation and determination for improvement, he is a clear example of the heterogeneity that exists among black people as far as identity and individual goals. His insightful mind, his analytical perspectives as well as the choices he makes raise moral questions about the racist society he lives in.

Devil in a Blue Dress, A Red Death, White Butterfly, and *Black Betty* show the formation of Easy Rawlins' subjectivity as he reveals through his thoughts and his actions more and more about himself and his growing black consciousness in every novel. The trajectory of my argument has been a linear one by way of showing how Walter Mosley utilizes the codes and conventions of the hardboiled genre, moulding them to his own purposes, while retaining particular features or characteristics in his creation of Easy as a detective. In addition, the influence of

the black community and black culture has a crucial impact in Easy's development as an African American private eye.

Mosley has consciously set out to write a series of detective novels in which the hero's personality mirrors the changes in society around him. Indeed these four novels span a historical period which was central to the African American social improvements in the United States and which accordingly had a direct effect in Easy's growth as a black man. Some of these changes were: the Supreme Court's declaration in 1954 that stated that segregation in schools was unconstitutional, the emergence of Dr. Martin Luther King as a black leader, the Montgomery bus boycott triggered by Rosa Parks in Alabama in 1955 that lead to all the major civil rights groups to combine their efforts to protest, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 that was the act that kick-started the civil rights legislative program that was to include the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, etc. As Gilbert H. Muller indicates:

> In the sun and smog of postwar Los Angeles, Easy learns what he attempted to deny in *Devil in a Blue Dress*—that inextricably he is a part of history. He is a part of racial and urban history—in Mosley's words 'an Everyman who describes the Southwest black migration. He's the voice of a million people who moved out of their sharecropping days and came into Southern California.' At the same time, as a bitter World War II veteran, Easy brings however grudgingly a sense of history […] into this contemporary urban world. (296)

Easy witnesses the historical changes around him and is affected by them. Unwilling to settle down in Texas after his involvement in World War II, and aware of the existence of other standards of living, he moves to Los Angeles and initially endeavors to just survive and make a living. Like many other African Americans that migrated, Easy then goes through a period of adaptation to the new urban space he inhabits. In this process of redefinition it is his ethnic and cultural identity that develops his double consciousness, and provides him with a background and a sense of belonging. At this point, the emergent black community of L.A. therefore constitutes a crucial setting for Easy's formation.

Furthermore, in spite of his awareness of the racial issues that characterized the American society, Easy defies the old and biased stereotypes that predicated that all black people are the same; he starts his own personal battle

for equality and respect; attends college; buys his own house; and shows determination to improve himself. In this way, his first job as a detective in *Devil in a Blue Dress* brings him a large sum of money that raises his expectations for a more decent social and economic status in society. At this moment, Easy establishes himself both as a businessman and as a respected figure among his community that helps its members when they have some type of problem and do not want to rely on the police, since the law for African Americans represents injustice rather than protection.

Always playing with his identity, sometimes as a detective to obtain information, and others in his real life by not revealing to barely anyone, not even his wife, the properties he owns, Mosley presents an Easy Rawlins who constantly masquerades as someone else. Like the trickster figure in traditional black folklore, Easy lies and hides his real intentions in order to obtain his goals. As he affirms, in his mind he becomes sort of invisible since he can move freely and investigate without raising suspicion in the black community, and when in the white one, no one would ever expect an African American to be a detective. Easy learns to shift worlds. He becomes fully acquainted with the white way of thinking, establishing a distinction between the white perspectives and his own. Most importantly, we see how he learns to take advantage of this knowledge to cross the color line without restraint.

At the same time, Easy is in addition a private black eye whose views come from the margins and are shaped by the discrimination and the prejudice African Americans suffer. His position as a detective empowers him but also shows the constant struggle he has to endure with the police just for being black. Unlike other white detectives, Easy finds himself put in jail in every novel and beaten up for no reason. As a first person narrator, Easy portrays a vivid picture of the noir world of Los Angeles in which crime and justice are just the two sides of the coin. He denounces the corruption among the police and the authorities of the city and presents the injustices African Americans have to bear.

As the plot of these four novels progresses, Mosley clearly illustrates how Easy's identity is the result of how he manages all the shifting tensions he is

subject to. The traditional hardboiled detective canon is initially the dominant force that encapsulates him into a particular was of existing. Unlike his white counterparts, Easy's profile is in constant development and change. By the end of *Black Betty*, he is 41 years old and totally used to living in L.A. Interestingly, at this point, his past does not consist of just memories from the South but also of events that have taken place during his recent years living in Los Angeles. These have definitely contributed to his personal (de)formation. As the quote at the beginning of the chapter indicates, his subjectivity is therefore made out of all the little pieces that his experiences have brought him: "My life had dire consequences; there were reminders of it all over Los Angeles" (*WB* 195). The different choices he has made, the different personal stages and the different historical times he has gone through have constructed the person he is. As a result, his mind has developed in one particular way. In the next set of novels, Easy's development and struggle continues. His condition as an African American mirrors then the tensions the black community undergoes the years before and during the Civil Right Movements.

Chapter 5

Easy's Attempt to Redefine Himself

> I stood at the end of the field looking down over the dark trees and shrubs that gathered on the edges of L.A. I used to live on the edge. I used to move in darkness.
>
> Walter Mosley, *A Yellow Dog*

The evolution of Easy's character revolves around his need for recognition and respect, and his development of multiple identities. His experience and personal growth allow him to see that his lack of success as a business man at the end of *Black Betty* is mainly due to his condition as a black man and the limitations imposed on him by powerful white investors regularly favored by the city's dominant politicians. Like many African Americans, Easy understands his failure in racial terms as he relates the idea of being black with being poor and marginalized. Since he was a black orphan in Texas, he has always experienced loss, scarcity and discrimination: "Any poor black child of the South who woke up in the morning was lucky if he lived to make it to bed that night" (*BB* 331). Aware of how mainstream white society reduces his choices for development, Easy decides now to step aside and seek new ways to redefine himself. In *A Little Yellow Dog*, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, *Six Easy Pieces*, *Little Scarlet* and *Cinnamon Kiss*, Easy attempts to start a new life by applying for a job as head custodian through which he can demonstrate his many capabilities and earn a new social position. Likewise, now at the age of 43, Easy decides to leave the streets

and lead a decent lifestyle as a father taking care of his family. All these decisions reflect the different ways he reclaims his agency and attempts to construct a safe space, emotional and spatial, that he can moderately control and that allows him to demonstrate his intellectual competence.

The concept of agency from a postcolonial perspective is useful in this study of Easy Rawlins's subjectivity because one of its major arguments contains the idea of a fluid or hybrid identity, and provides a constructive starting point in the way Easy chooses to develop his new self. After deciding to obtain a new job, Easy's different occupation enables him to demonstrate his capability as a group leader and his value as a black man doing a job that requires expertise, decision-making skills, organization, and responsibility: "I loved that job. It might have seemed like a lowly position to many people, both black and white, but it was a good job and I did many good things while I was there" (*CK* 23). "Good" for Easy here means that the job gives him the opportunity to create the most favorable conditions in which to enhance his recognition and his social empowerment within the school and to fight racial prejudice and discrimination. He becomes a central figure at Sojourner Truth Junior High School in helping to establish a productive educational atmosphere and discipline code, and he even helps in organizing the general system of relationships between black parents and teachers. In the same way, his position as a family man offers him the possibility to develop his own notion of masculinity and his identity as a father. Family is a central context in black men's conception of themselves and their male ego. Easy endeavors to build his image as a patriarch and as a responsible adult male bringing up Jesus and Feather, and providing them with all the care and the economic needs they require. In this domain, like in the others, Easy also displays his middle class aspirations and his desire to increase his social status. Easy's class and racial consciousness are manifestations of the American system of social stratification and inequality. Lastly, in these novels we also see how he sporadically feels obliged to get involved again in some investigations that he cannot turn down due to different reasons. As a result, he will further develop his identity as a blues detective, a hybrid investigator figure that situates himself on the edge between the white and the black world. In this case, due to his

contribution of solving several crimes, Easy achieves in 1965 a detective license from the LAPD. At this moment, symbolically, Easy no longer feels the need to continue working for the Board of Education and quits. In *Cinnamon Kiss*, the latest book of the series to date, Easy's identity becomes a matter of choice[1]. Easy's sense of self is fully satisfied and rather inflated with his new official acknowledgment. At least on a personal level, his goal of reaching respect and recognition is fulfilled. He particularly values that now he is considered a *professional* detective and his experience and powers of intellect have been accredited.

Throughout these novels Easy manages to be his own man in the path he creates for himself and also to establish a profile as an amateur intellectual. The term "intellectual" as amateur is here used to describe "an individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public" (Said 11).This definition is borrowed from Edward Said's work *The Representation of the Intellectual* in which he also indicates how the intellectual's role "has an edge to it, and cannot be played without a sense of someone whose place it is publicly to raise questions and to confront orthodoxy and dogma" (11). This person is characterized by a "desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love and unquenchable interest in the larger picture [and] in making connections across lines and barriers" (76). He represents people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug; and he does so on the basis of universal principles such as freedom and justice (11). Although Easy might not totally become an open spokesperson for the masses, he often does stand up for his friends and other members of the black community. Furthermore, he also maintains a critical voice through his writing and denounces the racism and discrimination African-Americans have been subject to throughout history. Always providing a critical perspective, Easy positions himself on the border between his professional and his private life, between the black and white communities, between his image as a family man and his image as a detective,

[1] The word "choice" as used in this context refers to Easy's decision as an option available to him, as his choices are always played out against the backdrop of environment and history.

and finally, on the wavering line between the world of crime and the world of justice. As *Cinnamon Kiss* closes he is fully devoted to his new role as a recognized and certified private eye who is paid for using his knowledge and detective skills.

Simultaneously, Easy's life is continuously influenced by the historical context in which every novel in the series is set up. In this case he is affected by the events that take place in the United States from the end of 1963 until 1966, which is the time setting of these five novels. While the 1950s had been a decade marked by historic progress in the campaign for racial justice, the struggle to build a society free of persecutions and discrimination against blacks was far from finished and it would carry on into the 1960s. Thanks to the emergence and the influence of prominent leaders such as President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the African Americans' demands for equality and change came to be recognized as the nation's pre-eminent challenge (Rosenberg 212). According to historian Jonathan Rosenberg, "how the United States could expend blood and treasure to defend democracy abroad while it was unwilling to establish a just society at home would again challenge the nation to reflect not merely on its international mission, but also on its domestic purpose" (185).

In April 1963 the Albany Movement, along with the participation of Martin Luther King Jr., organized a series of nonviolent methods of confrontation, including sit-ins and kneel-ins at local churches, in order to protest the segregation of Birmingham's downtown merchants. The city, however, obtained an injunction barring all peaceful demonstrations and brutally arrested the supporters. These incidents sparked a lot of controversy and in June 1963, President Kennedy said in one of his speeches addressed to his countrymen: "We preach freedom around the world, and we mean it. And we cherish our freedom here at home. But are we to say to the world—and much more importantly, to each other—that this is the land of the free, except for Negroes…? Now the time has come for this nation to fulfill its promise" (quoted in Rosenberg 216).

Along the same note, a few weeks later, Martin Luther King Jr. when addressing a crowd of two thousand people, observed: "The United States is

concerned about its image. […] People would not respect [this nation] if it continues to deprive men and women of the basic rights of life because of the color of their skin" (quoted in Rosenberg 216). Easy Rawlins's development as an African American is an example of a black man fighting for those rights mentioned by the civil rights leader. Like King, Easy in these novels is also courageous. According to Na'im Akbar, "the image, the idea, the example that Martin Luther King Jr. brought to [black people] was the power of courage" (67). He believed in what he was doing. Certainly, that was one of the major characteristics that distinguished the black leader, and this is also the power that Easy brings to other members of the African American community.

Furthermore, these novels echo how African Americans' hope for social change was disrupted when Kennedy was killed. Mosley emphasizes the impact of this fatality in the series by placing the putative death of Easy's best friend, Mouse, on November 22, 1963, just a few hours after president John F. Kennedy's assassination. As the critic Charles E. Wilson, Jr. indicates:

> Easy's world will never be the same. Likewise, the president's murder changed America forever. While the Kennedy reign was described as a time of hope, innocence, and romance (with its Camelot identity), its unexpected end left an irreplaceable void. Though the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 will follow, the remainder of the decade will witness major unrest. Easy's Watts neighborhood will erupt into a veritable inferno by mid-decade. (117)

Just as Kennedy was the person America looked to for the redefinition of the country, Mouse is for Easy a point of reference throughout his entire life. Both deaths disrupt him deeply on a personal level, but Kennedy's causes irreparable national damage. It brought desolation to the country and triggered even more despair among African Americans. Mosley presents in the background of these novels the tense atmosphere between blacks and whites in the American society of the 60s. By then, Malcolm X was proclaiming that a more militant approach could be used to gain civil rights. The Nation of Islam he initially embraced had been in existence in the era of Eisenhower, but its real inroads into Northern inner cities came in the 1960s when little if anything from the federal government was seen to be advancing the causes that African Americans were supporting (Rosenberg

212). Consequently, the seemingly more passive approach of the 1950s was gone. The northern city ghettos were now moving more and more towards militancy. At the same time, Dr. Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and his words and demands received even more international attention than before. When Lyndon Johnson—Vice President during Kennedy's term—suddenly found himself sworn in as President, he soon realized that a major civil rights act was needed to advance African Americans' position within United States' society. Johnson wanted to make some changes before potential civil unrest forced it through. To this aim, he used the shock of Kennedy's murder to push forward the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Eyerman 179). Ironically, however, many African Americans, reacted with discontent. There were riots in northeastern cities because from their point of view, the act did not go far enough. All forms of power, but especially political power, were still dominated by whites. Johnson's dismay at this lack of public support among the black community only intensified when the Watts riots took place in 1965.

Significantly, while Easy does not directly participate in the Los Angeles outburst, he is a close witness who has the wisdom and the experience to explain why the riots happened. As we will see, his behavior—and his lack of physical involvement specifically—responds to an attitude that appears among the amateur intellectual within minorities and subaltern groups, "making his or her representation in a very different, dramatically altered way" (Said 73). Cornel West considers that two characteristics that must distinguish the black intellectual are wise preservation and critical negation (1993: 67). Although Easy comprehends the masses' reaction and supports their demands, he opts not to fight the white power by mixing himself in with the crowds and becoming an anonymous subject. Instead, totally aware of the injustice of the legal system and the preferential treatment given to whites, he situates himself on the edge and presents himself as a rational thinker that knows what is licit and what is not. It is crucial to understand that this choice does not constitute an elitist attitude but a rationalist one. Easy tries to avoid a head-on clash with the white power structure because he knows that if that happened he could be then easily defeated. He believes that he can best serve his community by speaking out against society

when he has the chance, and by doing *favors* to his people in his work as a detective—protecting their interests and solving cases that the LAPD police do not care about. According to Edward Said, "the intellectual has to walk around, has to have the space in which to stand and talk back to authority" (121). Also, as Harold Cruse explains, it is wise for the black intellectual to stand aside and develop his double consciousness:

> The Negro intellectual must deal intimately with the white power structure and cultural apparatus, and the inner realities of the black world at one and the same time. But in order to function successfully in this role, he has to be acutely aware of the nature of the American social dynamic and how it monitors the ingredients of class stratifications in American society… Therefore the functional role of the Negro intellectual demands that he *cannot* be absolutely separated from either the black or white world. (Quoted in West 1993: 59)

Easy reflects with maturity on the whole situation and offer sensible explanations in his reasoning. Likewise, he also expresses his own feelings of anger as rationally as possible.

> I had resisted it all through the riots: the angry voice in my heart that urged me to go out and fight after all the hangings I had seen, after all of the times I had been called nigger and all of the doors that had been slammed in my face. I spent my whole early life at the back of buses and in the segregated balconies at theaters. I had been arrested for walking in the wrong part of town and threatened for looking a man in the eye. And when I went to war to fight for freedom, I found myself in a segregated army, treated with less respect than they treated German POWs. I had seen people who looked like me jeered on TV and in the movies. (*LS* 18)

What, then, is Easy's ideological position as a black man? What sort of black politics does he embrace? Easy is in favor of integration but not of assimilation. He does not want to lose his African American background and the cultural features that identify him and his community. He does not affirm black values over white ones but he does fight the white hegemony because it imposes white ideology, white law, and the white canon over black Americans. From Easy's perspective, integration must go both ways. Here, his attitude echoes Du Bois' philosophy: Easy wants to be both a Negro and an American. Whites need to open their minds and be more accepting of the presence of African Americans in the United States, their way of life, and their cultural idiosyncrasies. On the other

hand, African Americans need to keep trying to find a place in the American society. As Mosley himself highlights in his essay "Giving Back," survival can be in their own hands (1999: 39). This does not mean they have to accept subjugation. On the contrary, they must claim recognition and respect, equal opportunities, and equal rights. How can they do this? What Easy does is to turn away from white dependence and turn to black independence. He is not a revolutionary man but rather a reformist. He believes in self-respect, self-knowledge and self-definition in order to improve one's conditions, and that is exactly what he tries to achieve by aiming to redefine himself in this group of novels. In the same way, Easy's experience and knowledge of the system makes him cautious and reluctant to believe in revolution. He is a survivor himself. He has seen the worst of both the black world and the white world. Hence, although he supports the emancipation of the black community and sympathizes with the black nationalists' ideas, he is too skeptical to believe in their open fight against the system. Mosley asserts: "Maybe survival isn't our only goal anymore. Maybe we can aim at success. […] But if we are to aspire to success in current-day America we must, to some degree, play by the rules of the house" (1999: 44). Finally, it is noteworthy that Easy does not express himself explicitly in terms of politics. He is unclear and often uses metaphors that do not totally clarify where he stands and what political party with which he identifies himself. In this way, and as already mentioned in Chapter 1 when examining Marilyn C. Wesley's work, Mosley does not aim to give precise solutions to the racial issues that the Rawlins series raise. His goal instead is just to portray the complex power relations between whites and blacks in the American society where Easy lives (Wesley 114).

Easy's subjectivity evolves according to his experiences that reveal his condition as an African American marginalized man and the relationship that exists between the canonical figure of the "self" and the "other" (whites and blacks respectively). These relationships, according to Amal Treacher, "are made within and through profoundly unequal relations, for the white person is the subject, while the person of color is neither subject or object" (50). Easy's attempt to obtain new recognition, respect, and power, and to improve his social status,

reflect his need to overcome the condition of inferiority that white ideology, as Du Bois condemns, has inflicted upon him for being a black man. Furthermore, based on Homi Bhabha's notion of "mimicry," Easy can also be seen as an example of the tendency of the colonized to mimic their colonizers in order to obtain the same rights and privileges they have. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, "represents an *ironic* compromise" (1989: 25). Mimicry repeats rather than re-presents… (author's emphasis), and in that very act of repeating, originality is lost, and centrality de-centred. He considers mimicry as being "the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which "appropriates" the Other as it visualizes power. Mimicry is also the sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an immanent threat to both 'normalized' knowledges and disciplinary powers" (1989: 25).

After more than fifteen years living in Los Angeles, Easy has gained wide knowledge of white society, the white man's system of values and his way of thinking. As Ed Christian puts it, paraphrasing Bhabha, "as both the colonizer and the colonized learn from each other, they become more like each other, whether they want to or not, whether they realize it or not, and the result is the strengthening of both peoples, even though the process may have led to suffering, to the violent wresting of culture away from its owners and the enforced replacement by another one" (13). Easy's awareness of the American mainstream way of life prompts him to aim for the same standards of living that society propagates. On the one hand, he desires to reach middle class status: having his own house, a stable job, a family and enough money to live by comfortably. On the other hand, it also means not being discriminated against or treated as second-class citizen for being black. It is not that he denies his identity as a black man, just that he claims his civil rights as an American. As Bhabha would say, Easy manifests therefore the inevitable hybridity that results as the colonizer and the colonized meet.

Easy's self-actualization and the continuous development of his consciousness and identity constitute the major focus of study in this chapter.

Concerned about what others, not only his kids, but also his friends, his neighbors, other members of the black community, and even the people he randomly meets, think of him, Easy firmly attempts throughout these novels to develop a new profile in which he can always exercise his agency and prove his cleverness. Throughout the following pages I aim to examine the changes that take place in his life and how these reflect the person he is as a black man, as a father and as a detective. In *A Little Yellow Dog*, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, *Six Easy Pieces*, *Little Scarlet* and *Cinnamon Kiss*, Easy creates a unique space in which he can combine his steady job at the school, the welfare of his family and his investigations. This space constitutes an overlap of identities that symbolizes his actual position on the edge between his different profiles in society. This causes in turn the origin of a distinctive subjectivity. According to Homi Bhabha's "'in-between spaces' provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood […] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (2005: 2). In this respect, one term that Bhabha uses to refer to such a space is "liminality," the condition of being within a place made by the meeting of two or more borders. Bhabha compares this "liminal-space" with a stairwell, a pathway in-between the designations of identity:

> The stairwell […] becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy. (2005:5)

Like in the previous novels, Easy's overlap of identities defines him: "I stood at the end of the field looking down over the dark trees and shrubs that gathered on the edges of L.A. I used to live on the edge. I used to move in darkness" (*YD* 184). However, an important difference from before is that this time he is more conscious of the space he occupies. As already mentioned, in this new period of his life Easy is more inclined to display his agency through the decisions he makes. Likewise, at this point, he also negotiates his different identities to take advantage of the situation. For this reason, in spite of his initial unwillingness to

carry out his job as a detective again, Easy eventually returns to it and does so for his own benefit. He understands that he must intervene in some cases: first, for his own good when the crimes affect him or his people in one way or another, and second, to exercise some control in the chaotic and vicious system created by white society.

Easy invents then a liminal space for himself that, according to Christian, is the space that characterizes the post-colonial detective. Easy embodies a meeting area of overlap and hybridity. For Christian, "in the detective the colonizer and the colonized collide, the oppressor and the resistor struggle for space" (11). As we will see, while Easy skillfully manages to resist the distinct authoritarian individuals he confronts, he also establishes himself as a superior figure in control of the different spaces he frequents: at the school as head custodian, at home as a family man and in the streets as a detective. Certainly, it is in the first two cases that he obtains social recognition and self-assurance, but it is as a detective that he brings up his own justice and defeats others more clearly. He must do so in order to do his work or even just to stay alive. Likewise, it is also as a detective that he can prove his reasoning and extraordinary deductive powers. In the following pages, I study the development of Easy's subjectivity according to these three different identities that he adopts and shifts as needed.

5. 1. Easy Rawlins as head custodian at Sojourner Truth Junior High School

> It was a chance at a new life and I was willing to gamble everything for that chance.
>
> Walter Mosley, *A Yellow Dog*

Easy's new job provides him with a new identity. As he begins to narrate this new period of his life he puts special emphasis on proving that his street life is over and that he is not just a regular worker but the "supervising senior head custodian" (*YD* 11). As will be shown, he struggles to exercise his agency; he has the need to gain power after being so long without it. In his new position Easy is given a series of functions which he gradually manages to expand to so he ends up being more than a mere custodian: "I was the highest-ranking black person on the campus of a school that was eighty percent black" (*CK* 22). As a black man, Easy attempts to gain respect but also to create his own space, one in which no one is above him. For this reason, his relationships with other authoritarian figures of power are regularly conflictive, especially if they are white, such as the school's principal Newgate (or later with different members of the police). Interestingly, while he is just one more black person according to white mainstream social values, he manages to be a respected figure at the school, an emblematic place that represents the government's investment in the future. Easy's job as head custodian symbolizes the position of a caretaker watching over the students and caring for the education system. In these novels, Easy demonstrates his agency by developing a new identity that brings him to come to terms with his own self and the social recognition he craves.

In this section, I will first analyze Easy's new start and how he acquires this new identity, with his goal of earning respect always in mind. Secondly, I will look at the parallels between Easy's refusal to subjugate to principal Newgate and the black national movements that promoted subversion against white domination.

Finally, I will point out Mosley's portrayal of Easy's success as a custodian, obtaining in the end the recognition he so desired.

As *A Little Yellow Dog* opens, the first idea that Easy as narrator wants to make clear is that there has been a radical change in his lifestyle: "Images of bodies I'd stumbled upon in my street life came back to me. But I dismissed them. I was a workingman, versed in floor waxes and bleach—not blood. The only weapon I carried was a pocket knife, and it only pierced flesh when I cut the corns from my baby toe" (*YD* 11). In just the first ten pages of this novel, the references to his new life are already numerous. While each of the previous books started with a self-introduction in which Easy explained the reasons why he was working as a detective and what traits made him a good one, in this case he starts by establishing himself as a new type of man. He is especially interested in contrasting his past and his present: "I'd been on good behavior for more than two years. I was out of the streets and had my job with the Los Angeles Board of Education. I took care of my kids, cashed my paychecks, stayed away from liquor" (15). Not only does Easy begin by highlighting the time he has been committed to his new life but also by rejecting his former way of living. He even sounds remorseful:

> I had spent most of my adult years of hanging on by a shoestring among gangsters and gamblers, prostitutes and killers. But I never liked it. I always wanted a well-ordered working life. The Board of Education didn't pay much in the way of salary but my kids had medical insurance and I was living a life that I could be proud of. (*YD* 20)

What Easy wants is to lead a more "transparent" life, one in which he does not have to hide what he does and one that is also more befitting of his role as a father. In fact, in these novels, he is more aware than ever of his responsibility for the economic, moral and intellectual wellbeing of his two adopted children. Easy's following comment about her daughter's comfort supports this idea: "She needed every day to be the same as the day before and needed something to say when her friends and teachers asked what her daddy did for a living" (*BBBB* 47). This way of thinking corroborates him as a family man but also reveals one other significant reason why he wants a change in his life: he needs a job that brings

him some social approval. Easy recognizes the fact that he could not have taken just any job. As he explains:

> I could have gotten a job as a dishwasher or stone buster, I could have become a regular janitor for the city or state. But I was like Sallie when it came to the disrespect shown to blacks by white men. I needed a job with responsibility and, at least, some pride. (*YD* 93)

Sallie Monroe is a black gangster that controls part of the crime underworld in L.A. and Easy has to negotiate with him on different occasions in *A Little Yellow Dog*. While they dislike each other, they share solidarity in their contempt for white people and the same need to wield some type of power over others. Easy makes clear how he could only settle for a job that meets his requirements of not being just a regular employee. In this case, he is the senior head custodian in charge of a team of twelve day-janitors and a night crew of five. He is always addressed as "mister" and is highly regarded and respected by almost everyone, including other custodians, the teachers and even the students.

In Homi Bhabha's terms, Easy's new position can be seen as the completion of his strategy by which his demand of a new powerful identification is fulfilled. "The question of identification," Bhabha explains, "is always the production of an image of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (65). Easy's self-image is one of somebody as competent as any other white man (if not more). As an African American man dominated by white stereotypes of blacks that render him unqualified and incompetent, he has the need to prove his skills and proficiency. That is why we frequently find him commenting on the different types of work he can do and the power he holds: "Everybody set out on their daily tasks and the special jobs I gave" (*YD* 20). The following examples reiterate Easy's insistence in reaffirming his agency through his talent and his new position above. In fact, since they are taken from different novels, they indicate how Mosley highlights these points in his protagonist over and over throughout the series. Easy enjoys being in charge and he prides himself on the job he performs. As the series progresses, his confidence in his position as a custodian grows stronger and his control not only transcends among his staff but also through the rest of the school:

> I was a black man in charge at a black school. No boy student was big enough to challenge me and the parents trusted me more than they did the white teachers. I was well read too. I'd perused every textbook in the school and often found myself instructing the kids on how to do their homework and how to use the library. (*SEP* 86)

Easy presents himself as a knowledgeable man whose influence goes beyond his duties. This idea is emphasized again two years later in 1966 at the beginning of *Cinnamon Kiss*:

> I had over a dozen people who reported directly to me and I was also the manager of all the plumbers, painters, carpenters, electricians, locksmiths, and glaziers who came to service our plant. […] I had read the study plans for almost every class and often played tutor to the boys and girls who would come to me before they' d dream of asking their white teachers for help. If a big boy decided to see if he could intimidate a small woman teacher I dragged him down to the *main* office, where the custodians congregated, and let him know, in no uncertain terms, what would happen to him if I were to lose my temper. (*CK* 22-23)

He highlights the numerous and uncommon tasks he performs as head custodian. Besides, it is noticeable that he is well acquainted with the academic curriculum. Apart from helping teachers and students, Easy pursues appreciation and credit, as he does when the new principal, Ada Master, replaces Newgate:

> 'You know the faculty and the students talk a lot about you.' 'They do?'
>
> 'Yes. It seems that they've come to rely on you for many problems that have nothing to do with the maintenance of the plant. Many of the women teachers, some men too, say that they depend on you for discipline when some of the more aggressive students have problems.' (*SEP* 85)

All these circumstances place Easy in a position even above white teachers when dealing with black students and their families: "Often, when parents were having trouble with their kids or the school, I was the first one they went to. Because I came from the South I could translate the rules and expectations of the institution that many southern Negroes just didn't understand" (*CK* 23)

In his role as a "translator" Easy also acts as a mediator. His many years living in the city, allows him to translate to the new African American arrivals the white urban dialect and the white system. This indicates how well acquainted he is with both the white and the black community and their respective customs. He

occupies a hybrid place "in-between" cultures that is the result of his double-consciousness. Furthermore, we can also observe that through his words (in this case, his writing), Easy embellishes the role he carries out. He appears as the trickster who has the ability to play with language, tell stories, and even turns his blackness into an advantage.

On the other hand, we also see how his need for self-worth results in his radical refusal to bow down to whites. His attitude reflects his desire to be perceived as a competent and talented human being, not just an inferior black person as most white people would expect him to see himself. For this reason, Easy's relationship with any white figure of authority that does not show him respect becomes consistently conflictive. Walter Mosley portrays the tensions that take place between Easy and Hiram Newgate, the white principal at the school when he first got the job, during his tenure as head custodian. Their antagonism and friction are manifest at all levels. Any little thing becomes a cause of argument, from the clothes Easy wears to the execution of his duties. As Easy comments:

> [Newgate] knew his clothes. I did too. Ever since I wangled my job at the Board of Ed I decided that I was going to dress like a supervisor. I'd had enough years of shabby jeans and work shirts. That day I was wearing a buff, tending toward brown, jacket that had trails of slender green and red threads wending through it. My fine cotton shirt was open at the neck. The wool of my pants was deep brown.
>
> 'Aren't you afraid to get those nice clothes dirty if you ever have to do some real work?' Newgate asked.
>
> 'You said you wanted to see me?' I replied
>
> Newgate had a smile that made you want to slap him. Haughty and disdainful, the principal hated me because I wouldn't bow down to his position. (*YD* 23)

Easy's rejects the idea that he must subjugate to the principal's higher rank, which represents his refusal to occupy the place of the "other" in the dichotomy self/other, white/black, that the principal urges. By performing an outstanding daily job and being on top of his responsibilities, Easy feels that he can maintain a defiant approach. He even reminds the principal that he is not to tell him which his obligations are. Newgate is not his boss and he did not hire him; the Board of Education did (*YD* 25). While Newgate is in charge of the academic part of the

school, Easy is in charge of keeping it clean. The result of this tension between the two is not the depowering of one or the other, but a decentering or a sharing of power. While Newgate symbolizes the traditional image of white authority, Easy symbolizes challenge and social change. "I like dressing up because of my background, which was poor and secondhand. But it also gave me a secret pleasure to see Newgate look me up and down, comparing my clothes to his" (*SEP* 6). Easy even repeatedly dares to address the principal by his first name:

> 'Rawlins, I want to talk to you,' […]
>
> 'What about, Hiram?'
>
> Principal Hiram Newgate didn't like being addressed as mister. He certainly didn't like being called by his first name. The tall and gaunt man strode the distance between us looking as if he were ready to throw down and fight. I smiled and let my eyebrows rise in innocent anticipation. (Bad 150-151)

Calling him "Hiram" is not only a sign of disrespect but is also a strategy for Easy to let Newgate visualize that he also holds some power and deserves some consideration. According to Ed Christian, "The better the colonized understand the colonizers—the better they understand the weaknesses of the colonizers—the closer their mimicry grows at times to mockery and disdain" (12). Easy is conscious of how much Newgate dislikes being addressed in this way and that is the reason why he does it: "Newgate's lip curled into a snarl at my disrespectful tone" (*SEP* 6). In Easy's mind the master-slave relationship is continuously present, which becomes evident when he explains: "Black men in America have always worked for white taskmasters. It had only been in the past few years that I could talk back without fear of losing my job, or maybe even a tooth or two" (*BBBB*153).

Social changes are taking place, which are reflected by Easy's subjectivity. By 1964, African Americans are feverishly claiming their rights and demanding the end of segregation. Walter Mosley portrays in *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* the appearance of radical urban groups of young African Americans whose ideas resemble in many ways the Black Panthers and Malcom X's political ideology at the time. When looking for Brawly Brown, the stepson of his friend John, Easy needs to investigate one of these groups in which Brawly is involved. They call

themselves "Urban Revolutionaries or First Men." Easy gets one of their pamphlets and reads it:

> The Urban Revolutionary Party was a cultural group, it said, that sought the restitution and recognition of the builders of our world—African men and women. They didn't believe in *slave laws*, that is to say, any laws imposed on black men by whites, just as they didn't accept forced military service or white political leadership. They rejected the white man's notion of history, even the history of Europe. But mostly they seemed perturbed about taxes as they applied to social needs and services; *the distribution of wealth*, the blurred purple words explained, *as it applies to our labor, and the dreams that we hardly dare to imagine, is woefully inadequate*. (*BBBB* 30)

As an ideological framework, black nationalism was oriented toward articulating aspirations and organizing the resources of the black community. According to George Ducas, black nationalism was born of "a loss of hope among Negroes of ever achieving full participation in American democracy. It is not surprising that this sentiment [was] most apparent whenever the burden of systematic exclusion from the benefits provided by an open community [was] most unbearable" (299). There were different groups that were organized around various types of nationalism. Territorial Black Nationalism, which seeks a separate state either in Africa or elsewhere, is not to be confused with Black Nationalism in a broader sense. This broader nationalism, at least among the urban black population, is confined to the 20th century. Ideologically, it supports many of the same doctrines as before; but it does not insist on a separate black state. Because of this similarity, the transition from one to the other is not totally surprising. The career of Malcom X, for example, embraced both forms.

In either case, as Ducas highlights, Black Nationalism "has always been accompanied by a heightened race awareness and an extreme sensitivity to the oppression, affronts, and disparagement that are the almost daily emotional fare of the masses of Negroes" (300). Edridge Cleaver, a member of the Black Panthers, spoke the following words at the founding convention of the California Peace and Freedom Party in 1968: "We start with the basic definition: that black people in America are a colonized people in every sense of the term and that white America is an organized imperialist force holding black people in colonial bondage. [We need] a revolution in the white mother country and national liberation for the

black colony" (quoted in Eyerman 182). In his speech Cleaver links post-colonial theory to the basis of Black Nationalism. As Ron Eyerman indicates: "African national liberation struggle provided American blacks with new categories within which to interpret their own situation, as they transformed the view of Africa itself" (182). At this point, there is a significant shift from an emphasis on the economic to the psychological effects of slavery. This idea also becomes clear in Malcom X's approach. Prior to his assassination in February, 1965, he completed a "Basic Unity Program" in which he stated: We, Afro-Americans—enslaved, oppressed and denied by a society that proclaims itself the citadel of democracy, are determined to rediscover our history, promote the talents that are suppressed by our racist enslavers, renew the culture that was crushed by a slave government and thereby—to again become a free people (quoted in Eyerman 188). Eyerman points out, "[h]ere slavery is not something relegated to the past, it is forever present. [It is] a form of slavery of the mind which denies to the enslaved the possibility to develop their own 'talents'" (quoted in Eyerman 188).

Black Nationalist movements such as the Black Panthers and their cry for "Black Power," or the Nation of Islam—also known as Black Muslims—, have been criticized by blacks and whites for preaching a doctrine of hate, a kind of racism in reverse that emphasizes the potential hostility of the common enemy—the white man—in order to promote the unity of blacks. In this respect, as Eyerman points out, the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) "condemned 'Black Power' as a 'menace to peace and prosperity… no negro who is fighting for civil rights can support black power, which is opposed to civil rights and integration'" (198). Martin Luther King was more diplomatic in his criticism. He believed that the term "Black Power" was "unfortunate because it tends to give the impression of Black Nationalism. […] Black supremacy would be as evil as white supremacy (quoted in Ducas 301). On the other hand, the American government saw them as extremely dangerous. The head of the FBI, Edgar J Hoover, called the Black Panthers "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country" (quoted in Eyerman 199).

While not a Black Nationalist, Easy's personal subversion and struggle for equality disclose an enduring aspect of the post-colonial relations that affect the

current society in which he lives. Not only does he want to manifest the talents he already knows he has but also to avoid having to subjugate to anyone for being black. For the scholar Amal Treacher, "there is the issue of subjugation for those who have been colonized and how the fantasies of inferiority and subordination have been internalized and have become a part of the self" (47). This is made evident in Easy's subsequent comment: "Some men I'd known had died challenging their superiors. So Newgate's aggravation was a kind of balm. It soothed my symptoms, but the disease was still there" (*BBBB* 153). The disease was somehow engraved in Easy's black mind but it is also omnipresent in the hegemonic white mentality. According to Stokely Carmichael:

> It is very ironic how aware whites in this country can champion anticolonialism in other countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, but when black people move toward similar goals of self-determination in this country they are viewed as racists anti white… it can be said that this attitude derives from the overall point of view of the white psyche as it concerns the black people. This attitude stems from the slave revolts when every white man was a potential deputy or sheriff or guardian of the state. Because when black people got together among themselves to work out their problems, it became a threat to white people, because such meetings were potential slave revolts… (Quoted in Eyerman 183)

Even though Easy is willing to redefine himself and live as a respectable head custodian in the space he has created for himself, he realizes that white society will not entirely let him. When one morning a corpse is found in the school garden, he is the first suspect. Because of his skin color and his notorious past among gangsters and thieves, Easy soon finds himself connected to this murder and two others that immediately follow. As always happens, if he does not help solve the crimes, he may be accused of them himself.

Under these circumstances, the position of responsibility he has as head custodian does not help him as much as he would like. In fact, he shows his frustration when Sergeant Sanchez is investigating the case and Bertrand Stowe,[2] the area supervisor in the school district, does not give the police the image of Easy that he has gradually built and expects his friends to have: "He didn't see

[2] Stowe is friends with Easy because of a past exchange of favors. Actually, it was he who hired Easy as head custodian via unorthodox means after Easy solved the gangster Sallie Monroe' s blackmailing of Stowe.

anything wrong in believing a stranger in uniform over a friend" (*YD* 97). Easy expresses his distress:

> 'You could have said that you knew me, that I wasn't the kinda of man who went around killin' folks. You could have said that I was an excellent worker who came in on time every day and who bent over backwards to make sure that my plant worked smoothly for the kids and teachers. You could have said that I got a hard principal but that, to your knowledge, I never lost my temper or spoke a word in anger.' I sat up straight in my chair. 'You could have said I was a good friend to you who never asked you for nuthin' without givin' you something in return. It wouldn't have cost you a dime to tell that man that you backed me up. Not a goddam dime.' (*YD* 97)

Here Mosley brings up the contrast between what the police probably think of Easy and his own self-image. Easy may have left the streets but he is still a black man and that makes whites suspicious of him: because his identity is questioned and put on the spot, he feels forced to intervene in the case in order to save his job and his reputation.

Finally, however, when Easy's experience as a custodian comes to an end in 1966, we see that he has achieved the recognition and the image of himself he had aimed to build. His staff, the children and the new white principal, Mrs. Masters, praise him and see him as much more than a black custodian. Ace, a white man working for him, would defend him in front of the police and would take off his baseball cap in deference every time he talked to him: "I told them that I didn't know a thing except that you were the best boss I ever had" (*YD* 231). Similarly, the school kids would admire him and see him as a protector:

> I could have asked him why he came to me, but I knew the answer. I was the only black person on the campus who had any authority. Most of the children came to me with their problems because bill collectors, policemen, and angry store owners were the only white people in their daily lives. (*SEP* 12)

Another student would draw a full body portrait of him in art class: "[I]t had my spirit and my style. She caught the pride in my eye from being able to help a young boy make it on his way. It was the Easy Rawlins they knew at Sojourner Truth" (*SEP* 185). Here it is clearly emphasized how he feels successful with the new image he has created at the school. Easy is definitely highly regarded and in control of this new terrain he occupies, so much so that we see how it is also him

who Mrs. Masters listens to when trying to comprehend why the riots took place and damaged the school so severely.

> 'Why would people want to burn and destroy their own community?'
>
> She began to tremble and cry.
>
> I folded the small white woman in my arms.
>
> 'It's okay,' I crooned as if talking to a child' […] 'This is a tough place, Ada. You got working men and women all fenced in together, brooding about what they see and what they can't have. Almost every one of them works for a white man. Every child is brought up thinking that only white people make things, rule countries, have history. They all come from the South. They all come from racism so bad that they don't even know what it's like to walk around with your head held high. They get nervous when the police drive by. […] 'Almost every black man, woman, and child you meet feels that anger. But they never let on, so you've never known. This riot was sayin' it out loud for the first time. That's all. Now it's said and nothing will ever be the same. That's good for us, no matter what we lost. And it could be good for white people too. But they have to understand just what happened here.' Ada Masters had a look of both awe and terror on her face. It was as if she were seeing me for the first time. (*LS* 78)

It is through Easy that Mrs. Masters reaches a new understanding not only of the riots but also of what Easy feels like being an African American. Easy's explanation not only describes acutely his state of mind and his long struggle for power but also reflects his figure as the amateur intellectual who can comprehend and put in plain words a perplexing matter.

In conclusion, Easy's new role as a custodian marks the beginning of a new period in his life. He consciously adopts a new identity through which he can reposition himself and achieve the recognition that, as a black man, he did not have before. The fact that this transformation takes place in a school is symbolic since it is in this space where children are first taught about historical and social issues. Easy instructs both students and co-workers, and have an effect on the grounding of principles such as respect and equality in society. This job makes him feel more confident and strengthen his demands and his self-esteem when dealing with the white world.

5. 2. Easy Rawlins as a family man

> It was one of the most perfect mornings in my life. I had a steady job, a nice house with a garden in the back yard, and a loving family.
>
> Walter Mosley, *Six Easy Pieces*

Easy's personal life represents the second central point in his attempt to redefine himself. While in Chapter 4 we saw how his expectations to achieve the American Dream were shattered as far as being a successful business man, on a familial level he does reach his goal of having his own household. In *A Little Yellow Dog*, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, *Six Easy Pieces*, *Little Scarlet* and *Cinnamon Kiss*, his family ties to Jesus and Feather, and later to Bonnie—his girlfriend, who lives with them all the way through this group of novels since they met at the end of 1963—reveal new significant aspects about his role as a family man. On the one hand, Easy's middle class values, his involvement in parenting, and his thoughts about remarrying signal a particular frame of mind according to which his notion of masculinity is constructed. On the other hand, his condition as a black man in a post-colonial society and his constant shifting of identities produce a different approach to his masculine role and differentiate him from the conventional father figure. The analysis of these two separate lines of characteristics constitutes my focus of study in this section.

In this new period of his life, Easy wants to do what is "right," and rightness for him, as Jerry H. Bryant indicates, is determined not by the code of the street, but to a great degree by what is highest in mainstream morality (Bryant 152). This is a key issue present throughout the series that reveals Easy's constant attempt to show his principles and break the stereotype of "Blacks as beasts" that white America has historically fostered (Hunter and Davis 1992). Following the social pattern to which he has been exposed for almost twenty years now, Easy aims for a middle-class status in which he can raise his family. According to Bryant:

> It is hard for decency to survive in the stony soil of Watts' streets. But Easy's cynism, that of a man who has seen the worst in human nature and extremes of racist violence, does not overwhelm his better instincts. Indeed, it is his cynicism that supports those instincts. Only as a bona fide member of the street community, as one utterly respected by the very worst of the Watts hard-men, as one who understands at the core of the mean streets down which he goes—only so can he make a credible choice for decency. And Mosley does make Easy's choice credible. Easy has opted unabashedly and without apology for the very best of middle-class values. (151-152)

What are the consequences of this choice? Does an increase in class consciousness represent a decrease in race consciousness? It could be argued whether Easy perceives that the life chances of blacks have more to do with their economic class position than with their skin color. At any rate, although he adopts the appropriate behavior and lifestyle of a middle class man, his attitudinal expressions of racial identity, pride, loyalty, culture and group membership remain the same. The basic assumption to understand in this case is that as Thomas Durant and Kathleen Sparrow maintain, "both race consciousness and class consciousness are two forms of group consciousness that result from social structured inequality" (334). Easy's reactions are always due to his experiences of inferiority in the American society. In this sense, Durant and Sparrow's study reveals that "lower-class Blacks express much more consciousness about the inequality gap between them and the middle class, especially in terms of distribution of wealth, power, and prestige" (349). Likewise, it should also be noted that the type and degree of race and class consciousness of members of a particular racial group may vary over time. Easy is not an exception to this rule.

After getting the job as a head custodian, Easy works hard to fulfill his family responsibilities. He provides a home for Jesus and Feather in his quest for a middle class status and the development of a male role that will bring him a satisfactory sense of worth. He seeks a life of order and security that would bring him social stability. In this respect, in the mid 1960s one of the most outstanding determinants of middle class status in the United States was occupation and property ownership, especially the family home (Smith 252). Among blacks, moreover, education and family stability were key factors in reaching a middle class position (Smith 252). Because of racial discrimination, segregation, and the

fact that prior to the 1960s most blacks lived in the rural South, African Americans experienced a limited opportunity within the social structure. As Robert Harris Jr. explains:

> The black middle class, as defined by education, occupation, and income, is primarily a post-1960s development. […] In 1950, a sizable portion of African Americans still picked cotton for a living, as 90 percent of the South's cotton was harvested by hand. […] The small number of black professionals was largely confined to serving the black population. They were primarily small businessmen, ministers, teachers, and undertakers. African Americans found minuscule white-collar opportunities in either the public or private sectors. (40)

Meaningfully, although in the 1960s the black population became largely urban, still only 20 percent of African Americans finished high school, compared with 43 percent of the white population (Harris 40). In *A Little Yellow Dog* it is 1963 and Easy makes his priorities clear. He comments: "I was trying to live the quiet life with my kids, away from the people and problems that I knew during my earlier years in L.A." (*YD* 44). The code that Easy tries to live by derives from his family values and his goal to reach a middle class position. As Charles U. Smith, points out: "[T]he United States is no exception to the general rule throughout the world that people have different privileges, rewards, attitudes, and values because of the status that they occupy in the system of stratification" (251). Easy grew up having no privileges, no rewards, and no status. Therefore, he now endeavors to adopt those values for himself and his family that represent significant factors in determining their life chances and opportunities.

At the same time, Easy's love for his two adopted kids and the responsibility he feels for them push him as well in his desire to relocate himself. He wants his children to have a positive image of him: "I wondered about what my own children saw when they looked at me" (*SEP* 263). That is why he also makes an effort to consolidate his position at the school: "The classified building supervisor's exam […] was the next step up the ladder for me. Studying made me feel as though I still had a foot in the workaday world that Feather needed me to be part of" (*BBBB* 46). Furthermore, Easy demonstrates his deep awareness about how much influence he can have in his kids' upbringing: "A man raising children has to set an example. […] Our children, especially our sons look at us to tell what

it is they should be doing with their own lives. That's human nature" (*SEP* 263). His way of thinking here responds to his patriarchal mind-set and to his overall concept of manhood, one that he has acquired from his own father. According to Clyde Franklin (1987), "African American men are expected to conform to dominant gender role expectations (e.g. successful, competitive, and aggressive) as well as to meet culturally specific requirements of the Afro-American community that may often conflict (e.g., cooperation, promotion of group, and survival of group)" (quoted in Hunter and Davis 465).

In spite of the negative social construction of black manhood in mainstream American culture and the context of oppression, Andrea Hunter and James Davis argue that "African American men have been instrumental in the continuation of their communities and families, suggesting that there is cultural tradition within which Black men have forged a meaningful and viable identity for themselves" (465). As Easy recalls in *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, it was his father, when he was only eight years old, who told him what defines and set a "real man" apart from others:

> '…a real man will know that he has to overcome anything that gets in the way of him caring for his family. […] He will make sure he's a better man with one arm than other men are with two. And he'll make it so, no matter how hard he has to try. A real man can be beat only if you kill him. And with his dyin' breath he will try to overcome Death itself.' (*BBBB* 161)

Easy remembers these words and applies them to his male role as a family head. Being a man for him implies rising above all the difficulties that life brings him but most importantly, it implies taking good care of Jesus and Feather. As Hunter and Davis point out: "Research examining social roles indicates that Afro-American men endorse the importance of economic provider roles and family responsibility and involvement" (468). Actually, not only do we see how Easy is constantly concerned about their children welfare but also that he is exceptionally affectionate with them and openly expresses his feelings.

These novels include numerous family scenes that portray Easy's previously unknown and loving paternal side with each one of his children:

> I was used to my kiss good night and [Jesus] was used to giving it to me.
>
> 'You better go to bed, Juice.'
>
> He nodded and then reached over to shake Feather but I said, 'Leave her. I'll get her to bed.'
>
> He came over to hug me and I kissed him on the top of his head. Then he stumbled down to the hallway toward his bed. (*YD* 117)

Likewise, a similar moment is repeated months later in the next novel, giving a sensation of continuity in their dynamics and stability as a family unit:

> Feather put her soft arms around my neck and laid her head just below my chin. She always fell asleep in my arms at night when I came home late. She would try her best to stay awake until I got there, but the moment I picked her up she was on her way to dreamland.
>
> I left Jesus on the couch. It was hard to wake him up, and it had been years since I could carry him to bed. After all, he was almost seventeen years old. (*BBBB* 59)

Easy's comments and emotional attachment to Jesus and Feather along these lines make him an unusual single father in a time when it was also common to find a pattern in which "the patriarchal family system had been replaced by the 'matriarchate,'" especially in the urban contexts where "the structure and organization of many poor Afro-American families led to juvenile, illegitimacy, increasing numbers of female-headed households, and a litany of other social ills" (Hunter and Davis 466).

Easy thus creates a new type of black patriarchal family in which there is no mother. In this way, he becomes a heroic father figure. His case is unusual in a historical context when a significant number of black men, unable to find adequate employment, could not provide for their families—who could actually often survive better without them (Segal 155). As Lynne Segal comments, in the 1960s "black families were frequently held together by women (a tradition dating back to the time of slavery), with fathers either absent or exerting only a weakened paternal influence" (155). But Easy reverses the negative meaning attached to black fatherhood. His influence in Jesus and Feather's life more than praiseworthy, it is exceptional. Not only did he rescue them as baby children from

poverty and ill-treatment, but also adopted them and raise them as if they were his own kids. Easy becomes thus a single father who chooses parenthood as a way of making his life meaningful. In this sense, fatherhood turns crucial for Easy's development and redefinition. Being a father figure constitutes for him one way of proving his manhood and fulfilling his self-realization as a black man. He becomes a provider and a caretaker, and unlike other black fathers at the time, does not maintain control of his family through psychological, physical violence or exploitation of women as it often happened (Segal 157). In this regard, Easy's total identification as a family man reaches its highest point in *Cinnamon Kiss*. Here his sense of commitment and his deep feelings for his children are remarkably disclosed when Feather is seriously sick with a blood infection. In this circumstance, he will express his determination to do *anything* to obtain the thirty-five thousand dollars he needs to pay for the only possible treatment that can save her in a Bonatelle Clinic in Switzerland. He even considers breaking the law and accepting Mouse's offer to go to Texas to rob an armored car: "It was a perfect puzzle. Every piece fit. Mouse had all the bases covered, any question I had he had the answer. And why not? He was the perfect criminal" (*CK* 8). The whole situation is portrayed as a matter of life or death that rises above any other personal, social, or racial issue that Easy might have had before: "Right then I had problems that went far beyond me and my mortality" (*CK* 6). His desolation totally overwhelms him.

> I felt as if I had died and that the steps I was taking were the final unerring, unalterable footfalls toward hell. And even though I was a black man, in a country that seemed to be teetering on the edge of a race war, my color and race had nothing to do with my pain. (*CK* 10)

In this closing novel, Easy clearly puts his family's interest before his own. Saving Feather becomes his only goal. He feels defeated and expresses his intense anguish and frustration: "Nearly twenty years of trying to be an upright citizen making an honest wage and it all disappears because of a bucketful of bad blood" (*CK* 11). Easy's words reveal how in his mind all his arduous attempts to become someone and attain a better lifestyle are worthless if Feather dies. He is hopeless and skeptical: "I was afraid to hope. Every day I prayed for a miracle for Feather.

But I had lived a life where miracles never happened" (*CK* 19). In the end, the situation will finally be solved when Easy accepts a new case, this time as an *official* detective, and Feather is taken by Bonnie to the hospital in Europe for three months.

In this group of novels, the presence of Bonnie constitutes another significant influence in Easy's development. She represents Easy's final step to establish his patriarchal masculinity as a way of life and to find stability through his family. His attempt at marriage in 1956 did not work out when his first wife left him taking their only child with her. Seven years later, however, in 1963, his life takes a new turn when he meets Bonnie and she moves in with him. Easy's desire to build a new relationship reveals his hope to find meaning in life through true love and companionship. While this way of thinking displays once again a western traditional mentality, it also later shows Easy's most vulnerable and idealistic part:

> I was there because I wanted to believe in something—in Bonnie Shay. I wanted her to be what she said she was; a good woman with a strong mind who did what she knew was right. I couldn't live in the streets, and the workaday world wasn't enough—not without some kind of faith. (*YD* 246)

Bonnie's presence at home brings about new changes in Easy's way of looking at life, and most importantly, at himself. First, he realizes about how much he needed someone like her in his life:

> Sitting there in the chilly morning dew, I thought about how alone I had been for most of my life. Mouse had been my closest friend, but he was crazy. The kids and I had bond as deep as it gets, but they were still children with needs and desires that kept them from understanding the adult world.
>
> But Bonnie was my equal… (*BBBB* 222)

Second, his concept of the duties he has as a family head undergoes a change from before. He abandons his former idea of needing to hide information about himself or putting up a false image in front of his wife:

> No one had ever really been there for me before. I never talked to my first wife. Back then I thought that a man was supposed to be strong and silent; he was supposed to make her safe and warm while paying the bills and siring children.
>
> But Bonnie changed all that. (*BBBB* 60)

Thus, Easy's relationship with Bonnie not only reveals changes in some of his perspectives on his male role but also makes him feel satisfied with his whole life; another aspect which can be directly connected to his sense of manhood. As Hunter and Davis comment: "[A] man's pride is linked to his desire and capacity to better himself and his life" (472). Interestingly, as Easy reflects on it, not only do we observe that he compares himself with other black people and feels above them, but also that Bonnie contributes to his self-worth and sense of achievement,

> I knew how [other black men] felt because I had been one of them for more than four and a half decades. Maybe I had done a little more with my life. I didn't live in Watts anymore and I had regular job. My live-in girlfriend was a stewardess for Air France and my boy owned his own boat. I had been a major success in light of my upbringing… (*CK* 10)

Furthermore, Bonnie also takes Easy to explore some of his more deeper feelings: "I was talking from a place inside me that I didn't even know was there; saying words that had been worked out in a part of my mind that I was unaware of" (*SEP* 182). If his marriage to Regina had failed partly because he had withdrawn from her emotionally, now with Bonnie he feels ready to open his sentiments to her. In contrast, it is this love for her that also brings Easy to experience feelings of jealousy and inferiority. Significantly, he responds very negatively when she receives flowers at home from an African prince (from Senegal) that she has met on one of her trips working as a flight attendant for Air France. Here Easy feels his masculinity threatened. Having copied and adapted his sense of manhood from both his own father and the cultural hegemony, he feels his self-identity and his ideal home—part of his American Dream—undermined when he thinks that he has been betrayed. As one would expect, he reacts furiously, almost violently:

> I wanted to drag her out of the shower by her hair, naked and wet, into the living room. I wanted to make her tell me everything that I had imagined her and her royal boyfriend doing on a deserted beach eight thousand miles away. (*SEP* 121)

He talks to her with anger and hurts her feelings: "I saw in her face the pain that I felt. Deep. Grinding pain that only gets worse with time. And though it didn't make me feel good, it at least seemed to create some kind of balance. At least she wouldn't leave unscathed" (*SEP* 150).

In his personal pursuit to redefine himself, we see therefore how Easy loses his self-confidence when Bonnie spends five days in Madagascar with this other man, Jogaye Cham, a prince from Senegal who is described as a renowned figure among his people for his social projects and good intentions for Africa. To him, Cham sounds like a *better* man than him. He cannot stand the thought of Cham and Bonnie together:

> A thousand questions went through my mind. Did you kiss him? Did you hold hands in the sunset? Did you say that you loved him? But I knew I couldn't ask. Did he touch your breast? Did he breathe in your breath on a blanket near the water? I knew that if I asked one question that they would never stop coming. (*SEP* 150)

Easy compares himself with Bonnie's new friend. Although as we saw before his ability to have dominion in the workplace enables Easy to build an identity that will cause him to be comfortable with himself as a black man, he suddenly feels vulnerable and weak thinking that he is not good enough for Bonnie. We see that he changes his mind when thinking of her and the future: "Just four weeks before I would have spent my solitary time wondering if I should ask [her] to be my bride" (*SEP* 179). Now his dream is shattered. Moreover, this time he feels inferior when he links his condition as a man with his job status:

> [Jogaye Cham], a man who expected to be a king, who was working to liberate and empower a whole continent, wanted Bonnie by his side.
>
> How could I compete with that?
>
> How could she wake up next to me year after year, getting older while I made sure the toilets at Sojourner Truth Junior High School were disinfected? How could she be satisfied with a janitor when a man who wanted to change the world was calling her name? (*SEP* 198)

Easy is jealous thinking about Bonnie's possible feelings for Cham, but also for being unable to do what the African prince aims for: "liberate his people." Going back to Edward Said's definition of "intellectual," it is significant that Easy Rawlins and Jogaye Cham have similar profiles and similar goals. In his own way, Easy would like also to empower the black community in America. However, he does not have the power or the resources to accomplish this goal. The whole incident not only destabilizes Easy's thoughts and his relationship with

Bonnie during several months but actually brings it to their final separation by the end of *Cinnamon Kiss*:

> 'It's not either me or him,' I told the love of my life. 'It's either me or not me. That's what I've come to in this time you were gone. When we talked at the airport you should'a said right then that it was always me, would always be. I don't care if you slept with him or not, not really. But the truth is he got a footprint in your heart. That kinda mark don't wash out,' […] 'You can take your stuff whenever you want. I love you but I got to let you go. (*CK* 312)

Walter Mosley finishes the novel with the above lines. These certainly reopens the debate about whether the author feels indebted to follow the hardboiled detective formula by which the detective cannot be a married man, or on the other hand, he could just be thinking about the plot of his next novels and wants to leave Easy's development open to new women and new relationships. While the first option would respond to his interest in keeping his work within the canon established by the most prominent detective fiction writers, the second could be connected to a question of male identity development: Easy must continue searching for other ways of constructing his masculinity as a black man. In this sense, although, as we have seen, Easy's attempt to redefine himself in these novels is done according to different factors and he has always been loyal to Bonnie throughout the time they have been together, it is noteworthy that in *Cinnamon Kiss* when he feels down and disappointed—and realizes that he cannot trust her and their relationship is almost over—he has sex with two different women: Georgette, friends with Mouse; and Philomena Cargill, also known as Cinnamon, the young black girl who was to find as a part of his investigation.

In this regard, as Robert Staples indicates, "Black males have traditionally had a strong sexual orientation because the sexual conquest of women was considered a masculine trait. Since other symbols of masculinity have been denied them in the society, sexual prowess became a partial substitute for achievement in other areas" (81). Black males are both victims and participants in their own destruction (Hunter and Davis 468). African American masculinity has been affected first by the myth that white society created of black men as sexually uncontrolled beasts (Segal 150), and second by the collective black frustration and

anger over the denial of manhood and identity that lead some black men to a maladaptive model of manliness that is antithetical to the cultural imperatives.

Central to the first image is "the emphasis on the physical attributes of the black male, the limited capacity of mind, and the absence of soul that made one human" (Hunter and Davis 466). The black male was considered a menace to society. This way of thinking provided a rationalization for the enslavement of African people who needed the control and the paternal protection of whites. The Anglo fear was based on the alleged sexual prowess of the darker-skinned people: "the big-dicked destroyer not just of pure pristine white women but also of white men's sense of themselves" (Poulson-Bryant 7). For this reason, Poulson-Bryant explains, African American men were "strung up from trees; lynched to protect the demure pureness of white women; dissed to soothe the memory sin of slave-raping white masters; castrated to save the community from the sexual brutality black men trail behind them like a scent-the scent of the stereotypical boogeyman created by the fears of a nation" (7).

On the other hand, findings suggest that phallocentrism is another representation that black men have accepted from the dominant culture. Na'im Akbar in his work *Vision for Black Men* (1991) indicates that "the black male defines who he is by the power of his anatomical protrusion and then further defines the value of what he is by the volume, the depth, the length and the activity of that anatomical protrusion" (5). Some black men believe the size of their penises define who they are. Stronger adherence to male gender ideologies related to toughness and sexual prowess is influenced by black males perceived inability to fulfill their primary gender role as economic providers or have suffered a failure in their relationship (Oliver 1984: 199). "Examples of the behavioral manifestation of these images are reflected in the 'tough guy' and the "player of women" personas that Oliver argues emerged as acceptable alternatives to traditional definitions of manhood, particularly among low-income Afro-Americans" (Hunter and Davis 469). While Easy's economic problems are not an issue here, his self-esteem as a black male is noticeably low at this point. Thus, when his affairs with Georgette and Cinnamon take place, he makes comments about the two women that reveal how he considers these sexual encounters

valuable for his manliness and his self-importance. Above all, he boasts about how both women were fully satisfied:

> Georgette was wonderful and passionate but Cinnamon Cargill was the spice of sex with no impediments of love at all. Where Georgette kissed me and told me that she wanted to take me home forever, Cinnamon just sneered and used sex like a surgeon's knife. She never said one nice or kind thing, though physically she loved me like I was her only man. (*CK* 275)

Similarly, he also makes remarks about his sexual prowess upon spending twenty-four hours making love with the latter.

> Cinnamon and I had taken four showers between our fevered bouts of not-love. My sex ached in my pants. I thought about her repudiation of love and my surprising deep need for it. I wondered if my life would ever settle back into the bliss I'd known with Bonnie and the hope for happiness I had discovered in Cinnamon's arms. (*CK* 277)

Easy recognizes his need for love but at the same time hints at his new expectation of finding joy through new other ways.

Finally, on a different level, it is necessary to note that while Easy as a family man pursues the mainstream middle class expectations throughout these novels, the dominant white society that surrounded him considered blackness a handicap in recognizing any achievement of African Americans. This includes cases like him when all the conditions had been theoretically overcome and he is still struggling to obtain such a middle class status. The postcolonial circumstances produced an equation of black with inferiority (Gilroy) that triggered the systematic elaboration of racist discourses which influenced class relations and identities in the metropolis. Robert Morrell and Sandra Swart in their article "Postcolonial Perspectives on Masculinity" argue that to understand postcolonialism, "one must first recognize that race, gender, and class are not 'distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other;' rather, they come into existence in relation to each other, albeit in conflictual ways" (92). Along these same lines, Anne McClintock in her work *Imperial Leather* (1995) considers that these connections proved crucial to the development of Western modernity and the emergence of new definitions. She explains that

> Imperialism is not something that happened elsewhere,—a disagreeable fact of history external to Western identity. Rather, imperialism and the invention of race were fundamental aspects of Western, industrial modernity. The invention of race in the urban metropoles…became central not only to the self-definition of the middle class but also to the policing of the 'dangerous classes' : the working class, the Irish, Jews, prostitutes, feminists, gays and lesbians, criminals, the militant crowd and so on. At the same time, the cult of domesticity was not simply a trivial and fleeting irrelevance, belonging properly in the private, 'natural' realm of the family. Rather, I argue that the cult of domesticity was a crucial, if concealed, dimension of male as well as female identities—shifting and unstable as these were. (Quoted in Morrell and Swart 92)

Easy's condition as a black male in a post-colonial society takes him thus to develop a peculiar identity as a father and to create, as he calls it, a *middle class* "patchwork" family (*LS* 161) which is definitely not a regular one. By and large, while Easy still holds the power at home he does not wholly represent the traditional rigid gender roles of the past in which the male was an authoritarian figure. In this respect, two characteristics that define his actions as post-colonial are first, how he establishes his own ideas over top of those of the dominant group when bringing up his children; and second, how his identity as a father is also hybrid in the sense that it is fluid and shifts, and he does not always entirely fulfills it according to the society standards of the 60s. Many times he would rely on his son Jesus, and others in Bonnie, to perform tasks related with the household. These changing directions of conduct tend to produce not only new experiences but also a different type of family man

Regarding how Easy's way of raising Jesus and Feather differs from mainstream expectations, this is clearly presented at the beginning of *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* when Jesus—sixteen at the time—asks Easy to let him drop out of school. As a father, Easy's initial reaction is a sensible one that shows a regular common sense: "A diploma will help you get a job. And if you keep up with track, you could get a scholarship to UCLA" (*BBBB* 4). Likewise, it also reflects how Easy expects his children's life to be better and easier than his: "'I love you boy,' I said. 'You know when I was a kid I lost my parents, too. I know what it's like to be in the street. That's why I wanna see you get an education. What I never had'" (134). Nevertheless, Jesus' insistence and reply turns the whole topic into a post-colonial subversive issue. He argues that he does not like what he learns nor

the perspectives that the teachers impart in class. This makes Easy reconsider the issue and change his mind later:

> 'I can't learn in class,' [Jesus] said.
>
> 'Of course you can,' I said.
>
> His tone and demeanor could not be denied. 'I don't want to listen to them anymore. They act like we should just listen and believe. They say things that are wrong. They lock the gates. I don't want to be there anymore.' (*BBBB* 134)

Mosley here connects the issue of education with the questions discussed previously in Chapter 4 about the colonialist type of reading African American children do or have access to in schools and in public libraries. In this case, the conflict is presented as one affecting Easy more directly as he has to make an important decision on whether he lets Jesus drop out of school or not. Mosley's post-colonial approach and criticism is evident: Jesus, of Mexican origin, refuses to be taught the white discourse. Mosley presents it in such a manner so that the reader can not only understand Jesus' point and sympathize with him, but can also perceive Easy's progression in reaching the decision.

First, we see how Jackson Blue talks to Easy about the possibility for a person to learn things by himself studying subjects more in depth and focusing on matters that are not addressed in the schools' curriculum. He gives the example of Isaac Newton:

> I'm sayin' that all they teach in schools is how a apple done falled on Isaac's head and that's it. They don't teach you about how he believed in magic or how he was in his heart against the Church of England. They don't want you to know that you can sit in your room and discover things all by yourself that nobody else knows. (*BBBB* 286)

Next, we follow Easy's train of thought and how he finally reaches a conclusion. Here, in addition to discrediting American mainstream biased education, he also denounces the institutionalized racism present in the schools. This type of racism is a basic feature of American society, being subtly structured into its political, social, and economic institutions. As Arthur Spears indicates, institutionalized racism is "in its most profound instances, covert, resulting from acts of indifference, omission, and refusal to challenge the status quo. Thus, an individual

need never have willfully done anything that directly and clearly oppresses minorities, she/he need only have gone about business as usual without attempting to change procedures and structures in order to be an accomplice in racism" (129).

The implications of these views are numerous. For instance, although the academic performance of black students is much lower than white students, trying to explain and remedy their education failure would force researchers "to locate the cause within the system of which they are an integral, sustaining part" (Spears 129). Consequently, in such a case, it would be pointless for the government agencies to promote research to reveal what they already know. Furthermore, as Spears questions:

> Why would black educational failure be a desideratum of a racist American society? Perhaps because just as reading and writing blacks were dysfunctional in the antebellum South and laws were in a blatantly racist fashion passed to keep them from literacy, similarly [later on] well-educated blacks—particularly those from academic achievement (e.g. Malcolm X and Huey Newton)—are dysfunctional. They formulate ideas, through their reading and analysis of history, which are deeply threatening for the social order. (130-131)

As we saw before, this is also the point that Jackson Blue made. Mosley justifies Easy's position with a solid argument. Easy comments:

> I realized that [Jesus] wasn't the type of child who could learn from white strangers who couldn't hide their natural contempt for Mexicans. I had seen it at Sojourner Truth. Most children ignored the signs or connected with the two or three teachers who really did care about them. But Jesus wasn't like that. He was connected to me, and it was my job to make sure that he learned what he needed to make it through life. (*BBBB* 294-295)

In post-colonial terms, Easy's approach symbolizes the resistance of the colonized to accept the colonizer's ideology and their way of limiting one's chances of learning. Through his words he establishes himself as the person responsible for Jesus' wellbeing. For this reason, he makes manifest his determination not only to let him choose what he wants but also to be deeply involved in his new education. As he announces his final decision to the family, he makes it sound solemn and gives the moment a special dimension because he is aware of what this means for both of them. At the same time, we also see how he does not lose his perspective as a father talking to a teenager:

> 'I wanted to talk to the family', I said. 'I want to say something to the kids.' […] 'Without an education, you can't do anything. Without an education, they will treat you like a dog,' […] 'That's important because Juice is going to learn in a different way. From now on he's going to study being a boat builder. He's found his calling in that, and I won't stand in his way. But if he's going to do that, he has to study even harder than if he was in school. I know all of the curriculum for school and I'm going to make you read out loud to me for forty-five minutes every night. And after you read, then we're gonna spend another forty-five minutes talking about what you read. You hear me? And if you ever stop working on that boat, you have to get right back in school. I don't care if you just turned eighteen, you still have to go back. You hear?' (*BBBB* 293-294)

This change represents a turning point in Jesus' life but also in Easy's role as a family man. His rejection of the dominant group's prejudiced doctrines takes him to widen his position as a father into a private teacher. In fact, as the subsequent novels go by, we see how this arrangement is carried out with success. As Jesus builds the boat he proposes making, they read a broad list of books all related with sailors, ships and the ocean, such as *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, *Treasure Island*, etc. Although all these fictional works are clearly a part of the white canon in English literature, Easy's reading choices, as already addressed in Chapter 4, reveal how he supports the reading of classic authors to make his own the content of their books. He acknowledges that these are some of the pillars of Western culture, and thus they belong to him and Jesus as much as they belong to white people. Above all, we see how Easy inculcates to his son the idea of being a free man. "I was proud of the man my son was becoming" (*BBBB* 83). More than a year later in *Little Scarlet*, he would affirm: "[Jesus] was the master of his own fate when he no longer had to deal with anyone he didn't want to, like all the teachers who didn't believe that little Mexican kids were worth the seats they sat in" (*LS* 41).

On the other hand, with respect to how Easy's identity as a father represents a non-conventional role, we see that he frequently shares his duties as head of the family with Jesus and Bonnie. His way of functioning at home at that time in history displays a gender role as a black male that responds to a mentality of placing more importance on shared responsibilities than on sole responsibilities. In the first place, we see how Easy recognizes on more than one occasion how he relies on Jesus to do jobs that actually correspond to him as a

father. He presents this idea as if they shift roles sometimes. In such cases, we see that Easy signifies his position as a family man; his father-son dynamic is one in which the son is sometimes the one in charge: "I might have taken him in when he was a child, but the truth was that *he* had adopted *me*" (*BBBB* 4). Likewise, he implies how without Jesus' help he could not have raised Feather or carry out his investigations which made him work until unearthly hours:

> I planned to be home before Jesus and Feather woke up. But if I didn't make it in time I knew that Jesus would be up to dress and feed Feather; she'd be there to hug him and kiss him good morning. I had children who were more adult than I was. Jesus didn't have an afternoon school because he was always taking care of us. (*YD* 194)

Lastly, in *Cinnamon Kiss*, he emphasizes his son's labor at home once again. He praises his attention and admirable attitude: "Jesus had been a man since the age of ten, taking care of me and Feather like a fierce and silent mama bear" (*CK* 25).

Secondly, we also see how Easy as a masculine figure constructs a relationship with his feminine counterpart in which he is open to let her play a significant role in the family space he has constructed. Aware of the fact that Bonnie does not represent the traditional black woman who is a housekeeper, he celebrates with joy her contributions to their home.

> Something good happened while I was gone. I tried to remember the last time in my life that someone, other than Jesus, took care of something for me, without me having to ask; the last time that I could lay back and relax, sure that someone else was at the wheel. I thought all the way back to my childhood but I couldn't remember it still. (*YD* 241)

Although later, as we have seen, they end up breaking up, it is noteworthy how it is Bonnie who takes care of Feather when she is in the hospital in Europe. This reveals how Easy still trusts her deeply for this matter despite knowing that their relationship is almost over: "Bonnie wouldn't let Feather die no matter who her heart belonged to" (*CK* 123).

On the whole, Easy negotiates different identities as a father but at the center is the development of his image as an adult black male who struggles to gain recognition through fatherhood. As Kenneth Clatterbaugh writes in his book

Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity, "the message to black men from patriarchy is to 'be a man'; the message from capitalism is 'no chance'" (160). Easy knows that black men are not privileged in the prominently white society in which he lives. As a result, establishing himself as the head of his "makeshift" family represents a way of reconstructing the dominant culture's norms of masculinity. He wants the pride of giving himself his own identity and leading his own life. This is what he aims to accomplish, and for this reason, he moves toward a transformation in his male roles. In this way, Morrell and Swart state that "gender roles have a fixity that postcolonial theories are reluctant to grant them" (101). Easy's circumstances produce an atypical experience of parenting and masculinity if we take into account that this is the American society of the 60s and he is a black family man.

5. 3. Easy Rawlins as a blues detective (from amateur to professional)

> 'Twenty dollars for anything you got to say and another twenty if it sound good t'me.' It was a sentence that I'd said many times in my life.
>
> Walter Mosley, *A Little Yellow Dog*

> 'Where I come from they don't have dark-skinned private detectives. If a man needs a helpin' hand, he goes to someone who does it on the side. I'm that man…'
>
> Walter Mosley, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*

Easy Rawlins represents Mosley's attempt to construct an African American detective in terms of American cultural hybridity. The traditional hardboiled detective traits combined with the African American vernaculars (black culture, black dialect and a black conscience) produce what Stephen Soitos call the blues detective: a hybrid figure that shifts identities and operates on the borderline of black and white society and culture. In these novels, Easy Rawlins is that blues detective. He shows both the distinct characteristics that define his white counterparts and those others that reflect his African American mindset and his cultural integrity: a double consciousness, a trickster's attitude, an intense disdain for racism, and an angry demand for equality, recognition, and respect. If in Chapter 4 I divided his emerging detective profile into three different categories (as a conventional detective, as a black one, and as a post-colonial one), in this section my foci of study are his actual hybridity and the development that his identity undertakes. From *A Little Yellow Dog* to *Cinnamon Kiss,* we see how Easy strengthens this blend of characteristics that make him a blues detective, but also, how he goes from being an amateur detective to a professional one.

Throughout these novels, Easy certainly redefines himself as a blues detective too. In the following pages I explore Easy's development from his reluctance to go back to the streets to the moment he establishes himself as an official licensed private investigator with a downtown L.A. office with a sign on the door that reads: Easy Rawlins—Investigations (*CK* 27). As this transformation

takes place, the two elements that remain throughout the whole period are his continuous shifting of identities and his critique of the urban and chaotic American society in which he lives. In this respect, making the best possible use of the social criticism typical of the hardboiled detective conventions, Walter Mosley presents through Easy an examination of the injustices inherent in racism. Easy's observations represent a blend of post-colonial and classic noir commentary on the significant changes in American political and social history that occurred from November 1963 to the summer of 1966. Last of all, it is also necessary to look at how in this stage Easy exercises his agency and takes control of his own life. He does not let anybody make any decisions for him, and systematically confronts every figure of authority who does not respect him or threatens his condition as a black man. Since the detective plot constitutes the main theme and the literary frame of the Rawlins series, the above-mentioned points appear in each of the novels of this group. Subsequently, I will study Easy's development as a blues detective as it is portrayed chronologically throughout the fictional time in each of them.

The first characteristic he displays as such is his use of hiding and shifting his role as a detective. Notably bothered by having a reputation that only relates him to the crime world, as we have seen, Easy endeavors at the start of this new stage to demonstrate his worth and his reliability as a serious worker and as a family man. He feels unsatisfied with the previous recognition he had as a detective because this has brought him too many problems and conflicts with his community. In fact, he has already lost several friends and his name is associated with danger and conflict. Liselle, for instance, an old friend that has known him since they both moved from Texas to L.A. in the mid forties, says: "Trouble follows you, Easy Rawlins. It always has, and it always will" (*BBBB* 178). This is the image that many of his acquaintances have of him and the one he would like to change.

Accordingly, it is ironically this intention to build a new image, his sense of dignity, and his desire to be respected and demonstrate his innocence that takes him back again to the underworld of Los Angeles. In *A Little Yellow Dog* he must do it to resolve the murder that takes place in his school and incriminates him:

> I could have gone home then—I should have. But the streets had been calling me all day long. I had been seduced, hoodwinked, and blamed for a thief; I'd been bullied and looked at like a crook instead of an honest man. I could have gone home but I knew that I wouldn't be able to sleep. […] I was no longer in the law-abiding workaday world. I was alone, hanging by a thread again. (*YD* 51)

This case brings him on the one hand to the confrontation with two authoritarian figures: Sergeant Sanchez and Captain Foghetty, and on the other, to experience once again the racism inherent in his society.

At the outset he tries to cooperate with the policeman: "I wanted Sanchez to see me as an honest and hard worker" (*YD* 48), but later, out of fear and distrust, he does not give him all the information he could have: "I should have told [him]; if he had been friendly I probably would have. But that cop could have looked into my business; my job, my history, my kids. And just by looking he could have destroyed all that I had built" (*YD* 53). Easy establishes a double conflict here. First, that it is not totally possible for him to lead an upright life when his past is dubious and contaminated with different crimes. He even explains that his current job as a head custodian was not achieved through regular channels (*YD* 41). Second, that in order to protect himself he has to lie: "I lied to him because keeping in practice keeps you alive" (*YD* 70). Lying becomes a key factor in surviving the world in which he lives. In fact, this is how he establishes the first sign of antagonism between him and Sanchez: "He was a living lie detector. I was a living lie" (*YD* 39). Lying is the trait that distinguishes the figure of the trickster in the black folklore and is also the trait that distinguishes him as a blues detective dealing with the white world. Although Sanchez is not actually white, his position as a Sergeant who represents white law makes Easy see him as an opponent. Besides, Easy detests him as he always does when non-white policemen assimilate and speak as if they were white: "[Sanchez talked] without a trace of an accent. There was an education in his diction; a hard-earned learning that came from the late-night interrogations of used and battered textbooks" (*YD* 36).

From this moment on, Easy is placed in different circumstances in which he has to decide whether to collaborate with the police or not. His dilemma is

complex and as he reflects on it, it is possible to observe where he stands: "There are moments in your life when you can tell what's right and wrong about yourself—your nature. I wanted my job and my everyday kind of life. I wanted to see Jesus get his track scholarship at UCLA and Feather to become the artist I knew she could be" (*YD* 73). Although Easy knows what he should do in order to keep his priorities safe and in order to present himself as the middle class honest man he wants to be, something inside of him does not let him react as he should. Ironically, he has to do what is traditionally "wrong" like lying in order to give himself and his family the opportunities that they have been denied because of their marginalized position in society. If he plays by the white man's rules, he will never be the man he wants to be. He has to live outside the traditional values in order to be successful in them. Likewise, he cannot cooperate with the police when they do not show him respect or threaten him. It is a question of principles. It is his mentality as a blues detective. "It wasn't going to be as easy to break me down as [Sanchez] thought" (*YD* 72). Furthermore, Easy distrusts the white system of justice. Nobody guarantees him that if he tells them what he knows, things would not turn against him: "I was a fool; but I was my own fool" (*YD* 73). His development is thus lead by his subversive agency. As a blues detective, he would go back to the streets and investigate the case by himself before submitting to any whites or accepting any commands from them.

From a post-colonial perspective, this situation represents on the one hand the desire of the colonized to be like the colonizer and on the other, the strong psychological difficulty and intense emotions that this brings up. Easy wants to lead the mainstream lifestyle but in order to do so he would have to assimilate and give up some of his old routines/perspectives. Amal Treacher explains the impossible tensions: "[t]o survive you have to become like the white person and to do so you lose who you are, who you are meant to be" (51). Cooperating with the police and responding to their requests is just not possible for Easy without betraying himself. As he implies above, it would be almost going against his *nature*, something he simply cannot do.

Another scene that can be analyzed in post-colonial terms and presents a strong social criticism is the moment when Easy is asked to go to the police

station to talk to Sanchez's boss, Captain Foghetty. Surprisingly, Sanchez takes him the long way through the building and Easy gets a glimpse of the jail cells:

> Just thirty or so men living in cages underground. Like livestock waiting for some further shame to be laid on them. Like sharecroppers or slaves living in shanty shacks on the edge of a plantation. There was evil in that room, and on that plantation too. Because, as I knew too well, if you're punished long enough you become guilty of all charges brought against you. (*YD* 147)

It is significant that as soon as Easy sees the prisoners, his first thoughts reveal an African American perspective. Easy's consciousness as a blues detective makes a quick connection between the prisoners and the slaves on the plantations. Soon after, when he finally meets Captain Foghetty, he comments: "When he smiled I realized that my trip through the bowels of the jailhouse had been calculated to break me down" (*YD* 151). Foghetty's main goal is to intimidate and frighten him. Thus, the confrontation and the division of categories self/other between Foghetty and Easy occur immediately.

Mosley portrays how the reality of the hardboiled world traditionally represented in the detective genre includes strong similarities with the post-colonial relations of power that take place between master and slave. Easy interprets Foghetty's above position as the master. He and the rest of black prisoners are the slaves below. In this sense, as Ed Christian also highlights, "police methods are one of the most obvious forms of colonial control, and these methods have not necessarily grown less repressive in post-colonial societies" (11). This reality and this kind of method are clearly reflected when Easy is for example manipulated to join four other black men in a lineup for murder. An eyewitness was to try to uncover the suspect:

> From the central vantage point of number three I looked up and down the row. No two of us bore the slightest resemblance. […] There was yellow, gray, brown, and black skin. Our faces spoke of the variety of peoples of Africa and of the white masters who raped those ancestors. […]
>
> It was a setup, but I still had some points on my side. We were still a row of Negroes—and white folks, on the whole, could barely tell us apart. (*YD* 152)

The worst type of racism is that one that presumes that all African Americans are the same and cannot be differentiated one from one another. Easy points out this

idea and how in this case it actually benefits him. Easy's train of thought in this scene displays what I title a "blues consciousness:" that is, his hybrid consciousness as a blues detective that results from his experiences as a southern black man and his acquaintance with the history of slavery that his people have suffered. Furthermore, it is also the consciousness that comes from his awareness and knowledge of the streets, of white people, and of how little they can tell one black man from the other. As soon as the lineup failed, Foghetty and Sanchez scare and play with him. At this moment, another tense confrontation takes place:

> 'Our witness thought that he recognized you, Rawlins.' […]
>
> I knew that I shouldn't show too much fear or they'd think I was guilty. The best thing for an Honest John to do would be to stutter out a 'Wha?' That way I could seem the innocent kind of scared.
>
> 'The hell you say,' I said instead. 'I didn't do anything for anybody to see.' (*YD* 153)

Easy's experience allows him to read the situation properly and most importantly, to resist the oppression. As we have seen, Easy's reaction, far from being submissive, trying to play the honest guy, is sharp and challenging. In a way, this is another example of how the colonized mimics the colonizer, a crucial characteristic in him as a blues detective. Easy can think as a white cop to figure out what Foghetty is trying to do and how he should react. As Homi Bhabha states, "mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (2005: 122). Easy uses it to defy Foghetty and Sanchez's repressive authority. Mimicry becomes thus, as Treacher theorizes, "a way of gaining power in a situation in which the subject is powerless" (Treacher 54). Easy responds in the same way he is treated. Instead of reacting with fear, he disregards Foghetty and Sanchez's threatening accusations and replies to them using the same kind of attitude and the same kind of language they employ. This makes them more equal.

Similarly, we also see how his learning of the way the police operate turns into contempt for the white man:

> Fogherty's smile was demented. 'Yeah, Sanchez told me that you saw Felix Wren down in his cell.' Fogherty watched me and nodded, sage like. 'He's only in on a

> drunk driving charge but he resisted the arresting officers—bit one of them. Don't worry about him though, he'll be okay. We won't even charge him. Once he gets his last tooth knocked out we'll send him back home to his mother.' (*YD* 154)

Easy feels furious then: "That was the first moment I felt murder in my fingers. It's not that I wanted to kill Fogherty particularly. I could have killed anybody" (*YD* 154). Easy's attempt to leave the streets comes to a first stop here as a result of his hatred for white society and the injustices it promotes: "Somewhere in the lineup I had become invisible again. I'd taken on the shadows that kept me camouflaged, and dangerous" (*YD* 154). Easy becomes a trickster all over again. He cannot help going back to the underworld to investigate who is behind the crimes that are incriminating him. He feels morally forced to do it and in order to do so, he exploits his talents of lying, deceiving, and concealing himself so that he can pass unnoticed among the different territories he must cross out: "I was coming back to the old days and feeling mean" (*YD* 139).

In each of this group of novels Mosley hints at the idea that it is society that constantly makes his character violent, another main feature in his profile as a blues detective. In *A Little Yellow Dog* Easy tries to lead a decent and normal life but the circumstances do not allow him to do so: "There were gangsters out there in the shadows whispering my name. There were cops hoping that my body broke before my spirit did. My life had gone to pieces and none of it was my fault" (*YD* 260). Easy is thus presented as a hero who is torn by warring allegiances to honesty and subversion. He is a blues detective with a unique combination of contradictory impulses, such as morality and violence, hope and despair, integrity and distrust. Therefore, once he gets totally involved in solving the case he comments with perplexity: "The fact was that I found it hard to imagine that I had to come so far over the line in just a few days" (*YD* 270). In any event, his position as a private eye allows him to situate himself on the shadows and to fight against the system, its racism and its injustices using once again his blackness to his advantage. Nevertheless, there are still also many things beyond his control. In fact, this time his involvement in this case and the use of violence brings him tremendously tragic consequences such as the death of his best friend Raymond "Mouse" Alexander who is fatally shot when backing him up. As Andrew Pepper

indicates, "Easy's involvement in 'crime' is always damaging: damaging in a physical sense, of course, but damaging in an emotional sense too, because the consequences of his involvement are often tragic and far-reaching. The death of Mouse […] is particularly affecting because Rawlins is only too aware of his own complicity in his best friend's demise" (2000: 126-127). At this point, Easy's commotion mirrors the chaos of the nation. Easy feels helpless. Society is chaotic and there does not seem to be a solution for its social and racial conflicts. As already mentioned, Walter Mosley places Mouse and John F. Kennedy's deaths in the same date to illustrate the extent of Easy's despair and sorrow: "For a week the nation mourned the passing of JFK. Everybody wondered would things ever get set straight again; they never did" (*YD* 296).

In the next novel, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, Easy's development undergoes a similar metamorphosis. Deeply affected by Mouse's death,[3] Easy is at first unwilling to get involved in any job as a detective. He returns to his idea of leading a lifestyle away from the crime world of the investigations. Nonetheless, when his old buddy John asks him to find his stepson Brawly as a *favor*, he accepts because he finds comfort in helping a friend. "There was my friend John and his need. There was the fever burning like a funeral pyre over Mouse's death in my mind" (*BBBB* 125). Again, the case is presented as one of those times when a black man would not go to the police but call Easy instead: "John called on me because he knew that I had been among desperate men my whole life. I could see when the blow was coming" (*BBBB* 30). Mosley shows one more time Easy's attachment to his community and how black people help each other; as a rule they do not trust white justice. In this way, like in the old days, it is the racial and social context that once again bring up precise circumstances for Easy to fulfill a job as a blues detective. Mosley makes this point explicit when Bonnie asks Easy: "Didn't you say that you used to trade favors? That before you had honest work, you used to help people when they couldn't go to the authorities?" (*BBBB* 9). Furthermore, in this particular case, more than trading favors, what Easy does is to demonstrate his value of friendship and his black southern mentality. When Alva,

[3] Easy starts this novel's narration with the sentence "Mouse is dead" (*BBBB* 1). However, we find out a few months later that he has not actually died.

John's girlfriend, tells him: "[F]rom now on my door will always be open to you" (*BBBB* 28), he reacts by thinking: "That open door meant more than any money John could offer me. In country terms it was worth the host's weight in gold. If she was willing to pay such a high price, I wondered what the cost might be" (*BBBB* 28). Easy's connection to his friends and the black community has now become crucial in the shaping of his consciousness and his identity.

By contrast, we can also see how Easy's attitude changes when it is the police who go to his house later and ask him to intervene in the same matter in which Brawly is involved but for different reasons. Detective Knorr tells him: "The police department and the city of Los Angeles need your help, Mr. Rawlins. […] There is blood boiling under the surface of Watts" (*BBBB* 111). Easy's reaction at this point is one of denial. This is an example of how he exercises his agency, makes his own decisions, and confronts white authorities. "That's outside my field of expertise, Officer Knorr. I'm a janitor. I wax floors and empty trash bins. Boiling blood is some other department. And I already did my stint in the army" (*BBBB* 112). Easy conceals his intentions not telling the police he is already in the case. It is also significant that as the story goes on, when he is trying to look for Brawly and is arrested for being caught with two members of the Black Revolutionary Party, he then manipulates the situation to negotiate with the police and get out of jail. Acquainted with the whole issue, he tells them: "If I see something I think you need to know, I'll tell you about it. I won't be a rat for you but if we have some interest in common, I might let something drop in your lap" (*BBBB* 165).

In this particular novel, Easy's development can also be traced by paying attention to how his way of investigating is different between the beginning and the end of the story. At first, he is more calm and appeased. He is visibly still affected by Mouse's death: "Those words had gone through my mind every morning for three months. *Mouse is dead because of me*" (*BBBB* 1); he feels piteous about life and the world he lives in: "I felt loss that went all the way back to my childhood" (*BBBB* 46). Consequently, his most existentialist mood appears and he decides not to lie and not to conceal his intentions when carrying out his investigations. "I saw no reason or profit in lying to Sam" (*BBBB* 43). Likewise,

he comments that "sometimes the truth is just good as lie" (*BBBB* 57). Ironically, to his surprise, the results of his determination not to lie are contradictory and have the opposite effect on people: "In years past when I did favors for people, I lied all the time. Gave the wrong name, never admitted to what my true purposes were. As a rule, people believed my lies. This was the first time that I told the truth consistently and the result was that no one believed what I said" (*BBBB* 141). Easy experiences anew the irrationality of the human race. His good intentions are not valued as he expected. Towards the end of the novel, however, he changes again. He finds himself suddenly, almost instinctively, masquerading himself. He must do it to reach his goals. Here his intrinsic skills as a trickster reappear. When this happens, he admits: "It felt good to be lying again. It was as if I disappeared behind a cloud of black ink like the squid or cuttlefish" (*BBBB* 308). Easy's shifting of identities remains constant throughout the novels. This, in addition to his double consciousness, allows him to bridge the white and black world, using both to his advantage.

Mosley sets *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* in February 1964 and presents, as already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the historical context when violent groups of young black men organized themselves to demand changes in American society. Brawly Brown is depicted as one of them. The author voices through him and his organization some of the ideas that characterized these radical black movements before the 1965 riots. "They say that they're freedom fighters," Alva, Brawly's mom, denounces, "but when it comes down to it they only want violence and revenge" (*BBBB* 24). Whereas Easy is not portrayed as being identified with such thoughts, he is at least well acquainted with them as he has to investigate among them. The whole novel thus acquires a deep political tone and Easy often appears reflecting on these ideas:

> Their voices might have seemed angry to someone who didn't know the gruff bark of the American Negro's soul. Those men and women were far beyond anger, though. They were expressing a desire for love and revenge and for something that didn't exist—had never existed. They were going to create freedom out of the sow's ear called America. They believed in the spirit of the Constitution and not the direction of the cash register. (*BBBB* 48)

Although Easy can understand what triggers these black people's thoughts he differs from them in age and perspective. Now his vision of the world has changed. Displaying now his profile as an amateur intellectual, it is striking how clearly he can articulate his awareness about his position as a black man in white society. When Henry Strong, one of the leaders and most venerated members of the "Urban Revolutionaries" asks him: "Are you a race man?" Easy replies:

> 'I'm just a everyday black man, doin' the best I can in a world where the white man's de factoking. I got me a house with a tree growin' in the front yard. It's my tree; I could cut it down if I wanted to, but even still you cain't call it a black man's tree. It's just a pine.' (*BBBB* 139)

Easy understands that he lives in a world that belongs to whites. He cannot change that. As a black man, he cannot help but be a race man but even so, he does have some control in his life and sometimes things are not about race. The tree is just a tree—and it is his tree. So he is a race man in the sense that every black man has to be concerned with race, but he is just trying to live his life, be in charge of his own world. He could cut down his tree if he wanted to and it would have nothing to do with race. It is a paradox of the black world—everything and nothing is about race. It is all about race because they live in a white man's world, but on the other hand, (in this case) he has to make every day decisions not based on race. He is the owner of his house and his decisions do not necessarily have to do with race. In contrast, he could be the kind of person that does everything based on race—a kind of militant person like Strong who is consumed by the effect of his race. However, here Easy is saying that he is not consumed by it—it affects him because as a black man it has to affect him, that is the black man's life. Thus, even though the white man is in charge of the outside world, Easy is in charge of his own.

At some point in his youth Easy was an idealist himself but that time is gone. He remembers now how it was Mouse who had to correct his perception of things:

> Mouse would say to me: 'You know you just too sensitive. You think that you can keep somethin' bad from happening here or there. But that kinda power ain't in your reach. It was all settled a long time ago. What happens with you—when you get borned, when you die, who you kill, who kills you—that was all writ down in

> your shoes and your blood. Shit. You be walkin' down the road outside'a Pariah, hopin' that New Orleans is just beyond that yonder stand of live oaks. But it ain't. No, baby, you want it, you want it bad, but there's just more swamp after them trees, and more swamp after that. (*BBBB* 332)

Thus Mosley portrays development in Easy's outlook of the world. He is conscious that things are not going to be exactly as he wants. For this reason, he gradually accepts the idea of working as a detective again. It is a good way of situating himself on the edge between white society and his own community, of establishing his own path and crossing the racial boundaries as needed; only thus can he gain some power to deal with the prejudiced system.

In this novel, he also presents his own lucid understanding of the traits that make him unique as a blues detective. When Colonel from the LAPD tells him: "'I thought you were a janitor. […] But you sound like some kind of detective'" (233), Easy replies:

> 'Do you know how to sew, Officer?' I asked in response.
>
> 'What?'
>
> 'I don't mean darn,' I said. 'I mean could you piece together a pattern and stitch the seams of a shirt or a pair of pants?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'Can you bake a cake from scratch or lay a floor in an unfinished room?' I continued. 'Or lay bricks or tan leather from a dead animal?'
>
> 'What are you getting at?' the colonel commanded.
>
> 'I can do all those things,' I said. 'I can tell you when a man's about to go crazy or when a thug's really a coward or blowhard. I can glance around a room and tell you if you have to worry about getting' robbed. All that I get from bein' poor and black in this country you so proud'a savin' from the Koreans and Vietnamese. Where I come from they don't have dark-skinned private detectives. If a man needs a helpin' hand, he goes to someone who does it on the side. I'm that man, Colonel. That's why you sent Detective Knorr to my house. That's why you talk to me when I come by. What I do I do because it's part of me. I studied in the streets and back alleys. What I know most cops would give their eyeteeth to understand. So don't worry about how I got here or how to explain what I do. Just listen to me and you might learn somethin'… I closed my mouth then, before I said even more about what I'd learned in a world that had already passed those cops by. (*BBBB* 233-234)

Easy's long and insightful speech about all the things he knows how to do reflect his self-image. He implies that because of his condition as a black man, society

makes him find a way of surviving that rises over what any white man can know. Society makes him a site of hybridity, a blues detective. Easy is himself a blending of western police methods and African American cultural knowledge, and his abilities are greater because of this hybridity.

The next book in the series in which we can see Easy's development as a blues detective is *Six Easy Pieces*. It is actually a compilation of seven short stories; all of them related by some type of investigation and chronologically take place immediately after *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*. Easy's personal circumstances are the same but the reasons that take him to the street differ from one case to another.

> I had been slipping back into the street in spite of my respectable job as supervising senior head custodian at Sojourner Truth Junior High School. In less than three months I had investigated arson, murder, and a missing person. I had also been party to a killing that the police might have called murder. (*SEP* 59)

Sometimes Easy gets involved in a case for the sake of his friends and others of his own initiative as when there was a fire in the school or when he has the urge to find out once and for all whether Mouse is dead or not.[4] Indeed, one of his main concerns in this volume turns around the absence of Mouse and his return.

On the whole, Mosley demonstrates a sureness of voice and a firm grasp of the portrayal of Easy's double consciousness and awareness of his blackness in relation to white society. There are three major aspects related to his development and redefinition as a blues detective: First, the way in which he continues to adopt the trickster role and mask himself to carry out his investigations; second, how he

[4] Mouse's death is still one of the subthemes in *Six Easy Pieces*. Walter Mosley creates suspense and hints at the possibility of Mouse being still alive. In this respect, Easy's search for definite proof of Mouse's demise forms a subplot to two of the stories, "Crimson Stain" and "Lavender." The mystery is finally resolved when Raymond Alexander reappears in "Gray-Eyed Death" and explains that Momma Jo, his old witch friend from Pariah, now lives in L.A. and saved his life with her powders and her voodoo magic. One of Mouse's most interesting aspects is, as Alice Mills indicates, "that he is a remarkable composite of the African American community's entire range of popular mythical heroes" (30). In this way, not only is he a typical badman figure and is able to turn situations around with disconcerting ease and audacity, he also is constantly associated with the idea of magic. This leads Easy to attribute to him in several novels the supernatural powers of witchcraft: He appeared "as if by magic" (*WB* 218). Moreover, sometimes Easy also identifies his friend with the Devil, and Mouse himself brags that he has a signed with Satan—much like other figures in African folklore. Accordingly, that he re-appears in the series does not result far-fetched. It actually suits the character's previous description.

displays impressive deduction skills; and third, his unexpected decision to have his own office as a private investigator.

Easy's attitude as a trickster is clearly portrayed in his work as a sleuth. He hides his identity, replies with sarcasm, assumes roles and changes his name repeatedly. Moreover, in "Smoke," the opening story in this collection, he also becomes a badman. First, we see how he conducts himself when going to meet a dangerous white gangster called Haas. Upon entering the hotel, he does not bother giving any information to the white receptionist: "'Looking for Mr. Haas,' I said. 'Who are you?' 'You don't need to know my name,' man" (*SEP* 26). Next, when going to the bar, he runs into one of Haas's thugs.

> 'What's up, Rochester?' […]
>
> 'Could be your ticket,' I said.
>
> While he considered my words, I took a step closer to get within arm's distance, so that if he decided to go for a weapon, I could stop him before he stopped me.
>
> 'Fuck you,' he said.
>
> 'Now that's better,' I replied. 'Are you Mr. Haas?'
>
> 'Who wants to know?'
>
> 'Ray,' I said. 'Ray Alexander. I need to talk some business with the man.' (*SEP* 26)

Easy's choice to use Mouse's name is triggered partly by his unwillingness to accept that his friend is dead. He still feels guilty about his loss and although thinking of Mouse's killing instincts used to make him feel uneasy, now he praises him.

> Raymond Alexander had been the largest part of my history. My parents were both gone before I was nine. My relatives treated me like a beast of burden, so I ran from them. I fought a war for men who called me nigger. The police stopped me on the street for the crime of walking. Raymond was the only one who respected me and cared for me and was willing to throw his lot in with mine, no matter the odds. […] I didn't want Mouse to be dead. Somehow by using his name I felt that I was making a tribute, even a eulogy, to his meaning in my life. (*SEP* 35)

Secondly, by using Mouse's name, Easy also adopts his friend's identity as a "badman." He becomes then both the trickster and the badman. He does this in order to feel safe when crossing out between worlds and entering the white man's

territory: “I wasn’t the moderate custodian/landlord Easy Rawlins, I was the crazy killer Raymond Alexander. I was dangerous. I was bad. Nobody and nothing scared me” (*SEP* 31). Easy adopts his friend’s aggressive and violent character to go out alone in the dark streets of Los Angeles. In such a case, it is clearly shown how his disguises are appended to his consciousness. When Easy masks his identity he shifts his way of thinking and his conduct. In this case, he even orders Mouse’s favorite breakfast. “I never liked raw onions and eggs before but I loved them right then” (*SEP* 32).

In fact, Easy’s use of shifting identities will become regular in the next stories. In “Gator Green” he goes undercover as a mechanic to help his friend Saul Lynx prove that his cousin-in-law is innocent of robbing the garage safe. This time Easy pretends to be “Larry Burdon.” He explains: “It was one of many names that I typed in as dead or missing during my stint as a statistics sergeant during WWII” (*SEP* 171). Similarly, in “Lavender,” he adopts the name of “Bryan Phillips.” This time he has to help Etta Mae locate Willy Longtree, a young black musician in trouble for running away with a rich white girl with whom he has fallen in love. When getting ready to look for them, he says:

> I pulled out my black slacks and yellow jacket. Then I went to the drawer for a black silk T-shirt. It wasn’t going to be Easy Rawlins the janitor out on the town tonight. A janitor could never find Willis Longtree or Sinestra Merchant. [I] reached back on the top shelf, and took down my pistol. I checked that it was working and loaded, and then walked out the door. (*SEP* 140)

As a trickster-detective Easy displays a unique ability to acquire multiple names and identities; he has an acute sense of knowing who he needs to become in every case.

This being so, the second aspect of note regarding Easy’s hybrid blues detective profile in *Six Easy Pieces* is his demonstration of great deduction skills like the old traditional private eye. As mentioned before, apart from the blackness that defines him, the blues detective also show signs of the abilities of his classic counterparts. On two different occasions, Mosley presents his hero in the most Sherlock Holmes style possible. In “Crimson Stain,” he is on a personal quest trying to unravel the puzzling circumstances surrounding his friend Mouse’s

death. There have been rumors that the deadly little man somehow survived and has been seen with a beautiful prostitute called Etheline Teaman. When Easy is going to meet her, he discovers that she has been murdered. All he has left from her is a worn and stained photo album with all the pictures Etheline has taken of her family, her friends, and all the men she has slept with. At this point, Easy endeavors to examine the album carefully. Apart from learning that it was not Mouse who she saw, he also inspects all the clues to come up with the assassin: "I studied the album for hours after Feather and Jesus went to bed, until I was pretty sure I knew who the murderer was" (*SEP* 79). He would not explain how he figures it out but his deduction process proves successful as he does come out with the right killer.

In the same way, his ability to infer hidden clues to work out a case is also portrayed later in "Silver Lining." Being asked by Jackson Blue to find Jewelle's missing half-sister who might have been kidnapped, he just needs to study the cardboard box that was sent to Jewelle in the mail and collect a few more basic facts to decide how to proceed. "I considered the box and its contents. […] I had a pretty clear notion of what to do next…" (*SEP* 98). His capacity to detect key information and the way he discovers it reveals how his traits as a private investigator are a mixture of the classic, the hardboiled, and the black detective.

Thirdly, the last significant aspect in Easy's development throughout this collection of stories is his impulsive decision in the last of them, "Amber Gate," to have his own office as a private investigator. The reasons for it are never made clear: "My heart skipped when we came to that amber gate. I don't know why. There was no sign on it. It was just a door but somehow it seemed perfect" (241). Perfect for what? As a reader, we cannot but wonder at Easy's intentions. Does he intend to become a more legitimate, full-time investigator? Mosley here is just foreshadowing some of the changes that will take place in Easy's career as a detective in *Little Scarlet.*

"Amber Gate" is about the murder of a young, ambitious, and a liberated black woman; Easy takes the case as a favor to his German shoemaker who promises him a new pair of shoes (worth 200 dollars) if he proves that Musa

Tanous, his Middle Eastern landlord and friend, did not kill her. When they all meet to talk about the matter, Mr. Tanous observes: "You haven't told me your price" (*SEP* 250), and Easy replies:

> 'If I find out who did it and get you off, you give me that office for twenty dollars a month for as long as that building is in your family, I said. 'The rent stays the same, forever.'
>
> My demand amused him. He smiled for a moment and then nodded.
>
> For my part I was surprised. I had no need for an office but somehow that room seemed as if it had been waiting for me. I wanted to go back there, sit in a chair, and look out of the window at the street. (*SEP* 250)

Easy's surprising reaction could be seen in a way as one of his traits as a trickster. As I have already argued in Chapter 1, contradiction according to the critics Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Alice Mills is an integral part of the black characters in Black Folklore. Easy, like Esu-Elegbara in the black mythology, is unpredictable. Mills considers his disconcerting behavior to be "reminiscent of the myths of Esu, whose preferred forms of expression are ambiguity and the co-existence of opposites" (29). Easy's unexpected desire to have an office clashes indeed with his previous idea of leaving the streets. The ambivalence that characterizes his feelings and decisions can be seen as another example of his hybrid profile. Once again, Mosley is just reinforcing the traditional component of the trickster archetype. On the one hand, he portrays Easy affirming that he is happy with his life, especially now that Mouse is back. On the other, however, Easy is persistently getting involved in more and more investigations and contradicting his initial intention of not working as a detective.

Furthermore, we can also see Easy's struggle to balance home and work as a result of his genuine desire to bring about justice when police officers and white authorities ignore the problems of his black community. He emphasizes this idea repeatedly: "The police are hardly ever in the position to make a Negro's life easier. They're there to keep us from making trouble" (*SEP* 270). Thus, although he says "I like my life just the way it is" (*SEP* 262), Mouse, who knows him better than anyone else, refutes:

> ‘No, baby. That ain’t true.’
>
> ‘Why not?’
>
> ‘If you did like it you wouldn’t be out here takin’ a pair’ a shoes to go out and find a murderer. No, man. You need to come around.’ (*SEP* 262)

Accordingly, Easy’s behavior and feelings are constantly changing and are often conflicting. While this aspect of his personality strengthens his traits as a trickster, it also reveals his annoyance with the way African Americans are treated. Such a reaction can be seen as a result of his post-colonial condition. According to Ed Christian, “The post-colonial detective is a work in progress. These detectives are in process, they are learning, adjusting, changing, compromising, rejecting, resisting” (13). Easy changes his mind repeatedly as he goes through different periods and continues his personal development. His consciousness, like his identity, is fluid.

On a different level, it is symbolic that Easy’s first and only explicit explanation to have the new office is, as quoted before, “to go back there, sit in a chair, and look out of the window at the street” (*SEP* 250). *Looking out* of the window, keeping his *eyes* open, is the one activity that as a blues private *eye* he does while displaying a particular perspective and a strong criticism of society. Interestingly, as *Little Scarlet* opens, he is at that window *watching* what is happening outside. Through it, he becomes a close *eye*witness of the uprisings that devastated L.A. in August 1965. His narration thus constitutes his own account of the Watts race riots; a testimony of the African Americans rebellion against the power structure, and a critique of the oppression to which they were subject: “The morning air still smelled of smoke […] after a five-day eruption of rage that had been simmering for centuries” (*LS* 3).

As Stephen Soitos points out, “[r]ather than focusing simply on the crime and capture of the suspect, blues detectives are interested in the social and political atmosphere, often to the exclusion of detection” (31). In *Little Scarlet*, Walter Mosley portrays an Easy Rawlins who is first and foremost a blues detective that observes and talks of the problems in his society. He presents the tensions and racial confrontations between young black men and white soldiers.

> I wondered if the riots were just one symptom of a disease that had silently infected the city; a virus that made people suddenly unafraid of the consequences of standing up for themselves. For almost a week I had seen groups of angry black men and women go up against armed policemen and soldiers with nothing but rocks and bottles for weapons. (*LS* 17)

Additionally, Easy appears involved in investigating a crime which, in this case, as will be shown, is also a direct consequence of the racist society that the white system has produced. However, finding the murderer is not as important as presenting a general and critical outlook of the conditions that wreak havoc and social disorder. In this novel, the criminal Easy is battling with is society itself.

So on the one hand, Easy's role as a blues detective in *Little Scarlet* is that of social commentator. His version of the events constitutes the typical "noir" narrative of the hardboiled detective genre in which he presents the dark side of urban America, its racism and its corruption. Likewise, here he explicitly indicates how the "individual crime comes to be as a symptom of, a result of, or reaction to basic flaws in the political, social, and industrial systems" (Christian 2). On the other hand, his investigations become essential to the resolution of the case and for this reason he is promoted and receives an investigator's license. Paradoxically, it is his blackness that gives him special insight into black behavior that is relied on by the LAPD police.

Easy's narration represents a powerful story of race relations in L.A. He finds himself in the aftermath of a race war: "n TV they had aerial views of this part of the city. […] It was like a war, I thought. A war being fought under the skin of America. The soldiers were all unwilling conscripts who had no idea of why they were fighting or what victory might mean" (*LS* 66). While he condemns the devastation the riots have left behind, he also feels the decades of fury that finally erupted in Los Angeles:

> I was tired of policemen stopping me just for walking down the street. I hated the destruction of property and life, but what good was law and order if it meant I was supposed to ignore the fact that our children were treated like little hoodlums and whores? My patience was as thin as a liberty dime, but still I stayed in my house to protect my makeshift family. (*LS* 43)

This passage brings to light interesting dynamics/questions that come from Easy's position as a black man and as father. If you are black, are you obligated to unite with all blacks in the interest of the entire community, or should you care for your family and home first? This was a phenomenon during that time when many parents decided not to agitate in favor of their children's safety. Then, however, there is always the guilt that accompanies inaction (Smith 251). Easy makes cogent statements about racism and the frustration of being black in America: "[T]hose people were out there shootin' and burnin' and throwin' rocks […] because they're sick and tired of knowin' that they can't ever get it right. They're tired'a bein told that they can't win" (*LS* 137).

Similarly, at this stage in his life, his personal moral code keeps shifting too. Like before, although he tries as a rule to be a decent civilian, he has some habitual slips when dealing with the white authorities: "If I found myself in a situation where I could ignore a white man in authority I would, even though I might have been wrong" (*LS* 111). Now when his friend Jackson Blue applies for a job in a white company and asks him to recommend him by lying and saying he was his former boss, Easy hesitates at first but he finally does it. Easy's comments reveal how his investigations have reinforced his views; not only does he understand that society is rotten but also that he must adhere to the rules in order to play the game.

> I realized that I had been of two minds about giving Blue a fake recommendation. It hadn't felt right. I needed his help too, so I said I would do it, but I still didn't like it. With that stack of dead black women on my desk now, I felt differently. Nobody cared about them. I had told police about what I suspected about Jackie Jay's death. I'm sure there had been other complaints with so many women dead. But the denizens of Watts were under the law with no say. We were no different than pieces on a game board. (*LS* 204)

The system is presented as the biased and corrupted villain of this novel. Easy is throwing out questions for which there are no answers: how many black women have been killed in LA? Why have the cops not investigated them? Easy becomes, if at all possible, more depreciatory and contemptuous. He confesses: "I was happy to have Jackson on the inside of the world that ignored the women on my desk. I would have put Mouse in the White House if I could have" (*LS* 205).

Finally, Easy's criticism of society goes to the extent of blaming the system for sowing the seeds of hatred between white and black people, in other words and as it turns out in *Little Scarlet*, sowing the seeds of crime. When the LAPD asks Easy to help them in solving the murder of a redhead black woman called Nola Payne (Little Scarlet), Easy stumbles upon the work of a serial killer who preys on black women and is motivated by a loathing of miscegenation. This culprit is a black homeless man called Harold Brown who is allegedly responsible for killing as many as twenty-one African American women, all of whom had had sexual relations with white men.

After tracking down the suspect, he discovers that Harold's mom had run away and left him with a light-skinned black woman, Jocelyn, who "was ashamed to have people know that she was raising a colored child" (*LS* 246). Easy takes the case very personally: "It was as if I had adopted Nola Payne as my blood sister" (*LS* 34), and at some point he admits that he would have liked to kill Harold with his own hands. However, once he finds out from Jocelyn's neighbor, Mrs. Mathers, about Harold's background, he explains that he is not surprised by what he had become. Mrs. Mathers informs him that Jocelyn "wouldn't even take him to school. From the time he was five years old she made him walk the nine blocks to Redman Elementary. She never took him to the park or allowed his friends into the house" (*LS* 246). Easy's first reaction is to imagine "a lonely black boy living out in a white world where even his mother treated him like dirt" (*LS* 247). Harold became homeless at twelve. Jocelyn married a white man who never found out that she was black. When Easy finally talks to this woman, he presents a line of reasoning that echoes Du Bois' words on African Americans self-perception through the stigmatized perspective that white ideology has normalized and imposed on them:

> It wasn't the first time I had met someone like her. And I didn't hate her for hating herself. If everybody in the world despises and hates you, sees your features as ugly and simian, makes jokes about your ways of talking, calls you stupid and beneath contempt; if you have no history, no heroes, and no future where a hero might lead, then you might begin to hate yourself, your face and features, your parents, and even your child. It could all happen and you would never even know it. And then one hot summer's night you just erupt and go burning and shooting and nobody seems to know why. (*LS* 255-256)

In the last line, Easy links Harold's crimes with the Watts riots. Although they are different issues, he implies that both of them are rooted in the same origin: the defective and prejudiced system. Mosley's interest in having the reader reflect on who is to blame for Harold's murders and the subversive incidents of 1965 becomes evident when Harold's mom states in the end: "'It's not his fault.' She said. 'He cain't help what life made him'" (*LS* 259). The history of the denial of freedom and discriminatory applications of rights and privileges cultivates not only a self-concept of inferiority among African Americans but also rage and hate for whites. This hate in turn, like in Harold's case, leads to violence and uncontrolled detrimental conducts.

On the other hand, the last but also central element of this novel that reflects Easy's transformation as a detective is his new license as a private eye. As a result of Little Scarlet's death during the riots, the cops fear that a police investigation in the black neighborhoods might set off a new uprising. In this regard, Easy's help turns crucial solving the case in the black community outside of the public eye. As a sign of their trust and appreciation, the LAPD grants him a detective license. The Deputy Commissioner, Gerald Jordan, announces to him: "I don't hate you Rawlins. I like you. I like you so much that I recommended to the chief that we give you an investigator's license. So the next time you're out there hustling, nobody will be able to say you have no right to be there" (*LS* 303). On a symbolic level, this license represents two things. First, it represents the changes that will begin to take place in America after the riots. As Easy mentions "nothing will ever be the same" (*LS* 78). The summer of 1965 certainly represented a turning point in American society: "The world was changing so quickly that I was worried about making a misstep in the new terrain" (*LS* 31). And once again we see how the historical context has an impact on Easy's life: "It was as if the violence of the past few days had given me the power to look deeper, or maybe it was that the people around me had changed" (*LS* 12). Second, the license is an external manifestation of other small internal changes in the police department. Some of its members, such as Gerald Jordan and detective Suggs, rely on Easy's blackness and his knowledge of the African American mind as the only way of unraveling the mysterious circumstances under which Nola Payne was killed:

"The notion that a white cop would let me do business without interference or condescension tickled me. It was as if I'd died and gone to another man's heaven" (*LS* 271). Easy's success in this case is without a doubt due to all the characteristics that differentiate him as a blues detective. Jordan and Suggs realize this and acknowledge this unique trait that he has.

In *Cinnamon Kiss*, the reasons he is hired by renowned San Francisco private detective Robert E. Lee include, once again, Easy's condition as a black man, and also the new condition of him being a licensed detective. As mentioned before, in this story Easy is desperate for money to pay for medical care for Feather. His state of anxiety is emphasized by his serious consideration to assist Mouse in committing a robbery. However, at the last minute, his friend Saul Lynx, also a detective, offers him the chance to go to San Francisco and work for Lee, who needs to track down a missing wealthy white lawyer, his black girlfriend Cinnamon, and the important briefcase they might have with them.

The recurring aspects of this novel regarding Easy's development as a blues detective are the display of his agency—this time through his inflexible attitude and his request for respect—and his constant critical view of society which now captures some glimpses of the historical context of 1966 including the hippie era. On the other hand, the two new elements that appear are that we hear Easy for the first time introducing himself as an official license detective, and secondly, that he has to deal with a private assassin who puts his family in danger and has been paid to eliminate him.

Easy's narration of the events reflects the clash that immediately takes place between him and his new employer. It is a confrontation in terms of both race and power. From the very first moment, he disliked even the connotation of Lee's name and the history behind it. The Confederate General Robert E. Lee (1801-1870) was one of many people in the American South that believed that slavery existed because God willed it. As Douglas S. Freeman, indicates, Lee thought that this "would end when God so ruled" (372). In a letter to his wife in 1856, Lee wrote:

> The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially and physically. The painful experience they are undergoing, is necessary for their instruction as a race, and I hope will prepare and lead them to better things. How long their subjugation may be necessary is known and ordered by a wise Merciful Providence. (Quoted in Freeman 372)

Well aware of these ideas, Easy's attitude towards Detective Lee is more negative than normal. The association of the name to the infamous Confederate General makes him be suspicious and defiant. Nonetheless, because he needs the money urgently, he tries initially not to give it a second thought. In fact, he demonstrates that he is willing to do anything to save his daughter. He comments:

> All I thought about was doing a good job for the man named after one of my enemies by descendants of my enemies in the land of my people's enslavement. But none of that mattered. I didn't care if I made him a million dollars by working for him. And if he wanted a black operative to undermine black people, well… I'd do that too—if I had to. (*CK* 31)

But Easy is stubborn and soon after he cannot stop himself from claiming his agency and asserting his equality with anyone, especially with a man like Lee who according to Saul, "thinks that he is the better of every, and any, man regardless of race or rank" (*CK* 38). As soon as he hears that Saul has worked for him before but that they have actually never met face to face, Easy expresses his initial irritation: "How can you work for a man don't even have the courtesy to come out from his office and nod at you?" (*CK* 38). That nod means accepting and recognizing the presence of the other and is the very least that Easy expects.

The situation reaches its peak when, once in Lee's San Francisco house, Easy requests to see him in order to accept the job. In the beginning, he justifies this demand as if to check if he were in front of a question of racism, but immediately after, he reveals how it is indeed a matter of pride and respect.

> 'And on the other hand,' I went on, 'being of the darker persuasion, you wouldn't want to be treated like a nigger or a slave.'
>
> 'Mr. Lee doesn't meet with anyone who works for him,' [his secretary] informed me.
>
> 'Come on, Easy,' Saul added. 'I told you that.'
>
> Ignoring my friend, I said. 'And I don't work for anyone I don't meet with.' […]

> I made ready to leave, knowing that I was being a fool. I needed that money and I knew how powerful white men could act. But still I couldn't help myself. Hell, there was an armored car waiting for me in the state of Texas. (*CK* 45-46)

Easy does not tolerate being treated with inferiority. This is his one trait that remains the same throughout the entire series. He stated before that "Money isn't everything" (*CK* 39), and he means it. His self-respect is above that. In the end, he obtains what he wanted. He makes Lee come out and they meet. Easy admits: "I had tussled with almost every boss I'd ever had over the state of my employment and the disposition of my dignity" (*CK* 49).

Next, we also see how his criticism of society from his black perspective as a blues detective carries on. Firstly, he points out how there have not been major changes in the way African Americans are still treated after the riots. Easy makes profound statements against racism and manifests his frustration when he and Mouse are in downtown L.A. making a call from a phone booth, and suddenly, there are two policemen eyeing them:

> Most Americans wouldn't understand why two well-dressed men would have to explain why they were standing on a public street. But most Americans cannot comprehend the scrutiny that black people have been under since the days we were dragged here in bondage. Those two cops felt fully authority to stop us with no reason and no warrant. They felt that they could question us and search us and cart us off to jail if there was the slightest flaw in how we explained our business. (*CK* 203)

Second, he expresses his alarm on how some issues related to black men in the armed forces disclose the emergence of a perplexing and inexplicable reality. Easy brings up in this novel his astonishment when meeting a friend of Saul called Christmas Black, a black soldier who left the army after fighting in Vietnam. Easy finds the fact that Christmas once killed a whole town outrageous: "My country was sending out lone killers to murder women and children in far-flung nations. […] The taxes I paid on my cigarettes and the taxes they took out of my paycheck were buying the bullets and gassing up the bombers" (*CK* 243). Furthermore, he connects Christmas's condition as an African American with his military actions and finds it overwhelming. He feels ashamed. "All those years our people had

struggled and prayed for freedom and now a man like Christmas […] was just another killer like all those white men had been for us" (*CK* 243). Easy condemns the system and questions its "progress." He establishes a parallelism between the oppression the black community had to endure in the past at the hands of the white colonizer and the inconceivable reality that some African Americans are presently adopting a similar role:

> Is that what we labored for all those years? Was it just to have the right to step on some other poor soul' s neck? […] If we could kill like that, everything that we fought for would be called into question. If we became the white men we hated and who hated us, then we were nowhere, nowhere at all. (*CK* 243)

As ever, Easy's critical eye captures and condemns the chaotic aspects of his society. In a mixture of ironic and serious tone, being now familiar with hippie ideas, he comments: "Maybe the hippies were right. […] Maybe we should all go outside in our underwear and protest the way of the world" (*CK* 118).

On the other hand, Easy's transformation into a licensed private investigator suddenly becomes in *Cinnamon Kiss* an issue that takes on special significance. Not only is it brought up as indispensable to be hired by Lee, but also, and most importantly, it represents the beginning of a new stage in Easy's development. First of all, we see how while before Easy had always referred to his job as a detective as a "trade of favors," that has now changed, and he introduces himself for the first time as a detective: "I am a private detective from down in L.A." (*CK* 87), he says when he is in San Francisco searching for Cinnamon and her friend Axel Bowers. This change in articulating his identity through the use of new words reveals a change in his conscience and his self-perception. Moreover, his new status has an effect on his way of looking at the world; now his demand for social recognition and respect is partly fulfilled as a result of his new official badge.

This causes the second relevant aspect regarding Easy's transformation. As an official private investigator, with his license and his office, Easy loses interest in his job as head custodian. Therefore, when he has to go to San Francisco,

instead of asking Principal Ada Masters for a few days' leave, he asks for an indefinite period of time off.

> 'I'm taking a leave of absence,' […]
>
> 'For how long?'
>
> 'It might be a week or a month,' I said. But I was thinking that it might be ten years with good behavior. (*CK* 26)

Although Easy's plans are at first portrayed as vague, a later conversation with Helen McCoy, a friend that works for the board of education, clarifies Easy's intentions:

> 'Grapevine says you quit the board'
>
> 'Sabbatical'
>
> 'Don't shit me, Easy. You quit.'
>
> 'I didn't argue.' (*CK* 143)

At this moment of his life, Easy's identity becomes a matter of choice; it depends on his own decision. He has the opportunity to choose between carrying on with his job as head custodian or becoming a full-time detective. The fact that when Cinnamon's case is solved, he does not return to the school indicates that he has opted for the latter. Above all, the most significant point is that Easy, as a black man, has the privilege to decide what he wants to be, and at this point he chooses a professional occupation. For a black person like him who has experienced racism, economic problems, intermittent unemployment, etc., having a professional job as a detective represents success and recognition.

Finally, the last aspect of note in this novel that shows Easy's profile as a blues detective is how his job as a private investigator is connected to his family. It has already been discussed at length that he cares deeply about them and that he constantly shifts roles as a father and as a sleuth. The question here is not how being a private eye influences his home life but how the fact of having a family affects his work and his decisions as a private eye. In this sense, we see how he must consider the repercussions of his actions in order not to jeopardize Jesus, Feather, and Bonnie's safety when dealing with people such as Joe Cicero, a

private operative, who has been hired by someone to dissuade Easy from continuing his investigation and search of Cinnamon. Cicero appears unannounced in Easy's office and warns him:

> 'You have twenty-four hours, Mr. Rawlins,' he replied. 'Twenty-four or things will get bad.'
>
> 'Do you see this gun?' I asked him.
>
> He grinned and said. 'Family man like you has to think about his liabilities. Me, I'm just a soldier. Knock one down and two take his place. But you—you have Feather and Jesus and whatshername, Bonnie, yeah Bonnie, to think about.' (*CK* 173)

Easy's family makes him more vulnerable. He is exposed, as are his family members, to threats and perils that the regular hardboiled detective is not. Consequently, as it happens at this particular time, he has to alert his children and live-in girlfriend to stay away and not to go home under any circumstance. Their lives are in danger. As Saul informs him, "Joe 'Chickpea' Cicero" is:

> 'The most dangerous man that anybody can think of. He's a killer for hire, an arsonist, a kidnapper, and he's also a torturer.' […]
>
> 'It's widely known that if someone has a secret that you need to get at, all you have to do is hire Chickpea. He promises an answer to your question within seventy-two hours.' (*CK* 235)

Additionally, the other significant connotation related to Easy being threatened by such a criminal, is that his investigations and his status as a detective are acquiring more relevance. He has become a strong figure in the fight against crime to the extent of having new enemies plotting against him.

Easy's development in these novels reflects how he manages to be his own man in spite of the numerous and different issues that affect him. Always determined in his demand for respect and recognition, he lives in permanent conflict with the world and is never quite able to find equality. As a head custodian, as a family man and as a blues detective he regularly attempts to do things his way, and only his way. He negotiates his multiples identities, redefines himself, and creates an ambiguous space that allows him to achieve some dignity in the racist American society of the mid 1960s.

Conclusions

I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.
Jacques Lacan

Man is nothing other than what he makes himself.
Jean-Paul Sartre

Easy Rawlins' development throughout this series represents Walter Mosley's attempt to create a black male hero whose subjectivity subverts the traditional narratives in white American hegemony and the old stereotypes of African Americans. Opposed to following social expectations, Easy challenges the position of inferiority and the constraints that were historically attached to black people and endeavors to create his own space in an American society that attempts to render him invisible and voiceless. From *Gone Fishin'* to *Cinnamon Kiss*, Easy demonstrates his agency as he explores a wide range of alternatives – becoming a soldier, moving to L.A., buying several properties, working as a detective, having a family, etc. —to reach the respect, equality, and recognition that he strongly believes he deserves as an individual. In this way, he engages in a gradual and continuous process of self-invention that takes him through myriad stages and conflicts.

I have organized Easy's formation of subjectivity according to three main periods that correspond to Chapters 3, 4, and 5 in this thesis. Throughout these periods Easy's personal circumstances and the historical contexts that surround him vary significantly, consequently altering his growth and view of the world.

Mosley emphasizes above all the ideas of change and hybridity as inherent to his protagonist and how Easy manages to redefine himself based on his progressive experience and knowledge; he constructs alternative identities and relations of power that allow him to reconstitute blackness outside of essentialist traditions and homogeneous standards (Hall 1991: 54). In actual fact, we see how Easy relies on his blackness for relocation, and instead of looking at it as an oppressive reality, it becomes, in bell hook's terms, a site of transformation where liberating black subjectivity can fully emerge. Mosley's writing constitutes in this manner a postcolonial narrative that is concerned with issues of resistance, segregation, marginalization and self-recognition. As Angela Flury puts it, his series present a central history of racial relations in America (96). Easy Rawlins is a prime example of how black Americans see their skin color as a primary factor in the formation of their subjectivity.

In Chapter 3 my analysis explores *Gone Fishin'* and presents Easy's awakening experiences in 1939 as he goes on a journey down South to Pariah with his best friend Mouse. *Gone Fishin'* is the typical coming of age novel in the sense that the protagonist, at the time only nineteen years old, undergoes adventures and inner turmoil in his initiation into adulthood. Easy comes to grips with the reality of cruelty in the world as he confronts violence, death, racism, and hatred. Disillusioned particularly with Mouse's actions and lack of morality but even more puzzled with the whole trip in general, he decides to leave Texas. He does not yet know where to go but at least he knows that he does not want to live the kind of life that his friend seems bound to lead. At this moment, Walter Mosley establishes one of the main traits that will characterize Easy's personality in the rest of the novels: he is ambitious and believes in self-improvement. Easy has dreams and wants to seek other chances in life outside his community. We find him asking himself: "Why did I have to live so close to disaster?" (*GF* 168). Here Mosley begins to demonstrate how Easy differs from other African Americans in his reactions, goals and initiatives. The author's objective is to produce a counter-discourse through his novels in which the heterogeneity of the black community and the fluid identities he portrays refute the long-established dehumanizing labels on the Negro people.

As the story of *Gone Fishin'* proceeds, Easy reveals some of the crucial aspects of his early life that shaped his childhood and that ultimately were responsible in determining who he is. He was left an orphan at age ten, after his mother died and his father, after a violent altercation with white men, escaped to save his own life and never returned. Easy grew up therefore not only poor and alone but also feeling defenseless and scared of whites. Ironically the experiences of the trip south, although shocking and distressing, will help him to overcome some of his previous fears and acquire a more mature view of reality. While he still experiences racism and segregation, the interaction, mutual recognition and exchange of ideas that take place, such as those exchanged with Miss Dixon, the rich old white lady that took care of him when he got sick, empower him and give him a new insight of white people and the white world. If before in his life he had always felt inferior and as though he were occupying the position of the Other – the *colonized* subject – now spending time with an elderly white woman allows him to gain new perspectives and new knowledge.

This experience of empowerment corresponds to Bhabha's definition of mimicry. According to the postcolonial author, colonizer and colonized cannot "be viewed as separate entities that define themselves independently" (1984 on line). In fact, the colonizer's attempt to discipline and *normalize* the colonized turns into a sign of double articulation since the colonized learns from the colonizer's norms and lifestyle, reappropriating knowledge for himself. In this particular case, Easy learns from Miss Dixon that there are other ways of life apart from his own. Likewise, it is through her that he comprehends for the first time the incomparable value of literacy. She persuades him into becoming literate and he embraces the idea. Easy realizes that if he learned how to read and write, he would have access to a new world. Furthermore, he would not have to rely on Mouse for guidance, especially at that time when he still could not overcome the guilt for being involved in the murder of his friend's stepfather: "That was a big moment for me. And I´d say that whole trip was worth it just for that, but I can´t say that because I live to tell about it and not everybody else did" (*GF* 133). Although upset with the fatal outcome, Easy realizes that reading and writing, that

is, education, will provide him with the chance to be his own man and reach a higher social status than the one he was currently assigned.

At the end of *Gone Fishin'* Easy takes the first steps in his personal quest for self-invention. After gaining some basic schooling, he joins the army in an attempt to redefine himself but also to demonstrate to mainstream American his capability as a black man. It is then, after partipating in World War II, that he, like many other African American soldiers, acquires a broader black consciousness. He understands, among other things, that he is going to find discrimination anywhere he goes in America and that he will have to *fight* all his life in order to achieve respect from white people. Interestingly, as he discovers that the world makes him aggressive in order to survive, he also realizes that Mouse's killing of his stepfather was triggered by the conditions of scarcity that African Americans in general have to suffer for being black, poor and illiterate. He does not justify Mouse's behavior but at least now he sees it from a different perspective and can come to terms with the whole disturbing event. After all, he himself had to use violence to survive in the war.

Other changes in Easy's profile are visible after the end of the war. It is apparent, for instance, that he displays a higher self-esteem (he has received recognition as a soldier) and that he shows self-improvement in the fact that it is he who appears writing his own memories (he has reached his goal of learning how to read and write). Furthermore, symbolically, he does go back home, something his father never achieved. For Easy, running away is not a solution, especially now that he is no longer afraid of white people. In his return to Texas, however, Easy's sense of inadequacy grows stronger. He envisions a future for himself away from the world of poverty that has surrounded him before. For that reason, he decides to migrate to Los Angeles. He looks for an opportunity of having a better life –a life more similar to those of other Americans.

In the following novels, *Devil in a Blue Dress, A Red Death*, *White Butterfly*, and *Black Betty,* Walter Mosley presents a whole new stage in Easy's development. Chapter 4 in my work is devoted to the study of the evolution Easy undertakes in the series from 1948 to 1961. Throughout these years, Mosley's

protagonist displays an African American subjectivity that reflects major changes as a result of his new urban life, his need for reaffirmation and his new job as a detective.

Easy's arrival to the city coincides with the historical massive migration that occurred in the U.S. during and after World War II. He therefore experiences the tensions and difficulties that many black people went through trying to find employment and making a new living in overcrowded poor neighborhoods. Mosley portrays the social and racial discrimination African Americans suffered and how the growth of the black urban population produced a strong sense of community and cultural bonds that will prove crucial in Easy's posterior development. Also, as Elisabeth Ford explains, arriving and settling in the metropolis required the individual to reinvent himself in order to adapt to the new circumstances (32). Easy's assimilation to the city not only implies but also requires a change of mind and identity.

At the beginning of *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Easy is twenty-eight and is all wrapped up in his new life in L.A. He has lost his job and is highly concerned with losing his house if he is not able to keep up with the mortgage payment. Symbolically, owning property acquires a strong significance for him as a way of achieving recognition and positioning himself as the equal of whites. He comments: "I loved going home. Maybe it was that I was raised on a sharecropper´s farm or that I never owned anything until I bought that house, but I loved my little home." (*DBD* 11). According to Anthony Sze-Fai Shiu, Easy's desperate pursuit of ownership and having money signifies his need for reaffirmation and his desire to be in possession of his own self (17). Easy wants to be in control of his life and does not conform to the position of subjugation and mediocrity that whites expect him to occupy. In this part of the series, he constantly expresses his aspiration to make something of himself by pursuing a higher education and by becoming rich. Easy believes in the American Dream and in reaching a middle class status that would advance his position in American society.

The other major change in Easy's identity that at this point determines the representation of his subjectivity and his central characterization for the rest of the novels is his new role as a detective. Mosley's decision to use as a literary framework the hardboiled detective genre forces him to include specific traits in the portrayal of his hero that make him identifiable as such. Consequently, it is discernible that he follows as an example the model set up by Raymond Chandler's work in the creation of the renowned Phillipe Marlowe or in the essay "The Simple Art of Murder." Nevertheless, while Easy and Marlowe certainly have many similarities in their behavior and attitude, Mosley does not just draw a literal and straightforward categorization of the conventional private eye. He repeats the detective figure but with variations. In other words, and as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. would say, Easy *signifies* the traditional detective figure. Mosley accomplishes the creation of an African American hero that subverts the detective conventions by including traits from both the classic and the hardboiled private eye but that also displays intrinsic black characteristics. Furthermore, Easy presents qualities that in many cases overcome those of his white counterparts; he contests the representation of marginal black characters. As a result, not only does Easy present a critical view of a corrupted and *noir* American urban life in his first person narration but he is also regularly asked by the LAPD to assist them in their criminal investigations in black neighborhoods that they cannot unravel. Easy subverts the system by having the police subjugate to his demands.

As the novels progress, it is thus possible to hear different voices in Easy Rawlins' discourse as a detective: the voice of the white detective novel conventions and the voice of an empowered and emergent black detective novel tradition. These voices struggle with one another and one of them is alternately at the center and the other in the periphery (Bakhtin 342). Throughout my work, I analyze how Easy's formation of subjectivity combines and develops all the different traits that define him. I have grouped these traits in three different categories according to his profile as a conventional detective, a black detective and a post-colonial detective.

In the first case, we see that although Easy becomes a detective almost by accident, Mosley makes this shift plausible by imbuing his hero with intrinsic

characteristics and a natural instinct that fit the traditional detective figure. As *Devil in a Blue Dress* opens, Easy appears in a bar, alone, and having a glass of whiskey. He displays a tough image, is observant, and asks direct and defiant questions with an attitude: "What's my business got to do with you, Mr. Albright?" (*DBD* 4). In the same way, it is Easy's background as a soldier that enables him to be considered by Albright to have the job investigating the whereabouts of a woman called Daphne Monet. This implied that he knows how to fight, how to use a gun, and how to take care of himself in the dark and dangerous streets of Los Angeles.

From this point on, Easy will gradually build and strengthen his identity as a sleuth showing other typical detective traits such as his moral values, his attraction to women, his will to protect the good people from the bad people, his recurrent disregard of rules, his verbal prowess, his capacity for deduction, and his overall sense of confidence. In the rest of the novels, Easy gets involved in numerous and various cases that prove his skills and make him a successful private eye. Most importantly, Easy will keep developing and gaining knowledge to the extent of becoming a professional detective and having his own office by 1965. These changes in characterization as well as in his personal life constitute a notable innovation with respect to the previous conventional detective, which traditionally is presented as a cardboard figure. As Stephen Soitos indicates, Mosley noticeably reappropriates the detective fiction for his own ends (29). He steps outside of the script to depict a black private eye who subverts the formula by reflecting constant development and a predominant attachment to the African American community.

Secondly, as a black detective, not only does Easy present a more human side but also a less standardized profile. In fact, we see how he develops a unique personality that breaks the hardboiled conventions by, for example, beginning what Anthony Shiu highlights as "a patriarchal system of detection" (33). Easy adopts two children, Jesus and Feather, and combines his job as a detective with his family life. Also, in *White Butterfly,* he even appears married but his wife, unable to cope with his lies and his business of *favors,* leaves him before long. As a rule, Easy is portrayed as a sensitive black detective that goes through personal

difficulties and is used to express openly his feelings of love, anger or distress. He is persistently concerned about his friends and the people in his community, and his set of priorities differs widely from those of his white counterparts. In this respect, we see how he becomes a trusted figure in Watts, and often times he gets involved in cases that do not bring him any profit. He solves conflicts among black people that police do not care about. He does this as a trade of favors like in the old black southern style. His connection to the African American culture shapes his actions noticeably.

Indeed, Easy's perspective as a black private eye is always related to his blackness. Some exclusive characteristics that distinguish him are his double consciousness, his ability to shift identities, and his use of the African American speech. Having been in contact with the white culture and having suffered racial discrimination all his life, Easy develops the concept that Du Bois' coined as double consciousness and uses it to his own advantage. He has the faculty to know how white people think and look at Negroes disparagingly, and at the same time he maintains his African American point of view. This proves essential in his investigations when having to solve complex crimes and having to cross the color boundaries between the black and the white world. It is also under these circumstances when Easy displays his capacity for shifting and negotiating identities. Like the figure of the trickster in black folklore he shows impressive skills lying and changing names. He conceals his real intentions to protect himself and deceives whoever he needs to achieve his goals. In the same way, his command of language can also easily shift between standard English and black English. Easy's acquaintance with African American cultural traditions is emphasized by his use of a particular speech pattern that characterizes the black community and forms part of the black vernaculars. Since language, as Bakhtin, Hopper, and Whorf indicate, constructs the individual on a social and ideological level, Easy's choice to speak the black dialect constitutes a crucial factor in his way of understanding and looking at the world that surrounds him.

Finally, Easy's traits as a post-colonial detective are produced by the historical, social and political tensions that as a black man he has to endure in American society. He develops a subversive black mind that rejects all kinds of

subjugation as well as derogatory terms such as "Son," "Boy," "Uncle," and others, regularly used by whites in the U.S. to refer to blacks that categorize African American men as inferior and as a homogenous group. In this sense, not only does Easy endeavor to prove those stereotypes wrong through his way of life and his sharp critical perspective of society, but most importantly, he also attempts to accomplish all his goals in spite of them.

Symbolically, Easy is a detective that writes his own stories. His first-person writing turns him into a post-colonial thinking subject that reappropriates the white discourse to reconstruct it. He is the *Other* that denounces the institutionalized racism of the United States and presents a different reality and a different truth. Along these lines, Easy condemns the problematic nature of law in America criticizing how the capitalist system controls justice and applies it differently depending on the individual's ethnic background and social status. Likewise, in *Black Betty*, he shows how hard work does not guarantee success for African Americans; there is a "glass ceiling" that they cannot trespass. After losing his properties and his hope of becoming a millionaire, Easy attacks the propaganda behind the American Dream and the maxims on being the land of opportunity and freedom. He echoes Cornel West's postcolonial ideas and points out how American democracy and notion of liberty were predicated upon black oppression and degradation. Last of all, like in the anti-colonial reinterpretation of Shakespeare's Caliban –the colonized subject that refuses domination and confronts the European colonizer– Easy raises his own argument against the education that black children receive in American schools and how they are induced to dislike themselves and denied the resources to learn about black literature, art and music. When Easy speaks about these issues his is a post-colonial voice that demands equality, respect and dignity.

Ultimately, in Chapter 5 I analyze the final group of novels in the series. *A Little Yellow Dog*, *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, *Six Easy Pieces*, *Little Scarlet* and *Cinnamon Kiss* cover Easy's last stage of self-invention from 1963 to 1966. This period is characterized by important historical events such as President Kennedy's murder, the advent of Martin Luther King, the growth of Black Nationalist groups, and the L.A. riots of 1965. On a character level, it is marked by Easy's

decision to change his way of life. He opts to step out of the streets and the business world and to look for alternative ways to redefine himself and achieve recognition. Conscious of how mainstream white society restricts his chances for development, he constructs a space that allows him to be his own person and control the different terrains he occupies. In my study, I focus on Easy's self-actualization and how he claims and demonstrates his agency through the choices he makes for himself and the multiple identities he adopts as a head custodian at Sojourner Truth School, as a family man, and as a blues detective.

Easy's new job as a head custodian represents a new step to lead a different lifestyle and gain a new reputation. While a position as head custodian might not appear as a great improvement on a social scale, it does provide Easy with an identification of authority and competence. He is responsible for the work and organization of more than fifteen janitors. Better still, it bestows upon him power to confront white principals and have a say in the running of the school. In a historical context of intense racial tensions, Easy symbolizes challenge and social change. He does not bow down to whites nor does he accept any insulting or unreasonable demands from anyone. Actually, as a result of his hard work and his image of fairness, he becomes the one black man who both teachers and students trust and ask for help. Easy's emblematic position transcends to the extent of getting involved in the establishment of an appropriate discipline code and educational atmosphere at the school. He even acts as a mediator *translating* norms and expectations for the southern black families that are new arrivals. Easy thus manages to succeed reinventing himself and achieving the image of pride and worth he had anticipated for himself.

On a family level, Easy's identity as a black father reveals significant traits about his attempt to reinforce his male role. Having a family and accomplishing his responsibilities as a family man represent Easy's way of fulfilling his particular notion of masculinity according to both white and African American expectations. On the one hand, the fact that he grew up under a condition of outrageous social and racial inequality –the post-colonial legacy of slavery– takes him to pursue a middle class status in which to raise his kids. He seeks social stability and reassurance in mainstream society in order to aspire to a better life.

To this aim, Easy constructs a patchwork family and creates a home to realize his goals. On the other hand, Easy's sense of manhood is influenced by the gender role standards that he learned from his own father and the cultural traditions within the black community (Hunter and Davis 465). Being a family head and providing protection, economic care, and involvement constitutes a sign of respect and achievement among African Americans. In this way, Easy also becomes a heroic black single paternal figure that subverts the stereotypes on black fatherhood at a time when it was common to find a significant number of black mothers in charge of their households because black men could not provide for their families and had abandoned them.

Simultaneously, Easy's relationship with Bonnie in this group of novels also constitutes another new factor in his development of manhood. She contributes to his stability and to his sense of achievement. Far from being just a common housekeeper, she works as a flight attendant for Air France and speaks several languages. Being born in the French Guiana and having traveled all over give her a multicultural touch that Easy values and regards as an asset for himself and his household. Furthermore, if his first marriage failed mostly due to his incapacity to open himself and his habit of putting up a false image in front of his wife, now Easy hides no secrets from Bonnie. In this respect, not only does she bring him to explore his inner self and his deepest feelings of love but also his worst feelings of jealousy and rage. While she increases Easy's sense of worth when they live happily together for more than three years, it is also she who makes him lose his self-confidence and feel vulnerable when he suspects she is being unfaithful. This situation reversal, common in the African American folktales and especially in the figure of the trickster, takes Easy to pursue his masculinity through the maladaptive model of manliness that are connected to sexual prowess (Oliver 199). Highly criticized and certainly overextended by mainstream society, African American men have traditionally been infamous for replacing their low self-esteem and sense of failure through the manifestation of their sexual capacity. Easy displays this other understanding of manhood through his sexual encounters with several women.

Last of all, the third aspect to study in Easy's process of self-invention that determines his subjectivity is his hybrid identity as a blues detective. Throughout these novels, Easy's intention to build a new image forces him to get involved in new investigations. He does it first to demonstrate his innocence, and second to secure his family's freedom. As Pepper indicates, "[t]he very fact that Rawlins owns his own home, has a job, cares about his family, means that people (usually white people) are able to threaten him, threaten the things and people he cherishes" (2000: 126). Ironically, Easy has to go back to the streets in order to secure his priorities and fulfill his image as an honest middle class man. As he does this, he uses all the skills that made him successful before. The only difference is that this time he has more knowledge and experience. By now, Easy has learned that in order to be a detective there are some requirements he has to follow. There is a certain kind of attitude he has to adopt, there are certain lines he has to say. In Chapter 2 I started the analysis of Easy's subjectivity as a detective with Chandler's quote on how Sherlock Holmes is above all a character with an attitude and some remarkable and unforgettable sentences. Later, in Chapter 5, I used as an epigraph Easy's line from *A Little Yellow Dog* to demonstrate correlation and progress in relation to the previous one: "'Twenty dollars for anything you got to say and another twenty if it sound good t'me.' It was a sentence that I'd said many times in my life" (*YD* 258). From *A Little Yellow Dog* to *Cinnamon Kiss*, Easy displays the distinct traits that define him as a conventional hardboiled detective but also all the others that are intrinsic to his blackness and his subversive mind as a post-colonial subject: his trickster skills, his double consciousness, his shrewd critique, etc. He consolidates thus a hybrid identity and a hybrid consciousness that turns him into what Stephen Soitos deems the blues detective. Likewise, the other substantial difference in this stage is that as a result of all these traits that distinguish him, he achieves recognition for the LAPD that grants him an official badge as a private investigator. Easy goes from being an amateur to a professional sleuth.

In essence, I hope to have contributed with my thesis to the study of Easy Rawlins as an African American character whose subjectivity is shaped by the different identities he adopts as well as by the American reality of racial oppression that surrounds him. Easy represents a site of overlap and hybridity on a cultural and social level. Unlike any other previous essays on the Rawlins series to date, in my work I have explored Easy's development throughout the ten novels in which he appears, paying close attention to the changes and experiences he undergoes in each one of them. Walter Mosley seems to be suggesting that Easy's syncretic nature has evolved not simply from his condition as a black man or his profile as a black detective but as a result of his interaction and relation to other influences, other cultures, and other communities.

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