



*Detective, Untipografico*

# Easy Rawlins' Identity: a Unique African American Male Detective

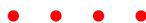
AGUSTÍN REYES TORRES  
*Universitat de València*

**ABSTRACT:** Using the hardboiled conventions as the narrative framework for his series, Walter Mosley portrays a black detective hero, Easy Rawlins, who goes through a process of discovering his true identity by exploring the nature of being a black male throughout the 1950s and 1960s in America. He displays peculiar characteristics in the way of leading his life and the use of his double consciousness and his abilities as a trickster.

**KEYWORDS:** Easy Rawlins, Walter Mosley, black identity, African American community, discrimination.

**RESUMEN:** Utilizando el género negro como marco narrativo, Walter Mosley ha creado la figura de un héroe afroamericano, el detective Easy Rawlins, que va descubriendo gradualmente su identidad como hombre negro en las décadas de 1950 y 1960 en Estados Unidos. Rawlins exhibe rasgos únicos en lo que concierne a su estilo de vida, su doble conciencia y sus habilidades como charlatán-estafador.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Easy Rawlins, Walter Mosley, identidad negra, comunidad afroamericana, discriminación.



Every step could mean death to a black man like me.

Easy Rawlins, *Gone Fishin'*

Most famous detectives can be distinguished due to some particular traits that make them unique. All the same, it is also clear that all of them share some common characteristics. Without any doubt, Walter Mosley follows the hardboiled conventions set by Hammett or Chandler to create a black private eye whose profile mirrors that of his white counterparts. However, in this case, he also subverts such conventions when he imbues his hero with very distinctive features. Mosley creates an African American detective that not only becomes a social commentator on the racism that exists in the community in which he lives but also takes advantage of his blackness to solve the crimes. Mosley represents a critical social perspective which shapes the gradual formation of a particular identity in the character of his protagonist. In this way, he uses the detective genre to his own means. As quoted by Jerry Bryant (2003), “the genre might be mystery, but the underlying questions are moral and ethical, even existential” (150). The aim of my work is to show first how Walter Mosley represents a hero that 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 a black male in America. As he gradually learns his new trade as a private investigator, he strongly criticizes the racial context that surrounds him. Ultimately, I will also explore how the characterization of Easy Rawlins evolves as a black man –challenging old stereotypes of African American identity, and as a black detective –enhancing the figure of the tough sleuth through the display of his own distinctive traits such as his double consciousness and his trickster abilities.

Walter Mosley's representation of the black community in Los Angeles constitutes the conception of a new discourse and a replacement of the old narratives by reappropriating 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. Not only does he create a new type of detective novel that expands traditional hardboiled conventions, but also depicts a local black community that is heterogeneous and struggles for a new identification and recognition. Thus, through his writing Mosley contributes to the establishment of new models of the local African American individual by discarding traditional stereotypes. He portrays an Easy Rawlins as well as other African American characters in the series who speak, demand reasons, and demonstrate agency, who before were frequently rendered voiceless and helpless by the dominant American society. Furthermore, Easy's identity is not fixed and steady but in constant progress.

Regarding the traditional stereotypes of 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.

In this new type of detective novel, Mosley illustrates the construction of African American identity by deconstructing the foundations that for centuries have segregated and singularized the black community in the United States. Focusing specifically on the black male, as Charles W. Thomas indicates in his essay "On Being a Black Man," there is a long list of names which were 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:

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 (1970:239).

These old concepts dehumanized the black man and constrained him with any expectations of development. Furthermore, they reveal how the black man was "tamed" by the white discourse. Mosley's

portrayal of Easy's struggle to break the old stereotypes concurs with 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). In this way, Easy's disapproving reflections on the reality he confronts and his determination to accomplish his goals, reveal how he opposes those traditional views and barriers.

It is significant that his first-person writing constitutes a discourse of resistance and reconstruction. As Andrew Pepper indicates,

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 and having him grow older, Mosley has the opportunity to present from an African American point of view a wide list of significant domestic matters that took place in the United States in the 50s and 60s. Indeed, aspects such as the rural migration of thousands of black people to the cities, institutionalized racial oppression, African Americans' day-to-day challenges and the injustices to which they were subject, are a piece of American history that Mosley brings up 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 is often seen struggling to challenge discrimination and demanding a certain degree of respect and dignity.

At the beginning of the *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), for example, Easy says: "The law is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead" (Mosley 1990: 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. (Mosley 1990:121)

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.

In this first novel of the series the time setting is 1948 and Easy 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 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 present:

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 (Mosley 1990:27).

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. 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" (1990:709).

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, according to Neil Wynn, "as more and more blacks entered the cities the ghettos became increasingly congested and run down, affecting morals, health and race relations" (1993:63). Furthermore, due to their low economic status and the extended racial discrimination, it was extremely difficult for African Americans to move out of the ghetto once they were settled. Mosley presents the social and racial challenges that Easy faces when living in the new urban space that Los Angeles represents. Certainly, 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 (2002:32).

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” (2002:37). 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. Here the acquisition of a language or a dialect, as M. Bakhtin argues, is parallel to the acquisition of a world view (1981:271). 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.

Accordingly, Easy’s sense of identity 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” (2005:50). 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 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 subject 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-centered. Bhabha 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.” (1989:25). After several years living in Los Angeles, Easy has wide knowledge of the urban white society, the white man’s system of values and his way of thinking. 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 the inevitable hybridity that results as the colonizer and the colonized meet.

This becomes evident for instance when Walter Mosley emphasizes the effect of ownership in Easy's way of thinking by steeping the first novels of the series *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death* (1991), *White Butterfly* (1992) and *Black Betty* (1994) with Easy's desire to own properties. He relates this goal 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" (Mosley 1990:09). Easy left Houston because he did not want to be at the bottom of the social ladder. That's why, as the novels progress, we see his constant 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" (1997:17). 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" (Mosley 1990:52). Mosley indicates that African Americans' desperate pursuit of ownership and having money is really their desire to declare ownership of themselves. 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 reaching a middle class status.

In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, being still 28, 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" (Mosley 1990:48). 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 (Mosley 1992:162).

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*. Many years before, however, in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, 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. (Mosley 1990:153).

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" (Mosley 1990:205).

On a different level, in order to study Easy's distinctive mind as a black man and his continuous development and self-actualization, it is necessary to focus on two other central traits: his interest in learning and acquiring a higher education and, secondly, his role as a father of two adopted children. If, as already mentioned, Easy leaves Texas in order to find a new way of life, and, achieves the objective of learning how to read and write, later 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 in his third English course at LACC reading Shakespeare's sonnets: "I had two part-time years of Los Angeles City College under my belt" (Mosley 1991:104). Likewise, he is told for the first time about W.E.B. Du Bois by one of his friends:

'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 (Mosley 1994:185).

In fact, later on he indeed appears reading Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*, and as we 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” (1996:11).

Without any doubt, one of Easy’s strengths 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 white culture or 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 western literature; he makes it his own. Like Du Bois, Easy is supporting the study of both 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 [...] (1996:11).

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” (Mosley 1992:82). Finally, in *Black Betty*, he says that he “takes up his empty time” (Mosley 1994:18) 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 (Mosley 1994:18).

Easy’s comments 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.

Alternatively, the other crucial aspect of Easy’s growth and his unique characterization as a black man is his involvement in parenting. This is clearly portrayed in the novels: *A Little Yellow Dog* (1996), *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* (2002), *Six Easy Pieces* (2003), *Little Scarlet* (2004), *Cinnamon Kiss* (2005) and

*Blonde Faith* (2007). While in the previous ones we see how his expectations to achieve the American Dream were shattered as far as being a successful business man, in this second group, Easy does reach his goal of having his own household.

He in fact 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 1990:155). 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” (1990:155). But Easy reverses the negative meaning attached to black fatherhood. His influence in Jesus and Feather’s lives is 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 raised them as if they were his own kids. Easy becomes 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 1990:157). 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 his friend Mouse’s offer to go to Texas to rob an armored car. 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” (Mosley 2005:6). 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 (Mosley 2005:10).

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” (Mosley 2005:11). 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” (Mosley 2005:19). In the end, the situation will finally be solved when Easy accepts a new case, this time investigating a crime in San Francisco, for which he obtains a large sum of money, making it possible for Feather to be taken to the hospital in Europe for three months.

On the other hand, with regard to the other major characterization in Easy’s unique profile, the use of double-conscious tropes in his portrayal as a black private eye is another area in which Mosley not only does he alter the traditional detective formula but also Signifies it and makes it his own. As defined 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” (1987:49). In this case, Easy’s traits 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, and the ability of the American Negro to lead a double life as a Negro and as an American (Du Bois 1996:164). 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 (1996:05).

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 of how African Americans almost felt guilty for existing: “We were hung and burned for just being alive” (Mosley 1991:91). 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 (Mosley 1994:73).

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" (Mosley 1994:72). 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 (Mosley 1994:91).

Easy knows the different expectations 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. According to Elisabeth Ford, "Easy manages to negotiate these varied spaces with miraculous success" (2002:14).

As the series progresses, Easy's double consciousness allows him to understand the white perspective without abandoning his own as an African American man and, in addition, to develop his abilities as a trickster. According to Mary Young, this shows the presence of black folklore in Mosley's work. In this way, Easy's 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." By and large, Easy's use of shifting identities will become regular throughout the novels. He hides who he is, replies with sarcasm, assumes roles and changes his name repeatedly. In the story "Gator Green" for instance, 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" (Mosley 2003:171). 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 [...] out on the town tonight. A [regular man] could never find Willis Longtree. [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 (Mosley 2003:140).

As a trickster-detective, there is no question that Easy displays a unique ability to acquire multiple names and change identities; he has an acute sense of knowing who he needs to become in every case.

In conclusion, 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 stand for the deconstructive criticism on black identity that Mosley includes between the lines of every novel. On the other hand, I also have shown how Easy reinvents himself as a black male. He acquires an education and considers himself as good as any white man. In this way, Easy's self-motivation and determination for improvement constitute an example of the heterogeneity that exists among black people as far as identity and individual goals. His search for equality and empowerment through his attempt to reach a middle class status and his fatherhood, together with his obsession with ownership demonstrate his desperation for having his own space and owning his own self.

Finally, Easy's traits as a detective reveal how he develops a unique profile that breaks the hardboiled conventions. Some exclusive characteristics that distinguish him are his double consciousness and his ability to shift identities. 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 under these circumstances that Easy shows impressive skills lying and changing names like the figure of the trickster in black folklore. All of these traits make him unique as a detective and as an African American male.

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