
Hanan Jezawi
Department of English, Al-Balqa Applied University, Irbid- Jordan

Received on: Feb. 15, 2012
Accepted on: April 19, 2012

Abstract

African American authors of detective fiction helped develop a new generation of the American detective novel, called the hard-boiled detective novel. While writers of the classical detective novel concentrated on solving the crimes and finding the criminal at the end of the novel, the writers of the new generation of detective fiction, mainly Black American authors, effected a significant change in this genre. They started using it to serve their ethnic social groups by highlighting the social problems that face them in America and presenting their viewpoints.

This paper is an attempt at analyzing Walter Mosley's Devil in a Blue Dress as an example of American Hard-Boiled detective fiction. The theme, setting, and characters, in this novel, are typical and representative of their counterparts in other American hard-boiled detective novels by Black American authors. In its implications for the history and development of American detective fiction in general, this novel forms a kind of microcosm of the macrocosm of American hard-boiled detective fiction. These implications are explored in this paper in the light of Soitos' tropes of black detective fiction. These tropes provide significant help in defining and explaining race conflict in American society between the blacks and the whites. When applied to the hard-boiled novel in question, these tropes help us see how the black characters in the novel, the detective persona included, are aware of being the "Other", how they are affected by this awareness, and how the race conflict that results from this awareness leads to Crime.

Detective fiction naturally deals with crime and is associated with mystery. American detective fiction is no exception. However, the twentieth century Black American authors of detective novels developed a new generation of detective fiction that came to be called hard-boiled detective fiction. Ray Browne observes that the previous phase of detective fiction, which was called in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the classical detective fiction, has been criticized for being far from real life (327). This kind of fiction is meant for entertainment; the plot in the typical novel focuses on a kind of "puzzle": a mysterious crime is committed, and the protagonist's main aim is to discover the criminal and solve the mystery at the end of the novel. Thus, this kind of novel, as Scott McCracken observes, is called "whodunit" (454).

It followed that some of the American detective writers, such as Dashiell Hammet and Raymond Chandler, in the late 1930s, developed this genre into the so-called "hard-
boiled detective fiction" (Nyman 15). Like its counterpart in classic detective fiction, this new phase of the hard-boiled fiction includes crime and is associated with mystery. However, the writers of the new phase effected significant change in the common view about the detective novel; they started using it to serve their society by highlighting the social issues that face the American society.

One of the major issues that affect people in the United States is racism: the superiority of one group over another according to skin color. Racism is a major cause of the division of the American society into classes. White Americans usually look down upon ethnic groups, like Black Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican Americans, and others. The supposed inferiority of these groups is treated widely in the hard-boiled detective novels. The assumption of the inferiority of the black person, the Black American, in particular, began with slavery. Black Americans originally were brought to be exploited as cheap labor to work in America. They were either enslaved or employed as laborers, and in both cases they suffered extreme poverty. The inequality of wealth, which causes class conflict, was a major cause of crimes committed by the poor against the rich. Such crimes are called "blue crimes," as opposed to "White- Collar Crimes," a designation of crimes committed by the upper class. Both kinds of crimes are in a way or another related to class conflict. Philip Rubio observes that at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century American society witnessed what was called the nadir of American race relations (57). It was the worst period of discrimination; during it, Black Americans had no civil rights and they were systematically ill-treated, even killed violently. The hatred between the blacks and the whites leads to the so-called "hate crimes". These are criminal acts that take place usually between racial groups, when one group or a member of it attacks another for religious, gender, or color reasons. The victims of hate crimes include both blacks and whites. These crimes started after the civil war when slaves became free and the whites became afraid that they would demand, or try to be, equal with them; thus, they began to persecute the Black Americans as a preemptive measure, so to speak. Such acts of persecution increased hatred, and, as a result, the Black Americans defended themselves by attacking the whites, who in their turn became the victims of hate crimes.

Racism leads to class conflicts because it involves power, both political and economic. The group that considers itself superior to the other groups usually does so because it is in power. The powerless people realize that they cannot be equal to those who have the power to control everything. So, a conflict arises, and, more often than not, the conflict leads to crimes. Hence it is that theorists of criminology see "social ills such as poverty, racism, sexism and destruction of the environment as true crimes" (Gaines 50). By the same token, and since the detective novel deals with crimes, the
American hard-boiled detective fiction writers relate these crimes to the social conflicts that affect the American citizens.

There are many sociologists and economic theorists who have studied modern society and social conflicts, but they do so from different perspectives. Many social conflict theorists start from criticizing and then developing the Marxist social conflict theory, which was originated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Since "Marx first put forward his theory of the RULING CLASS [and] its conflict with other classes" (Bottomore 32), he led theorists after him to think more about social conflicts and their causes.

Marx and Engels assert that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle" (57). They divide the society into the "bourgeoisie", who own and control, and the "proletarians", who work for wages. They believe that the relation between people is a relation of exploitation. This exploitation leads to social conflicts in capitalist societies, where those who control the economy and production control everything (57-9). Larry Siegel suggested that although Karl Marx did not talk a lot about crimes, he led theorists to think about the relation between crimes and social inequalities since he noted that in capitalist societies there is an increase in "wealth" as well as "crimes", and conflicts lead to criminal behavior (230-32).

The sociologist Max Weber studied social inequality in modern life. Weber agrees with Marx that the economic inequality produces conflicts in capitalist societies, but he adds other elements that are considered sources of inequality. For example, he finds a relation between religion and capitalism. He observes, “Capitalism is not just economic but a distinctive pattern of a whole society” (78-89). Weber finds that the class is a social status, not “acquisitions” related just to the economic system. He thinks that “social status” includes “mood of living”, “formal process of education”, and “prestige of birth” (429).

The Marxist literary critic Raymond Williams asserts that "class is thus the central focus through which Marxists view societies", while "gender and racial formations" are not important factors in class conflict (41). He criticizes Marxists for using the term “class” in a one-dimensional sense, that is the economic, in capitalist society, and adds a new explanation for this term: “class is a social formation” and “the whole way of life” (282). So, according to Williams it is not just the economic relation that determines class and causes class conflict, but it is the way of life in general including race and gender.

Some social conflict theorists believe that wealth does not necessarily mean power. “Power is not synonymous with wealth”, Gaines and Miller say, and hence it is, according to them, that women or people from inferior races in American society, can have wealth, but they can’t be powerful (50). So, it is not wealth or economic factors alone that determine whether a person could be powerful in his society or not; there are other factors behind social inequality which leads to social conflicts.
Kathleen Klein observes that treating social issues like the issue of race in the hard-boiled novel is something new because this issue was not treated in the classic detective novels (54). The issue of racism is raised in hard-boiled American fiction in the form of a clash between white and black characters. In this kind of novel, the protagonist is aware of his blackness; he knows what it means to be a black person in a society dominated by white culture.

Many Black American detective writers treat the race issue as a theme in their novels. These include Walter Mosley, Barbara Neely, and Chester Himes. The main aim in the novels of these detective fiction writers is not just detecting or solving crimes, but also revealing the world around their characters to their readers and presenting crimes as a result of class conflict. Their fiction raises issues that relate to race in American society, like social injustice, poverty, and violence and how they lead to crimes.

Like other black authors, Walter Mosley, a major detective fiction writer and contributor to the development of this genre, uses detective fiction to represent Black American viewpoints and to reflect life in America. Like most hard-boiled detective fiction authors, Mosley treats issues related to real life. Therefore, he depicts a black community that struggles for a new identity. By representing conflicts especially race conflict as the main reason behind crimes and by creating black heroes in positive roles, he attracts a huge number of readers from different races.

What distinguishes Black American detective fiction from other detective fictions is what Stephen Soitos calls the “Tropes of Black Detection” (27). He observes that hard-boiled novels have a tradition of detective writing, and that "African Americans from the beginning have fearlessly altered these [classic] formulas in their own way and to their own ends" (27). Soitos' tropes, most of which are featured in Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* can help us recognize the role of racism as a theme in the Black American detective fiction. Before discussing them, though, it would be useful to give a brief summary of the plot of *Devil in a Blue Dress*.

The events of *Devil in a Blue Dress* take place in Los Angeles after WW II. Easy Rawlins, a black man, is fired from his job as an employee in Champion Aircraft to find himself in a financial problem which prevents him from paying his debts. Although he hates working for white men, he accepts working with Dewitt Albright as a private detective for some money. His task in this job is to find Daphne, who is thought to be a white woman in love with another rich white man called Todd Carter. While Easy is searching for Daphne, some people who are related to Daphne are killed. The police arrest Easy thinking that he is involved in the crimes, but they release him later. Easy meets Daphne’s lover, Carter, who tells him that she has stolen thirty thousand dollars from him. Easy enjoys the support and help of Mouse, his strong black friend and comrade in the war. At the end of the novel, Daphne's brother, Frank, is killed and her
secret identity, namely, that she is a black woman with white skin and blue eyes is revealed when Mouse uncovers the fact of her being Frank's sister. She splits the money she has stolen from Todd Carter with Easy and Mouse and disappears. With the support and protection of the powerful Todd Carter, Easy succeeds in misleading the police by his faulty confessions and saves some people including Mouse; then he turns to work as a specialized detective with a license.

Now we turn to Soitos' four tropes. The first of these tropes is the black “detective persona” (Soitos 28). This trope involves shifting the focus in the detective novel from plot to character, with black characters, especially the detective persona, representing the impact of racism and social conflicts on them. This shift of focus from plot to character in the hard-boiled American detective novel forms a significant point of departure from the classic American detective novel. In the classical detective novel, writers "create classic English 'whodunit'' (McCracken 53), where the plot and action, the crime, who did it, and how he will be caught take precedence over the characters and characterization.

Black writers make the detectives black and make of their blackness an asset in their success in investigation. Besides that, the black detective's identity is directly connected to his community. Unlike his counterpart in mainstream American detective fiction, he is typically aware of his place in the American society as a black person, “the black detective shares a sense of community and family that doesn’t exist in the mainstream detective tradition” (Soitos 31). This detective has strong relations with his fellow Black Americans.

In Devil in a Blue Dress, Detective Easy sympathizes with black people and helps them because he experiences race conflict, just like other black people. From the beginning of Devil in a Blue Dress, Easy is surprised whenever he meets blacks and whites at the same place. Easy is surprised to see a white man entering Joppy’s bar, a bar for black people. Before knowing that Daphne is a black woman, he is surprised to know that she could be found in places for the blacks. The color white itself very much catches Easy's attention immediately: when he sees Albright for the first time, he notices his white skin, white suit, white socks, and his white Cadillac.

The black person also is not used to entering white neighborhoods because he is insulted by the whites; he is called nigger and boy. He is even forbidden to talk to their women. On one occasion, Easy returns the innocent greeting of a white girl, who he wishes to avoid in the first place because he is waiting for Albright to hold a secret meeting with him. The girl's friends move in around him and begin to say things like, "we don't need ya talking to our women”¹ (DBD 60). He explains that he doesn't want any

¹ All citations from the text of the novel will be from Devil in a Blue Dress. New York: Norton, 1990. Referred to henceforward as DBD.
problem, but the biggest one of the girl's friend respond with, "you already got a problem, boy." (DBD 61). Even the police don't like to see a white woman with a black man. As he drives with Daphne along a canyon road towards Hollywood, Easy is glad he sees no police cars on the ride; for, they might very well arrest him for driving with a white woman in his car "because the police have white slavery on the brain when it comes to colored men and white women" (DBD 98). Thus, it is natural that he feels odd in white neighborhoods while he feels at home among his people. So, the "detective persona" is aware of how things are going around him, and his awareness affects his feeling and behavior.

The Blacks are born to find themselves in a weak position. They fear the white man to the extent that they have developed self-defense mechanisms involving conscious erosion of knowledge or information when questioned by a white man of authority. Though Easy is aware of this practice and hates to find himself in such a position, he still resorts to it when under pressure. While entering a building to meet Albright, Easy is surprised by "a little" white man asking him what he wants: I "stuttered," he says, then:

> It was a habit I developed in Texas when I was a boy. Sometimes when a white man of authority would catch me off guard, I'd empty my head of everything so I was unable to say anything "The less you know, the less trouble you find," they used to say. I hated myself for it but I also hated white people, and colored people too, for making me that way (DBD 21).

Not only does Easy blame the White Americans, but also the Blacks who teach him to fear the Whites and accept his impotence before them. Though the white man was "little" in Easy's eyes, he was still a symbol of authority and power before whom Easy had to resort to the self-defense mechanism he had learned as a black boy.

As Ray Browne reports, the private eye "PI --who is privately hired by a client to investigate-- in the classical or British detective story works with the police and he is paid like them (3). But in the American hard-boiled detective fiction, the black private eye does not work with the police, nor is he welcomed by them. Elizabeth Leane describes the "PI" in the hard-boiled novels, as hardly powerful, isolated from others, and living a hard life (3). He works alone because he doesn't trust the police. He also knows that law usually stops short of bringing to justice those criminals who have power to control everything around them, even when their crimes are uncovered by the police, let alone cases when the crime is uncovered by a black detective. Mosley shows how the black "PI" is mistreated. After being fired from his job at Champion Aircraft, Easy becomes a private investigator. He is a clever detective who works for justice, but he faces
difficulties because he is black. When two police men, Miller and Mason, arrest him, they
call him names, mistreat him, and refuse to tell him why he is being arrested. He simply
demands his rights to know why they are taking him, "I've got the right to know why you
are taking me." But Mason retorts with, "You got a right to fall down and brake your face,
nigger. You got a right to die," he said. "Then he hit me in the diaphragm." (DBD 75).

Easy becomes afraid to run or walk fast in the street because the police will arrest any
black person they find. (DBD 83)

The Blacks in general and the black detective in particular do not believe that their
society is fair, especially when it comes to their cases. That is why the detective works
separately from the policemen. The Blacks know that, unlike the Whites, they do not get
their rights, and that, more often than not, law mysteriously fails to be enforced against
their victimizers. Though innocent, Easy is justifiably afraid of being indicted for the crime
he is investigating. On his second arrest by the police, Easy is told that there are
fingerprints on the knife with which Richard Ma'Gee was killed; this, however, does not
end his worries despite his never having touched the knife. He doesn't trust the police.
I knew that I hadn't touched the knife but I didn't
know what the police were up to….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 never could tell when it came to
the cops and a colored neighborhood. The police
didn't care about crime among Negros (DBD 165)

The effect of racism on the black characters is reflected throughout the novel. The
way white people treat the Blacks affects the Blacks' beliefs and values. Such effect is
noticeable in our novel where black characters relate manhood to violence. They think
that they should behave violently to be real men because the Whites call them cowards.
So, they come to believe that since they lack the money or good education that would
make them powerful, they could defend themselves by resorting to violence. For
example, The Second World War teaches detective Easy how to be strong in the face of
the white man; he calls himself "a killing machine" (DBD 60). Whenever he remembers
the war and how many blue-eyed men he killed, he stops fearing the white man.
Intimidating and extremely violent as he is, Albright reminds Easy of the dead corpses of
white men: "His pale blue eyes reminded me of the wide-eyed corpses of German
soldiers that I once saw stalked upon a road to Berlin." (DBD 29) For Easy, the concept
of manhood has been changed. Before he volunteered, he had thought that volunteers
in war were fools: "Why I wanna die in this white man's war?" I'd say. (DBD 105) But
because black men are called cowards, he volunteers as if in defiance of this
stereotypical view of his people:
But then one day I was in the PX when a load of white soldiers came in, fresh from battle outside Rome. They made a comment about the negro soldier. They said that we were cowards and that it was the white boys that were saving Europe. [I]t got me somehow. I hated those white soldiers and my own cowardice. So I volunteered.

As Easy sees it, Black Americans need to be respected like others. Knowing that he would never be welcomed by his white countrymen, Easy insists that he be respected like any American citizen, “I never minded that those white boys hated me, but if they didn’t respect me I was ready to fight” (DBD 105). Even at the police station, Easy’s main concern is to defend and show as much defiance as he can: “I looked into Miller’s face, not giving away an ounce of fear. I looked at him and I was thinking of every German I had ever killed. He couldn’t scare me and he couldn’t bring me down either.” (DBD 166) Issuing from the conviction that their White society is unfair to them, the Black Americans cling together and believe they need to support each other. Mouse asserts that a black man needs the support of his fellow blacks as he plays it tough to defend himself or earn a good living.

Nigger can’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 158)

Even when they seem aggressive, the Blacks in Devil in a Blue Dress are presented as underclass reacting in self-defense: “The types of violence practiced by Joppy and Mouse suggest the restriction of black power to defensive reaction in a white world of superior control” (Wesley 103).

For the Black American, manhood is realized not only through violence, but also through financial independence. Mouse, Easy’s friend, is a very tough man. All what he thinks about as a poor man is money; he is willing to do anything and kill anybody to obtain it. He kills his stepfather for money (DBD 54). He becomes a dangerous criminal because of his poverty and need for money. One’s worth is proportionate with how much money he has. Although Mouse is Easy’s best friend who saves his life many times, Easy doesn’t trust him especially when things are related to money, and that is what makes him hide from Mouse the fact that Daphne has money that she has stolen from her lover. He knows that if Mouse “got a whiff of that thirty thousand dollars”, nothing would stop him from trying to get it, not even if he had to kill Daphne or even his best
friend, Easy himself. (DBD 161) The need for money can, and indeed does, make of Mouse a dangerous criminal.

There are many factors that lead to crimes. Theodore Sasson thinks that people use five “frames” that cause crimes, and these are, “faulty system, blocked opportunities, social breakdown, media violence and racism system” (13). For him, “faulty system” is connected to “law and order”. For some reasons sometimes law is permissive; some people know that when they commit crimes, they will not be punished because they are powerful. In the case of “blocked opportunities”, crimes are committed because of unequal treatment, whether in education or jobs. This increases poverty and leads to crimes. Crimes are committed also because of “social breakdown”, which derives from social problems in society and “community disintegration”. The fourth reason of committing crimes is “media violence”. That is how people learn to be violent from mass media. The last frame is racism system, which “depicts the courts and police as racist agents of oppression” (Sasson 16). According to Sasson, The discrimination that comes from the law itself leads to crimes (13-16). In Devil in a Blue Dress, the corruption of the law system including the police is all too clear. Though only a suspect, Easy is tortured physically and insulted by the interrogators Miller and Mason (DBD 75-77). Even the white criminal Albright testifies that “The law….is made by the rich people so that the poor people can't get ahead.” (DBD 27) These frames are applicable to Mouse in our novel. Mosley depicts Mouse as a criminal who suffers discrimination as a Black American. He doesn’t have opportunities to earn money or to be educated. He suffers from social and family problems. He is separated from his wife (DBD 114). And finally, the faulty law system has made it possible for him to escape punishment for all the crimes he has committed. All the frames that Sasson has put are reflected in Mouse’s character as a criminal. Thus, it becomes clear that the first of Soitos’ “tropes of Black Detection”, namely, the awareness of the black persona of his blackness, applies to Devil in a Blue Dress.

Soitos’s second trope is the “Double consciousness” in the character of the black persona (Soitos 33). The Black American in general realizes the differences between his original culture and the white culture he lives in. So, a conflict appears in his character, and he lives with two personalities, so to speak, or with what is called the “double consciousness” (Soitos 33). For example, the Black American person wants to live as a black person with his own traditions, and as an American citizen who fits in the white culture. Although Black Americans are aware of their blackness, some of them are not satisfied with what they are; they convince themselves that they may completely convert to be the same as the white Americans. They imitate the behavior of the whites and entertain hopes and aspirations of integration and social equality as American citizens.
This, however, causes them to have split-personalities and what Soitos calls "double consciousness" (Soitos 33).

In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Daphne is a good example of “Double consciousness”. She is a hybrid of a black father and a white mother. Because she has white skin and blue eyes, she deceives herself and others into thinking that she is a white woman. She acts like someone who feels ashamed of her race; she hides the fact that she is the half-sister of the black gangster Frank. She falls in love with a rich white man. She knows that she is a black woman, but she hides the fact hoping to live a respectable life and to get what she wants as any white woman. She doesn’t have the courage to face her reality, knowing that she will lose everything if she sticks to her real identity as black Ruby. Ruby has two characters, Ruby the black woman, who suffers from the sexual abuse of her father before her brother Frank kills him, and the white Daphne who lives a free life just like white women. When her true identity is discovered, she says to Easy: "I'm not Daphne. My given name is Ruby Hanks and I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I'm different than you because I'm two people. I'm her and I'm me." (*DBD* 208)

Easy experiences an inner conflict regarding Daphne: he sees her as his white lover and at the same time she makes him remember his black mother whom he has lost. This double consciousness is reflected in the ambivalence of his attitude toward her: "I didn't really want her to stay. Daphne Monnet was death herself. I was glad that she was leaving. But I would have taken her in a second if she'd asked me to." (*DBD* 208) Easy's friend, Mouse, who knows Easy very well, criticizes him for being like Daphne. Mouse thinks that both Easy and Daphne have dual personalities: “She looks like she white and you think like you white. But brother you don’t know that you both poor niggers. And a nigger ain’t never gonna be happy less he accepts what he is.” (*DBD* 209) This is a clear message from Mosley, through Mouse’s words, to all Black Americans. They should live their reality. The hybrids suffer because they are in-between, but they do not recognize themselves as whites and behave as if the renounce their black half, so to speak. By making Daphne suffer double-consciousness in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Mosley seems to disapprove of this tendency on the part of hybrids to deny their black half. He seems to be suggesting that black is black and white is white, and there will always be a gap between them. And, according to him, the black person must respect himself for what he is if he is ever to be happy. /S/he should come to terms with himself and his own identity.

We will move now from the trope of “Double consciousness” to the third and fourth tropes, which are “vernacular” and “hodoo”, as Soitos calls them. Soitos believes that the black detective fiction authors use “vernacular” to express Black culture and traditions, featured in the language and music of Black Americans, or what he calls “blackground” (37). It is important to know the traditions of Black Americans if we are to
understand their behaviors and ways of thinking. The use of black language differentiates black detective fiction from other types of detective fiction. The Detective Easy Rawlins finds it better to speak proper English, especially when he is talking to white men, to show them that he is an educated man and can speak the English they teach in schools. But he admits he doesn’t achieve "true" self expression unless he uses Black American English and expressions: "I could only truly express myself in the natural uneducated dialect of my upbringing" (DBD 17). More significantly, we notice that, through the novel, the black characters talk to each other only in their black dialect, and still most significant, Easy’s inner self, represented by what he refers to as "the voice" speaks to him only in that same dialect to urge him to act as a dignified man never to yield and never cry or beg (DBD 106, 153, and 200).

Black American traditions -- what they prefer to eat, to listen to, or to dance--reflect the “blackground” of their culture in Devil in a Blue Dress. Since Daphne is a black woman, she goes to places of the Blacks, enjoy listening to their music, and eats what they eat even though she pretends to be a white woman. She finds herself in the places she truly belongs to. When the detective Easy starts searching for Daphne, Mr. Albright tells him she likes “the company of negroes, she likes jazz and pig’s feet, and dark meat” (DBD 26). Thinking that she is a white woman, Easy is surprised to find such a white woman attracted to Black traditions.

The last of Soitos’ tropes, is “hodoo”, which represents "indigenous, syncretic religions of African Americans in the New World, expanding the term to suggest that it also represents alternative worldviews of some Black Americans" (Soitos 42). The only character in Devil in a Blue Dress who is described as a religious man is Easy’s friend Odell Jones. Easy has this to say of Odell:

"And even though he was a God-fearing man he’d find his way down to John’s about three or four times a week. He’d sit there until midnight nursing a bottle of beer, not saying a word unless somebody spoke to him. Odell was soaking up all the excitement so he could carry it around him on his job as a janitor at the Pleasant street School" (DBD 42).

Such portrayal of Odell by Easy in this passage suggests more than one thing about religion and its relation to the daily life of the average black person. First, being God-fearing does not stop Odell from hunting black bars with all their rowdy customers and the violence usually associated with them. Secondly, it seems that Odell’s life at home and on the job, as a religious man who keeps away from trouble is dull and lacking excitement: he seeks at John's and "soaks up to carry around with him on his job."

We meet Odell again when he gives Easy a ride home and advises him to leave Los Angeles to get away from the mess that the tough criminals and the police are
making around him. (*DBD* 88-89). When Easy laughs that suggestion off saying he cannot leave, Odell advises: "Maybe you should come on down to church on Sunday. Maybe you could talk to Reverend Towne" (*DBD* 89). But Easy knows better: "Lord ain't got no succor fo' this mess. I'm a have to look somewhere else" (*DBD* 89). This retort by Easy reflects the Black American's lack of trust if not in the white man's God, it would be in the white man, whose pronounced religion has not stopped him from oppressing and discriminating against his fellow citizens regardless of their religious affiliation. Interestingly enough, the novel closes with Easy and Odell conversing over dinner about the moral issue of failing to turn a criminal in to justice because he is your friend. When Easy asks Odell whether it is right to shield a friend like that Odell says "All you got is your friend, Easy." Thus Odell seems to be going back to Easy's earlier scruples about religious morality when he says that God has no succor for the black man's mess, and adds that he has to look somewhere else. Indeed Easy looked for succor and got it from Mouse, his strong black "friend" whose being a criminal did not stop him from risking his life to save a friend, even before he knew of the money, which would naturally form an additional motivation. Furthermore, Odell, the God-fearing man attributes it to bad luck if one turns into justice somebody less evil than his own friend while protecting the latter; he thus absolves the doer of sinfulness or moral corruption: "I guess you figure that that other guy got a hold of some bad luck," says Odell. (*DBD* 219)

Another reference to religion in the novel occurs in the scene where Easy meets Ronald White at Vernie's. Ronald has nine sons and one on the way because "His wife dropped a son every twelve or fourteen months. She was a religious woman and didn't believe in taking precautions" (*DBD* 132-33). This big family is drying up Ronald's financial resources and driving him crazy: "I swear I can't take it man. I swear." (*DBD* 133) This linking of Ronald's troubles to his wife's piety seems to suggest that piety is of little help to a black man in the face of poverty.

Finally, Easy himself advocates this view of religion's being hardly a solution to the problems faced by Blacks in a society where discrimination, poverty, and corruption prevail. When Odell suggests that he seeks support at the church, Easy says that he has to seek it somewhere else other than at the church (*DBD* 89). Furthermore, Easy asserts that justice is available only for the powerful and the rich. His experience as a Black American citizen teaches him that money is power, which the black person can hardly acquire under the circumstances. Religion does not compensate for money on either side of the spectrum, the White or the Black:

But I didn't believe that there was justice for Negroes. I thought that 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* 128)
Thus we can say that Soitos' "tropes" apply to Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* as a Black American Hard-boiled novel.

The "Tropes of Black Detection" afford us great help in defining the Black-White race conflict in *Devil in a Blue Dress* as an American hard-boiled detective novel. They show how Black characters in the novel become aware of being the "Others" and how such awareness affects their self-esteem and their attitude toward their White co-citizens. Such awareness is at the heart of racial and class conflicts in American society as presented in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, conflicts which ultimately lead to crime.

Although Walter Mosley in *Devil in a Blue Dress* concentrates on Black Americans in America, he alludes to race conflict in Europe and America for different races such as, the Jews, and the Mexicans to show that racism is not limited to the Blacks. Mosley mentions the relation between these races from the time they come to America, the circumstances that bring them to America, and how the Americans treat them as inferior. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, the two Jewish men, Abe and Johny, whom Easy meets by chance, suffer a lot in the Nazi camps; Abe's family and all the people he knows died there. Easy remembers that the Jews in America or in Germany during the war were "Nothing more than skeletons, bleeding from their rectums and begging for food … then dropping dead right there before my eyes" (*DBD* 143). They were tortured and treated badly. Thus, Easy says, the Jews sympathize with Black Americans and understand them because "in Europe the Jew had been a Negro for more than a thousand years" (*DBD* 144). Back to their history "The Jews kicked about in Germany and the Negroes kicked about in Georgia; and yet both Jew and Negro continue to insist upon the privilege of facing their doom separately" (Sandquist 17). For, while racial discrimination against the Black Americans started with slavery and continued in practice even after the official abolition slaver in the US, the Jews came to wield power shortly after the migrated to America. Furthermore, the legacy of the Jewish Diaspora and the causes that lie behind it can hardly be equated or even compared to that of slavery.

Besides Soitos' tropes of detective fiction, which explain race conflict in American hard-boiled fiction, Black American detective writers pay special attention to choosing the places where the events of their novels take place. Unlike their counterparts in the classic novels, where the setting as Leroy Panek observes is a small place like a village (134), the setting in the hard-boiled novel is urban cities. The increase in wealth in big cities causes dramatic change in people's relations. The division of the capitalist society into classes increases the gap between people; the result is the spread of exploitation, corruption, and crimes. Exploitation under capitalism means "the expropriation of labor, but under socialism means the expropriation of any aspect of full human capacity" (Lukacs 48). In addition, a lot of immigrants, legal and illegal, come to big cities to find job opportunities, and this highlights the problems of race inequality and exploitation.
between these immigrants and natural American citizens. Mosley's awareness of the spread of exploitation in urban cities leads him to opt for the big capitalist city as setting of his novel. The events of *Devil in a Blue Dress* take place in Los Angeles, one of the big cities in the US.

In such big cities as Los Angeles the cause of crimes is more often than not financial. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, knowing that Easy has a financial problem, Albright exploits him to get what he wants; he tells Easy, "We all owe out something, Easy. When you owe out then you're in debt and when you're in debt then you can't be your own man. That's capitalism" (*DBD* 109). In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, crimes are committed because of money. Money is the devil that leads people to crimes without feeling guilty. Mouse kills many people, including Easy's stepfather and Daphne's brother, to get money. He knows that the financial independence is the most important in a capitalist society. The one who has money can buy the poor.

So we can say that the hard-boiled detective novel has been developed to be a realistic genre that deals with issues related to the real life. Black authors have contributed to developing it. Walter Mosley reflects the life in America by treating issues that affect the life of the Americans. In *Devil in a Blue Dress*, race conflict affects people's characters negatively. These conflicts lead to inequality, which increases crimes hence it is that this detective novel represents crime as the result of social conflicts. The effect of social conflict on the hard-boiled novel is shown through the characters. The characters come to be the most important. The detective himself suffers race conflict. The setting becomes also important in reflecting corruption in the United States especially in high, economically prosperous states and cities. The hard-boiled detective writers, especially the black detective writers, appear to be more concerned with race and social conflict as a real problem in American society than the writers of the golden age or the classic detective writers. Thus the black authors of the hard-boiled detective novel helped in making American detective novel a realistic genre that deals with issues related to daily life in the United States. And, as we have seen here, Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* is a case in point.
شخصية الأسود في الرواية البوليسية الواقعية: دراسة لرواية موسي
شيطان في ثوب أزرق

حنان جيزاوي

ملخص
تبحث هذه الدراسة في تطوير الروائيين الأمريكيين من أصل أفريقى لجيل جديد من الرواية البوليسية الأمريكية، بينما كان تركيز كتاب الجيل السابق من الرواية البوليسية ينصب على حل لغز الجريمة واكتشاف المجرم، بدأ كتاب الجيل الجديد وخصوص الروائيون الأمريكيين السود بالتركيز في روايتهم على المشاكل الاجتماعية التي تواجههم في أمريكا، مما ساعد في تغيير الرواية البوليسية وتعزيز خصائصها مقارنة بروايات الجيل السابق لها.

لتوضيح التغييرات التي طارأت على الرواية البوليسية الأمريكية على أيدي هؤلاء الروائيين السود، تستخدم هذه الدراسة مجموعة منصات أطلقها ستيفن سويتس تحت مسمى "عبارات المجاز" (Tropes)، وربطها بأعمال الروائيين الأمريكيين السود على أنها تشكل عاملًا أو قاسما مشتركًا بينها يتحاور حول علاقة شخوص الرواية من السود مع أفرادهم البيض في هذه الروايات. تلك العلاقة التي تقوم على إدراك السود كونهم يعدون "الآخر" (The Other)، وجهة نظر البيض من مواطنيهم.

تعالج هذه الدراسة فكرة إدراك السود لموقعهم في مجتمعهم بناءً على كونهم "الآخر"، وتأثير ادراكهم هذا على أدائهم وسلوكهم في الرواية البوليسية الواقعية "شيطان في ثوب أزرق" للكاتب الأمريكي من أصل أفريقى وثروت (Walter Mosley) موسي (Hard-boiled detective novel) "الواقعية جدا"، ويتبنى من تحليل نص الرواية أن كاتبه عزو ميل شخصيات الرواية من السود إلى ارتكاب أى أنواع الجرائم، وبخصوصاً منها تلك المرتبطة بالطبيعة الكاذبة والمسمى "جرائم الكراهية" (Blue crime)، إلى شعور السود بالظلم والدونية، وعدم استعداد البيض من مواطنيهم لتقديم اندماجهم في مجتمعهم كمواطنين على قدم المساواة مع غيرهم.
References


