



Creatures of Darkness: Raymond Chandler, Detective Fiction, and Film Noir

By Gene D. Phillips

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More than any other writer, Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) is responsible for raising detective stories from the level of pulp fiction to that of literature. Philip Marlowe - his cynical, hard-boiled private eye - set the standard for rough, brooding heroes with a strong sense of honour despite living in an unfair world. Like Ian Fleming's James Bond, Marlowe has lived beyond his creator's works, appearing in radio and television shows and in numerous film adaptations. Chandler's seven novels, including "The Big Sleep" (1939) and "The Long Goodbye" (1953), with their pessimistic view of life and stark, grim realism, had a direct influence upon the emergence of film noir. In addition to the novels, Chandler wrote short stories and penned the screenplays for several films, including "Double Indemnity" (1944) and "Strangers on a Train" (1951). This is a biocritical study of the works of Raymond Chandler. It explores Chandler's unpublished script for "Lady in the Lake", examines the differences in the American and British releases of "Strangers on a Train", discusses the merits of the unproduced screenplay for "Playback" and compares Howard Hawks's directors cut of "The Big Sleep" with the version shown in cinemas. The author offers an insight into the genius of Chandler and the power of his vision to transcend the constraints of a single art form.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

Welcome to the dark world of Raymond Chandler, film noir, and scholarship, where behind every corner lurks a plot synopsis blocking the organic growth of analysis. Once the obstacles of too much prefatory material (a Preface by Billy Wilder, a Prologue, an Introduction, and a brief biography of Chandler) have been overcome, the reader proceeds to Phillips's interpretations of the Chandler oeuvre in fiction, screenwriting, and film. Phillips proves his encyclopedic knowledge of noir as he analyzes, among many others, the three film versions of *Farewell, My Lovely* and the two film versions of *The Big Sleep* through extensive comparisons to Chandler's novels. Chandler despised Hollywood yet needed Tinseltown's lucre as a source of income, and Phillips is at his best as he describes how Chandler's screenplays, including *Double Indemnity* (directed by Billy Wilder) and *Strangers on a Train* (directed by Alfred Hitchcock), implicated him in torturous collaborations with the Hollywood elite. Such behind-the-scenes moments—for example, the different receptions Chandler found at MGM and Paramount, the drama of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, Robert Montgomery's innovative camera technique in *Lady in the Lake*—are welcome and informative. Unfortunately, such moments can only be found after sifting through endless plot synopses in which Chandler's haunting tales are subjected to a sort of Cliff Notes summarizing. The analysis is also marred by a squeamishness on Phillips's part in dealing with the homoerotic subtones of many noir films. He goes to great lengths to exonerate Chandler and his characters from any such imputation, no matter that countless viewers see a little something more in some of the characters' relationships. The darkness of noir never fails to serve up a treacherous treat, so read or watch Chandler's originals rather than reading Phillips's summaries. (30 b&w photos) -- Copyright © 2000 Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

A comprehensive introduction to America's foremost mystery writer." -- *Alain Silver, co-author of Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles*

"An opulent repository of material on the premier American noirist." -- *Choice*

"Phillips constantly dazzles with both the precision of his presentation and the power of his analysis." -- *Lester Keyser*

About the Author

Gene D. Phillips, S.J., teaches fiction and film history at Loyola University of Chicago. He is the author of books about Alfred Hitchcock and Stanley Kubrick and numerous studies of fiction and film.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Lou Bryant:

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