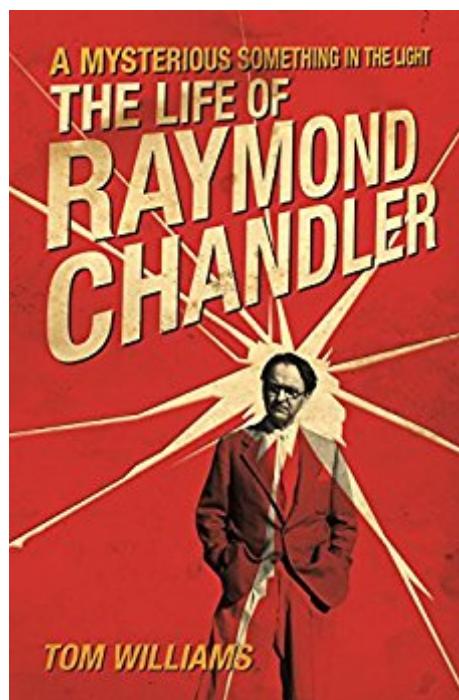


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Mysterious Something In The Light: The Life Of Raymond Chandler



Synopsis

Drawing on new interviews, previously unpublished letters, and archives, this biography casts a new light on Raymond Chandler, one of the most mysterious of writers. The man revealed was troubled by loneliness and desertion from an early age—experiences that informed his writing as much as they scarred his life. The bleak picture details the collapse of his parents' marriage, and the relocation of Chandler and his mother to Ireland, and later London, due to his father's alcohol-fueled violence. In his 20s, he returned to the United States and he met his one great love, Cissy Pascal, a married woman 18 years his senior. Only during middle age, after his own alcoholism dissolved a lucrative career as an oilman, did Chandler turn to crime fiction, although his success proved bittersweet. His literary obsession, ambition, and suicidal turn after Cissy's death combined to prevent him from living up to the promise of his first novels. This long-awaited biography shadows one of the true literary giants of the 20th century and considers how crime writing was raised to the level of art.

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Customer Reviews

In his fine biography of Chandler, "A Mysterious Something in the Light," writer, literary agent and

editor Tom Williams goes beyond the author's public persona, piecing together Chandler's family history, private relationships and key episodes from his childhood that give us a clearer understanding of why the novelist became an exemplar of the hard-boiled school of writing. He also gives a simple and straightforward explanation of how the author's experiences in the business world of Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s tilted him toward the proletarian form of detective fiction I call "red noir:" As Chandler put it himself, "The typical racketeer is only very slightly different from the business man in many of the more tricky kinds of business such as oil, real estate, sports promotion, theatrical ventures, nightclubs and hotels and restaurants." This is the philosophy of "red noir," the anti-capitalist theme I have mentioned repeatedly in other essays, which forms the underpinning for much hard-boiled detective fiction. Briefly stated, crime is not a form of evil unto itself; it is the inevitable product of our economic system. As Williams puts it, "the detective remains pure. He is one of the little people, doing his job, but up against the might of the political and criminal forces that run the city." Or, as Chandler put it himself, "The typical racketeer is only very slightly different from the business man in many of the more tricky kinds of business such as oil, real estate, sports promotion, theatrical ventures, nightclubs and hotels and restaurants." This is the philosophy of "red noir," the anti-capitalist theme I have mentioned repeatedly in other essays, which forms the underpinning for much hard-boiled detective fiction. Briefly stated, crime is not a form of evil unto itself; it is the inevitable product of our economic system. As Williams puts it, "the detective remains pure. He is one of the little people, doing his job, but up against the might of the political and criminal forces that run the city." Williams' study is an excellent examination of Chandler's personal life and also provides insight into his style of writing about the need for a knight in tarnished armor who goes down those "mean streets" not for personal gain, but to live up to the moral code that demands it.

Great, thanks

Raymond Chandler - July 23, 1888 – March 26, 1959 Though the subject of Raymond Chandler was an exciting one to my mind, I often found this book to be a little repetitive. However, the complexity of this man was quite fascinating and I did learn a lot from this biographical history. Unfortunately, many of his formative early years seem to be based more on supposition than researched facts, but perhaps there were few facts available to research. On the other hand, he was a prolific letter-writer even while young and much of the biography is based on quoted snippets from those letters. Born the son of an alcoholic, it is not surprising that though he abhorred

alcoholism, he would fall into the same trap, regardless of how he felt about it. Chandler appears to have been a lonely boy who never really completely grew up. The need to be important and powerful, the need to have close friends and a wife who loves him wholeheartedly plays as a theme throughout the book. I felt for him, a tribute to Tom Williams, who obviously 'got' him. Raymond Chandler, a world-famous author whose work lives on decades after his death, is definitely an enigma, but I feel at his core he is a little boy lost, often has no idea of his impact and yet irrationally thinks he does. The author is not just giving nod to a list of Chandler's books, but looks at them, takes them apart and puts them back together again, using his own comments. In fact, that is exactly how Chandler himself looked and learned how to write a book. He lived in Chicago and in Los Angeles in what might be called their heyday, but was at the time gangster-ruled. Chicago had nothing on Los Angeles for corruption. Here we are not talking about Hollywood but the fast rise to wealth from oil, the collapse of morals from the Depression and the resulting city corruption. He was a product of his time, yet in his mind he lived in an earlier time. Here, then, is the root of Ray Chandler's books and his association in writing of his character, Philip Marlowe, and later to his screenplays. I think it is honest to say his personal life revolved around three main themes: His deep love for his older wife to whom he was married until her death; his commitment to literary writing rather than grinding out corruption and murder, but with a similar theme; his alcoholism. A brilliant man, but complicated and driven.

This is a must-read for Chandler enthusiasts. It is well researched and it contains a lot of detail not found in other books about Chandler. Williams does a first-rate job of describing how Chandler's life spirals out of control toward the end. A major weakness in this book is that where sources are lacking, detail is often supplied by inference and conjecture. We read quite a lot about what one person "must have felt," what another person "must have thought," and so on. This occurs more frequently in the early chapters than in the later ones. I also don't particularly care about the fixation that many people have with Chandler's "racism," "misogyny," and "homophobia." Chandler lived in another generation and wrote for another generation. By the standards that Williams and contemporary writers use, virtually everyone who lived before 1960 could be branded a racist, a misogynist, and a homophobe.

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