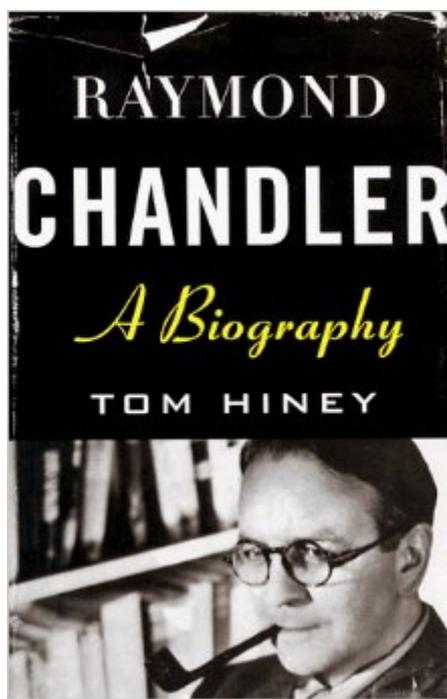


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Raymond Chandler: A Biography



Synopsis

Described by Evelyn Waugh in the late 1940s as "the greatest living American novelist," Raymond Chandler won the admiration of millions of fans, in addition to the more astute praise of writers such as T. S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson for his Philip Marlowe detective novels. He was central to the birth of what became known as film noir--for both the movies he wrote in Hollywood and those that were made from his books -- and has been credited as the inspiration for the classic film, Chinatown. For this major new biography, Tom Hiney has had access to unseen personal papers, as well as previously unrecorded accounts of those who knew Chandler throughout his life. In the first biography in over twenty years, Hiney takes an uncensored look at Chandler's life as an author, a husband, a screenwriter, and occasional rogue. Chandler's career as a novelist was only one facet of his unusual life: when he wrote his first book, *The Big Sleep*--at the age of fifty -- he had been variously rich, poor, drunk, teetotal, married, and despondent. Born in Chicago in 1888, Chandler spent his early years in Nebraska, grew up in Ireland, and matured in London, where he published his first writing -- essays and poetry. As a newcomer to Los Angeles in 1917, his work as a writer was still many years off: Chandler was an oil executive who rode out the '20s boom before discovering his taste for alcohol during the Depression, finally turning to fiction in the mid-1930s. By the time of his death in 1959, his seven Philip Marlowe novels had sold five million copies and have since been published in twenty-five languages. Today, more than a dozen films stand as testament to Chandler's influence, including the 1946 release of *The Big Sleep* starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. Chandler lived in the city of Los Angeles from the age of twenty-five and was there long enough to witness an oil boom, two earthquakes, the Depression, and the 1932 Olympic games. Like the city he lived in, his life weathered many changes. Vividly, Hiney evokes the strange early years before Chandler was a writer, brings alive the dangerous glamour of the Hollywood era in which he flourished, and puts his screenwriting in the context of the organized crime and corruption of Los Angeles during Prohibition. He gives illuminating details of Chandler's alcohol addiction -- which plagued him off and on throughout his life--his friendships with Howard Hawks, "Lucky" Luciano, and Alfred Hitchcock, and fully records for the first time Chandler's most intimate friendship -- with Cissy, his wife of thirty years, seventeen years his senior. This is a raw and complex portrayal of a vulnerable and brilliant Chandler -- a man quite as extraordinary as the fiction he wrote.

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Customer Reviews

Forty years after his death Chandler was in need of a new study, both of his life and of his writing. This one strikes me as dealing with the former better than with the latter, but it has interesting and illuminating things to say about both. However what I want to commend the book for above all is just how readable it is. Chandler himself had some trenchant and uncomplimentary things to say about some of the more intellectual kinds of writing, creative as well as critical, Hiney quotes some of these with evident approval, and I fancy the book was written with a sense of Chandler's ghost looking over the biographer's shoulder, alert to detect and deflate pretentiousness. Chandler's story is a triumph of talent over alcoholic insecurity. He never knew his alcoholic father, and he was educated through the charity, far from affectionate but very real and very patient and long-suffering, of an uncle. He attended one of England's better schools, presided over by one of the more enlightened headmasters of the time. This headmaster instilled a distaste for insincerity and pretence that stayed with Chandler to the end. Chandler was always a bit of a loner. In his early years his only real relationship was with his hard-pressed mother, and he displayed an innocence that stayed with him throughout his life too that lurks behind the seeming worldliness and disillusionment that he displays both in his books and in his dealings with the world around him. He once said of himself that he 'could be a good second-rate anything.' This was a fairly modest self-assessment, given his brains and astuteness. He achieved rapid promotion in his Californian oil company through his gift for figures and his alertness to fraud until his drinking brought that career to an end.

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