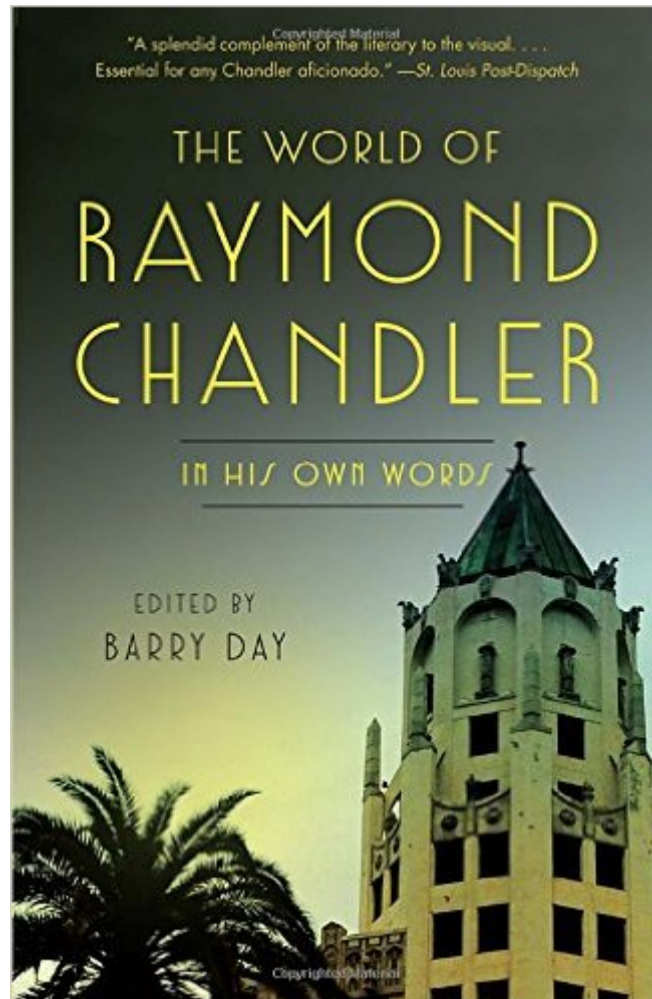


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The World Of Raymond Chandler: In His Own Words (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard)



Synopsis

The World of Raymond Chandler shows how Chandler precariously balanced the values of a classical English education against those of a fast-evolving America during the years before the Great War; how he adopted Los Angeles as his home after WWI, with Hollywood in turn adopting him (and adapting his works); how his detective hero and alter ego Philip Marlowe evolved over the years; and, above all, what it is to be a writer, and in particular one writing in the "other language" of hardboiled fiction. Acclaimed biographer and historian Barry Day deftly interweaves images and text, using quotations from Chandler's novels, short stories, letters, and interviews, to craft a unique portrait of the mystery writer's life and times.

Book Information

Series: Vintage Crime/Black Lizard

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Vintage (November 10, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0804170487

ISBN-13: 978-0804170482

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.8 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 10.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (22 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

This is a lovely book for Chandler readers and, indeed, for all interested in American crime fiction. First "what is it and what is it not? It is neither an autobiography nor a memoir, pieced together from Chandler fragments. It is a reconstruction of the Chandlerian ethos, using quotations from Chandler's fiction and letters. The editor provides some narrative threads and links but Chandler's work dominates the book (as it should) as his world is recreated. There are nine sections: Chandler as Atlantic writer, split between two homes and cultures; the writing process; Philip Marlowe, Chandler's protagonist and alter ego; cops and crime; the city of the angels; Hollywood; women in life and fiction; writing, part 2; and the final farewell. These are solid, organizing themes. The editor is providing us a sense of Chandler's experience, of his world, as

writer and man. There is no attempt to fill in all of the blanks of his life, e.g., the treatment of his mother by her family when she was forced to return to England after Chandler's father left. For those details the reader will want to read an actual biography. I recommend Tom Hiney's (1997). This compilation reminds us of Chandler's consummate skill as a stylist. He was not much for plots or situations, but he excelled and achieved immortality as a line-by-line, word-by-word writer. Billy Wilder chose to work with him because of a single line from *The High Window*: "He had hair growing out of his ear long enough to catch a moth." Who writes like that? Who could write like that, Wilder thought. Such phrases were very hard-won, the work of a writer who had studied Latin, Greek, French and German and mastered the English of two quite different cultures. *The World of Raymond Chandler* is filled with them.

For all his fame, Raymond Chandler had a relatively slight output (seven slim novels, a couple dozen short stories). But that hasn't prevented a steady stream of biographies, literary studies and adaptations of his work. At this point, more words probably have been written about the creator of Philip Marlowe than he wrote himself. Barry Day's *THE WORLD OF RAYMOND CHANDLER*, consisting mostly of excerpts from Chandler's letters, stories and novels, with some connective commentary in between, is the latest in this line of books about the man who invented Southern California noir. Chandler, who was born in Chicago and raised in England, was always an outsider --- a "man with no home," according to Day, who begins with a cursory overview of Chandler's first 40 years. He traces his brief career in the British Civil Service, his early, mostly failed, literary efforts, and his service in World War I. As he does throughout, Day lets Chandler speak for himself whenever possible, quoting liberally from his letters to draw a picture of a man struggling to find his way in the world. And it certainly took Chandler some time to find his path --- he didn't publish his first novel until his 40s, after being fired from his job at a Los Angeles oil company because of his alcoholism. After establishing the outlines of Chandler's biography, Day shifts focus to his career as a writer. Despite claiming that he had "absolutely no talent" for fiction when he started out, Chandler was a quick study, and it didn't take him long to start turning the hard-boiled detective story into genuine literature.

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