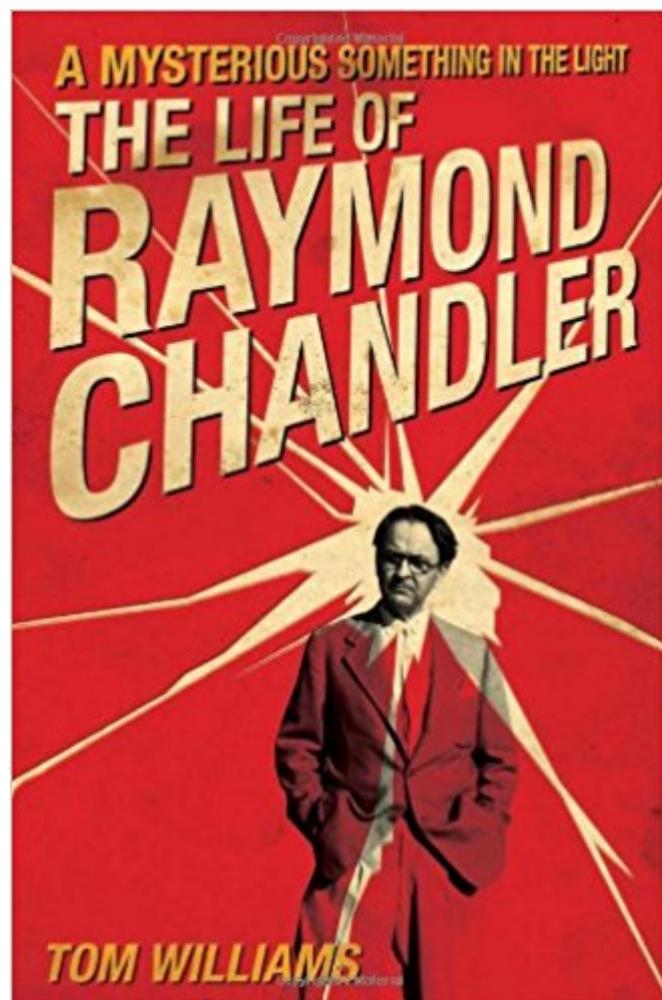


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A Mysterious Something In The Light: The Life Of Raymond Chandler



Synopsis

The life of Raymond Chandler has long been obscured by secrets and half-truths as deceptive as anything in his novel *The Long Goodbye*. Now, drawing on new interviews, previously unpublished letters, and archives on both sides of the Atlantic, Tom Williams casts a new light on this most mysterious of writers. The Raymond Chandler revealed is a man troubled by loneliness and desertion from an early age. Born in Chicago in 1888, his childhood was overshadowed by the collapse of his parents' marriage, his father's alcohol-fuelled violence eventually forcing the boy and his doting mother to leave for Ireland and later London. But class-bound England proved stifling, and Chandler, in his twenties and eager to forge a new life, returned to the United States where "in corruption-ridden Los Angeles" he met his one great love, Cissy Pascal, a married woman eighteen years his senior. It was only during middle age, after his alcoholism wrecked a lucrative career as an oilman, that Chandler seriously turned to crime fiction. And his legacy "the lonely, ambiguous world of Philip Marlowe" endures, compelling generations of crime writers to follow him. In this long-awaited new biography, Tom Williams shadows one of the true literary giants of the twentieth century and considers how crime writing was raised to the level of art.

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Customer Reviews

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.

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.

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