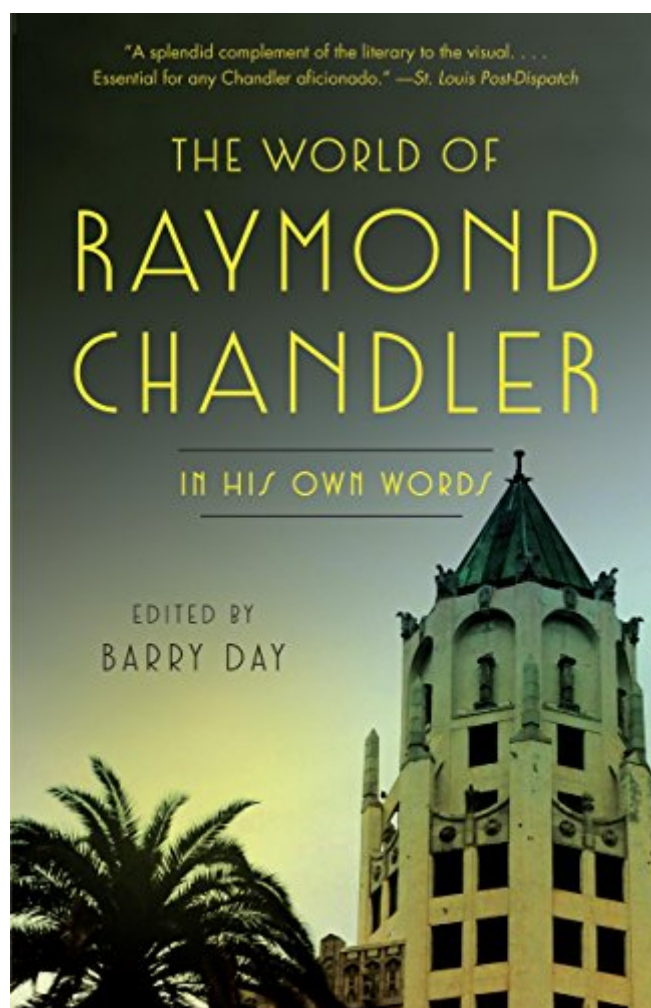


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The World Of Raymond Chandler: In His Own Words (Vintage Crime/Black Lizard)



Synopsis

Raymond Chandler never wrote a memoir or autobiography. The closest he came to writing either was in his novels, short stories, and letters. There have been books that describe and evaluate Chandler's life, but to find out what he himself felt about his life and work, Barry Day, editor of *The Letters of Raymond Chandler* (There is much to dazzle here in just the way we expect . . . the book is meticulous, artfully structured "splendid" - Daniel Mendelsohn; *The New York Review of Books*), has cannily, deftly chosen from Chandler's writing, as well as the many interviews he gave over the years as he achieved cult status, to weave together an illuminating narrative that reveals the man, the work, the worlds he created. Using Chandler's own words as well as Day's text, here is the life of the man with no home, a man precariously balanced between his classical English education with its immutable values and that of a fast-evolving America during the years before the Great War, and the changing vernacular of the cultural psyche that resulted. Chandler makes clear what it is to be a writer, and in particular what it is to be a writer of "hardboiled" fiction in what was for him another language. Along the way, he discusses the work of his contemporaries: Dashiell Hammett, James M. Cain, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Agatha Christie, W. Somerset Maugham, and others (I wish, said Chandler, I had one of those facile plotting brains, like Erle Gardner). Here is Chandler's Los Angeles (There is a touch of the desert about everything in California, he said, and about the minds of the people who live here), a city he adopted and that adopted him in the post-World War I period . . . Here is his Hollywood (Anyone who doesn't like Hollywood, he said, is either crazy or sober) . . . He recounts his own (rocky) experiences working in the town with Billy Wilder, Howard Hawks, Alfred Hitchcock, and others. . . We see Chandler's alter ego, Philip Marlowe, private eye, the incorruptible knight with little armor who walks the mean streets in a world not made for knights (If I had ever an opportunity of selecting the movie actor who would best represent Marlowe to my mind, I think it would have been Cary Grant). . . Here is Chandler on drinking (his life in the end was in a race with alcohol and loneliness) . . . and here are Chandler's women - the Little Sisters, the "dames" in his fiction, and in his life (on writing *The Long Goodbye*, Chandler said, I watched my wife die by half inches and I wrote the best book in my agony of that knowledge . . . I was as hollow as the places between the stars. After her death Chandler led what he called a "posthumous life" - writing fiction, but more often than not, his writing life was made up of letters written to women he barely knew.) Interwoven throughout the text are more than one hundred pictures that reveal the psyche and world of Raymond Chandler. I have lived my whole life on the edge of nothing, he wrote. In his own words,

and with Barry Day's commentary, we see the shape this took and the way it informed the man and his extraordinary work. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

The World of Raymond Chandler In His Own Word offers a fine introduction to Chandler's life and work and supplies a refreshing reminder to those who are quite familiar with his novels and short stories. It is well illustrated with historic photographs of Chandler's life, his book covers and Los Angeles during the era in which the novels and short stories are set. The chronology is a very helpful guide to Chandler's childhood, World War One experiences, his business career, and his work writing short stories, novels, and screen plays. Chandler along with Hammett, Cain and McDonald had an immense impact on American popular literature and cinema. He was twice nominated for Academy Awards for his screenplays and several films of his novels helped to make the careers of Humphrey Bogart, Dick Powell, Fred McMurray, Lauren Bacall and Barbara Stanwyck. Chandler wrote for both Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock. Additionally, Chandler wrote extensively on the craft of writing as it relates to the genres of hard boiled and noir detective fiction. Notable chapters in

The World of Raymond Chandler In His Own Words include those on his birth, childhood and growing up in Chicago, Nebraska and the England, the development of his writing style for the pulp literature market, the urban history of Los Angeles, and his literary and film industry criticism. Barry Day relies almost exclusively on Chandler's novels, short stories and personal letters; most of the book is Chandler's words organized by Day whose transitions within chapters are clear and concise.

Raymond Chandler is my favorite author, but I really didn't know much about him before now. I knew a few things, like that he grew up in England. And that he wrote some screenplays. That was about it. I must admit that I shy away from biographies of people whose work I really admire. I'm afraid that I'll learn something about them that will taint the way I view their creative work, be it books or movies or songs or whatever, and then I'll never be able to enjoy those things again. However, the subtitle here, "In His Own Words," made me feel like this might not shatter my love of Chandler's writing. And happily, I was right! Editor Barry Day provides a basic framework and the connective explanations needed to make this coherent, but 95% of the words in this book are Chandler's not Day's. Through them, we begin to see a deeply unhappy man who never found as much acceptance or approval as he craved, but who stubbornly insisted on writing and living his own way anyway. I can respect him for that.

This must have been an easy book to write. The author just had to read all of Chandler's books and copy quotes on various topics - what Chandler writes about LA, women, etc. I like Chandler's writing but for me it got tiresome reading quote after quote strung together by a few sentences. Too rich a meal - I'd rather read them in the context of a novel.

a really nice book, very easy to read but NOT for someone doing any scholarly work on Chandler. It's a helpful guide for an enthusiast but go for either a straight biography (preferably Hiney or McShane, the definitive) AND the pure letters. In addition, a much more classic version of this book is one published shortly after his death titled "Raymond Chandler Speaks." This book would be a better bet and more respectable for what you're looking for.

This is a good read because it includes many of Chandler's great lines. It also has some good background info about the author. But as for the style of its compilation, it is sometimes disconcerting--it can be difficult to tell where the commentary leaves off and quotations begin, and vice versa. There is also some repetition of passages that make the reading labored in places.

However, all-in-all, this is a good bedside companion for use when you want to catch a few thoughts, rather than wading through the entire thing in a day or two, which is what you want to do with one of Chandler's novels.

This little morsel of a book is sure to delight Chandler fans by whetting their appetites for more of Chandler's fine writing. This quick read is fun and reminds us what a wordsmith Chandler really was. That gets lost sometimes amidst the praise he receives as a "hardboiled" writer, but it needs to be remembered he was a fine craftsman.

I loved this book. You could open it up at any point and read something interesting. I have many books on Raymond Chandler, and would place this at the top. The many pictures were ones I had not seen before as well. Bottom line, if you are a Raymond Chandler fan, get this book.

This is a great book for someone who loves the quotable Raymond Chandler. Even though a lot of the photographs were simply stock photos of old L.A. rather than of Chandler, the way the material was organized, etc. made it a worthwhile purchase.

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