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Raymond Chandler Playback (BBC Radio)



Synopsis

Fast-talking, trouble-seeking private eye Philip Marlowe is a different kind of detective: a moral man in an amoral world. California in the 1940s and 1950s is as beautiful as a ripe fruit and rotten to the core, and Marlowe must struggle to retain his integrity amidst the corruption he encounters daily. In *Playback*, Marlowe is awakened early in the morning by a phone call from a lawyer. Clyde Umney instructs him to meet the eight o'clock train from Chicago, and shadow one of the passengers. The lady in question, Eleanor King, is beautiful, classy, and clearly unhappy. Obediently, Marlowe follows her all the way to Esmerelda, where she's going under the name Betty Mayfield and being leaned on by a cheap blackmailer. Stuck doing a sneaky job for people he doesn't like, Marlowe feels even grubbier than usual: and he's soon in more trouble than usual too as he comes up against gangsters, hard men, and a hitman. . . Starring Toby Stephens, this exciting dramatization retains all the verve of Chandler's last novel. 1 CD. 56 mins.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Yes, *Playback* is the last of Chandler's novels. No, it is not the best of his novels-- not by a long shot. Yes, it is still worth the time that it takes to read. *Playback* is an afterword to a great series. As a book, it is a little bit sadder, a little bit more cynical. Marlowe (like Chandler himself?) is going through the motions and none of what used to interest him is quite as compelling. The character and writer both have seen a vision of how it all ends and fail to stay quite as focused on the plot. In the book, Marlowe agrees to enjoy the charms of the lovely Miss Vermilyea, but not unless she agrees

to go somewhere besides his apartment. He had fallen in love with someone else in that room, and is not sure that her charms will live up to the comparison. He says: "I had a dream here once, a year and a half ago. There is still a shred of it left." As a reader, you may have the same feeling about this book. It is a lovely moment, but not to be compared to the real thing. But still, a lovely moment.

I have read all of Raymond Chandler's novels, and I believe *Playback* was his last. This story was first intended, I believe as a screenplay, and reading the story, you definitely sense a filmic quality. The novel and tone is quiet, almost as if Philip Marlowe is sleepwalking throughout the mystery. This is not necessarily a bad thing. The plot has Marlowe shadowing a wealthy young woman hiding out in a small Southern California beach town who is trying to escape her past. There are the usual sordid characters and sprinkling of murders, but Chandler also introduces a love affair or two. A lot of the reviews I've read here so far seem unimpressed with this story -- ignore them. *PLAYBACK* is classic Chandler.

Playback is the last Chandler's novel featuring the PI Philip Marlowe. The plot is far more simple than in previous Marlowe's cases and more emphasis is put in the atmosphere of the settings (a small and quiet coastal village full of rich people). The book explores some of the social class-conflicts present in other Marlowe's novels although with less bitterness: the policemen are not so brutal, the richmen are not so mean. The girl, though, is as cruel as usual. The Black Lizard edition is quite good: comfortable to read, aesthetically attractive. Just one mistake: the text in the back cover (yes, the one that you read before buying the book) tells you a little bit too much. Marlowe is told to follow a girl and you only know why on chapter 24 (of the 28 of the book). Well, if you read the 12 lines of the back cover you already discovered that before you even bought the book and that spoils half of the mystery (the other half is quite predictable anyway). So the advice is: buy the book, begin reading in the first page and never look at the backcover. The book is good both for Chandler's fans and just crime novel lovers, but if you hadn't read the previous Marlowe's adventures you won't enjoy it that much. Read the other Marlowe cases first, beginning with *The Big Sleep*.

From Hammett to Chandler we see the beginning of the modern day tough guy detective. In this novel, Chandler's raging cynic, Phillip Marlowe, completes the cycle which began in early short stories and in "*The Big Sleep*." Chandler takes Marlowe through his normal routines, but also allows his detective to show more fallibility than normal. Marlowe finally stops shunning the seductresses

he normally encounters and actually makes love in this novel. Chandler's decision to let Marlowe fornicate freely paved the way for future authors who followed the Hammett, Chandler rule book. This novel is both a perfect ending to the Marlowe series, and a marvelous requiem to an author so disillusioned by the post-war 40's and 50's. Chandler never shied away from showing his disdain for the spoiled and wealthy members of Southern California during his time, but in no other novel or story does he so boldly bare his cynicism. A true masterpiece from a brilliant writer. It is a shame his works are viewed only as Crime Fiction and not as literary treasures.

Why do I love Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels so much? I love them for Marlowe's edgy, wisecracking comments that drive its recipients mad. I love the gorgeous, incendiary women who linger just a bit on this side of evil. I love the twisty and turny plots and Marlowe's dogged search for the truth. In a world full of liars and crooks one can always depend upon Philip Marlowe's steely honesty and integrity. He is never in it for the money. "Playback" has all of these elements but, unfortunately, in far lesser quantities than in Chandler's other Philip Marlowe books. In "Playback" Marlowe is assigned to follow this woman without knowing why and to report back on what he finds out about her. All the typical plot devices are there, but the results are far less than scintillating and are sometimes rather dull. If I were to pick out, however, my favorite part of the book it would be Marlowe's conversation with an elderly and infirm man who is staying at a hotel where Marlowe is holed up. Their discussion about the belief in God is incredibly sharp and extremely relevant to a man of Marlowe's profession. All in all, despite its shortcomings, "Playback," while not top Chandler, is still Philip Marlowe and that can never be bad.

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