The Big Sleep Study Guide

The Big Sleep by Raymond Chandler

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Introduction

Raymond Chandler began writing his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, in 1938, and it was published in 1939. Critics consider it the best of the seven that he wrote. Before publishing the novel, Chandler wrote stories for pulp fiction magazines. He uses the plot and details from three of these stories, "Killer in the Rain," "The Curtain," and "Finger Man" in *The Big Sleep*. Alfred A. Knopf, Chandler's American publisher, promoted the book by linking Chandler with Dashiell Hammett and James M. Cain, two popular novelists of detective fiction also published by Knopf. Chandler's writing, however, was more hard-boiled than Cain or Hammett's. The narrator of the novel, private investigator Philip Marlowe, is a world-weary tough guy who nevertheless lives by a chivalric code of honor and retains a sense of professional pride in his work. He negotiates the decadent world of crime-ridden Los Angeles, trying to sort out the details of an increasingly complex scheme to blackmail the Sternwoods, a wealthy family that made its money in oil. The story is as much a character study of a certain male American mindset as it is a "who-dunnit" crime story. More than simply a mystery novel, *The Big Sleep* has become a classic of American literature, with Chandler praised for his deft handling of plot, as well as his terse style and acerbic wit. Avon Books brought out the novel in paperback in 1943. In 1946, a film adaptation of *The Big Sleep* was released, starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, two of the biggest movie stars of the day.

Author Biography

Raymond Thornton Chandler was born July 23, 1888, in Chicago, Illinois, to Maurice Benjamin Chandler, a civil engineer, and Florence Thornton Chandler, a British immigrant. Chandlers' parents divorced when he was seven years old, he and his mother moved to London, England, to live with her family.

Chandler was educated at Dulwich College preparatory school, which taught students the value of public service and gentlemanly behavior as much as it did academic subjects such as mathematics and literature. After graduating from Dul-wich, Chandler studied French in Paris, and spent time as a tutor in Germany before returning to England, where he worked as a civil servant for a brief period before growing disgusted with bureaucracy. In 1912, after trying and failing to make a living as a writer, Chandler moved back to the United States, where he worked at a variety of odd jobs until joining the Canadian army in 1917. Chandler saw limited time at the Western front in France during World War I and was training to be an air force pilot when the war ended. In 1924, Chandler married Pearl Cecily Eugenia Hurlburt, a woman twice-divorced and eighteen years his senior; the marriage lasted thirty years until her death in 1954. By the time of the marriage, Chandler had been employed for two years by Dabney Oil Syndicate in Los Angeles, rising through the ranks to become a vice president. His affairs with office workers and his heavy drinking, however, led to his dismissal in 1932.

Chandler began writing stories for the pulp fiction market, publishing his work in outlets such as *Black Mask* and *Detective Fiction Weekly*, learning the trade as he went along. After years of what amounted to paid apprentice work writing for the pulps, Chandler published his first novel, *The Big Sleep* in 1939. It was a critical and popular success. Like Hammett, whose writing Chandler studied, Chandler set his stories in cities, and used the language of the streets. His meticulous attention to physical detail, complex plotting, and especially, his development of one of the greatest twentieth-century characters in American literature, private investigator Philip Marlowe, helped make Chandler one of the most popular mystery writers of his day. In Marlowe, Chandler created someone who, though exhausted and battered by the world's brutality and corruption, nonetheless lived by a code of honor and took pride in his work.

In addition to his short stories and seven novels, which include *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) and *The Lady in the Lake* (1943), Chandler wrote screenplays for Hollywood including *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), for which he received an Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America and an Oscar nomination for best screenplay, and *The Lady in the Lake* (1947). After a bout of pneumonia following a period of heavy drinking, Chandler died on March 26, 1959. He was, at the time, working on a new novel called *Poodle Springs*. The novel was later finished by Robert B. Parker and published in 1989.

Plot Summary

Chapters 1-5

The Big Sleep opens with private investigator Philip Marlowe visiting General Sternwood's mansion. Marlowe muses on the house's art and the fact that the furniture looks as if no one uses it. He first meets Carmen Sternwood, a flirt who, at twenty years old, is the younger of the General's two daughters. Then he meets the General, who receives him in his hothouse, a jungle-like setting in which the old man grows tropical orchids. The General tells Marlowe he is being blackmailed by someone named Arthur Gwynn Geiger, who wants the General to pay for Carmen's alleged gambling debts. Marlowe agrees to visit Geiger and put an end to the General's troubles. On his way out of the house, Vivian Regan, the older of the General's daughters, meets with Marlowe and tries to find out what the detective and her father spoke about, suspecting that it was about her husband, Rusty Regan, who left her about a month previously.

Pretending to be shopping for a rare book, Marlowe visits Geiger's antique bookstore, but Geiger is not in. While Marlowe waits for Geiger, a man comes in and disappears into a back room and then reappears with a book that he pays for and then leaves. Marlowe follows him a few blocks until the man hides the book in a tree. Marlowe, however, finds the book. Attempting to find Geiger, Marlowe visits another bookstore in the neighborhood and is given a description of Geiger by a woman who works there. He surmises through his discussion with this woman that Geiger's shop is a front for something. He discovers what that something is when he opens the book he had retrieved from the tree and sees that it contains pornographic photographs.

Chapters 6-10

Marlowe follows Geiger home and sees Carmen Sternwood's car parked in front of Geiger's home. He hears shots, and then breaks in to find Geiger dead on the floor and Carmen drugged and naked in front of a camera, the plate holder (negative) of which is missing. While rummaging through the house for clues, he finds a notebook with entries written in code. Marlowe takes Car-men home. The next morning, Bernie Ohls, the District Attorney's chief investigator, calls Marlowe and the two of them drive to the Lido fish pier where a man had driven into the ocean. The dead man is Owen Taylor, the Sternwoods' chauffeur, who once proposed to Carmen. Investigators cannot decide if the death was a homicide or a suicide. Marlowe returns to the city and visits Geiger's store once more, only to see men in the back room packing up books. He follows one of the men to Geiger's house, where the same man is packing up yet more books, and then to the apartment of Joe Brody.

Chapters 11-16

Vivian Regan visits Marlowe and shows him a nude photograph of her sister taken at Geiger's house, claiming that someone is blackmailing her for $5,000 and will give the photo to the "scandal sheets" unless she pays up. She says that she can borrow the money from Eddie Mars, an owner of a gambling parlor that she frequents. Ohls tells Marlowe that all of the Sternwoods have alibis for last night. Hunting for more clues, Marlowe returns to Geiger's house, only to find Carmen Sternwood, who has gone there to retrieve the nude photographs taken of her. While Marlowe and Carmen are in the house, Eddie Mars arrives, telling Marlowe that Geiger is his tenant and threatening the private investigator with a gun. Marlowe heads to Joe Brody's apartment, and after a standoff that includes Agnes Lozelle, the blonde woman who works at Geiger's store and who is Brody's girlfriend, Marlowe learns that Brody was also at Geiger's the night Geiger was killed. Brody claims he saw Taylor running out of the house and he followed him, hit him on the head, and took the photographic plateholder Taylor himself had taken from Geiger's. Marlowe finally convinces him to give up the photographs and plateholder. Just then, Carmen knocks at the door, holding a gun to Brody and demanding the photographs. After a tussle, Brody gives the photos to Marlowe, and Carmen leaves. Shortly after she leaves, Carol Lundgren, the young man Marlowe had seen at Geiger's store, knocks on the door and shoots Brody dead when he answers. Marlowe chases him down and takes him back to Geiger's.

Marlowe finds Geiger's body in a bed in Lundgren's room and learns that Lundgren had been living with Geiger. Marlowe, Ohls, and Lundgren visit Taggart Wilde, the District Attorney, who is meeting with Captain Cronjager when they arrive. The two tell the story of the last few days but leave out a few details, specifically Carmen Sternwood's visit to Brody and Marlowe's run-in with Eddie Mars. The story goes as follows: Owen Taylor, who had once proposed to Carmen Sternwood, killed Geiger in a fit of rage when he found out Geiger was taking nude photographs of her. Brody tried to capitalize on the death by taking over Geiger's pornography business. Lundgren came home and moved Geiger's body to the back room, so that he would have time to move his things out of the house before the police found out about Geiger's murder. Lundgren sees Brody moving Geiger's pornographic books, and so believes that Brody killed Geiger. Lundgren kills Brody. Cronjager is upset because he is just learning about all of this the day after it happened. The next day, the newspapers report the Brody and Geiger murders solved, with Brody accused of killing Geiger over a shady business deal involving a wire service and Lundgren accused of killing Brody. The Sternwoods, Mars, Marlowe, and Ohls were not mentioned, nor did the papers connect the Taylor death to any of the events. Mars calls Marlowe to thank him for keeping his name out of his report.

Chapters 20-25

In these chapters, Marlowe hunts for Rusty Re-gan, first visiting Captain Al Gregory of the Missing Persons Bureau, and then Eddie Mars's casino. Mars claims to know

nothing. Marlowe "apparently" rescues Vivian Regan from a mugging outside the casino, and then takes her home. She attempts to seduce Marlowe, but he fends off her advances, asking her what information Mars has on her that she will not share with him. She says nothing. When Marlowe arrives home, he discovers Carmen in his bed and undressed. Again, Marlowe declines an invitation for sex and kicks Carmen out. The next day, Harry Jones, a two-bit grifter who had been tailing Marlowe, tells him that Eddie Mars had Regan killed and that Mona Grant, Eddie's estranged wife, is hiding out outside of town.

Chapters 26-32

Marlowe visits Puss Walgreen's insurance offices and overhears Jones talking to Lash Canino. He listens as Jones tells Canino where Lozelle is hiding out and then listens as Canino poisons Jones by pouring him a cyanide-laced drink. Marlowe calls Lozelle and offers her two hundred dollars for information about Mona Grant's whereabouts. After paying her and receiving the information, Marlowe heads out of town, where he runs into Canino and Art Huck, who runs an auto repair garage. The two beat up Marlowe and handcuff him. He wakes up to see Grant in a silver wig guarding him. After Marlowe tells her that Mars is a killer, she lets him escape. Marlowe waits outside for Canino to return and then, with Grant creating a diversion, shoots Canino dead. The next day Marlowe visits General Sternwood and explains to him why he kept looking for Regan even after the General had told him the case was closed. The General first feigns anger and then offers Marlowe a thousand dollars to find Regan. On his way out of the house, Marlowe sees Carmen and she asks him to teach her how to shoot a gun. She takes Marlowe down an old deserted road and, during target practice, shoots at him, but does not kill him because he had loaded the gun with blanks. Carmen has an epileptic seizure and Marlowe takes her home. He tells Vivian what happened and finally discovers the truth from her: Carmen had killed Regan because he refused her advances. With Eddie Mars's help, they disposed of the body in an old oil well. Marlowe makes Vivian promise to take Carmen away and get professional help for her, threatening to report the details of Regan's murder if she does not. She agrees and Marlowe leaves, musing on death and how nothing matters when one is doing "the big sleep."

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Philip Marlowe, a 33-year-old Los Angeles-based private investigator and the first-person narrator, has been summoned by General Sternwood for a case. The Sternwood family is very rich and Marlowe pauses at the entrance to admire their sprawling house, the magnificent entrance, and the impressive Packard convertible that the chauffeur is dusting. On the whole, it is not hard to be impressed with the opulence of their estate.

Marlowe enters the house and comes across Carmen Sternwood, a blonde-haired beauty with an empty head. Though General Sternwood is very old, he has two daughters that are still in their 20's, Carmen and Vivian, and both of them are dangerously immature. Carmen affectionately plays with Marlowe as though she were still a young girl. She even pretends to faint in order to get Marlowe to hold her.

As Carmen lies in Marlowe's arms, the butler arrives to bring Marlowe to see the General. Marlowe makes a snide comment about Carmen, but the butler pretends not to notice.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The coy, immature Carmen is obviously not intelligent. She is; however, impulsive and she almost immediately tries to seduce Marlowe simply because he is both cute and tall. Her readiness to seduce a strange shows us that she is quick to get into bed, probably sleeps around a lot, and foreshadows her latter attempts to seduce Marlowe. The fact that Marlowe is unimpressed by Carmen Sternwood and her attempts to seduce him explains his ability to turn down her offer of free sex.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The butler leads Marlowe to a very hot greenhouse. Marlowe immediately regrets his decision to dress nicely for his interview with General Sternwood. Marlowe is not only sweating profusely he is being smacked in the face by the tropical plants that fill the interior of the greenhouse.

Eventually, the butler leads Marlowe to the wheelchair-bound General Sternwood, who sits in the oppressive head covered by blankets. Needless to say, Marlowe is shocked that the General can tolerate the heat of the greenhouse; much less the heat of the blankets, but the General thinks nothing of it. The general does; however, he tells Marlowe to take off his jacket, since he realizes that it is too hot, "for a man with blood in his veins." (22) Marlowe is more than happy to comply.

Eventually, General Sternwood explains his reasons for summoning Marlowe. The General has received a blackmail note and he wants to know who it is from and what he should do about it. Since Vivian's last husband, a man named Rusty Regan, disappeared, Sternwood has not had anyone to take care of such matters. Thus, he has turned to Marlowe for help. This is not the first time that the General has been blackmailed. Sternwood once had to pay five thousand dollars to a man named Joe Brody, in order to convince him to leave Carmen alone.

Sternwood hands an envelope to Marlowe so that he can investigate the contents. Inside the envelope are several promissory notes for one thousand dollars each, made out to an Arthur Gwynn Geiger, a man who apparently owns a bookshop. A note inside the envelope says that the money is for gambling debts, but Sternwood believes that the money is actually to pay for Geiger's silence.

Marlowe advises the General to pay the money, since it would save him a great deal of difficulty for a quantity of money that is trifling to a man of Sternwood's wealth. The General does not want to pay as it would be an admission of defeat. Thus, the General hires Marlowe to find out what is going on and to find a way to stop it.

Once Marlowe leaves the heat of the greenhouse, the butler informs him that Vivian Regan, Sternwood's daughter and the ex-wife of Rusty Regan, is waiting to meet him. Although Marlowe doesn't like it, he knows that he should probably visit with her.

Chapter 2 Analysis

When Marlowe meets with General Sternwood, they are in a sweltering greenhouse and Marlowe can barely stand the heat. The General is unaffected by the warmth of the room. This symbolizes the fact that the General is seemingly incapable of actual warmth. He can't stand either of his daughters and the last person he felt any affection

for was Rusty Regan; however, the General does not tell Marlowe that he wants Rusty Regan found. Thus, General Sternwood is too metaphorically cold and bloodless to tell Marlowe to find Regan, just as Sternwood is too physically cold and bloodless to notice that he is inside a witheringly hot, densely humid greenhouse.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Marlowe sits down across from Vivian Regan and takes the opportunity to stare at her beautiful form. She has exquisitely formed legs, stunning dark hair, and a come-hither face that is both sulky and strong. Marlowe is more than happy to look at her and Vivian seems ready to let him.

Finally, Vivian starts trying to get information from Marlowe, but Marlowe is unwilling to offer her much information. In fact, Marlowe is intentionally quiet so that he can find out what Vivian is after. Thus, as Marlowe evades Vivian's attempts to draw him out, he figures out that Vivian thinks Marlowe is there to find Rusty Regan. When Marlowe continues to be evasive, Vivian gets angry at him for being so cagey.

Once Vivian snaps at him, Marlowe takes the opportunity to point out that he did not intend to talk with her, rather, she sent for him. Marlowe tells her that he has no intention of allowing her to succeed in her cross-examination, no matter how hard she tries.

Needless to say, Vivian resents being talked to in such a manner and she hates him for so successfully dodging her questions so she orders him to leave. She does not; however, anticipate Marlowe's reaction, which is to get up and leave. She then orders him to sit down.

Eventually, Vivian coaxes Marlowe into admitting that he did not come to speak with the General about Rusty. When Vivian learns what she wants to know, she dismisses him with a contemptuous indifference.

Leaving the house, Marlowe realizes that he has been given a lawyer's job, not a private investigator's. After all, lawyers are the ones who are normally sent to bargain with people, even blackmailers. As Marlowe thinks about everything, he realizes that the blackmail case may simply be a test for a larger and more interesting case.

Eager to learn more about the case, Marlowe visits the local library in order to study up on rare books. Though he only reads for about half-an-hour, he learns all that he needs to know for his next step.

Chapter 3 Analysis

When Marlowe realizes that Sternwood has given him a job that really doesn't require a private investigator, it sets up Sternwood's request for him to find Rusty Regan. Although Sternwood does not tell Marlowe to look for Rusty, Marlowe knows that there must be more to the case than simply finding a blackmailer who leaves his return address. Thus, Sternwood must want something else from Marlowe. Sternwood's

admission that he misses Rusty tells Marlowe that Sternwood will probably send him after Rusty if he successfully stops the blackmailer.

Vivian's attempts to chisel information out of Marlowe foreshadow the revelation of her involvement in Rusty Regan's death. Because she knows that her father was very fond of Rusty, she fears that Marlowe is there to investigate Rusty's disappearance. Thus, she carefully arranges herself so that she might be able to use her sex appeal to get information out of Marlowe. Her inability to get information directly from Marlowe– show us that Marlowe is very honest and will not be either dissuaded from his case, or pulled off the track.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Marlowe carefully dresses himself like a bookworm intellectual and pays a visit to A.G. Geiger's bookstore. Once inside, he meets a blonde woman named Agnes who has, "enough sex appeal to stampede a business men's lunch." (38)

Despite the fact that she is obviously there as window decoration, Marlowe asks Agnes about a few rare books which he pretends to be interested in. Of course, Agnes is not there to sell rare books, she is there to look pretty, so she does not have the first clue what he is talking about.

Eventually, Agnes tells Marlowe that he should talk to Mr. Geiger, but he isn't in and won't be back until late. Marlowe is not dissuaded by such an obvious attempt to get him to leave the store, so he sits down in one of the chairs and smokes cigarettes while he waits for Geiger.

Eventually, a scrawny man with a cane enters the store and Agnes pushes a button to allow him into a hidden back room. Then, after several minutes of waiting, he walks out of the room carrying a large, brown parcel and pays Agnes for it. Once he sees this, Marlowe has learned all he needs to know and he follows the man down the sidewalk.

As the man wanders down the street, he turns a corner and Marlowe has to hurry to catch up with him before he disappears. Marlowe is not surprised to see that the man has disappeared, so he wanders down the street until he catches sight of the man's sleeve as he hides behind a large tree.

Marlowe waits the man out and as Marlowe watches him walk down the street, he realizes that the man must have stashed the parcel, or he wouldn't be so relaxed. Thus, Marlowe walks back to tree where the man was hiding, finds the parcel, and carries it off with him.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Although Marlowe does not come out and say it in this chapter, it is obvious to him that A.G. Geiger is running a smut shop. The knowing smile of the diamond seller, the woman who works the desk but doesn't know anything about books, and the secret room that hands out brown parcels indicates that there is something shady about Geiger's bookshop and that it must be selling or renting pornographic books out of the back room.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Marlowe returns to the street where Geiger keeps his bookstore, but he is looking for a bookstore that actually sells rare books this time. He the rare book store and finds out what Geiger looks like so that he can tail him.

The woman who works at the store is, at first, hesitant to give Marlowe information about Geiger. After a little plying, Marlowe convinces her to give him a description. She has sharp eyes and a good memory so she rattles off a very good profile of the man. Then, with a clear idea of just who Geiger is, Marlowe returns to his car. Marlowe considers how Geiger manages to keep a smut shop open on a very nice street.

Chapter 5 Analysis

When Marlowe asks the woman at the legitimate bookshop about the, "Ben Hur, 1860, Third Edition, the one with the duplicated line on page 116" (44), the woman behind the counter immediately looks up information about the book that he describes. The fact that the woman working in this bookshop can look up this information and the blonde in Geiger's bookstore could tells us that Geiger has no interest in actually selling books. This difference also hammers home the idea that Geiger's bookstore is just selling pornography; however, this is not made explicitly clear to the reader until Marlowe opens the brown parcel and sees the pornographic book inside.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Marlowe sits in his car watching the rain pour down on the streets as he waits for Geiger to show up. As he waits, Marlowe watches a high-class crowd of men and women in expensive cars drive up to the store and walk out with brown parcels. Then, at four o'clock, Geiger finally arrives and, after another hour, he leaves again.

Marlowe follows Geiger's car and tails him until they arrives at his Geiger's house. In order to watch the place, Marlowe parks his car at the top of a hill that overlooks Geiger's house. Although Marlowe does not know what, exactly, he is waiting for; he has a feeling that whatever happens will be interesting.

Eventually, a nice Packard pulls into the driveway and a woman enters the house. Marlowe wants to know who this woman is, so he sneaks into the driveway and checks the registration. As it turns out, the woman is Carmen Sternwood, the General's younger daughter. It seems that Geiger, the porn merchant, is using Carmen as his blackmail bait.

Marlowe returns to his car to think when, at 7:20, a bright flash erupts in Geiger's front window, followed by a scream that echoes out of the house. Hearing the scream, Marlowe rushes toward Geiger's house to see what is going on but, as Marlowe thinks about it, he realizes that the scream was not really a scream of terror. It was a scream of idiocy or insanity. When Marlowe reaches the door, he hears three gunshots, followed by a thump and departing footsteps.

Unfortunately, there is no way for Marlowe to run around to the back door, as the house is built above a steep incline and the front porch connects to the road by way of a footbridge. Thus, when Marlowe hears footsteps clattering down the back stairs and a car starting up, he has no way of finding out who fired the shots.

Desperate to get inside, Marlowe tries to break into the house by battering his shoulder against the door, but the door is far too strong. He smashes a pane of the front window, reaches in, and releases the catch. Neither of the people in the room notices his strange entrance, "although only one of them was dead." (48)

Chapter 6 Analysis

While Marlowe is waiting for Geiger to arrive at his bookshop, the rain comes into Marlowe's convertible through a hole in the roof. This shows that Marlowe is far too poor to be crooked. After all, if he were crooked, he would be able to live comfortably off of bribes and kickbacks. He obviously can not afford to fix a hole in the roof of his convertible which is one of the first things he would want to do with his money, since he has to spend a lot of time tailing people.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Inside the house, Geiger lies dead on the ground and a stoned Carmen Sternwood sits in a chair, wearing nothing but a pair of long jade earrings. Although Marlowe does pause to admire her, he mostly ignores her. Marlowe doesn't spend much time examining Geiger, as the three bullet holes in his chest show that he is clearly dead. Thus, with nothing else use to do; Marlowe gets Carmen into her dress.

Looking around the room, Marlowe notices a camera that is built into a decorative totem pole and he deduces that its flashbulb was the source of the flash he saw earlier. The negative is missing, so the murderer must have run off with it. In order to further his case, Marlowe checks the rest of the house. Fortunately, he finds a clue when he opens a small metal box and finds a blue leather book with coded writing in it. Because Marlowe does not understand the code, he takes the book with him.

Finally, Marlowe returns to the main room to rouse Carmen and take her to her car. Carmen is too stoned to walk, so Marlowe has to almost drag her to the Packard in order to take her home.

Chapter 7 Analysis

When Marlowe examines the house, he notices that it is almost entirely decorated in antiques, except for one room which is decorated in a very masculine style. From this, Marlowe deduces that there must be a second man living in the house, although he is not at home at the time. Because Geiger has a lodger, despite the fact that he clearly does not need the rent money to get by, Marlowe guesses that the second man must be Geiger's gay lover.

Though it seems that Marlowe's job is over now that Geiger, the blackmailer, is dead, Marlowe is too good a detective to just leave well enough alone. Instead, he wants to find out what is happening so he examines the house, takes the blue book, and helps his client's daughter home. It seems that Marlowe is can not leave a case simply because the case has broadened beyond his original assignment, rather, he wants to see his case all the way through, even when it goes into an entirely unexpected and dangerous direction.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Marlowe arrives at the Sternwoods' and tells the butler to fetch Carmen's maid. Of course, when the butler sees Carmen passed out in the Packard, he understands the reasons. When the butler asks if he can call a cab for Marlowe, Marlowe tells him not to do that because he does not want anyone to know that he is at the Sternwoods.'

Marlowe returns to Geiger's house but, upon entering, he notices that Geiger's body is gone. Shocked at this development, Marlowe examines the house and discovers tracks in the carpet, not unlike the marks that the heels of a body that was being dragged would make. Following the tracks, Marlowe sees that they may be headed toward the front door, but the trail is lost in the tile of the front room. It seems that somebody wants Geiger to be missing rather than dead. Marlowe leaves the house and returns home to drink and to try to crack the code in the blue notebook. Unfortunately, all he can figure out is that it seems to be a list of names and addresses.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Marlowe does not mind that Geiger's body is gone because it gives the police less to work with. Rather than a murder, it is now a missing persons' case, and a missing person is harder to investigate than a murder. Thus, the disappearance of Geiger's body may actually help Marlowe work quietly, which will help keep the blackmailing of General Sternwood quiet.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning, Marlowe receives a call from Bernie Ohls, the lead investigator for the District Attorney and the man who gave Marlowe the lead on the Sternwood case. Ohls has called to tell Marlowe that one of the Sternwoods' cars is sitting in the water off of Lido pier with a body inside it. When Ohls offers to drive Marlowe up to the pier, Marlowe jumps at the chance to find out what is going on.

At the pier, Ohls and Marlowe learn that the person is not Regan, as Marlowe first thought it might be, but the Sternwoods' chauffeur, Owen Taylor. Interestingly, Owen was hit in the side of the head with a blunt object, which seems to make it a murder case. Unfortunately, there isn't much else to go on, so Ohls drives Marlowe back into the city.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Ohls asks Marlowe about Regan, but Marlowe says that he isn't looking for him. Though Marlowe is not, at this point, looking for Regan, the fact that his name keeps coming up shows that Marlowe will be looking for Regan later in the book.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Marlowe returns to Geiger's store. This time he pretends that he is selling pornography. Obviously, this throws off the woman behind the desk and she can barely stammer out that Geiger may be in tomorrow. Marlowe sees a man in the back room packing up boxes. It seems that Geiger's supply of dirty books is being shipped out.

Outside, Marlowe hires a cab to tail the truck that is carrying the boxes. The cabbie is young and inexperienced and he loses the trail several times but he finally tracks down the truck to the garage of an apartment house.

Marlowe gets out of the cab and checks the mailbox names to see if there was a likely candidate in the building. Marlowe notices the name Joe Brody on a mailbox and he remembers that Sternwood paid a person by the name of Joe Brody to leave Carmen alone. Marlowe thinks that it is probably the same person. So, with this in mind, Marlowe goes down to the garage to check on the truck. As it turns out, the books are being delivered to Joe Brody, so there may be a connection. Marlowe returns to his office, where he finds Vivian Sternwood waiting for him.

Chapter 10 Analysis

The fact that Marlowe keeps his door unlocked in order to give clients a place to wait further indicates that he has no money and nothing worth stealing. If he were running a successful practice, he would have a receptionist who would allow his clients to enter. Instead, he just leaves the door unlocked, in case a client wishes to wait on him.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Marlowe invites Vivian back into his main office and Vivian is nicer to him. Marlowe still refuses to tell her anything without her father's permission. Vivian shows Marlowe a photograph that was sent her. In fact, it is the picture that was taken of Carmen on the night when Geiger was killed. Furthermore, the woman who phoned Vivian demanded $5,000 for the negative and said that if the money was not given up that night, Carmen would land in prison. Unfortunately, the woman did not say how or why. Thus, Marlowe recommends that Vivian get $5,000 quickly in order to pay off the blackmailer.

Marlowe asks Vivian about her movements the night before and about Owen Taylor; however, Vivian is no help because she was playing roulette at Eddie Mars' establishment. She doesn't know why Owen took the car, since he only takes it on his night off and it was not his night off.

As the two of them share a drink, Vivian mentions that Regan ran off with Eddie Mars' wife. However, he obviously did not leave in order to steal money and he is not mixed up in the blackmail scheme, since he carried $15,000 with him wherever he went. It seems that he was already set up very well and that would not need to steal or extort money in order to survive.

After Vivian leaves, Marlowe calls Bernie Ohls in order to check on how his investigation of Owen Taylor's death is going. Unfortunately, Ohls is no closer to a solution and he says he could use Marlowe's help. Marlowe is not interested in helping the police, so he declines the offer.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The fact that Eddie Mars runs his own gambling house shows that he is both a criminal and a very well protected one. Gambling was illegal in 1930's California and a man must have powerful friends in order to run it without interference. Thus, Mars is, in many ways, above the law simply because the law is either refusing to do anything about him or it is too scared to go after him.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Marlowe returns to Geiger's house because he thinks that the killer might have put the body into Geiger's car and driven it into a canyon somewhere outside of Los Angeles. Before Geiger can open the door with the keys he took from Geiger's house, he spots Carmen Sternwood standing outside the door.

Needless to say, Carmen is surprised to see Marlowe and she is shocked when he unlocks the door. Though she tries to play cute, she is obviously concerned about something and Marlowe has an idea of what it is. He tries to find out what she remembers from the night before, when Geiger was murdered. Unfortunately, she does not seem to remember much, such as the fact that Marlowe drove her home. She does say that Joe Brody killed Geiger.

Marlowe confirms Carmen's statement that Brody killed Geiger and tells Carmen that the nude photo of her is missing and then he lets her leave. As she is about to leave, a car pulls into the drive and someone rings the doorbell. A key enters the lock and Eddie Mars, a gray-haired gang boss, walks in.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Carmen can't remember anything about the night when Geiger was killed, yet she claims that Brody was the one who shot him. This shows that Carmen is probably lying, especially since she says that she hates Brody. Since Carmen is something of a loose cannon with no intelligence to speak of, she would frame Brody just to satisfy her own spite.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Marlowe attempts to get Carmen and himself out of the door safely but Eddie Mars has other ideas. Eddie tells Marlowe to stay or he will have the two men in the car force Marlowe to stay. Eddie doesn't care if Carmen leaves, so she runs away as fast as she can.

Eddie examines the front room and, as he does, he finds a patch of blood on the carpet. Eddie is surprised by this and he pulls out his pistol but he doesn't point it at Marlowe. Despite the fact that Marlowe knows what happened the night before, he pretends that he doesn't know whose blood it is or how it got there.

Eddie does not know what is going on but he does know that Marlowe must have been there for some reason. Seeing no other way out, Marlowe admits that he is a sleuth and that he is there to work on a blackmail case. With that out in the open, Marlowe tries to gather information from Eddie. In order to keep himself clean, Eddie explains that he owns the house and that Geiger is his tenant. Marlowe takes that information and accuses Eddie of protecting Geiger's pornographic bookshop.

Mars explains that Geiger seems to have disappeared with no explanation. He is not at the store, he is not answering his home phone, and Mars wants to know what happened to his tenant. He came to the house to try to figure out where Geiger could be and he is suspicious about the fact that Marlowe and Carmen were in the house and that there is blood on the floor.

Marlowe admits that this is interesting, but he has more interesting information to provide; someone is moving all of the books out of Geiger's store. Marlowe tells Mars that it seems like somebody rubbed out Geiger in order to take over his business. Mars doesn't like this idea, since it also involves pushing Mars and his boys out of the business.

Mars gives a shrill whistle and the two men in the car come scrambling to the door. Mars order his gunmen to search Marlowe. One of them finds Marlowe's wallet and discovers that his name really is Philip Marlowe and that he really is a private detective. This discovery relieves Mars considerably and the two of them have an honest talk, even though Mars is still ready to plug Marlowe if he has to.

Marlowe says that it would be stupid to kill Geiger in order to steal his racket, so the killer must have had some other motive. On top of that, Marlowe admits that he knows where the books are, but he needs to take care of his own client before he tells Mars that piece of information. Mars is not willing to wait as he wants to know where the books are. Mars admits that he simply wants to know where his tenant is. Marlowe,

though, is not ready to talk to either Mars or the police, so he simply leaves the house. Fortunately, Mars does not have Marlowe shot or tailed.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The appearance of Eddie Mars introduces the importance role that he will play later in the book. Since he appears at Geiger's house and his wife apparently ran off with Rusty Regan, there is a connection between Sternwood and Mars. Since there have been hints that Sternwood will want Marlowe to find Regan, Mars and Marlowe will cross paths when Marlowe is sent to find Sternwood's former son-in-law.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Marlowe returns to Brody's apartment in order to find out more about the books. Brody responds to Marlowe when he explains that he knows who Geiger is, he knows that Brody has all the books, and Marlowe has the list of people who want to rent them. After Brody invites Marlowe into his apartment, he pulls a gun on him. Marlowe is unimpressed by Brody's show of force.

As Brody listens, Marlowe explains that a very powerful mob boss by the name of Eddie Mars is not happy that Geiger's books were taken and he would have no qualms about killing Brody over it. Though Brody pretends to be uninterested, he lowers his gun and listens. Marlowe tells Brody to bring out the woman he knows is hiding behind a curtain. With that, Agnes, the woman who ran Geiger's bookstore, steps out and glares at Marlowe.

Once that both of them are sitting in front of him, Marlowe explains to Brody that he has the tools to run the smut peddling business now that he has killed Geiger and taken the books, but he still needs the encoded customer list Marlowe is holding. Brody says that he didn't kill Geiger.

Marlowe explains that he has a witness who says he killed Geiger and she would be ready to testify to that. Brody explodes in anger at Carmen for lying. Brody tells Marlowe everything he needs to know. Since Brody wasn't there, he must have the nude pictures of her and he must have sent the blackmail letter to Vivian. Marlowe demands the pictures from Brody and Brody gives in.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The door buzzer starts ringing, which puts Marlowe, Brody and Agnes on edge. Nobody wants a visitor to interrupt the scene, so Brody gives a gun to Agnes so that she can cover Marlowe as Brody answers the door. Unfortunately, Carmen is at the door and she is pointing a gun at Brody.

Brody backs away with panic written across his face. Marlowe takes advantage of the distraction to pull the gun away from Agnes and she is too surprised to put up much of a fight. Meanwhile, Carmen forces Brody back into the apartment, demanding her pictures.

Coming back to her senses, Agnes attacks Marlowe and she wrestles with him fiercely. Although Marlowe tries to push her off, she is strong enough to put up a good fight. Meanwhile, Brody tries to knock Carmen's gun away, but he misses her hand. She fires a shot that misses him and he manages to knock her off of her feet, sending her pistol skidding away.

Marlowe hits Agnes on the head with the pistol and picks up Carmen's revolver. With two guns in hand, he goes back to Brody and takes his gun as well. With every gun accounted for, Marlowe demands the photographs and the negatives. When Brody finally gives them up, Marlowe sends Carmen home.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Carmen's cold willingness to shoot Brody shows that she is violent and unpredictable and willing to kill. This willingness to kill foreshadows her willingness to kill Marlowe simply because he will not sleep with her.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

Marlowe walks back into Brody's apartment, since he is still has a few questions. Marlowe asks Brody how he got the photo and the negatives, but Brody is very cagey. Finally, Brody gets fed up and tells Marlowe to leave; however, he changes his mind when Marlowe mentions that there could be a couple of murders pinned on him.

With this new information, Brody is much more willing to talk. He admits that he was watching Geiger's house, but he never entered it. Brody had noticed a Buick registered to Vivian Regan sitting outside the house; the same Buick that was found in the water off of Lido pier. Thus, when he saw Owen come running out of the house, Brody followed him and pulled him over as though he were a policeman. Brody hit him on the head with a sap in order to keep him from using his gun. It was there, on the side of the road, that he discovered the negative and he took it back home with him.

There is another knock at the door and Brody angrily gets up to answer it. When Brody opens the door, somebody shoots him twice, killing him on the spot.

Marlowe jumps up and runs out the door to chase this unknown killer, but Marlowe is quickly dissuaded from a foot pursuit by a few shots from the attacker's revolver. Since the direct route of pursuit is too dangerous, Marlowe jumps into his car, speeds ahead and sneaks up on the attacker from between two parked cars. Then, as sirens approach the scene, Marlowe forces the attacker into his car and they head back to Geiger's house.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The kid who kills Brody is actually Geiger's male lover. The kid lived in Geiger's house in the extra bedroom, the one that was fixed up in a very masculine style. Because the kid was in love with Geiger and he thought that Brody had killed him, he tracked Brody down and shot him out of revenge.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

The kid drives Marlowe's car to Geiger's house and Marlowe tells him to open the front door. Even though the kid claims not to have a key, Marlowe insists that he does have one, since he lives there. The kid punches Marlowe angrily; however, Marlowe is more than a match for him and he eventually manages to knock him out.

Marlowe handcuffs his unconscious companion and drags him into the house. Then, with another cursory examination of the house, he discovers Geiger's body laid out in one of the bedrooms, surrounded by burning candles and incense.

With Geiger finally located, Marlowe calls Ohls so that he can take a look at the body and arrest the kid who killed Brody. As it turns out, Ohls was actually tailing Marlowe and he walks up the driveway as Marlowe calls him.

Chapter 17 Analysis

It seems that the kid who killed Brody moved Geiger's body into his bedroom so that he could mourn the loss of his lover. The kid had no intention of ever leaving the man he loved, preferring to keep him close. Considering that, in the 1930's, homosexuality was considered to be one expression of an overall moral depravity, this necrophilic devotion to a dead lover is in line with the contemporary ideas of the time.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Ohls arrives and asks the kid about Brody, but the kid will not say anything other than "Go ------ yourself." (117) Marlowe knows it was him and he has the kid's gun to prove it. With the case in hand, Ohls takes the boy into custody.

Ohls and Marlowe drive to the home of Taggart Wilde, the District Attorney, so that they can wrap up the case. Sitting at the desk next to Wilde is Captain Cronjager of the Los Angeles Police Department.

As Wilde and Cronjager stare emptily at Marlowe, Ohls fills them in on everything that has happened, from the blackmailing of the Sternwoods, to Owen Taylor killing Geiger, to the kid killing Brody. Then, once Ohls finishes, Marlowe tells his part of the story although he leaves out Eddie Mars' visit to Geiger's house and Carmen's visit to Brody's apartment.

Cronjager is not happy that Marlowe did not report the murder until a day after it was committed, since they might have been able to prevent Brody's death had they been on the case earlier. Marlowe simply explains that he was in a tough spot, he wanted to protect his client, and he had no way of knowing that the kid would try to take out Brody.

When pressed by Cronjager, Marlowe admits that he has left some tidbits of his story out, since he is trying to protect his client and the police already have all the information they need to solve two murders. Of course, Cronjager asks why he should keep Marlowe's secrets and Marlowe produces the pornography book from Geiger's bookstore. As Marlowe explains it, he could show this book to a Grand Jury and they would ask why a porn shop was allowed to run openly on a city street and this would cause the police a lot of embarrassment. Thus, Marlowe manages to escape from a potentially serious jam.

Finally, when Ohls leaves with Cronjager, Wilde has an honest talk with Marlowe. Wilde explains that his father was friends with Sternwood and, because of that friendship; Wilde has been trying to keep news about his two daughters quiet. However, he knows that he can not do it forever, since Carmen is always in trouble. Wilde tells Marlowe that he hopes that Rusty Regan is not somehow involved in the blackmailing.

Chapter 18 Analysis

As Wilde talks with Marlowe about Sternwood, he mentions that the General is looking for Rusty Regan. This is the first time that Marlowe hears that Sternwood is actively looking for Regan rather than just missing his company. This new bit of information foreshadows Sternwood's request that Marlowe to track down his son-in-law.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Marlowe arrives at his home to find two thugs waiting for him. The two men want to take Marlowe in to see Eddie Mars but Marlowe shrugs them off and angrily tells them to return without him.

Taking the opportunity to relax, Marlowe tries to sits down with a nice, stiff drink but his phone rings. Eddie Mars is on the other end and he wants to know whether Marlowe kept his name out of the investigation. Of course, Marlowe is prickly enough to make Mars sweat for a bit, but he eventually admits that he did not mention Eddie's name.

Satisfied with this, Mars asks if Marlowe is looking for Rusty Regan. Of course, Marlowe says that he is not, but Mars is not entirely convinced. Mars invites Marlowe to his house tomorrow in order to give him a hint about where Rusty might be.

With Eddie Mars placated, Marlowe calls the Sternwood house and reports to the butler that he has found the pictures and everything is fine. Then, with the case finally closed, Marlowe goes to bed.

The next morning, Marlowe reads all three of the morning newspapers and finds that none of them have gotten the story quite right. This is good news to Marlowe as it leaves the Sternwoods out of the story and it prevents him from having to explain to his client just how the story got out. Marlowe has succeeded in solving the case and everything is wrapped up nicely.

Chapter 19 Analysis

In this chapter, Raymond Chandler is giving his own, cynical description of newspaper reporters and their inability to get a story straight. Chandler worked for a newspaper for short period of time and saw a lot of journalists up close. In this chapter, he holds them in a certain contempt for their inability to correctly report news.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Marlowe visits Captain Gregory of the Missing Persons Bureau in order to ask him about Rusty Regan. Gregory is reluctant to give out information until Marlowe explains that he has met the D.A. and that he knows his chief investigator, Bernie Ohls. Once Gregory confirms that Marlowe is who he says he is, he allows Marlowe to ask him questions.

Marlowe knows that he can not do anything that the Missing Persons Bureau can not do; however, he wants to check on Regan. It turns out that there is nothing particularly remarkable about Regan, except for the fact that he apparently disappeared with Eddie Mars' wife. Gregory doesn't think that Mars has anything to do with Regan's disappearance since that would draw too much police attention to him. It seems that Eddie Mars' is a dead end. Gregory expects that Regan and Mrs. Mars will show up someplace, since they have to get money somehow. Unfortunately, for now, the entire case is cold and they simply have to wait until they appear.

With little to go on, Marlowe admits that he doesn't think that Eddie Mars had anything to do with the disappearance either. In fact, he thinks that Rusty simply split with a woman who meant more to him than Vivian. As Marlowe heads back to his office he notices a gray Plymouth tailing him.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Sternwood never actually told Marlowe to look for Rusty Regan, but it is clear to Marlowe that Sternwood wants him to find Regan. Marlowe does some extra work to get his facts straight before he visits Sternwood again. This shows that Marlowe is intelligent enough to anticipate his client, even when his client is tight-lipped about his own desires.

The gray Plymouth is driven by Harry Jones, though Marlowe does not know that yet. He knows that the car is tailing him, but he doesn't know why. This introduces the eventual appearance of the man driving the gray Plymouth and the fact that he has information that Marlowe might want.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Marlowe returns to his office and calls the Sternwood house in order to let the General know that the case is closed. Marlowe only speaks with the butler who is very happy to hear that the news of the blackmailing has not reached the papers and that Marlowe will be destroying the photographs.

Marlowe knows that he should let the entire case drop but he calls Eddie Mars and sets up a meeting with him. Marlowe is not trying to find Rusty Regan; however, he doesn't want to miss the possible lead that Mars can provide.

After a few pleasantries, Marlowe asks Mars about the lead on Regan that he offered. Mars tells Marlowe that he already got the information from Captain Gregory, giving Mars nothing new to offer. He mentions that Marlowe could get a full time job working for General Sternwood, looking after his daughters. As a matter of fact, Vivian is in the casino right now and she is doing very well at the roulette wheel.

Seeing that Mars doesn't have anything more for him, Marlowe goes down to look at his gambling house. Before leaving, Marlowe asks if Mars has anybody tailing him in a gray Plymouth. Mars tells him, quiet genuinely, that he doesn't but Marlowe sees worry on Mars' face.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

At the roulette wheel, Vivian is, indeed, cleaning up. As a matter of fact, she has won several times in a row and it seems that the man running the table can not cover her bet. Vivian is angry and says that she is betting no more than the house limit. The croupier insists that he needs Mars to come out in order to ensure that the bet can be paid.

Mars dutifully arrives and offers to cover the full, $16,000 bet that Vivian wishes to place. Thus, with the bet covered, Vivian puts all her winnings on red. With everything in place, the croupier spins that ball and it lands on 25 red.

Marlowe has seen enough and he heads out toward the door as Vivian gathers her winnings. Outside, there is a dense fog covering everything, but Marlowe is not interested in it. Instead, he is interested in the man hiding behind a tree with a mask over his face. Not wanting to be noticed, Marlowe hides behind a tree himself.

Chapter 22 Analysis

The man wearing the mask is obviously up to no good and sets up the man's attempt to steal all of Vivian's winnings at gunpoint in the next chapter. It is not clear why the man is there but possibly Eddie Mars wants his winnings back from Vivian. Since Mars admits that he generally comes out the worse for Vivian's gambling habits, it seems that he has had enough.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Vivian leaves the casino and, as she walks through the fog, the man in the mask robs her at gunpoint. When he walks away with Vivian's purse, Marlowe gets the drop on him and gets Vivian's purse back for her.

Of course, Vivian is rather surprised to see Marlowe and she wonders what he is doing there. Marlowe explains that he is there because Eddie Mars wanted to see him about her husband, but he didn't have any useful information for him. Vivian was under the impression that Marlowe wasn't looking for Regan so Marlowe explains to her that everyone keeps throwing Regan at him and he wants to know why. He visited Mars to see if he had anything useful.

Since Vivian's boyfriend is dead drunk and passed out in their car, Marlowe gives her a ride to a diner where the two of them can talk over some coffee and whiskey. Vivian is visibly shaken after her encounter with the gunman, and she is unable to talk about anything but her worries about her father and her sister. She is trying to keep her family at least somewhat united but Carmen's antics are constantly upsetting both Vivian and the General. Vivian worries about her sister and the effects her antics have on their father.

Eventually, they leave the diner and drive down to the beach where Vivian tries to seduce Marlowe. Marlowe doesn't go for it. All he really wants to know is what Mars has on Vivian. His questions spoil the moment for Vivian and she tells him to take her home.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Once again, despite Vivian's best efforts, she can not seduce Marlowe. Although he does enjoy kissing Vivian, he is still working for her father and he does not want to sleep with his client's daughter.

The fact that Vivian is so concerned about her father and Carmen shows that she is willing to do just about anything to keep bad news from reaching the General. This explains why Vivian hid Rusty's body after Carmen killed him; she wanted to protect Carmen and she does not want the General to hate his own daughter. She hid Rusty's body in order to protect the family.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Marlowe returns home to find Carmen lying naked in his bed but he is not at all interested in her.. Carmen attempts to seduce him but he rejects her. When Carmen realizes that Marlowe is not going to give in to her, she grows angry and hisses at him like some sort of animal. Marlowe is not impressed. He forces her to get dressed and the he shoves her out the door.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Carmen is enraged when Marlowe refuses to sleep with her, showing that she does not take rejection well. This hints at the later explanation of Rusty Regan's disappearance: Carmen tried to sleep with him, he refused, so she killed him.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Marlowe leaves his apartment for his office but, as he exits his building, he sees a gray Plymouth outside, waiting for him. It is the same gray Plymouth that was tailing Marlowe earlier, but he still does not know who is in it or what they want so, he gets into his own car, drives to his office and parks. Then, as Marlowe walks by the Plymouth, he jerks the door open in order to find out why the man is tailing him.

The small man waiting in the car pretends not to know anything, so Marlowe simply tells him to come up to his office if he has something to say. After a short time, the small man appears in Marlowe's waiting room.

The man's name is Harry Jones and Agnes sent him to see Marlowe because she has information to sell; information that might help Marlowe find Rusty Regan. She is $200 for the information. Harry tells Marlowe that Eddie Mars had Rusty Regan killed.

As Jones explains it, Rusty was interested in Mona Grant, a singer that Mars later married. Although Rusty was married to Vivian, Rusty was still interested in Grant. Mars didn't want Rusty seeing his wife so the two of them tried to run away together. Unfortunately, Mars had other ideas and he sent Lash Canino after them.

Lash Canino is the sort of hit man who would, "bump off a guy between drinks" (182). He is tough and ruthless and he gets things done, but he only comes into L.A. when Mars has work for him. So, when Jones spotted Canino, he told Brody about it. Brody tailed him out to the Sternwood house, where Vivian paid Canino money for something.

Marlowe is not impressed and he doesn't want to pay Jones. Jones gets Marlowe's interest when he says that he knows that Mars' wife is living alone and that Agnes can tell Marlowe where she is. Agnes; however, will not tell Marlowe anything until she has the money in her hands. Thus, Jones and Marlowe make an appointment to meet later when Marlowe has the money. When Marlowe gives him the money, Jones will take him to see Agnes.

Chapter 25 Analysis

The fact that Lash Canino and Mona Mars are all wrapped up in the same story suggests that Marlowe will find Canino and Mona in the same house. Considering that Canino is a very tough hit man it is likely that Marlowe will have to kill Canino if he wants to survive an encounter with him.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Marlowe arrives at the meeting place, but as he walks upstairs, he hears Harry Jones say, "Canino?… Yeah, I've seen you around somewhere. Sure." (186) Marlowe freezes and listens carefully. Then, hearing Canino's voice, Marlowe realizes that he needs to keep himself away from Jones and out of trouble.

In order to stay hidden, Marlowe sneaks through another door to the same offices and listens to the conversation. It seems that Canino wants to know where Agnes is and how he can get to her. Though Jones is cagey, he finally gives out an address when Canino points a gun at him. When Canino has the information, he pours out some drinks to toast to their partnership. The liquor is poisoned and Marlowe hears Jones falls dead.

Once Canino leaves, Marlowe enters the office where Jones and Canino were talking. Examining the evidence and smelling the scent of bitter almonds in the air, Marlowe deduces that cyanide was used to kill Jones.

Agnes needs to be warned about Canino, so Marlowe finds the number for the address that Jones gave. When Marlowe calls, the man on the other end tells him that it is the wrong number. In fact, when Marlowe calls the manager of the apartment, he finds out that Agnes does not even live in the building. Jones fooled Canino and saved his girlfriend.

As Marlowe is about to leave, the phone rings. Unsure of whether it is a good idea or not, Marlowe picks up and hears Agnes's voice on the other end. In order to keep her calm, Marlowe tells her he still wants to meet with her but Jones got nervous and left So, since Agnes still needs the $200 that Marlowe has, she tells Marlowe where he can meet her.

Chapter 26 Analysis

When Marlowe walks outside, he realizes that he is mimicking the grotesque expression that Harry Jones had in death. This symbolizes Marlowe's own fear of Canino, since Marlowe is taking on the part of the dead Jones. It is as though Marlowe expects to be killed by Canino as well, and he is almost trying out the facial expression to see how it will feel.

Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

Once Agnes has the money, she explains to Marlowe that she saw Eddie Mars' wife getting some fresh air out on the road amidst the orange groves a mile away from Realito. She was with Joe Brody at the time and the two of them tailed the car until it turned into the lane of a house behind a garage. The garage was run by a man named Art Huck. Once Marlowe has the directions to the house, Agnes drives away, never to be seen by Marlowe again.

After a good, solid dinner, Marlowe drives out to orange country to check out the tip. Unfortunately, when he is nearly there, Marlowe runs over some tacks and they blow out two of his tires. With two of his tires gone and only one spare, Marlowe needs to find a garage.

Marlowe spies a skylight in the distance and he guesses that the skylight may be on top of Art Huck's garage. Of course, that may be a good or bad thing, but it is his only choice at the moment.

In fact, it is Art Huck's garage and Art is still working. Unfortunately, Lash Canino is there too and he is the last person on earth that Marlowe wants to see right now. But, since Marlowe is already there and he still needs a drivable car, he goes in and does his best to avoid looking directly at Canino while Art is out fixing the tires.

When Art returns, he repairs the tires and re-inflates them. Then, as Art is holding the tire in the air, he slams it down over Marlowe's arms, leaving him helpless against Canino. A few quick punches from Canino, who has a roll of nickels in his hand, puts Marlowe out.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Marlowe never tells Agnes that Harry Jones is dead, but he never fully explains why. Marlowe may have wanted to protect Agnes from the truth, he may not have wanted Agnes to think that he had something to do with Jones' death, or he might have simply not cared anything about her. Unfortunately, Marlowe never explains his reasons and, since she leaves the scene after she gives up the information about Eddie Mars' wife, he never has a reason to explain it.

Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

Marlowe wakes up and finds himself lying on a couch with his arms and legs tied up behind him. He is utterly immobilized. Sitting across from him is Eddie Mars' wife, a beautiful blonde with hair so platinum that it shines like, "a silver fruit bowl" (203).

Since he is in a bad spot anyway, Marlowe talks to Mrs. Mars in order to find out what is going on. It seems that Eddie Mars told her to hide out and she agreed in order to show him that she will do what he says. In fact, her platinum hair is really just a wig; she cut her hair in order to prove her loyalty to Mars.

As Marlowe talks to Mrs. Mars, he learns that she does not think of her husband as anything other than a racketeer, even as Marlowe tries to convince her that Mars is also a pornographer, a blackmailer, and a murderer. She is; however, finally convinced enough to let Marlowe go, though she can only cut the ropes since Canino has the keys to the handcuffs.

Marlowe tries to convince Mrs. Mars to come with him, but it is no use. She still refuses to believe that her husband is a murderer and she does not fear Canino. She refuses to leave mostly because she is still in love with Eddie and she will not leave him under any circumstance.

Because Canino will return soon Marlowe has no choice but to get out as fast as possible. Before he leaves, Marlowe asks Mrs. Mars for a kiss. When she gives him a cold kiss on the lips, he walks out the door into the pouring rain.

Chapter 28 Analysis

Though Vivian and Carmen both attempted to seduce Marlowe, he never actually tries to kiss either of them. However, before leaving Mrs. Mars, Marlowe asks her for a kiss. It seems that Marlowe has a soft spot for Mrs. Mars where he was unmoved by the beautiful daughters of General Sternwood. Though she is attractive, so are both Carmen and Vivian. It seems that the difference to Marlowe is that Mrs. Mars was kind to Marlowe when she had no reason to be kind to him. Marlowe never fully explains his attraction to Mrs. Mars, though thoughts of her haunt him in the close of the book.

Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

Marlowe runs back to his car to get the pistol he has hidden under the dashboard and runs back to the house in order to save Mrs. Mars. Unfortunately, it is not easy for him to move, since he is still handcuffed, and Canino is already at the house by the time that Marlowe returns. Canino hasn't left with Mrs. Mars yet, so there is still time for Marlowe to save her.

Marlowe slides into Canino's car and starts the engine. Needless to say, Canino is worried, since he needs the car to get away. In order to stop Marlowe, he fires several shots into the windshield. Marlowe gives out a yell and a choking gurgle that sounds like a man dying and Canino is satisfied that he has hit his mark.

Unfortunately, Canino is careful enough to know that he needs to keep himself protected, so he hides behind Mrs. Mars as they exit the house. Then, Mrs. Mars screams and says that she can see the man behind the wheel of the car.

Canino's attention is distracted as he fires into the car, allowing Marlowe to get the drop on Canino. Then, with his Colt aimed as carefully as possible while shooting a gun held behind his back, Marlowe kills the hit man with three shots to the stomach.

As Marlowe looks over the body, he suddenly starts laughing like a maniac. He stops laughing when Mrs. Mars asks, "Did you have to kill him?" (217) Then, understanding the situation and seeing that there was no other way out, she unlocks Marlowe's handcuffs and agrees that he probably did need to kill Canino.

Chapter 29 Analysis

When Marlowe gets the drop on Canino, he actually says something to get his attention. By doing this, Marlowe seems to be living up to the old Code of the West that says that you should never shoot a man in the back. However, Marlowe is not entirely honorable in his own code, since he says that he probably should have let Canino take a shot before killing him. Marlowe is not the ideal hero; he is simply a man trying to live up to an ideal.

Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Marlowe sits with Captain Gregory and Gregory observes that Marlowe is in a jam again, since nobody is going to congratulate Marlowe for killing Canino. However, they are not there to talk about Canino or Eddie Mars' wife. Instead, they are there to talk about Rusty Regan.

Gregory admits that he is not exactly the most honest cop, but that he would still like to see Eddie Mars in prison. Gregory does not; however, think that Mars killed Regan. In fact, Gregory is not even sure that Mars had any reason or inclination to kill Regan, so that entire angle is a dead end.

When Marlowe gets up to leave, Gregory asks him if he actually thinks he can find Regan. Marlowe says that he doesn't think he can do it, and he doesn't even want to try.

Marlowe returns home and, as he smokes his pipe, he thinks about everything that happened after he killed Canino. As Marlowe think, he decides that Eddie Mars knows something, but Marlowe can't quite figure out what it might be. Hi thoughts are interrupted by a call from the Sternwoods' butler; the General wants to see Marlowe again. Before he leaves, Marlowe drops Carmen's revolver in his pocket so that he can return it to her.

When Marlowe arrives, General Sternwood is lying in his bed, looking as though he does not have much longer to live. He does perks up when he sees Marlowe, even though he begins by saying that Marlowe has betrayed his trust by going off on his own in order to find Regan.

However, Marlowe tops the General by offering to return Sternwood's money for a job left incomplete. As Marlowe explains it, he thought that Sternwood sent Marlowe to find out if Regan was involved in the blackmailing, not just to find the blackmailer. He thought that the real case was to find Regan, not to warn off Geiger. As a result, Marlowe thinks that he has done an unsatisfactory job and he wants to refund the General's money. Sternwood tells Marlowe that he will pay him $1,000 if he can find Regan.

Chapter 30 Analysis

Marlowe describes Sternwood's bed as being like, "the one Henry the Eighth died in," (222) symbolizing the fact that Sternwood is dying himself. This point is furthered by Marlowe's statement, as he leaves, that Sternwood looks, "more like a dead man than most dead men look." (227)

When Marlowe meets Sternwood this time, Sternwood is not in the sweltering hot greenhouse, he is in a comfortable bed in a pleasant room. This symbolizes the fact that Sternwood is not the cold man he was in the beginning of the book. Instead, he is a man that has blood in his veins and he actually admits to feeling some affection for Regan, even if he did run off. Thus, Sternwood is not the frigid man who is resistant to all warmth; he is the man who is warm and comfortable now that he allows himself to show his warmth to others.

Chapter 31

Chapter 31 Summary

As Marlowe leaves the house, he happens to see Carmen outside, sitting on a stone bench and looking very bored. Since Marlowe has Carmen's gun with him, he returns it to her just as he intended to. Carmen wants Marlowe to teach her how to shoot, so the two of them go down to some old, abandoned oil wells where Carmen can fire off a few rounds without disturbing the neighbors.

Marlowe sets up an old can in a window for a target but, as he returns to where Carmen is standing, she points the gun angrily at him. As Marlowe approaches, Carmen fires off several shots at his chest. Since the gun is only loaded with blanks Marlowe easily takes the gun away from her before she falls unconscious.

Chapter 31 Analysis

The fact that Carmen turned on Marlowe shows that she is quick to anger and is willing to kill out of spite. This forms the basis of Marlowe's explanation of how Rusty disappeared. In fact, since Carmen already knows where to go to shoot, it shows that she must have been there to shoot before. It seems that she may very well have shot Rusty Regan at the abandoned oil wells.

Chapter 32

Chapter 32 Summary

Marlowe takes Carmen into the house and he sits down calmly in the sitting room. Eventually, Vivian comes in to yell at him, but Marlowe does not say a word. Instead, he simply takes her accusations in and waits for her anger exhaust itself.

When Vivian finally calms down, Marlowe explains how he got the gun from Carmen and how she tried to shoot him while they were at the abandoned oil wells. After telling Vivian his news Marlowe asks Vivian what Mars has on her. Although she says nothing, Marlowe explains what he suspects.

As Marlowe has it figured out, Carmen killed Regan because he wouldn't sleep with her, and then Vivian paid Canino to get rid of the body. However, Eddie Mars wanted to blackmail her for a million dollars or so when she gets her share of her father's inheritance. The blackmail money, of course, would be for Mars to keep silent about just who killed Regan and who helped cover it up.

With the truth out, Vivian confesses that she was just trying to keep the truth from her father. As Vivian explains it, Carmen seems to fall into fits where she does things that even she may not understand or control. Marlowe asks her to put Carmen away where she can be kept safe and where she can be treated.

Marlowe leaves the house and, as he does, he considers the fact that dead is dead no matter what. You are simply, "sleeping the big sleep" (243) and it doesn't matter where your body ends up. However, General Sternwood is still alive and Marlowe wants to keep him in the dark and happy about Rusty and his two daughters until he dies.

Chapter 32 Analysis

Marlowe's talk about the fact that, once you are dead, you are simply, "sleeping the big sleep" (243) is, in a way, the moral of the story. As Marlowe says, dead is dead, no matter where you body ends up, so there is no point in worrying about it. Instead, Marlowe is concerned about the people who are living, such as General Sternwood. Rather than taking the story of Rusty Regan's disappearance to the police, he would rather let the General die comfortably without knowing just how the one person he cares about was killed by his deranged daughter. Marlowe is also concerned about Carmen. He wants Vivian to put her away somewhere where she can not hurt others or herself. Marlowe is actually very moral, in his own cynical way, although the morality that he follows may run contrary to the ideas of others.

Characters

Joe Brody

Joe Brody is a small-time hood who was once involved with Carmen Sternwood; her father paid him to stop seeing his daughter. Brody's new girl-friend is Agnes, Geiger's employee. Brody has successfully blackmailed the General once and tries to do it again with nude photos of Carmen, which he took off Taylor after following Taylor from Geiger's home. Lundgren kills Brody because he believed that Brody had killed his lover, Geiger.

Lash Canino

Lash Canino is a cold and ruthless hit man who wears brown clothes and a brown hat and drives a brown car. He works for Mars as a bodyguard and all-purpose thug. Canino helps to dispose of Rusty Regan's body after Carmen Sternwood kills him. He also poisons Jones after extracting information from him about Agnes's location. Marlowe kills Canino in a shoot-out.

Larry Cobb

Larry Cobb is a drunk and Vivian Regan's escort at the Cypress Club.

Captain Cronjager

Captain Cronjager, "a hatchet-faced man," is at Wilde's home when Marlowe and Ohls chronicle the events leading up to and including Geiger and Brody's murders. He is angry with Marlowe for not reporting the murders earlier and the two of them argue.

Arthur Gwynn Geiger

Arthur Gwynn Geiger is a pornographer who owns a rare book store on Hollywood Boulevard and rents a house from Mars. A middle-aged "fattish" man with a Charlie Chan mustache, Geiger is shot dead while taking photographs of a nude Carmen Sternwood. His lover is Lundgren, who also lives in the house.

Mona Grant

Mona Grant is a former lounge singer and Mars's estranged wife. She is also a former girl-friend of Rusty Regan. She is hiding outside of town and guarded by Canino, so that the police will think that she ran away with Regan. Initially, she is naive and gullible,

refusing to believe Marlowe when he tells her that Mars kills people, but she lets Marlowe escape while she is guarding him, and then helps him kill Canino by creating a diversion.

Captain Al Gregory

Al Gregory is head of the Missing Persons Bureau. Marlowe describes him as "a burly man with tired eyes." He knows more than he lets on, initially presenting himself as a "hack," but later telling Marlowe that he is an honest man in a dishonest city. Gregory shows Marlowe a photograph of Regan and provides him with information about his history.

Harry Jones is a small-time criminal and friend of Brody and Rusty Regan's. He tells Marlowe that Mars had Regan killed. He is a small man with bright eyes. He sums up his philosophy of life when he tells Marlowe, "I'm a grifter. We're all grifters. So we sell each other out for a nickel." He is poisoned by Canino, after Jones tells the killer where Agnes is hiding.

Agnes Lozelle

Agnes Lozelle is Joe Brody's ash-blonde girl-friend who works in Geiger's store. She is surly and aloof when Marlowe visits the store, arousing his suspicions. She bemoans her luck at always attracting "half-smart" men. After Brody is killed, she connects with Jones, who tries to protect her from Canino. Marlowe gives her two hundred dollars for information about Mona Grant.

Carol Lundgren

Carol Lundgren worked for Geiger, was his lover, and lived with him. He is a good-looking, thin, blonde young man who Marlowe refers to as a "fag" and a "pansy." After Lundgren shoots Brody, Marlowe chases him down and brings him back to Geiger's house. He is arrested and charged with Brody's murder.

Philip Marlowe

Philip Marlowe, the novel's narrator, is a single, thirty-three year old private investigator. Mar-lowe had formerly worked for Wilde, the District Attorney, but was fired for insubordination. He is a handsome, charming, cynical, street-smart character who loves his work but shows contempt for women. When he is not smoking or drinking, he is nursing a hangover and working the Sternwood case. Marlowe has a high degree of professional pride and a general disdain for the rich. He puts work before romance and is loyal to his employer, General Sternwood, declining the amorous advances of both of Sternwood's daughters. Arrogant, witty, self-deprecating, and world-weary, Marlowe

served and continues to serve as the inspiration for the characters of numerous private investigators in both fiction and film.

Eddie Mars

Eddie Mars is the middle-aged proprietor of the Cypress Club, a gambling house on the beach that Vivian Regan frequents. He also rents a house to Geiger. Impeccably dressed in expensive gray suits, Mars has a cool demeanor and rarely involves himself directly in crime, choosing instead to hire others such as Canino to do his dirty work. His wife, Grant, was once Rusty Regan's lover. Mars has connections in the police department and it is likely that he will not be charged with any crimes.

Mathilda

Mathilda is Vivian Regan's maid. Marlowe describes her as "a middle-aged woman with a long gentle face."

Vincent Norris

Vincent Norris is General Sternwood's butler. He is about sixty years old, with silver hair, an agile manner, and a quick wit. He holds a considerable degree of power in the Sternwood household, writing checks for the General and deciding what information the General should and should not have.

Bernie Ohls

Bernie Ohls is the chief investigator for Wilde and a friend of Marlowe's who had recommended Marlowe to General Sternwood. Ohls is tough, having killed nine men during his career. But he also takes pride in his work and has a degree of integrity. He takes Marlowe to see Owen Taylor's body and accompanies him to Wilde's to report the details of Brody and Geiger's murder and subsequently to report Jones's and Canino's deaths.

Terence Regan

Terence "Rusty" Regan is an Irish immigrant, former bootlegger, and late husband of Vivian Re-gan. Regan was a good friend of General Stern-wood, who would listen to his stories of the time he spent in the Irish Republican Army. He was in love with Grant, Mars's wife, and becomes the object of Marlowe's investigation in the second half of the novel, after General Sternwood hires Mar-lowe to find him. Regan is killed by Carmen Stern-wood after he spurns her advances.

Vivian Regan

The oldest Sternwood daughter, Vivian is in her 20s and almost as hard-boiled as Marlowe, spending most of her time at the roulette table at the Cypress Club gambling or drinking and attempting to seduce men like Marlowe, who describes her as "tall and rangy and strong-looking." Her escort is Larry Cobb, a slobbering drunk for whom she has no affection but considered marrying at one point. She has been married three times, most recently to Rusty Regan. She helps to cover up the truth of Regan's death by deceiving Marlowe to protect her sister. She finally tells Marlowe the details of his death at the end of the novel.

Carmen Sternwood

Carmen Sternwood is the younger of the two Sternwood sisters. She is twenty years old, beautiful, relentlessly flirtatious, spoiled, and epileptic. She is also at the center of the blackmailing scheme that includes Geiger and Brody. She spends most of the novel sucking on her thumb or playing with her hair, or telling Marlowe that he is cute. After being sexually rejected by Marlowe a number of times, she attempts to shoot him while Marlowe is showing her how to use a gun. Her sister tells Mar-lowe that Carmen had killed Regan for the same reason. Marlowe makes Vivian promise to seek professional help for her sister as a condition for him to remain silent about the details of Regan's death.

General Gus Sternwood

General Sternwood is the elderly millionaire father of Carmen and Vivian, who initially hires Marlowe to "take care" of someone who is attempting to blackmail him. He fell off a horse when he was fifty-eight years old and is paralyzed from the waist down. Sternwood now lives through others, spending most of his time in a wheelchair in his hothouse growing orchids. He loved Rusty Regan because Regan told him stories and kept him company, and he hires Marlowe to find him. Norris and the daughters keep the truth of Regan's death from him.

Owen Taylor

Taylor was "a slim dark-haired kid" from Dubuque, Iowa who worked as a chauffeur for the Sternwoods. His body is found in a car off the Lido pier and his death is ruled a suicide. Marlowe speculates that Taylor killed Geiger when he found out he was taking nude photographs of Carmen Stern-wood, to whom Taylor had once proposed.

Taggart Wilde

Taggart Wilde is the District Attorney and Marlowe's former boss. He comes from an old Los Angeles family and his political connections are many and deep. His father was a friend of General Sternwood's. Marlowe describes him as "a middle-aged plump man with clear blue eyes that managed to have a friendly expression without really having any expression at all." He determines what will be reported in the newspapers regarding Brody and Geiger's killings and helps keep the Sternwood name out of the papers.

Themes

Privilege and Entitlement

Although Marlowe works for General Stern-wood, a millionaire, his loyalty to the man is not based on Sternwood's wealth but on his age, infirmity, and honesty. Throughout the novel, Marlowe treats people as they treat him, rather than as they expect to be treated by virtue of their class standing or social position. This is demonstrated in the way he responds to the Sternwood sisters, both of whom are privileged and behave as if they are entitled to special treatment. Vivian Regan is shocked by Marlowe's "rude manners" during their first encounter, and Carmen Sternwood is so disturbed by Marlowe's sexual rejection of her that she attempts to kill him. Marlowe is also discourteous to Captain Cronjager during his visit to Wilde's office, refusing to defer to Cronjager's position as police captain when discussing the Geiger and Brody killings. Marlowe's behavior in this instance has as much to do with his own sense of entitlement regarding what he can and cannot do in his job as a private investigator as it does with Cronjager's arrogance.

Meaning of Life

In the early twentieth century, the sheer horror and scale of atrocities during the first World War caused many people to lose faith in God and organized religion. Combined with the increasing acceptance of scientific theories such as evolution, many no longer believed in a higher benevolent intelligence to provide meaning to their lives, and so, struggled to find purpose. Some, like the Stern-wood sisters, spent their time pursuing pleasure gambling, drinking, and engaging in promiscuous sex. Others, like Marlowe, found meaning in their work and in adherence to a code of honor. Still others, such as General Sternwood, who had lost control of much of his body, survived by living through people like Marlowe and Rusty Regan. Death, however, hovers just above the heads of all the characters, as Marlowe reminds readers at the end of the novel: "What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? . . . You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell."

Law and Order

Laws are meant to ensure a safe environment for citizens, to maintain social order, and to instill a sense of justice in the populace. The rampant corruption and disregard for the law in Chandler's novel demonstrates that the social fabric has begun to fray in 1930s Los Angeles. Police protect pornographers and gamblers, women destroy men for sport, the wealthy buy their way out of trouble, and appearances inevitably belie reality. Characters routinely manipulate each other for personal gain. The spirit of Chandler's novel can be summed up by small-time criminal Harry Jones, who says to Marlowe, "We're all grifters. So we sell each other out for a nickel."

Style

Dialogue

Dialogue, the conversation between two or more characters, is a primary tool writers use for characterization and to drive plots. Writers use dialogue to reveal the desires, motivations, and character of the players in their stories, helping to create an idea and an image of them in readers' minds. Chandler is known as a master of vernacular dialogue. His characters talk the way that 1930s thugs, cops, and private investigators talk on the job, in language studded with slang such as "loogan" (a man with a gun), "peeper" (private investigator), and "centuries" (hundred dollar bills). His characters, especially Marlowe, are also known for their use of biting similes to describe someone or thing. Similes are comparisons that employ "as" or "like." For example, in describing the way Brody's cigarette dangles from his mouth, Marlowe states: "His cigarette was jiggling like a doll on a coiled spring." This is also an example of Marlowe's wit, which he uses to ward off sentimentality and to demonstrate his self-awareness.

Description

The bulk of Chandler's novel is objective description. Marlowe spends a long time describing the physical settings of individual scenes, thus making a kind of character out of place. This strategy creates vivid images in readers' minds, helps to develop characterization, and prepares readers for the ensuing action. Marlowe's elaborate description of Geiger's house as a virtual palace of tackiness, for example, emphasizes Geiger's sordid behavior as a pornographer and (to Marlowe) as a homosexual. Chandler was heavily influenced by Ernest Hemingway's use of description in his novels of the 1920s.

Plot

Plot refers to the arrangement of events in a story. In Chandler's novel, details of the events come fast. However, the interpretation of the events change as Marlowe receives new information, causing readers to rethink what they believe as well. For example, at first Ohls and Marlowe believe that Taylor had committed suicide. However, when they discover a bruise on his forehead, they believe he was hit by a blackjack and murdered. Later however, Brody claims to have hit Taylor but not to have killed him with the blow. The truth of what actually happened to Taylor is never revealed. Unlike conventional mystery novels where all loose ends are tied up, The Big Sleep leaves many questions unanswered and plot details unresolved.

Historical Context

While Chandler was penning his novel in the late 1930s, the United States was attempting to recover from the depression that had economically devastated the country since 1929. Marlowe, who charged millionaire General Sternwood twenty-five dollars a day plus expenses, was not only working, he was making well over the average national salary, which stood at $1,368. Unemployment during the 1930s reached a high of 25%. To help alleviate the economic suffering of many Americans, President Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act and the Wagner Act in 1935, ensuring the elderly an income, and ensuring workers the right to unionize, respectively.

Farmers were especially hard hit during the 1930s, and many from Midwestern "Dust Bowl" states such as Oklahoma and Missouri (so named because of the drought and dust storms that hit that area in the 1930s) moved to California hoping for work and a better life. On the outskirts of Marlowe's Los Angeles and in the fertile valleys of the state, migrant workers picked lemons, potatoes, cotton, peas, and other crops, going wherever there was work. The Works Progress Administration, a huge government job program, was also created in 1935. Over its seven-year life span the WPA spent eleven billion dollars employing more than eight million people for 250,000 projects that involved rebuilding the country's roads, bridges, and public buildings. The WPA also provided work for artists, writers, and musicians, as the federal government broadly sponsored the arts for the first time.

Sternwood, who made his millions in oil, would have been interested in the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935. The Act created a new federal agency, the Federal Power Commission, which regulated electricity prices, while the Federal Trade Commission did the same for natural gas prices. Many business people fought against components of Roosevelt's New Deal, claiming that they hindered job creation and development of markets, but Roosevelt remained resolute.

The literature of the 1930s explored issues of integrity and honor. Ernest Hemingway's novels,*To Have and Have Not* (*1937* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls (1939),* for example, both featured characters who pitted themselves against larger forces such as corporations and fascism. John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* (1939) chronicled the struggles of the Joad family, tenant farmers crippled by the depression and the effects of corporate capitalism. Hollywood, on the other hand, where Chandler would make his mark during the 1940s writing screenplays, offered less weighty fare, providing escapist entertainment for the masses. Films popular during this time include *Topper* (1937), *Bringing Up Baby* (1938), and Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939). Film noir, elements of which Chandler helped to define in his novels and screenplays, was just beginning to take shape in movies such as *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), featuring Humphrey Bog-art playing Hammett's Sam Spade, and *This Gun for Hire* (1942). The 1940s, of course, was noir's heyday, with Chandler writing the screenplays for classics such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), and seeing his novels *Farewell My Lovely*, *The Big Sleep*, and *The Lady in the Lake* adapted for the big screen.

Critical Overview

Knopf published The Big Sleep in America in 1939 and Hamish Hamilton published the first English edition the same year. The novel received brief but favorable reviews in publications in both countries, with reviewers likening Chandler's work to that of Dashiell Hammett's, the foremost writer of detective novels in the 1920s and 1930s. The first American printing of 5,000 copies sold out quickly, and a second printing was ordered immediately in both the United States and England. Chandler's publishers were so pleased with his success they offered him a 20 percent royalty for the first 5,000 copies of his next novel, and 25 percent on any copies sold beyond that.

After Chandler's death, his reputation as a serious writer grew, with many critics claiming *The Big Sleep* as his best novel. In his biography, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, Frank MacShane argues that although the novel was in reality a stitching together and elaboration of three short stories, the completed product was more than the sum of its parts. MacShane writes, "It is as if the creation of the original images required the sort of emotional energy that makes a poet remember his lines years after he first wrote them down." Other critics consider Chandler's use of Marlowe as the first-person narrator the key ingredient in the novel's success. Russell Davies, for example, in his essay, "Omnes Me Impune Lacessunt," claims Marlowe's self-mockery and "the balance of ironies" in the novel "is really the secret of Chandler's success." Knopf published *The Big Sleep* in America in 1939 and Hamish Hamilton published the first English Critic Clive James agrees, noting, "In *The Big Sleep* and all the novels that followed, the secret of plausibility lies in the style, and the secret of the style lies in Marlowe's personality." Jerry Speir also focuses on Marlowe in discussing the novel. However, instead of treating Marlowe as a knight-errant as have many other critics, Speir argues, "*The Big Sleep* might be read as a *failure* of romance." Daniel Linder draws attention to the linguistic irony in the novel in his essay for *The Explicator*, arguing that Carmen Sternwood's repeated use of the words "cute" and "giggle" have an "echoic" effect on readers that demands interpretation.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition and writes on literature and culture for several publications. In this essay, Semansky considers the appeal of Marlowe in Chandler's novel.

At the heart of Chandler's first novel and at the heart of all of his novels is Phillip Marlowe, a man of contradictions, who has served as a kind of prototype for private investigators in films and novels over the last sixty years. Rather than alienating readers with his homophobia, his machismo, and his seeming disdain for women, Marlowe has helped Chandler attract a large readership, as he also embodies professional and personal integrity, speaking his mind without worrying about being politically correct or offending the powers that be.

Marlowe, however, is also a cynic, who distrusts others and their motivations, and in general experiences the world of appearances as masking a darker, corrupt reality. This is readily apparent in his description of himself to General Sternwood during their initial meeting. Marlowe tells him: "I'm thirty-three years old, went to college once and can still speak English if there's any demand for it. . . . I'm unmarried because I don't like policemen's wives." Marlowe's comment about speaking English underscores his own contempt for pretentious talk and formal education in general. He learns what he knows from the streets and from his job, and has honed his powers of observation through hard work. His comment about "policemen's wives" also shows his disregard for convention, as he stereotypes the kind of women that

At the heart of Chandler's first novel and at the heart of all of his novels is Phillip Marlowe, a policemen marry. It is also a jab at police, who are at times Marlowe's adversaries.

Historically, cynicism emerged in ancient Greece and was popularized by Antisthenes, a pupil of Socrates, and Diogenes. Cynics were disgusted by ostentation, wealth, and the behavior of the leisure class. Cynics today retain those qualities, but also find fault with almost all institutions and individuals, believing that the former are corrupt and the latter selfish. This kind of attitude was easy enough to develop for someone like Marlowe who fought crime in the 1930s, when police corruption in the United States ran rampant and when those who displayed wealth were generally scorned by the masses, which were still suffering under the long shadow of the Great Depression. Marlowe's cynicism, however, was tempered by idealism and a belief that doing his job well and with integrity gave value and meaning to his life. In a revealing speech mid-way through the novel, Marlowe tells Wilde, the District Attorney, that he is willing to risk alienating half of the Los Angeles police force to be true to his values:

I'm on a case. I'm selling what I have to sell to make a living. What little guts and intelligence the Lord gave me and a willingness to get pushed around in order to protect a client. It's against my principles to tell as much as I've told tonight, without consulting the General. As for the cover-up. . . they come a dime a dozen in any big city. Cops get

very large and emphatic when an outsider tries to hide anything, but they do the same things themselves every other day, to oblige their friends or anybody with a little pull.... I'd do the same thing again, if I had to.

It is this sense of loyalty that makes Marlowe an attractive character, and the quality that makes him vulnerable. Without it, his wisecracks and put downs would ring hollow, come off as mere vaudeville. Marlowe's loyalty to the General, though, does not come at the expense of his obligation to

obey the law, for the law itself was little more than groups of self-interested parties battling for turf among Los Angeles's criminal elements. Captain Gregory, head of the Missing Persons Bureau, sums up the state of the law when he talks to Marlowe the day after the private investigator kills Canino:

Being a copper I'd like to see the law win. I'd like to see the flashy well-dressed muggs like Eddie Mars spoiling their manicures in the rock quarry at Folsom, alongside of the poor little slum-bred hard guys that got knocked over on their first caper and never had a break since. You and me both lived too long to think I'm likely to see it happen. Not in this town, not in any town half this size, in any part of this wide, green and beautiful U.S.A. We just don't run our country that way.

Gregory's comment is a dig at the idea that truth and justice for all exists in the United States. The cynicism of cops and of politicians such as Wilde makes Marlowe's cynicism easier to take, for on him it serves as a weapon with which to fight the deception he encounters every day in his job. Blind allegiance to the law for Marlowe would make him complicitous in the web of deceit and lies. Being true to a professional code of conduct sustains him through the ever-changing landscape of right and wrong that marks the world of the private investigator. Chandler's description of Marlowe's character in his well-known essay, "The Simple Art of Murder" puts it thusly: "He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge."

He will also take no woman's "insolence." Though he exhibits the sex appeal of a man's man with his tough talk and rough manners, Marlowe is no easy mark for a woman intent on seducing him. He first rejects Vivian Regan when she offers herself to him after he saves her from a mugger outside the Cypress Club, attempting to use her desire for him as an opportunity to extract information from her. He then refuses Carmen Sternwood's offer of sex, literally throwing her out of his bedroom, after telling her, "It's a question of professional pride.... I'm working for your father. He's a sick man, very frail, very helpless. He sort of trusts me not to pull any stunts." The morning after this incident, Marlowe wakes up groggy and remarks, "You can have a hangover from other things than alcohol. I had one from women. Women made me sick." Many critics have noted Marlowe's adherence to a chivalric code and some of them have labeled him a failed knight, a reading buttressed by the knight imagery in the stained-glass entrance of the Sternwood house and, later, in Marlowe's apartment, while he is puzzling a chess problem. "It wasn't a game for knights," Marlowe says, after making a move about which he thinks twice. More to the point, the world, and Carmen Sternwood,

did not deserve knights. Marlowe does not turn in Carmen for killing Rusty Regan because of his loyalty to her father and his desire not to add more pain to his dying days.

This decision has consequences, for in the end, the line between Marlowe's behavior and those he condemns throughout the novel has grown thinner. He takes an odd solace, however, in the idea of Regan's death, depicting it as an escape from the morally corrupt jungle he lives in and the tangle of conflicting desires that marks his life: "Me, I was part of the nastiness now. Far more a part of it than Rusty Regan was. But the old man didn't have to be." Coupled with the realization that he has been swallowed by the very kind of corruption he has sought to battle, Marlowe's description of General Sternwood on his death bed feels almost like the private investigator's own death wish: "His heart was a brief, uncertain murmur. His thoughts were as gray as ashes. And in a while he too, like Rusty Regan, would be sleeping the big sleep."

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on *The Big Sleep*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Speir offers a detailed analysis of the plot of The Big Sleep*, focusing on Marlowe's emotional transformation and the events that influence it.*

"I'm not joking, and if I seem to talk in circles, it just seems that way. It all ties together - everything."

Philip Marlowe crackles to life on a cloudy October morning in the first paragraph of *The Big Sleep* (1939). "I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars." Already he exhibits the wry self-mockery which occupies us throughout the novels. The tone is self-assured, even cocky, but it also maintains the ironic detachment of a man conscious of his own pose. By the end of the novel, however, these high spirits will have changed dramatically. And it is precisely in such alterations of Marlowe's mood and in the revelations which precipitate them that Chandler imbeds the meaning of his stories. To appreciate this transformation in *The Big Sleep*, we must first understand the events which prompt it - the plot, that element about which Chandler claimed to have little concern.

The plot of this novel has drawn considerable, undeserved criticism. One critic, Stephen Pendo, has gone so far as to assert that it is "a confused tangle that demonstrates Chandler's problem of producing a cohesive story line," expressing a fairly common judgment. Part of the problem here may derive from what one is willing to accept as cohesive. And part of the problem, particularly as relates to the public's general misconceptions about this story, no doubt relates to interpretations of the popular 1946 film version of the novel rather than to the book itself. While the film is quite successful within its own limits - and Chandler was very pleased with Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe - it achieves much of its mystery and suspense by omitting many of the subplots and explanations of motivation which are critical concerns for Chandler and which he so carefully details in the novel. A general caution is perhaps in order here concerning the use of any of the movies based on Chandler's works as guides for interpreting the novels or the novelist. Most, in fact, stray further from their sources than does the Bogart-Bacall version of *The Big Sleep*.

But, to return to the question of cohesiveness, as relates to Chandler's plots, we should bear in mind his remark that he was always "more intrigued by a situation where the mystery is solved more by the exposition and understanding of a single character . . . than by the slow and sometimes long-winded concatenation of circumstances." It is to character, then, and to the motivations of character that we must look in Chandler if we are to untangle the confusion. And, since the confusion among readers and critics is so widespread, a fairly detailed analysis of the plot seems in order.

The characters who occupy center stage in *The Big Sleep* fall into two echelons: the members and associates of the wealthy Sternwood family and a loosely associated group of racketeers with whom the Sternwoods have inevitably become involved.

In the course of their conversation, Marlowe gets the General's opinion of his children: "Vivian is spoiled, exacting, smart and quite ruthless. Car-men is a child who likes to pull wings off flies." Marlowe also learns about another member of the family, Rusty Regan, Vivian's third and most recent husband who has disappeared under mysterious circumstances. Regan's past accomplishments include work as a bootlegger and service as an officer in the I.R.A. The General has in fact been quite taken by the young man's tales of the Irish revolution, and Marlowe is soon amused and perplexed to learn that virtually everyone, daughters and police included, assume he has been hired to find Regan.

But, sticking to his primary suspect, Marlowe soon learns that Geiger's real business is a rather high-class lending library of dirty books. He locates Geiger's house and parks outside in the dying light to perform a little surveillance. The rain which has been threatening all afternoon drips through the leaking top of his convertible, and, typically, he turns to a pocket flask in his glove compartment for comfort. Carmen arrives and enters. Shortly afterward a flash of "hard white light" comes from the house in conjunction with a scream - a scream that "had a sound of half-pleasurable shock, an accent of drunkenness, an overtone of pure idiocy. It was a nasty sound." By the time Marlowe gets to the house, three shots have been fired and there is the sound of someone fleeing.

The Sternwood family consists of an aging, dying patriarch known as "the General," and his two daughters, Carmen and Vivian, "still in the dangerous twenties." Wrapped in a rug and bathrobe, sitting in a wheelchair amidst the orchids of his sweltering greenhouse, the General describes himself to Marlowe as "a very dull survival of a rather gaudy life" who seems "to exist largely on heat, like a newborn spider." His complaint is that he is "being blackmailed again." As he explains, he has recently "paid a man named Joe Brody five thousand dollars to let my younger daughter Carmen alone;" he then proceeds to show Marlowe a new demand for $1,000 from a man named Geiger for what Geiger says are gambling debts. Geiger's stationery indicates that he is a dealer in "Rare Books and DeLuxe Editions."

Marlowe's discovery of what has happened is revealed in a manner that is virtually a trademark of Chandlerian exposition. After building suspense with mysterious flashes, sudden gunfire, and an unidentified person running away, Chandler opens our first look at the scene with one of Marlowe's characteristically deadpan remarks: "Neither of the two people in the room paid any attention to the way I came in, although only one of them was dead." As we begin to read that statement, we sense that at least some of the suspense is about to be resolved. But its last phrase brings us up abruptly with the recognition that our expectations were too simplistic. Thus chastened, and with a smile for the author's almost perverse sense of comic relief, we attend more warily to Marlowe's typically dispassionate survey of the room and its every detail:

It had a low beamed ceiling . . . brown plaster walls decked out with strips of Chinese embroidery and Chinese and Japanese prints . . . a thick pinkish Chinese rug . . . bits of old silk tossed around, as if whoever lived there had to have a piece he could reach out and thumb . . . a black desk with carved gargoyles at the corners and behind it a yellow satin cushion on a polished black chair with carved arms and back

. . . the pungent aftermath of cordite and the sickish aroma of ether.

Only after that exhaustive catalog do we get any information about what most interests us, the people.

On a sort of low dais at one end of the room there was a high-backed teak wood chair in which Miss Carmen Sternwood was sitting on a fringed orange shawl. She was sitting very straight, with her hands on the arms of the chair, her knees close together, her body stiffly erect in the pose of an Egyptian goddess, her chin level, her small bright teeth shining between her parted lips. Her eyes were wide open. The dark slate color of the iris had devoured the pupil. They were mad eyes. She seemed to be unconscious, but she didn't have the pose of unconsciousness. She looked as if, in her mind, she was doing something very important and making a fine job of it. Out of her mouth came a tinny chuckling noise which didn't change her expression or even move her lips.

She was wearing a pair of long jade earrings. They were nice earrings and had probably cost a couple of hundred dollars. She wasn't wearing anything else.

Geiger, we are told after a similarly lengthy description, "was very dead."

This very calculated pacing serves several functions. First of all, it impresses us with the detective's method: having access only to objective data, he must weigh all details equally if he is to avoid overlooking one that might prove critical. But, more importantly, for Marlowe himself such pacing and apparent concern for objectivity provide a necessary check on his own subjective sensibilities. This kind of emotional control is further related to Chandler's notion of an "objective method" of writing in which dialogue and description become vehicles of emotion (see Chapter 7). That is, Chandler - and Marlowe - recognize that subjectivity is the ground of human experience and motivation, rather than objective reality. But, any one individual - Marlowe or the reader - has only the external indications of that subjectivity, that inner activity, from which to draw conclusions about any particular person. It was Chandler's desire to convey emotion and character not by *describing* them, but by *demonstrating* them through dialogue and physical details. A continued analysis of the plot and of Chandler's manner of relating it should enlighten the point.

Following Geiger's death, Marlowe discovers that the books from his store are being moved to the apartment of Joe Brody, the man whom the General mentioned as a recipient of $5,000 of his blackmail money. Agnes, the woman who worked in Geiger's store, is evidently assisting Brody in his plot to take over the business.

Back at Geiger's house, Marlowe runs into Eddie Mars, whom he describes with the same detached thoroughness as he had the furniture. He is

a gray man, all gray, except for his polished black shoes and two scarlet diamonds in his gray satin tie that looked like the diamonds on roulette layouts. His shirt was gray and his double-breasted suit of soft, beautifully cut flannel. Seeing Carmen he took a gray hat off and his hair underneath it was gray and as fine as if it had been sifted through gauze. His thick gray eyebrows had that indefinably sporty look. He had a long chin, a nose with a hook to it, thoughtful gray eyes that had a slanted look because the fold of skin over his upper lid came down over the corner of the lid itself.

His "colorlessness" is also a characteristic of Chandler's descriptive technique and, as we will see later (Chapter 7), another device by which he imparts meaning.

Mars is the operator of The Cypress Club, a local gambling establishment, and considers himself just a businessman. He claims to own the house in which Geiger was living and says he was just passing by to check on his tenant. But Marlowe is skeptical. He has already learned that Mars is also a good friend of Vivian Sternwood and that he has, in fact, financed some of her gambling sprees. It also appears that there was more connection between Mars and Geiger than the simple tenant-landlord relationship. If nothing else, Geiger's was a business that needed protection and Mars was the man with the contacts and power to deliver it. But the exact nature of their relationship must await further development.

Marlowe shortly finds his attention occupied by a small man with "tight brilliant eyes that wanted to look hard, and looked as hard as oysters on the half shell." His name is Harry Jones and he is selling information. His information concerns Eddie Mars's wife, Mona. Mona Mars, it is generally agreed, disappeared about the same time as Rusty Regan and popular consensus has it that they left together. Mona's presumed relationship with Regan is also believed to be the primary impetus behind Eddie Mars's relationship with Vivian. But Harry Jones has information which suggests otherwise. Harry is a mouthpiece for Agnes, the bookstore clerk assumed to be allied with Joe Brody, and their association represents yet another fragmented piece of the local rackets organization at war with itself, a primary subplot. Agnes has recently seen Mona and is willing to divulge her whereabouts for sufficient cash.

Harry is too loyal to Agnes to convey the information himself and insists that Marlowe meet him later with the money, and he will take him to her. When Marlowe arrives at the appointed rendezvous, he discovers that Lash Canino, one of Eddie Mars's enforcers, has gotten there ahead of him and is trying to get Harry to tell him where Agnes is and what she knows. After Harry finally relents and gives him a false address to placate him, Canino offers whiskey to seal their "friendship." Harry dies quickly from the cyanide in the liquor as Marlowe stands by helplessly on the other side of the wall. He must wait until later for his chance at this embodiment of evil whom Harry had described simply as the "brown man": "Short, heavy set, brown hair, brown eyes, and always wears brown clothes and a brown hat. Even wears a brown suede raincoat. Drives a brown coupe. Everything brown for Mr. Canino."

With the aid of a chance phone call from Agnes, Marlowe makes contact with her, gets her information, and heads out into the hills where Mona Mars was spotted. The rain that has pervaded the book is now very heavy, and as Mar-lowe nears the appointed site, in his words, "Fate stage-managed the whole thing." His car skids off the slick roadway, and he finds himself near Art Huck's Garage, a hot-car processing establishment associated with Eddie Mars's rackets. Canino is there and, without much ado, Marlowe is overpowered and knocked unconscious.

When he comes to, Marlowe finds himself handcuffed, bound, and alone in a room with a woman. The woman is Mona Mars. Despite his condition, Marlowe manages to amuse her with his bright chatter. She is particularly amused that he thinks she is being held prisoner. She even removes her platinum wig, disclosing her bald head which she claims to have had shaved herself "to show Eddie I was willing to do what he wanted me to do - hide out. That he didn't need to have me guarded. I wouldn't let him down. I love him." Eventually, Marlowe's tireless talk manages to persuade her to help him escape rather than wait to see what his fate might be when Canino returns.

But before Marlowe can get well outside the house, Canino is back. When Canino goes inside, Marlowe starts his car and provokes him to fire from the window. Finally, the ruse draws Canino from the house and, with a bit of cooperation from Mona, Marlowe manages to get the drop on him. After Canino has fired six wild shots, Marlowe steps calmly from his hiding place, asks simply "Finished?" and fires four shots of his own into "the brown man," thus ending his reign of terror - and marking Marlowe's only killing in the novels.

Next morning, the sun is shining and Marlowe makes his way first to the police and then to General Sternwood to explain his findings and activities. General Sternwood is quite distressed that the police have been revolved at all. Marlowe more or less apologizes by explaining that he has assumed from the beginning that there was more to the General's interest in the case than the simple matter of blackmail over debts. As he explains, "I was convinced that you put those Geiger notes up to me chiefly as a test, and that you were a little afraid Regan might somehow be involved in an attempt to blackmail you." Marlowe further elaborates that his disposition of the case has been based on the assumption that the police are not likely to overlook anything obvious in the course of their investigations. He sets himself distinctly apart from the more traditional detective of fiction:

I'm not Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance. I don't expect to go over ground the police have covered and pick up a broken pen point and build a case from it.... if they overlook anything . . . it's apt to be something looser and vaguer, like a man of Geiger's type sending you his evidence of debt and asking you to pay like a gentleman.

His explanations are sufficient to restore the General's confidence. The old man allows that he is just "a sentimental old goat" and tacitly admits that Regan has indeed been his primary concern all along; he offers Marlowe $1,000 to "Find him.... Just find him."

On his way out of the house, Marlowe spots Carmen and returns the little pearl-handled pistol which he had taken away from her in a scene where she tried to kill Joe Brody. "I brought you back your artillery," he tells her. "I cleaned it and loaded it up. Take my tip - don't shoot it at people, unless you get to be a better shot. Remember?" Carmen's immediate reaction is, "Teach me to shoot." And giggling in her strange way, she persuades him to drive her to an old abandoned oil field on the family property. Here, amid these reminders of the family fortune and its corruption, Marlowe sets up a target. But as he is walking back from it, "she showed me all her sharp little teeth and brought the gun up and started to hiss.... 'Stand there, you son of a bitch,' she said." Marlowe laughs and she fires at him - four times before he takes the gun from her. He has anticipated the scene and loaded the gun with blanks. Carmen makes a whistling sound in her throat and passes out.

After Marlowe has taken her home, he engages her older sister Vivian in conversation. From this encounter, then, we finally gather enough details to begin to make sense of this curious and deadly family tragedy. What we discover is that Carmen stands at the center of the troubles. She suffers, among other things, from epileptic attacks, as her behavior at the scene where Geiger was killed, and the strange hissing, giggling noises she frequently utters have already warned Marlowe.

When Regan disappeared, it was because Car-men killed him - in the very same fashion in which she tried to kill Marlowe. Marlowe explains her actions, conjecturally, as a combination of her epilepsy, adolescent lust, and the almost inevitable neurosis fostered by the circumstances in which she was reared. As he tells Vivian, "Night before last when I got home she was in my apartment. She'd kidded the manager into letting her in to wait for me. She was in my bed - naked. I threw her out on her ear. I guess maybe Regan did the same to her sometime. But you can't do that to Carmen."

Vivian admits that Carmen killed Regan and explains her own actions and motivations:

She came home and told me about it just like a child. She's not normal. I knew the police would get it all out of her. In a little while she would even brag about it. And if dad knew, he would call them instantly and tell them the whole story. And sometime in that night he would die. It's not his dying - it's what he would be thinking just before he died. Rusty wasn't a bad fellow. I didn't love him. He was all right, I guess. He just didn't mean anything to me, one way or another, alive or dead, compared with keeping it from dad.

Vivian, of course, is not the type to approach reality head on; none of the Sternwoods are. As she perceived the situation, her only option was to try to cover up the matter, and the only person she knew powerful enough to help her do that was her gambling acquaintance Eddie Mars. Mars, of course, was only too glad to be of service; the incident clearly gave him leverage on the Sternwood fortune. Canino, no doubt, did the dirty work of stashing the body. But Mars's commitment to service went even further. When the police appeared to be coming too close to the truth, he had his own wife, Mona, hide out to make it appear that she and Regan had left together, thus giving the police a reasonable explanation for Regan's disappearance.

But Mars's greed was finally stronger than his patience. Geiger's whole blackmailing scheme appears, in fact, to have been a ploy sponsored by Mars. As Marlowe theorizes to Vivian:

Eddie Mars was behind Geiger, protecting him and using him for a cat's-paw. Your father sent for me instead of paying up, which showed he wasn't scared about anything. Eddie Mars wanted to know that. He had something on you and he wanted to know if he had it on the General too. If he had, he could collect a lot of money in a hurry. If not, he would have to wait until you got your share of the family fortune, and in the meantime be satisfied with whatever spare cash he could take away from you across the roulette table.

But this plan did not account for the unpredictable influence of youthful passions. Owen Taylor, the Sternwood chauffeur, had his own romantic interest in Carmen. He was violently affected by her association with Geiger and when he discovered Geiger taking nude pictures of her, pictures that were to be a part of the blackmail plot, he killed him. It was Taylor's fading footsteps that Marlowe heard in that first scene at Geiger's house. Geiger's death then triggered a series of subplots. One of these involved his smut-lending business. With Geiger gone, Joe Brody moved to take over the trade, largely with the help of Agnes, Geiger's former assistant. This move persuaded Carol Lundgren, Geiger's young homosexual roommate, that Brody had been responsible for Geiger's death, so Lundgren killed Brody. Harry Jones was then killed by Canino when Harry tried to work a scheme with Agnes to sell information about Mona to Marlowe. And Mars, without his front man, was forced into covering his own tracks.

Such is the mushrooming effect of one poorly conceived decision. Even an apparently well-intentioned act, such as Vivian's effort to cover up Carmen's murder of Regan, can become the initial stone from which an expanding circle of evil radiates. Four deaths result from Vivian's actions. Owen Taylor kills Geiger because he does not approve of his relationship with Carmen. Carol Lundgren kills Joe Brody because he thinks Brody killed Geiger. Canino kills Harry Jones because he is getting too close to the truth and killing is Canino's job. And Marlowe kills Canino.

But curiously enough, Marlowe must also share, at least partially, in the blame for Harry's death. It was Marlowe, after all, who mentioned to Mars that he was being followed; this tip called Mars's attention to Harry's involvement in the story and led ultimately to his death. Indeed, Marlowe must finally recognize himself to be more subtly and pervasively involved in this very complex story than even he at first imagined. Part of his realization comes when he asks the butler, concerning the General, "What did this Regan fellow have that bored into him so?" The answer he gets is, "Youth, sir.... And the soldier's eye.... If I may say so, sir, not unlike yours." Understanding the similarity of Marlowe and Regan, at least in the General's eyes, is central to understanding the story. As readers, we, like Marlowe, begin to perceive that Vivian's decision to hide Carmen's murder of Regan may not, in fact, have been motivated solely by a desire to protect her sister or even to protect her ailing father. Rather, she may well have surmised that Regan was more important to the General than his own daughters. Thus, she may - rightly - have been more fearful of the unknown consequences of the discovery of the

murder by her father than of opening herself to the blackmailing demands of Eddie Mars. Marlowe must feel more than a little uneasy as he realizes that he has been drawn into this family saga as a substitute for Regan, one surrogate son hired to ascertain the whereabouts of another, while the daughters slip ever further into the grips of gangsters.

But a sixth death in the book, that of Owen Taylor, may help illuminate our search for "first causes," for a place to lay ultimate responsibility for the chain of murders chronicled here. Shortly after the scene in which he kills Geiger, Taylor's car is found in the surf off Lido pier with him still in it. The hand throttle had been set halfway down, and he was apparently sapped before the car plunged through the barricades into the sea. But this case is never solved, although Joe Brody is a prime suspect. When the first film version of *The Big Sleep* was being prepared, the screenwriters even sent a query to Chandler: "Who killed Owen Taylor?" Chandler's response was a simple "I don't know."

The incident is important because it calls attention to Chandler's general distaste for the typical demand that detective stories should tie up every loose end. Furthermore, it underscores his deep-seated aversion to strictly rational explanations for human actions. If we look closely at Vivian's decision to cover Carmen's deadly act, for example, we simply can not devise a purely rational account of it. Given the implied strife between the two sisters, Vivian's less-than-loving relationship with her father, and the fact that Carmen's victim was her own husband (even if she did not love him), Vivian's act simply can not be circumscribed within rational bounds. Nevertheless, given Vivian's character, her environment, and an emotionally-charged situation, we can readily *believe* that she might make such a decision. The deeper we penetrate the motives of Chandler's characters, the deeper we find the morass of human passion and unpredictability.

But if Chandler is not interested in constructing neatly rational puzzles, what exactly is he up to here? We can glean at least a partial answer to this perplexing question from a close examination of the opening scene and some related passages. When Marlowe first comes to call on the Stern-wood millions, his attention is arrested by a curious drama in glass:

Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.

Critics have often complained that Chandler was overly concerned with sentimentalism and the tropes of the chivalric romance; the kind of elements on which this glass panel focuses. But even a cursory look at Chandler's overt references to the romance and knight-errantry within the novel, as here, indicates a decided touch of irony in his

treatment of the subject. Indeed, *The Big Sleep* might be read as a chronicle of the *failure* of romance. In the midst of one of his confrontations with Carmen, for example, Marlowe turns to his chess board for distraction. He makes a move with a knight, then retracts it and comments, "the move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights." And near the end of the book, he comments again on the knight in the stained-glass window saying, he "still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree."

Carmen, of course, is the naked damsel in distress in this book, and finally we and Marlowe must ask ourselves if he has really been any more successful in aiding her than has the knight in armor trapped forever in the glass. And we must agree that he has not.

About all that can be said for Marlowe here as the "romantic hero" is that he does, at least, keep Carmen from killing anyone else while he is on the scene. And he keeps her from being killed or from facing the harsh justice of the legal system - rather, he advises Vivian to "take her away.... Hell, she might even get herself cured, you know. It's been done." But he has been totally ineffectual in penetrating the mystery of this family and its seemingly inexorable involvement with the world of crime. He has achieved no ennobling resolution. He has had no success in getting at the heart of this saga which is finally the story of two women, two sisters, Carmen and Vivian, and the last days of a dying old patriarch. Marlowe's understanding is hardly less limited than Vivian's, and she can not bear to probe her actions very deeply:

I knew Eddie Mars would bleed me white, but I didn't care. I had to have help and I could only get it from somebody like him. . . . There have been times when I hardly believed it all myself. And other times when I had to get drunk quickly - whatever time of day it was. Awfully damn quickly.

In Vivian's reluctance to face her relation to evil squarely, Chandler reminds us all of the limits of our ability to approach and comprehend the truth. Even if we still possess the idealistic, romantic sensibilities that can drive us to noble actions, the consequences, like the motives, are never really unadulterated. And finally, like Marlowe, we are impotent to untie the knots of our lives. He tries, like Vivian, simply to avoid seeing, to deaden his sensibilities; in the book's last paragraph he "stopped at a bar and had a couple of double Scotches." But, as he recognizes, "they didn't do me any good." Avoiding complexity does not resolve it.

As he walks out of the Sternwood house for the last time, Marlowe comments: "Outside, the bright gardens had a haunted look, as though small wild eyes were watching me from behind the bushes, as though the sunshine itself had a mysterious something in its light." At the end, there is still mystery - the mystery of the human condition, of life and death in a world of fate and chance and evil.

Source: Jerry Speir, "The First Novels: *The Big Sleep*, *Farewell My Lovely*, *The High Window*," in *Raymond Chandler*, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981, pp. 19-31.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Shatzkin compares the novel and film versions of The Big Sleep*, finding that in both confusion and illogicality are natural parts of the terrain.*

Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* appears to fit that category of novel critic Edmund Wilson identified as capable of being "poured . . . on to the screen as easily as if it had been written in the studios . . ." ("The Boys in the Back Room" [1940]). In many respects, director Howard Hawks and his collaborators did succeed in pouring the essence of Chandler into their 1946 film. Most notably, they recreated the novel's atmosphere of evanescent corruption and emphasized character at the expense of formal considerations of plot. Nevertheless, the glibness of Wilson's metaphor disguises the "filtering" process operant in any transfer of narrative from one medium to another: Chandler's story of his hero's failed individualistic and Romantic quest became on screen a dark romantic comedy that explores the feasibility of human and sexual commitment between a man and a woman, in this case the film's stars and real-life lovers, Humphrey Bog-art and Lauren Bacall. (In practical terms, Hawks was making a sequel to *To Have and Have Not* [1944], which first starred the pair.)

For *The Big Sleep*, there are added problems with Wilson's simple-minded notion of adaptation: Chandler's rather loosely plotted and crowded narrative (synthesized ingeniously out of four pulp magazine stories) became even more complex on screen. The reason for this was a seemingly straightforward filtering mechanism: the Holly-wood Production Code's objection to "censorable" aspects of the novel. "Much of the illogic of the film," James Monaco has written, "is simply due to cuts which were made to conform to the Code." But let us take a closer look at some of the misconceptions surrounding the novel and the film, and the apparently intertwined issues of incomprehensibility and censorship.

The first misconception: *The Big Sleep*, both as novel and film, defies comprehension. True, Raymond Chandler confessed to suffering "plot-constipation," wished to possess "one of these facile plotting brains, like Erie [Stanley] Gardner or somebody," and admitted that *The Big Sleep* "happens to be more interested in people than in plot . . ." And granted, director Hawks persisted in glorifying the illogic of his adaptation: in interview after interview he insisted that he "never could figure the story out . . ." that he "can't follow it," and so on. What is more, one of the oft repeated anecdotes about a film's production links author and *auteur* in mutual confusion: during the filming, Bogart, the picture's Philip Marlowe, apparently asked Hawks just who killed one of the minor characters, a chauffeur named Owen Taylor. (Taylor turns up in his employer's Buick, awash in the Pacific.) Since neither Hawks nor his screenwriters William Faulkner and Leigh Brackett knew, they cabled Chandler. And Chandler wired back: "I don't know."

For the record: with a little effort, novel and film *can* be comprehended, if what is meant by that is that their plots can be linearized, sorted out. (Paul Jensen deserves credit for mentioning this in his article on Chandler in *Film Comment*, November-December, 1974.) But to shift perspective, the popular myths about *The Big Sleep* are important.

Though their events and characterizations may be ultimately deciphered, novel and film are texts *about* confusion; impenetrability, if not their final result, is at their core. So the question becomes, not "who killed Owen Taylor?" but, more properly (to echo Edmund Wilson's skepticism about detective fiction), "who *cares* who killed Owen Taylor?"

Neither Chandler, nor Marlowe, the novel's detective-narrator, seems to have cared. Hired by the elderly, infirm General Sternwood to investigate some gambling debts his younger daughter, Carmen, has incurred, debts which in turn may become the basis for blackmail, Marlowe plunges into intrigue more complex than circumstances would seem to warrant. For one thing, the General's son-in-law, "Rusty" Regan is missing, and his older daughter, Regan's wife Vivian, suspects that Marlowe has been engaged to find him. As is clear in Chandler: Carmen's ostensible blackmailer, Arthur Geiger, runs a pornographic lending library; Geiger is murdered at his home in the presence of a stupefied Carmen; he has provided drugs and photographed her nude for future extortion schemes. Marlowe rescues Carmen, entering Geiger's place after hearing shots and observing two men leaving in quick succession. The first man turns out to be Taylor, who drives off to his mysterious death.

Marlowe (and Chandler) forget about Taylor. Attention shifts instead to the second man out of the house, Joe Brody, who, like Taylor, is an ex-boyfriend of Carmen's. Brody somehow obtains the negatives of Carmen and proceeds to blackmail her. Marlowe goes to Brody's apartment to recover the negatives and pictures; he first disarms Brody and then Carmen, who has come to retrieve the blackmail materials herself. After Carmen leaves, Carol Lundgren, Geiger's valet and lover shoots Brody, mistakenly thinking that Brody has killed Geiger. As Marlowe later explains, Taylor, chivalrously defending his old flame Carmen, had actually done the deed.

Either William Faulkner or Leigh Brackett (Hawks's original screenwriters) was the person concerned about what happened to Taylor. One of them wrote some dialogue for a scene, patterned after one in the novel (but cut from the final film), that sums up, more neatly than Chandler, what happened. In this scene, mid-way through the novel and screenplay, Marlowe is explaining his involvement in the affair to the district attorney. In the novel, Marlowe merely alludes to the events that have transpired and then responds to the D.A.'s queries. In the screenplay, the D.A., in dialogue never filmed, adds his own summation:

So Taylor killed Geiger because he was in love with the Sternwood girl. And Brody followed Taylor, sapped him and took the photographs and pushed Taylor into the ocean. And the punk [Lundgren] killed Brody because the punk thought he should have inherited Geiger's business and Brody was throwing him out.

Although no one involved with the production seems to recall this un-shot speech, the screenwriters' D.A. would have settled the question of Taylor's demise once and for all, tying up a "loose end" over which Chandler himself apparently never fretted.

Faulkner or Brackett's dialogue here strives for order (despite Hawks's recollection that "there was no sense in making [the story] logical. So we didn't"). And the dialogue, in

changing Lundgren's motivation from a lover's revenge also manifests another tendency toward "logic." And this brings us to the second misconception about the film: how it censored the novel.

Throughout the two drafts of the script, the screenwriters anticipated that many sections of the novel might offend the Production Code - matters of sexual conduct, police misconduct, Marlowe's final decision to let a murderer go free - and they took steps to circumvent possible problems. Many of the novel's "objectionable" aspects did have to be cut from the final film. Geiger's pornography racket is nowhere mentioned (we just see some posh clients skulking about his "bookstore"), nor is the homosexual relationship between Geiger and Lundgren. Both of these omissions cause confusions (as does the film's ending to a degree, but for reasons other than censorship). But other changes, such as presenting a clothed Carmen at Geiger's and later at Marlowe's apartment, do not alter the final quality of the film. A recent assessment, such as Gavin Lambert's that the movie "seems badly hobbled by censorship" (*The Dangerous Edge*, 1975), hardly seems appropriate.

Prior censorship was the rule in the screenplays. The screenwriters transformed Geiger's business from pornography and extortion to the vaguer endeavor of blackmail alone (late in the second script draft Marlowe actually finds packing cases of "manilla filing envelopes, ledgers, etc."). Lundgren's relationship to Geiger becomes all business. Even Carmen Sternwood's nymphomania is de-sexed (though one wonders how Martha Vickers sultry performance in the film could have possibly jibed with the script's conception). Carmen's psychotic and homicidal behavior is brought on by jealousy. She murders Regan and attempts to murder Marlowe, according to Faulkner and Brackett, because she has lost the affections of both of them (at least in her mind) to her sister Vivian, and *not* because they are the only two men who refuse to sleep with her. And though Hawks has credited the Production Code office with rejecting the novel's ending and, when prodded, providing their own, Faulkner and Brackett had already altered Chandler's denouement in their first script. (In letting Carmen go free to be "cured" in the book, Marlowe violates the Code's provision against unpunished crimes. The film's ending is actually a *third* script revision of the novel's ending.)

But Faulkner and Brackett's careful anticipation of the Code and their finely wrought "logic" were to no avail. Hawks excised a number of scenes from their screenplay as he shot. And the filming, done from the second draft or Temporary script, had run too long. So "Jules Furthman was called in," according to Leigh Brackett, "for a rewrite to cut the remaining or un-shot portion [of the script] into a manageable length. . . ." Whatever coherence the original screenwriters had concocted (or preserved from Chandler) was eradicated in shortening an overlong screenplay; it was not the direct evisceration of the novel for the censors, as Monaco and other critics have averred, that cause the movie's notorious incomprehensibility.

But the film, in its final and less "coherent" form, becomes - in the best Hawks tradition - a type of Rorschach test in which the ellipses can be filled in by the audience. And, paradoxically, it moves closer to the novel as a result. In the minds of viewers imbued with the requisite imagination, the spirit of the book's censorable content remains, albeit

sometimes between the lines. As Charles Gregory has written, despite the fact that the movie had to avoid "explicit references to sex, dope and pornography that are woven into the novel . . . somehow the film reflects all this to the sophisticated viewer without ever drawing the ire of the censors or even the notice of the prudes."

Typical of the cuts made to shorten the script was the removal of a shot in the first scene showing Owen Taylor washing the Sternwood Buick as Marlowe passes from the General's mansion to his hothouse (a direct transposition from the novel intended to identify the chauffeur and foreshadow his complicity in Geiger's murder). In the film, Marlowe simply walks from the mansion's hallway into the greenhouse - the magic of film editing has connected the two edifices. And Taylor gets whisked away to the limbo of legend.

But as Leigh Brackett observed: "Audiences came away feeling that they had seen the hell and all of a film even if they didn't rightly know what it was all about. Again, who cared? It was grand fun, with sex and danger and a lot of laughs...." Again, who cared? Let us turn to the novel and film in more detail to see if we can decipher what they are all about - and if it matters if they are *about* anything.

For that matter, what *is* Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* about? The novel functions as an entertainment, a sometimes self-satiric, self-contained world of double-cross, moral and political corruption in which our confusion as readers helps engender our involvement and our identification with the hero, Philip Marlowe. The central movement of the novel, though, focuses on its protagonist's quest, not for the solution to a puzzle or a mystery (though that is necessarily accomplished), but primarily for his double, his *doppelganger*. It is this covert quest - which informs the bulk of Chandler's novels but is most prominent in *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye* (1954) - and its requisite failure that create many of the novel's strong, if fugitive, resonances.

Marlowe's search for Terence "Rusty" Regan is the hidden energizing force of the novel (hidden, in some ways, from Chandler himself). It is also the genesis of the novel's seeming confusion and impenetrability. But the pattern of Marlowe's search for Regan does not emerge readily from the narrative. Throughout roughly the first half of the novel, questions about Regan, Vivian Sternwood's missing husband, keep surfacing, but Marlowe's chief preoccupation lies with keeping Carmen safe and the Sternwood's family name unbesmirched through the three deaths that touch on them (i.e., Geiger's, Taylor's, and Brody's). Marlowe's identification with Regan is established at his initial visit to the General (where he replaces Regan as the old man's sensual surrogate - drinking and smoking for Sternwood's vicarious enjoyment - and is hired for a job that Regan, the General's confidant as well as son-in-law, would probably have undertaken). But Marlowe does not turn his attention to the missing man until the mystery that propels the beginning half of the action, concerning Carmen's blackmail, has ostensibly been resolved. And all along, he denies various allegations that he *is* looking for Regan, even though, ironically, they are true.

At this point, to better understand Regan's place in the novel, it will help to clarify the structure of *The Big Sleep*. Writing on the film, James Monaco has offered a helpful

description that applies equally well to the novel. He notes in the movie's construction a "dual structure: a 'surface' mystery (usually the client's) and a 'deep' mystery (the metaphysical or political problem which presents itself to the detective)." Fredric Jameson views Chandler's dual structure slightly differently, noting a tendency for the novels to mislead readers because a Chandler work "passes itself off as a murder mystery." Jameson points out that "In fact Chandler's stories are first and foremost descriptions of searches . . ." Here the "murder mystery" corresponds to Monaco's "surface" enigma, the "search" to the "deep" structure. Jameson later expresses the double nature of the narrative in terms of time:

The final element in Chandler's characteristic form is that the underlying crime is always old, lying half-forgotten in the pasts of the characters before the book begins. This is the principal reason why the readers attention is diverted from [the underlying crime]; he assumes it to be a part of the dimension of the present....

Relating this to *The Big Sleep* then, this is what happens: the crime in the past that generates the whole novel, yet which is unknown to Marlowe or the reader at the outset of the book, is the murder of Regan by Carmen Sternwood. Regan, like some entombed character in Poe, lies mouldering in a sump in the oilfield below the Sternwood mansion while four more deaths result from the unrecognized cover-up of his demise. And Marlowe spends all his initial energy treating the symptoms of the case, the surface of the present, before turning to their cause in the past.

I do not believe that Chandler was in complete touch with the metaphysical significance of Regan for his protagonist. Chandler, as is most clearly exemplified in his *Atlantic* essay, "The Simple Art of Murder," written five years after *The Big Sleep*, tended to conceive of his hero in extremely idealized terms:

. . . Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.... He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world!

Despite Chandler's notion of the hero as knight in a corrupt world (a conception taken up too uncritically by many who have written about him), Marlowe is a far from simplistic character. In the beginning of *The Big Sleep*, he does literally project himself into a tableau on a stained-glass panel in the Sternwood home, depicting "a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady . . . [who] didn't have any clothes on . . ." "I would have to climb up there and help him," Marlowe says to himself. "He didn't seem to be really trying." However, later in the novel, when a naked Carmen invades his bedroom, he looks down at his chessboard and concludes that "Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights." The thought is reemphasized when he enters the Sternwood house for the last time and observes the knight, who "still wasn't getting anywhere...."

In short, a dialectic exists within the novel: Marlowe begins as knight, but is forced to cope in a sordid world: to do so he must be willing to summon a darker side of himself. Chandler's idealization represses this darker side. This is where Regan as "double" comes in: Chandler fractionalizes his hero into two characters. Regan, missing and

dead (ultimately repressed!) throughout the entire novel represents the potentially corruptible side of his protagonist which Chandler cannot brook. Regan has crossed the line. He is beyond the law all the way - a successful gangster-bootlegger. He commits himself sexually to women: he marries Vivian Sternwood; he (probably) has an affair with Mona Mars, before and after she is married. He commits himself to public social causes: he fought for the I.R.A. in 1922. He commits himself to having (if not coveting) money: he carries fifteen thousand dollars in bills at all times. In fact, the D.A. surmises that the real reason Sternwood hired Marlowe in the first place was to find out if Regan had betrayed his trust by being the real force behind the blackmail instigated by Geiger (ironically, he is). In sum, Regan is Marlowe's alter ego, an adult version of the detective's adolescent, solipsistic Romantic, who in "growing up" has taken the fall.

Throughout the novel we are given hints of the Marlowe-Regan bond. Marlowe resembles Regan: the D.A.'s man Bernie Ohls describes Regan as a "big guy as tall as you and a shade heavier." Both men are in their thirties. Their relationships to women intersect completely. Vivian Sternwood and Mona Mars are both attracted to Marlowe as they were to Regan, and Carmen tries to shoot Marlowe, as she did Regan, because he too would not sleep with her. (The link of the two men through the women is possibly covert evidence of Marlowe's repressed homoerotic attraction to Regan.) General Sternwood's butler explicitly compares the two men, and the General takes a paternal (and perhaps homosexual) interest in both. And when Marlowe confronts a photograph of Regan, the detective describes his impressions in terms he might as easily use for himself. It was "Not the face of a tough guy and not the face of a man who could be pushed around much by anybody . . . [It was] a face that looked a little taut, the face of a man who would move fast and play for keeps. . . ." Marlowe concludes portentously, "I would know that face if I saw it."

So Marlowe's search for Regan represents maximally an investigation into his own identity, into his own soul's potential weaknesses and arrested tendencies. In his final soliloquy Marlowe intones the following famous lines in speaking of his entombed "brother" Regan:

Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now. Far more a part of it than Rusty Regan was....

Marlowe, who when captive at one point made macabre jokes about his choice of casket and about Eddie Mars's henchman digging *him* a grave, finally comes face to face with his own mortality only through Regan. In so doing, he begins to understand his corruptibility, as well (on the ethical level as "knight" he has let murderess Carmen go unpunished). He is "part of the nastiness now . . ." and that is the full import of his search. For the reader, as Fredric Jameson has put it, the end of the novel "is able to bring us up short, without warning, against the reality of death itself, stale death, reaching out to remind the living of its own mouldering resting place."

Paradoxically, Faulkner, Brackett, and Hawks's screen version immediately makes the Marlowe-Regan connection much more explicit than in the novel. In the Hawksian

tradition of professional equals, Marlowe's first dialogue with the General reveals that he and Regan have been respectful opponents during prohibition, each on a different side of the law ("We used to swap shots between drinks, or drinks between shots - whichever you like."). But if anything, Regan (mysteriously now named "Shawn") is invoked quickly only to be exorcised. Though the surface mystery in the film remains the same, still concerning Carmen's blackmail, the deep mystery will ultimately concern, as Monaco has pointed out, what gambler Eddie Mars "has" on Vivian Sternwood Rutledge (Lauren Bacall), here a divorcee. (In the novel, Mars is blackmailing Vivian over Carmen's murder of Regan; he has helped her dispose of Regan's body.) The question of what Mars "has" on Vivian masks the real thrust of Hawks's film, which is to determine with whom Vivian will ultimately side, and as in his best comedies whether or not she and Marlowe will realize their mutual romantic attraction.

To emphasize leading lady Bacall as Vivian, Hawks and his writers placed her in three scenes in which she does not appear in the novel (Mar-lowe returning Carmen to her home, his visit to Brody's apartment, his incarceration in Realito at the hands of Mars's man Canino); they lengthened one encounter from the book (Vivian's visit to Marlowe's office), and added one long scene that appears only in the film. This scene, the famous Cafe/Horserace double entendre sequence (mandated by Warners' front office a full year after the rest of the movie was in the can, to give the stars yet more exposure together) is indicative of a pattern of attraction-repulsion between Vivian and Marlowe that firmly establishes as the center of the film the question of their eventual fate together.

In almost every scene in which they appear together, up until the penultimate one, Marlowe and Vivian begin a wary, but cordial verbal sparring. But each encounter ends in witty vitriol ("Kissing is nice, but your father didn't hire me to sleep with you."). The first mode of verbal skirmishing is the substitute for and correlative of a romantic language founded on emotion that Hawks employs throughout his romantic "screwball" comedies. Though Hawks took this convention from his comedies, in *The Big Sleep* he left its significance open ended. The dialogue between Marlowe and Vivian can end in romance or - in keeping with Chandler, the tradition of the *femme fatale* in general and of *film noir* in particular - in betrayal.

Near the end of the film, an obligatory "lay off the case" scene with Bernie Ohls (Regis Toomey) was written into the film; it confirms that Marlowe's vacillating relationship with Vivian has become the film's deep structure and raison d'être. After Ohls has conveyed his message instructing Marlowe to desist, the detective recapitulates the case so far and indicates why he must go on:

"Bernie, put yourself in my shoes for a minute. A nice old guy has two daughters. One of them is, well, wonderful. And the other is not so wonderful. As a result somebody gets something on her. The father hires me to pay off. Before I can get to the guy, the family chauffeur kills him! But that didn't stop things. It just starts them. And two murders later I find out somebody's got something on wonderful."

So the film comes down to Marlowe's endeavors to "clear" and win "wonderful."

When the ending does come, it makes little plot sense. Marlowe and Vivian are united after the detective forces Mars, his only serious "rival," out of a door into a hail of machine-gun fire. In Jules Furthman's reworking of the conclusion, the only logical extra-textual explanation for Mars's death is that he, not Carmen, killed Regan, and that he is blackmailing Vivian by making her think Carmen did it.

If the narrative logic is flawed, the emotional logic is not. We care about Marlowe/Bogart and Vivian/Bacall; they have earned our respect through their mutual (and mostly verbal) abilities to cope with a hostile environment. And it is satisfying to see their compatibility, which we have sensed all along, romantically vindicated. Likewise, in the novel, despite his limitations, we care about Marlowe. His voice unifies the quicksilver and chaotic world in which he operates, a world in which almost all events can never be known but only hypothesized about. And that extends to one misplaced chauffeur, at sea in the depths of illogic, about whom one ultimately need not care. Peace to you, Owen Taylor.

Source: Roger Shatzkin, "Who Cares Who Killed Owen Taylor?" in *The Modern American Novel and the Movies*, edited by Gerald Peary and Roger Shatzkin, Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1978, pp. 80-94.

Adaptations

Warner Brothers released the film adaptation of Chandler's novel in 1946. The movie, directed by Howard Hawks, stars Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall and is considered a classic of film noir. It is available in most libraries and video stores. Chandler's novel was adapted once more in 1978 in a film directed by Michael Winner and starring Robert Mitchum and Sarah Miles.

Topics for Further Study

Divide the class into four groups and assign each group eight chapters from the novel. Each group should compile a list of terms from their respective chapters that Marlowe and other characters use that are peculiar to the detective-story genre. Such terms might include words like "gat" (gun) or "peeper" (private investigator). Compile all of the terms into a dictionary for the class.

Watch the 1946 film adaptation of Chandler's novel and list the differences between the film and the novel. Discuss possible reasons for those differences as a class.

Rewrite the last chapter in the book, resolving the Rusty Regan mystery in a different way. Exchange your chapter with a classmate and discuss in pairs.

While screenwriters were working on adapting Chandler's novel to film, they sent him a note asking how Owen Taylor really died. Chandler responded, saying he did not know. On the board, brainstorm possible theories of Taylor's death and vote as a class on the best theory.

In pairs, make a list of your favorite similes in the novel and then put them on the board and as a class discuss what makes them effective.

Compare and Contrast

1930s: The economy of the United States continues to slump after a massive downturn in the stock market, which began in 1929 and led to the Great Depression.

Today: After a massive boom, the economy of the United States slumps after a massive downturn in the stock market, which began in 2000.

1930s: To combat widespread crime in the United States various federal government agencies within the Department of Justice are consolidated to form the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Today: After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, President Bush forms the Office of Homeland Security to strengthen protection against terrorist threats and attacks in the United States.

1930s: Although gambling is illegal, many gambling houses exist, and often have police protection.

Today: State lotteries are commonplace and many states have legal gambling casinos, many of them operating on Native-American reservations.

What Do I Read Next?

Another popular Chandler novel chronicling the adventures of Phillip Marlowe is *The Long Goodbye*, published in 1953. This novel was made into a Hollywood film (1973) directed by Robert Altman and starring Elliot Gould.

Al Clark's *Raymond Chandler in Hollywood* (1982) explores Chandler's life when he was writing screenplays for films such as *Double Indemnity* and *The Blue Dahlia*.

In 1994, Robert Parker, considered by many to be Chandler's successor as king of the hard-boiled detective novel, wrote *Perchance to Dream*, a sequel to *The Big Sleep*. Parker also finished the novel Chandler was working on when he died: *Poodle Springs* (1986).

Edward Thorpe's *Chandlertown: The Los Angeles of Philip Marlowe* (1983) examines the role Los Angeles plays in Chandler's detective fiction.

Further Study

Durham, Philip, *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go: Raymond Chandler's Knight*, University of North Carolina Press, 1963.

Durham examines Marlowe's code of chivalric behavior in this ingenious study.

Hiney, Tom, *Raymond Chandler: A Biography*, Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997.

Hiney draws on Chandler's papers and letters to construct this engaging biography.

Marling, William, *Raymond Chandler*, Twayne, 1986.

Marling provides a solid and accessible introduction to Chandler's fiction in this study.

Van Dover, J. K., ed., *The Critical Responses to Raymond Chandler*, Greenwood, 1995.

This collection of essays covers a wide range of critical approaches to Chandler's novels.

Bibliography

Chandler, Raymond, *The Big Sleep*, Vintage, 1992, pp. 114, 204.

—, "The Simple Art of Murder," in *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944, p. 59.

Davies, Russell, "Omnes Me Impune Lacessunt," in *The World of Raymond Chandler*, edited by Miriam Gross, Wei-denfeld and Nicolson, 1977, pp. 32-42.

James, Clive, "The Country behind the Hill," in *The World of Raymond Chandler*, edited by Miriam Gross, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977, pp. 116-26.

Linder, Daniel, "The Big Sleep," in the *Explicator*, Vol. 59, Issue 3, Spring 2001, p. 137.

MacShane, Frank, *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, Hammish Hamilton Ltd., 1986, p. 68.

Speir, Jerry, *Raymond Chandler*, Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981, p. 30.

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535