



## Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler

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I don't know why the hell I write so many letters, Raymond Chandler once mused to a correspondent. "I guess my mind is just to active for its own good."

In the seven novels from *The Big Sleep* (1939) to *Playback* (1958) and in a handful of short stories, Raymond Chandler recorded a vision of Southern California life sparked by acerbic observations on every level of coast society, from drug dealers and crooked cops to heiresses. But Chandler's gifts of observation and analysis extended well past the streets, alleyways, roadhouses, and stately homes that made up the world of his detective-hero Phillip Marlowe.

Brought together in this volume are some of the hundreds of letters Chandler wrote-many of them composed during long, insomniac nights. Chandler commented on all that he saw around him, from his own personal foibles, to the works of his contemporaries Ernest Hemingway and Edmund Wilson, to education, English society, and world events. Acute, sometimes impassioned, often witty, the *Selected Letters of Raymond Chandler* contains lively anecdotes of Hollywood, critical dissections of his fellow writers of detective fiction, lengthy discussions of the art of writing and of his own fiction, and, above all, amused, sometimes outraged glimpses of the Southern California society that was his inspiration.

Chandler once wrote that "in letters I sometimes seem to have been more penetrating than in any other kind of writing." But his letters could also be combative, as when he wrote to an editor at the *Atlantic* that "when I split an infinitive, God damn it, I intend that it should stay split," or dismissive, as when he said of James M. Cain that "everything he writes smells like a billy goat." He could also be painfully revealing, as when he wrote of his despair over the death of his wife. "It was my great and now useless regret," Chandler confessed, "that I never wrote anything really worthy her attention, no book that I could dedicate to her."

Lively, entertaining, and sometimes touching, these letters fully present for the first time the complex sensibilities of a man who was one of America's greatest writers of detective novels, and one of its most astute observers.

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