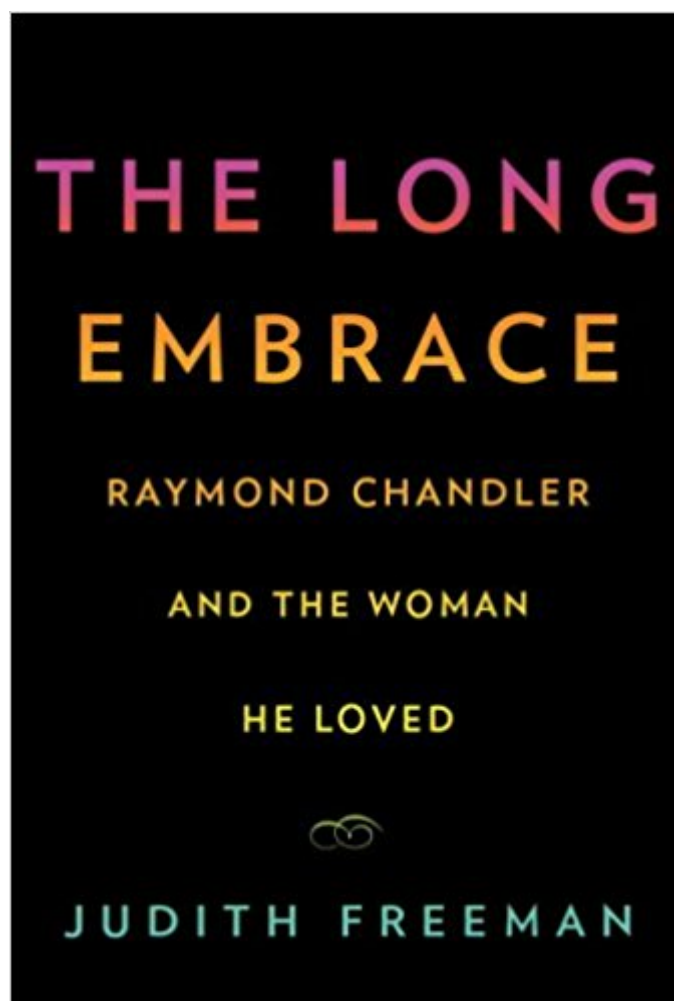


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# The Long Embrace: Raymond Chandler And The Woman He Loved



## Synopsis

Raymond Chandler was one of the most original and enduring crime novelists of the twentieth century. Yet much of his pre-writing life, including his unconventional marriage, has remained shrouded in mystery. In this compelling, wholly original book, Judith Freeman sets out to solve the puzzle of who Chandler was and how he became the writer who would create in Philip Marlowe an icon of American culture. Freeman uncovers vestiges of the Los Angeles that was terrain and inspiration for Chandler's imagination, including the nearly two dozen apartments and houses the Chandlers moved into and out of over the course of two decades. She also uncovers the life of Cissy Pascal, the older, twice-divorced woman Chandler married in 1924, who would play an essential role in how he came to understand not only his female characters and Marlowe's relation to them but himself as well. A revelation of a marriage that was a wellspring of need, illusion, and creativity, *The Long Embrace* provides us with a more complete picture of Raymond Chandler's life and art than any we have had before.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Novelist Freeman (Red Water) turns her obsession with Chandler and his beautiful wife, Cissy, into a kind of voyeuristic exploration of their unusual but symbiotic marriage. The creator of Philip Marlowe and author of such classics as *The Long Goodbye* and *Farewell, My Lovely*, remains an enigma and his much older wife (she lied to him about her age) is even more of a cipher. Freeman describes researching Chandler archives at both UCLA and the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and her pilgrimages to the extraordinary number of homes and apartments (more than 30) where the

peripatetic Chandlers lived in California. She also consulted printed resources and interviewed some who knew the Chandlers late in their lives. She effectively uses passages from Chandler's fiction and letters to illustrate his battles with alcoholism, boredom, manuscripts and screenplays. Less effective are the many passages where Freeman tries to read too much from scanty clues (for instance, trying to guess which woman in a photograph is the one Chandler had an affair with). The result is an uneven account, part author's journal, part biography, of an unusual couple whose marriage survived against all odds and may have been the key factor that allowed Chandler to create his tarnished knight, Marlowe. Photos. (Nov. 6) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

“Part biography, part detective story, part love story, and part sŒfŒance, *The Long Embrace* takes us on Judith Freeman's journey to discover the private Raymond Chandler through the lens of his marriage to a woman eighteen years older than himself, a woman he adored and yet whose every scrap of correspondence he destroyed following her death. Lively, quirky, revealing of both author and subject, this is a welcome addition to any Chandler addict's library. —Janet Fitch, author of *White Oleander* “This elegant, stirring book plumbs a great mystery, one hidden, from even Chandler's many devoted readers, in plain sight. Freeman's book is a meditation on marriage, a persuasive biographical and literary study, and, best of all, one of those rare books, like Nicholson Baker's *U and I* or Geoff Dyer's *Out of Sheer Rage*, where one writer's study of another takes the form of a confessional fugue on the writing act itself. —Jonathan Lethem, author of *The Fortress of Solitude* “A compelling picture of present-day Los Angeles and a compelling dual portrait of Chandler and his wife . . . Ms. Freeman knows the territory as well as Marlowe himself . . . she feels the language and captures the mood. Like Cissy, when she crooks her finger, it's impossible not to follow. —The New York Times “A beautiful and original book. . . Freeman writes about L.A. with a tender precision and yearning that borders on the religious. . . In “*The Long Embrace*,” magic has occurred. Freeman's identification with her subject is so complete we feel we're there with Chandler too. —The Los Angeles Times “*The Long Embrace*” may be the essential book on Raymond Chandler. Like his books, it offers a rational solution to a puzzle while at the same time retaining a sense of mystery. —The Chicago Tribune “An invaluable prism to understand Raymond Chandler, his wife and most of all Los Angeles and its environs, of which he became the literary champion . . . Ms. Freeman's intuitive understanding of the writer and his terrain make her

the perfect person to ask the right questions . . . Ms. Freeman not only establishes the centrality of Cissy to Chandler's life and art, she actually succeeds in making the reader feel their passion. "The Washington Times" "Compelling biography . . . a novelist's nonfiction triumph." "The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette" In this unusual, beautifully modulated study, Judith Freeman gives us a probing look at Chandler and his inspirations . . . [Freeman] is a wonderfully astute critic of Chandler's writing, and poignant explainer of the torments that fed his vision . . . What makes this an exceptional book is the way Freeman merges her own personal obsession with Chandler with a haunting meditation on Los Angeles. Few writers have revealed the essence of this chronically misunderstood city so well. "Newsday" "A fascinating book" "The Tucson Citizen" "An acute and empathic study . . . Freeman does some fine literary detective work." "The Guardian

Proof That Behind Every Famous Man Is A Good Woman. When I started this book I knew very little about Raymond Chandler. He turned out to be a much different character that I expected. Initially I found the book a little slow moving but once I read a little further, I was hooked. One of the things that fascinated me about this biography by a novelist was that there was so little information available on Cissy Chandler, that the author had to put together a portrait of her from Chandler's own writings, interviews, and information gained from visiting former homes of the main characters. Raymond had destroyed all her letters and he and Cissy had lived very secluded lives. The author visited the 36 L.A. addresses where Ray and his wife lived during their 30 plus years together. Chandler was a nomad who was constantly moving from one furnished apartment to another and only owned one house during his lifetime. This tendency of Freeman to reach conclusions based on very little actual fact and a lot on women's intuition sometimes seemed a bit of a reach. I didn't always agree with her conclusions and assumptions. She also did more psychoanalyzing of Chandler's personality, also based largely on her intuitions as another women, than I was comfortable with--especially the discussions about whether Chandler was a closet homosexual. I felt she was treading on thin ice in several sections of her book. Ray's wife Cissy was 18 years older than him. She was apparently able to maintain her secret because she looked very young for the duration of her long life. She was especially sexy looking when Ray stole her away from her second husband. It's doubtful he had the slightest idea of their true age difference since he didn't even know for certain when she died. Once it became apparent to Ray that he had been greatly deceived about their age difference it had the expected effect on him, but he remained married and devoted to the woman who eventually became his substitute mother. Cissy was the one person who was able to

control Raymond Chandler's alcoholism. She kept him under control and enabled him to function both as a member of the human race and as a gifted writer. When she died, Ray lost his moorings and survived only about five years before his alcoholism killed him. This is a book worth reading. It's well researched by an obvious admirer of Raymond Chandler's writings. It's also an interesting approach to writing biography when very little actual fact remains. It's very helpful if one knows the geography of the city and county of Los Angeles. As someone who lived in L.A. for a few years it was relatively easy for me to visualize the many locations discussed, but it may seem like a maze to non-Californians. I liked some of Freeman's writing very much. But keep in mind while reading this work that it serves as a perfect example of the old folk saying that "behind every famous man is a good woman."

This book captured me on many levels. I found in this book, not only a love and reverence for Raymond Chandler, but also for Los Angeles. I think that the Long Embrace is really the embrace of Los Angeles. An embrace that impacted Chandler and Freeman and readers. I am a native of Los Angeles and in the age bracket beyond midlife. I understand the journey and searching for a person's and a city's history. I enjoyed her almost tangible manipulations of Los Angeles sights, sounds, textures and smells. I recognize her experiences as my experiences lovingly put into words. I recognize many of the streets and areas. Also, my own memories of a Los Angeles with oil wells pumping, where we did not have to lock our car or house doors at night! Of a time when the building of the Music Center downtown showed that we were not a "hick town". A city where some of the best places are hidden away from the traffic and the tourists still to this day. Freeman's research intertwines Chandler and Los Angeles. She brings up questions and presents answers about the impact on Los Angeles of the automobile, oil, films, police corruption and the unlikely heroes that reveal themselves in the midst of it all. (as Chandler did) It is interesting to finally learn about Chandler's wife, Cissy. As to her giving the incorrect age- all the women friends of my mother and grandmother's did not give their true age. I remember them telling me "a woman never gives her true age". Children and men were not supposed to ask. I know of women who refused to use Medicare benefits because they did not want to reveal their true age. It was not unusual (among some circles) for creative women to have real loving relationships with younger men or gay men. (i.e. Neysa Mcmein-artist). Judith Freeman has real skill at blending research, fiction and her own interpretations on her lovingly selected subjects. She continues in the same vein in this book. If you are familiar and enjoy her writing you will love this one. If you are a Los Angeles native (whether born here or relocated here) you will enjoy learning more about your city.

Interesting format -- great historical background. The best thing about it was that obviously the author was enchanted by Raymond Chandler!

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