The Long Goodbye is a novel by Raymond Chandler, published in 1953, his sixth novel featuring the private investigator Philip Marlowe. Some critics consider it inferior to The Big Sleep or Farewell, My Lovely, but others rank it as the best of his work.[1] Chandler, in a letter to a friend, called the novel "my best book" and recalled the agony of writing it while his wife was terminally ill.[2] The novel is notable for using hard-boiled detective fiction as a vehicle for social criticism and for including autobiographical elements from Chandler's life.

In 1955, the novel received the Edgar Award for Best Novel.

Plot summary

The novel opens outside a club called the Dancers. It is late October or early November 1949. Philip Marlowe meets a drunk named Terry Lennox, a man with scars on one side of his face. They forge an uneasy friendship over the next few months. In June 1950, Lennox shows up late one night at Marlowe's home in "a great deal of trouble" and needing a ride to the Tijuana airport. Marlowe agrees as long as Lennox does not tell him any details of why he is running.

On his return to Los Angeles, Marlowe learns that Lennox's wife was found dead in her guest house and that she died before Lennox fled. Marlowe is arrested on suspicion of murder after refusing to co-operate with investigators, who want him to confess that he helped Lennox flee.

After three days of antagonizing his interrogators, Marlowe is released, the police explaining that Lennox has been reported to have committed suicide in Otatoclán with a full written confession by his side. Marlowe gets home to find a cryptic note from Lennox containing a "portrait of Madison" (a $5,000 bill).

Marlowe gets a call from Howard Spencer, a New York publisher, who asks him to investigate a case. One of Spencer's best writers, Roger Wade, has a drinking problem and has been missing for three days. Initially Marlowe refuses, but after Wade's wife, Eileen, also asks for Marlowe's help, he consents. Marlowe finds Wade in a makeshift detox facility in an isolated and soon to be abandoned ranch. He takes his fee, but the Wades' stories do not match.

The Wades each try to convince Marlowe to stay at their house to keep Roger writing instead of drinking, and though he refuses, he ends up making further trips to the house at their behest. On one such trip, he finds Wade passed out in the grass with a cut on his head. Mrs. Wade enters a sort of trance and attempts to seduce Marlowe, thinking him to be a former lover of hers who died ten years earlier in World War II.

Meanwhile, Marlowe is repeatedly threatened to cease his investigation of the Lennox case, first by a friend of Lennox's named Mendy Menendez, then by Lennox's father-in-law, the police, the Wades' servant (a Chilean named Candy), and Wade's wife. Marlowe also learns that Terry Lennox had previously lived as Paul Marston, who was previously married and had lived in England.

Wade calls Marlowe again, asking him to come by to have lunch with him. Wade drinks himself into a stupor, so Marlowe takes a walk outside. When he returns, Eileen Wade is ringing the doorbell, saying she forgot her key. Marlowe finds Roger Wade dead on the couch, apparently from suicide, but Eileen accuses Marlowe of killing her husband. Candy fabricates a story to implicate Marlowe, believing him to be guilty, but his claims are undermined in an interrogation.

Marlowe receives a call from Spencer regarding Wade's death and bullies Spencer into taking him to see Mrs. Wade. Once there, Marlowe grills her on the death of Terry Lennox's wife. Eileen first tries to blame it all on Roger, but Marlowe argues that she killed both Mrs. Lennox and Roger Wade and that Lennox was actually her first husband, presumed killed in action with British Special Air Service during the war. Eileen Wade leaves with no response. The next morning, Marlowe learns that she has killed herself, leaving a note confessing that she killed Mrs. Lennox and Roger Wade.

Marlowe refuses to let the story lie. He is assaulted by Menendez, who is arrested in a setup arranged by a police commissioner who served with Menendez and Lennox during the war. Finally, Marlowe is visited by a Mexican man who claims to have been present when Lennox was killed in his hotel room. Marlowe listens to his story but rejects it and offers his own version, ending with the revelation the Mexican man is none other than Lennox, who has had cosmetic surgery.

Background
The Long Goodbye is Chandler's most personal novel. He wrote it as his wife was dying. Her illness and death had a profound effect on him, driving him into fits of melancholy and leading him to talk of and even attempt suicide. Two characters in the novel are based on Chandler himself; both of them highlight Chandler's awareness of his own flaws—his alcoholism and his doubts about the value of his writing.[9]

The character most clearly based on Chandler is the usually drunken writer Roger Wade. Like Chandler, Wade had a string of successful novels behind him, but as he grew older he found it more difficult to write. Also, like Chandler, Wade had written novels (romantic fiction) that were viewed by many as not real literature, whereas Wade wants to be thought of as a serious author. Wade also stands in for Chandler in discussions about literature, as in his praise of F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The other Chandler stand-in is Terry Lennox. Like Chandler, Lennox is an alcoholic. Also like Chandler, he had fought in a war, and the war left emotional scars. For Lennox, it was the Second World War; for Chandler, it was the first. Lennox is a Canadian citizen, but he had spent a great deal of time in England and retained the restrained and formal attitude of an English gentleman. This made him somewhat of an anomaly in the fast-paced and more informal world of wealthy Los Angeles, which he inhabited because of his wife's money. Chandler was also raised in England and received a classical education there. Chandler also retained a great love for the English and what he viewed as their more civilized way of life compared to the shallowness and superficiality of Los Angeles. This frequently put him at odds with screenwriting collaborators, such as Billy Wilder, and with most of Los Angeles and Hollywood society[4][5]

Film, television and radio adaptations

This novel was dramatized for television in 1954 for the anthology series Climax!, with Dick Powell playing Marlowe, as he had a decade earlier in the film Murder, My Sweet This live telecast is memorable for an incident in which the actor Tris Coffin, whose character had just died, thinking he was out of camera range, stood up and walked away while in view of the TV audience.

In 1973, Robert Altman filmed an adaptation set in contemporary Los Angeles, with Elliott Gould as Marlowe.

An adaptation of the novel was broadcast by BBC Radio 4 on 16 January 1978, with Ed Bishop as Marlowe, and again on 1 October 2011, with Toby Stephens as Marlowe as part of its Classic Chandler series. Japanese broadcast NHK aired five episodes of a Japanese adaptation of the novel in 2014.

Appearances in other works

The Long Goodbye has been referred to in other works of fiction. Greg Iles referred to Chandler and the novel's title in his own novel The Quiet Game, in which one character is named Marston[9] It has been featured in the Japanese tokusatsu drama Kamen Rider W, in which the main character constantly reads from a Japanese version of the book. His partner's name is Philip. Michael Connelly refers to the novel's title and quotes from it in his own novel The Black Ice. There are flashbacks to the events in this novel in the hommage Marlowe novel The Black-Eyed Blonde.

The novel's title has been alluded to in the titles of other works of fiction with a hardboiled, noir, detective or gangster theme, including the British gangster film The Long Good Friday (1980), an episode of Star Trek: The Next Generation entitled "The Big Goodbye" (1988), and Frank Miller's graphic novel The Hard Goodbye (1991–92), the first volume in the Sin City series.

In music, crime novelist Matt Rees's band Poisonville, which is named after the fictitious location of the Dashiel Hammett novel Red Harvest, released a song about The Long Goodbye on its first album. Rees described the novel as "a creepier book than people think."[7]

References

7. ↑ Matt Rees, http://www.mattrees.net/2012/05/03/2708/
Goodbye is a novel for hard times, hard drinking, hard living; an aged and more cynical than ever Marlowe proves he's worth his salt in honoring the memory of a short-lived but impactful friendship with Terry Lennox. While I felt The Long Goodbye dragging on a little bit, I think the reason Raymond Chandler has stood the test of time is that as filmed or liberated as some of his plots have been over the years, nobody can write this wee-small-hours-of-the-morning prose, mix together various elements or make it feel as timeless as Chandler does. 

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