

**Fredric Jameson.** *Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality.* Verso 2016. 96 pp. \$25.95 CAD (Hardcover ISBN 9781784782160).

Fredric Jameson is one of a few contemporary thinkers who have continuously produced current and relevant work in the last fifty years. He has written on structural thought, dialectics, Sartre, Heidegger, Modernism in general, film, and criticism in a way that has proven not only insightful, but lasting and far-reaching in its effect. In his latest book by Verso, 'Raymond Chandler: The Detections of Totality,' he revisits his work on the detective novel. Despite its slim size, the book provides several explorations of Chandler's work that can offer even the experienced re-reader of the Philip Marlowe novels new understanding. Jameson is perceptive and incisive as ever; his approach is fastidious and focused at times, and abstract and metaphysical at others. All the while he writes with an awareness and measure for both the content of the novels and the depth of his own criticism.

A key point made by Jameson is the importance and ubiquity of everyday objects in Raymond Chandler's writing. According to Jameson, in Chandler's writing everyday objects are emphasized in a twofold manner: by the social reality at the time, and on a narrative level. In the golden age of advertising that coincides with Chandler's writing, everyday commodities are not so much simple objects as near-mythical entities. A car is a Ford, a hat is a Stetson, and so on. The abstract word (car, hat, etc.) is omitted and in its place one can find only the abstracted particular, the brand revealed as a fully fetishized commodity. This emphasis also extends to the narrative level. As Jameson claims, the American novel, unlike its European counterpart, aims to avoid exclusion and it includes in its focus a totality of American life—a totality, one imagines, where Ford and Stetson are key and ubiquitous names. However, Jameson argues, this is also done through the narrator's voice. The narrating voiceover, so typical to Raymond Chandler's work, serves to subjectivize and emphasize the perception of things, people, and environment. This can be seen in Chandler's writing on eyes, looks, and glances, but also on furniture, weather, geographical locations in Los Angeles, and so on.

It is Jameson's point precisely that 'the perception of the products with which the world around us is furnished precedes our perception of things-in-themselves and forms it' (21). We must first encounter objects, use them, and only then stand aside and try to make sense of them. This, in turn, brings in another dimension of Raymond Chandler's detective novels—that of detection. The subjective, yet detached and cynical, narration by the character Philip Marlowe is not only expressive of an ontological condition of knowledge, i.e., the detective's perspective as a kind of knowledge, but it is very much real to both reader and plot as seen in the mystery that must be solved. However, Jameson does not take things to be this simple; rather, he argues that Chandler's novels operate in two forms, an objective one and a subjective one, as a detective story on the one hand, and as a 'more personal distinctive rhythm of events' (22) on the other. This is also expressed in Chandler's approach to plot construction. Rather than relying simply on the murder mystery as some centripetal force, he constructs an intermittent line of searches. This way, it is not the case that the murder remains a very particular, yet somewhat abstract and detached from reality, event that necessitates a purer form of knowing and reasoning, but a real, actual phenomenon that is entangled in social reality. As Jameson points out, this search that drives the detective out into the social world is a particular spatial investigation as well.

When it comes to spatiality, Jameson's reading, while insightful and incisive throughout, truly shines. As outlined in the second chapter of the book, he reads space in Chandler's work in such a way so as to reconstruct the underlying social typology. For example, by focusing on the concept of *office* he outlines the list of social types in the novels—'the rich, the poor, crooked professionals, gigolos, gangsters, and the police' (46). To describe this a little further, it is the rich and

the poor who have homes without offices. This way, Jameson demonstrates that the rich, in Chandler's work, are not shown in a politicized way as capitalists, ruling class, etc., but rather are revealed to be rich through their surroundings and immediate environment; likewise with 'the poor'. Following this, there are the social types that have both homes and offices (for example, Chandler's Marlowe himself)—who tend to be mostly professionals at the service of the rich, but also clearly in an intermediary position of mobility between both top and bottom. Subsequently, there are the types that have a singular space that is both office and home, e.g., the gigolos and the gangsters, whose workplace is their home, be it casino or bedroom. And the final type according to Jameson's social typology is the social group that possesses offices but no homes e.g., the police. Jameson aptly points out that the police are never seen outside of their workplace, seemingly portrayed as not having any equivalent to the private living space of the other types.

Basing his social typology on the basis of the office is even more interesting considering the supplementary aspects that Jameson introduces in order to adapt it to the particulars of the separate novels. For example, Jameson brilliantly closes in on the first chapter of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and the interpersonal dynamics at play in it. By focusing on looking and the 'Look' (34), Jameson maps out the various interchanges between the characters in the first chapter. This way, he introduces the 'Look' as 'a place in which a signifying system is developed, flexed, and underscored' (34). This signifying system, in turn, reveals not only the mere exchange of glances, but introduces the characters and their traits: 'passion, fidelity and confidentiality, sexual obsession or pathological obsession' (34) and so on; as seen in the butler averting his eyes, or Marlowe turning his eyes away from the portrait of the General's black eyes to the blue eyes of the General's granddaughter entering the room.

The mapping of looking and the 'Look', however, is only one example of Jameson's attention to detail. Unsurprisingly, he picks up on subtle cues, such as travelling colours: the white colour of a room of a particular character reappearing sometime again as a mantic signifier of correspondence. This is further emphasized in Jameson's treatment of the various 'episode-types' of characters (44) appearing throughout the episodic narratives in Chandler's novels. The language of these characters, for example, or their hostility, Jameson notes, reveals their transitory nature, their precariousness and episodic quality. It is no wonder they are hostile, detached, or explicitly aggressive toward Marlowe: that is their only way of standing out, since they are in danger of being swallowed up by both space and narrative.

The episodic character of both social types and chapters in Chandler's novels, as well as their repetitiveness, reveals an interesting dimension to the 'socio-historical raw material' (59) at the time, according to Jameson. Any repetitiveness is due not to a lack of imagination on Chandler's part, but rather to an insufficiency of said material on the part of reality itself at the time. Moreover, Jameson draws on Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art' and the distinction between World and Earth, or History and Nature, in order to emphasize Chandler's novels' suggestiveness and their 'shifting back and forth between two systems and two "isotopies" (or levels of attention) which are given in advance as irreconcilable, and which can therefore presumably only *alternate* [*sic*]' (78). Furthermore, it is here that Jameson provides a brief, but fascinating, discussion of death in Chandler's novels; according to Jameson, for Chandler, death is 'something like a spatial concept'. From here, the parallel between the spatial construction of death and Nature is further strengthened; as well as, the examples of the ending of *Farewell, My Lovely* on the open sea, or the dead end of an unbuilt street from the same novel. In both cases, it seems that Chandler spatializes death quite literally as a limit, an event happening outside the map. This also leads one back to the spatiality of social reality; the ubiquity of finite, known, and knowable objects; interactions that are always connected; all of these being elements that constitute a larger and singular totality.

In summary, Jameson has written an impressive treatise on Chandler. It is not so much a reading of Chandler's work, as much as a penetrative look past its surface to its core. No wonder then that the reader is left looking back at the novels in 'a new and depressing light' (87), realizing that the crime of interest was much older than one thought, not in the present of the narrative, but rather somewhere deep in the world's past; thus revealing the hidden 'presence of graves beneath the bright sunlight' (87).

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