REVIEW ARTICLE

The Moral Character of Philip Marlowe: Complexity and Nuance in the Ethical Life of Chandler's Detective Hero

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Abstract

The central character in Raymond Chandler's seven acclaimed detective novels – the private eye, Philip Marlowe – is, according to his creator, a man of honour and a kind of hero and, as a man for our times, an archetype who may be compared to Sherlock Holmes, James Bond or the eponymous stranger in Clint Eastwood's famous Western movies. Chandler's novels – though derided by the author himself as pulp fiction and merely escape literature – are now considered to be classical paradigms of a certain kind of hard-boiled detective fiction and appear on English Literature reading lists in colleges and universities throughout the world. In this article, I will be analysing the novels in terms of the moral principles and practice of the central character of Philip Marlowe. In particular, the nuances of ethical conflicts and dilemmas will be explored as Marlowe struggles to navigate his way through the shadowy and morally corrupt world he inhabits, seeking to exact justice without compromising his deeply held core values. Moral education programmes now make extensive use of literary sources and – given the prominence of the type of fiction that Chandler helped to pioneer – I will conclude with examples of the ways in which ethical lessons may be drawn from examining the character of Marlowe.

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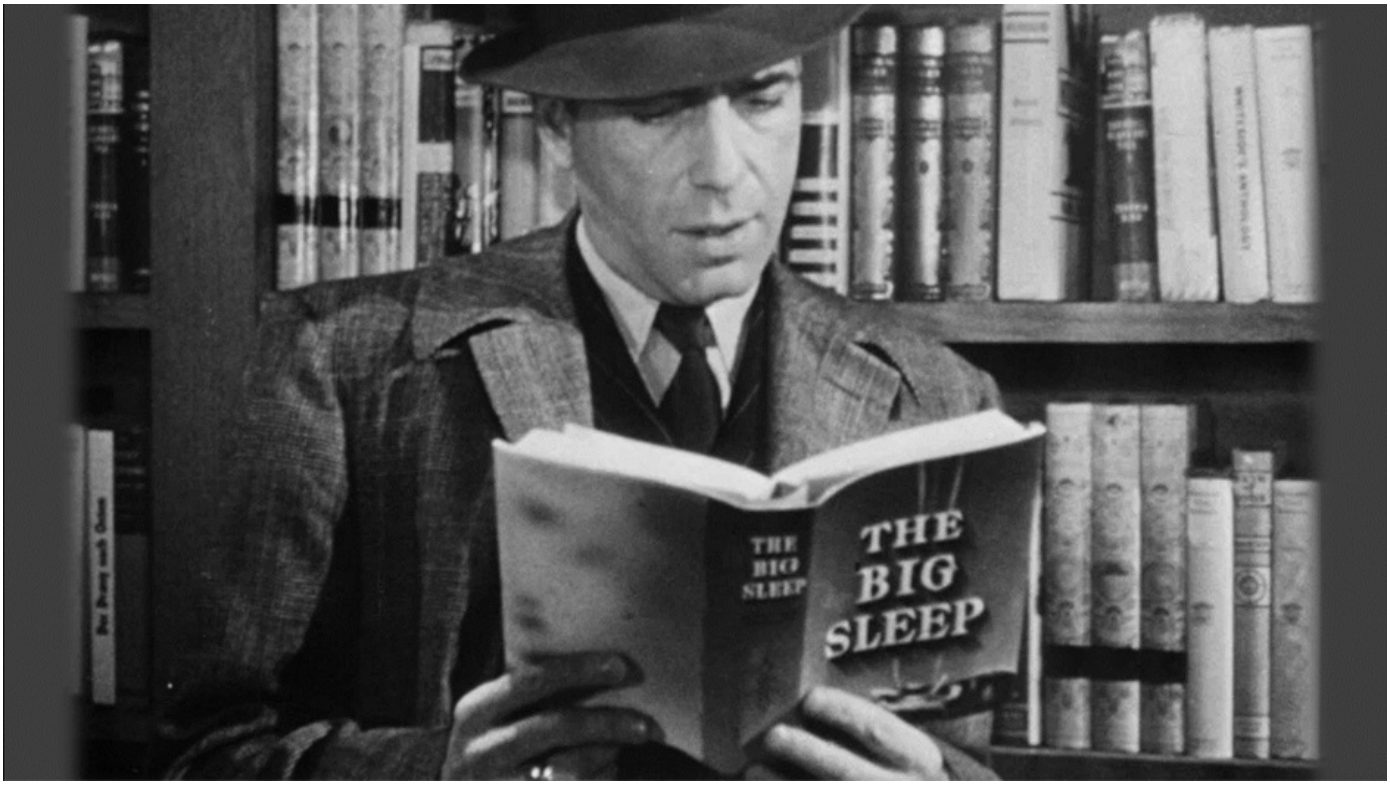

1. Introduction

Describing the general characteristics of his central character, Marlowe, in *The Simple Art of Murder*[1], Chandler writes:

> *down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour — by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world (p.7).*

We first meet this man in the short story *Killer in the Rain*[2] a palimpsest for the subsequent first novel *The Big Sleep*[3]. Here we are introduced to a private eye (who previously worked in the assistant district attorney's office) who is fearless, astute, honest, loyal and clear-sighted in his commitment to righting wrongs and acting with ethical determination in an essentially immoral and chaotic underworld.

As Hill, Jackson and Rizutto[4] comment in their analysis of Chandler's work:

> ***The Big Sleep*** *was Chandler's first novel, and it introduced the world to Philip Marlowe, the archetypal wisecracking, world-weary private detective that now occupies a permanent place in the American imagination. If Superman or John Wayne is the Zeus of American myth, and Marilyn Monroe is Aphrodite, then Marlowe is Prometheus: the noble outsider, sacrificing and enduring for a code he alone upholds.*

In describing the all-embracing scope of this first novel, they go on to observe that:

> ***The Big Sleep*** *does more than even Chandler intended it to do. Partially by design and partly by happy contingency, the novel dramatizes a cluster of profound subjects and themes, including human mortality; ethical inquiry; the sordid history of Los Angeles in the early twentieth century; the politics of class, gender, and sexuality; the explosion of Americanisms, colloquialisms, slang, and genre jargon; and a knowing playfulness with the mystery formula—all set against a backdrop of a post-Prohibition, Depression-era America teetering on the edge of World War II (pp.1-2).*

Out of this initial blueprint, Chandler went on to develop and elaborate the life and work of the Promethean private eye in six more novels: *Farewell My Lovely*[5]; *The High Window*[6]; *The Lady in the Lake*[7]; *The Little Sister*[8]; *The Long Goodbye*[9]; and *Playback*[10]; in addition to an unfinished novel, *Poodle Springs,* and many screenplays and essays until his death in 1959.

2. Marlowe as a Reflection of Moral Complexity

Marlowe emerges as a figure struggling to exact justice in Chandler's novels, yet his methods often raise questions about the very moral fabric he aims to uphold. He is a man governed by a personal code – an ethical compass that, albeit unconventional, guides him through a landscape riddled with moral dilemmas. Chandler's Los Angeles is painted with broad strokes of crime, betrayal and moral failure. Yet, within this landscape, Marlowe stands as a beacon of integrity, challenging the constructs of justice and morality in his quest for truth. However, his steadfast nature poses questions about the efficacy of personal ethics in a world where rightness often feels elusive[11].

Although, as Chandler suggests, Marlowe is a kind of hero, he is clearly not an orthodox one; rather, he is the anti-hero – typified in other guises by Clint Eastwood as The Stranger in *Pale Rider* (Malpaso, 1985) and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (Mapaso, 1976) or, in a more modern context, Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Columbia/MGM, 2011) – shaped by the grim and gritty world he has to make his way in. Marlowe's profession requires him to confront the darker elements of human nature and – in a world often characterized by cruelty, immorality and corruption on both sides of the law – his interaction with police and criminals highlights the fine and fuzzy line between good and evil.

The private investigator frequently faces moral choices that reveal his unyielding adherence to a personal commitment to truth, fairness and justice, even when the consequences for him are dire. His refusal to engage in transactions that compromise his integrity – whether it be betraying trust, taking bribes or ignoring injustices – underpins the nature of individual choice in moral judgments and decisions. This steadfast moral compass not only defines Marlowe as a character but also serves as an illustration of the struggles which people have to face in maintaining their values in a complex world. In moral philosophy, it is an example of what Peter Strawson[12] describes as the uneasy tension between social morality and individual ideal.

While Marlowe's integrity is laudable, it often leads to a heavy personal cost. The unflinching commitment to deeply held principles at times results in disillusionment, alienation, and violence, with the private eye resorting to temporary withdrawal and the comfort of the office bottle of liquor[13]. This speaks volumes about the nature of ethical commitment: it can be both a guiding light and a source of intense suffering. Marlowe's struggles serve as cautionary tales about the weight of responsibility that accompanies the ethical life and the sacrifices that come with it. In later sections, the connections between Marlowe's particular stance on ethics will be explored against the background of moral theory and philosophy. At this stage it will be worthwhile examining some practical examples of Marlowe's ethics as revealed in Chandler's novels.

3. Practical Ethics: Marlowe in Action

Rachel Sherlock[14] has pointed to the influence of Chandler's English education on his approach to writing detective fiction, and shows how medieval and romance themes serve to inform Marlowe's moral character. As she notes:

> *even though Marlowe's quests take the form of investigations, uncovering blackmailers, solving murders, exposing corruption, and so on, Chandler consistently incorporates imagery and themes from medieval stories, in particular the Arthurian myth cycle (p.2).*

The analysis of Chandler's novels by Suresh (2013) is informed by the image of the private eye 'in search of dignity'. As he explains:

> *Marlowe's world is populated with people across the class divide. In his world exists the millionaire who is fond of his once gun-running son-in-law, a rich lady who doesn't care for anyone, and chorus girls who marry millionaires or mobsters. In this world idle young men blackmail the wealthy women; gangsters tolerate the infidelity of their wives, gunmen don't think twice before pulling the trigger and robbers who cannot forget their childhood sweethearts. In this world, where the rich and the poor mingle closely, where the saint and the sinner co-exist, where killing is as common as sacrificing life to save a loved one, Marlowe helps people find their dignity and in the process finds meaning for his own existence. Philip Marlowe is basically a decent man living in a murky world and trying to keep his decency intact (pp.2-3).*

As mentioned in the foregoing section, Marlowe's moral code is nuanced, unorthodox and – because of the chaotic and corrupt world he has to navigate – often oblique and ambivalent. It is, nevertheless, not all that difficult to discern in Chandler's stories.

In *The Long Goodbye*[9] we are introduced to Marlowe's long-time friend, Terry Lennox, who, it transpires, is suspected by the police of murdering his wife. Marlowe is drawn to Lennox's easy sociability and charm yet – through his decision to support his friend – soon finds himself entangled in a complex web of deception and potential violence. His instinct to trust

Lennox clashes with the underlying suggestion that he has been involved in a serious crime. On the run from the police and gangsters, Lennox arrives at Marlowe's apartment worse for wear with drink, asking to be taken to Tijuana to board a plane for Mexico. Marlowe looks after Terry and agrees to drive him but lays down the following conditions:

> *'One', I repeated slowly, 'if you have committed a crime or anything the law considers a crime – a serious crime, I mean – I can't be told about it. Two, if you have essential knowledge that such a crime has been committed, I can't be told about that either. Not if you want me to drive you to Tijuana. That clear? (pp.537-8).*

The commitment to justice and honesty are here clearly in evidence alongside a sense of loyalty reflected in Marlowe's commitment to help his friend no matter what the circumstances. On his return to LA, Marlowe's is arrested by the police but refuses to say anything about Lennox. As he declares to the police captain, Grenz:

> *'Be reasonable, Grenz. You're trying to make a fink out of me. Maybe, I'm obstinate, or even sentimental, but I'm practical too. Suppose you had to hire a private eye – yeah, yeah, I know you would hate the idea – but suppose you were where it was the only way out. Would you want one that finked on his friends?' (ibid.p.576)*

His reference to being 'sentimental' here is significant and occurs in other Chandler novels (e.g.*Farewell My Lovely*[5], p.507). Marlowe's ethical commitments can never be transparent and sentimentality here is a cover for acting with honesty, compassion and loyalty. This reticence is on display when Marlowe is subsequently beaten and threatened by the police with being an accessory after the fact for helping Lennox to escape to Mexico. As he responds to Sergeant Dayton's bullying questions about Lennox:

> *'Okay', I said, 'Blow it. Terry Lennox was my friend. I've got a reasonable amount of sentiment invested in him. Enough not to spoil it just because a cop says come through'*[9].

Subsequently, it transpires that Lennox has faked his own suicide in Mexico and had plastic surgery to elude the police. It later turns out that the real perpetrator of the crime Lennox was alleged to have committed is discovered, and Marlowe visits Lennox in Mexico. In responding to Lennox's question of why Marlowe hadn't turned him in to the law instead of assisting his escape, he responds:

> *'You're just that kind of guy. For a long time I couldn't figure you at all. You had nice ways and nice qualities, but there was something wrong. You had standards and you lived up to them, but they were personal. They had no relation to any kind of ethics or scruples. You were a nice guy because you had a nice nature. But you were just as happy with mugs or hoodlums as with honest men (ibid., p.906).*

This is so revealing. Marlowe is here not simply telling us what he admires in people but at the same time he is expounding his own moral code, whether this is described in covert, nuanced form as sentimentality, having nice qualities

or adhering to personal standards.

More of these disguised ethical qualities are on display in Marlowe's escapades in Chandler's most famous and complex work, *The Big Sleep*[3]. In his earliest novel in the Marlowe series (filmed originally in 1946 with Humphrey Bogart in the leading role, reprised in 1985 with Robert Mitchum as Marlowe), the private eye's views on justice and general ethics are intricately woven into the fabric of the narrative. Marlowe is asked by General Sternwood to help with blackmail threats against his younger daughter, Carmen. Meeting her on his first visit to Sternwood's home, Marlowe's reactions are ambivalent. On the one hand, he recognizes her as a victim of circumstances – rich and spoiled but caught in a web of corruption, drugs, gambling and exploitation – but, on the other hand, he can perceive her arrogant, manipulative and malevolent nature. As she makes advances to him, Marlowe is caught between sympathy for her distressing plight and disgust at the inherent moral decay in the world she is enmeshed in. In a later episode Marlowe finds her drugged and naked in the studio of a pornographer, Geiger, who lies dead on the floor. Instead of phoning the police he takes her home and creates an alibi to protect her from potential accusations.

Marlowe's conflicted stance on justice and the law are on display when he later visits Geiger's studio to find that the body has been removed. While he is there he receives a visit from Eddie Mars, a notorious racketeer and casino owner who has been working with Geiger in a blackmail racket based on pornographic photos. Marlowe has Geiger's book of victims but won't share it with Mars and faces down the threats and bribes from Mars. The PI also pretends to know nothing of Geiger's demise. As he remarks to Mars:

> *'If anything has happened to Geiger, I'll have to give what I have to the law. Which puts it in the public domain and doesn't leave me anything to sell'*[3]

In a later episode he meets Mars in his casino and refuses to reveal what he knows about Geiger and Sternwood's daughters, pleading confidentiality and loyalty to his client. Marlowe's confrontations with Mars reveal his disdain for the corrupt power structures that dictate the lives of people in the narrative (Carmen ensnared in drugs and pornography and the older daughter, Vivian/Mrs Regan, being blackmailed by Mars for gambling debts). Whilst Marlowe abhors all that Mars stands for, he does not initially reveal what he knows about him to the police, wanting to protect the General and his daughters. He understands completely that the law does not always serve justice, and that sometimes personal ethics must override legal ones.

Marlowe's attitudes to women in the novel represent an ongoing tension between moral idealism and realism. After rescuing Carmen Sternwood from a compromising situation in Geiger's studio he later discovers her naked in his apartment and it is made clear that she wants Marlowe to have sex with her. The detective is tempted but his loyalty to his client, General Sternwood, overrides this and he refuses Carmen's invitations. As he remarks on being informed by Carmen that she is 'all undressed':

> *'That's nice but I've already seen it all remember? I'm the guy that keeps finding you without any clothes on…Don't make me dress you again. I'm tired. I appreciate all that you're offering me. It's just more than I could possibly*

> *take…I'm your friend. I won't let you down – in spite of yourself…It's a question of professional pride. You know – 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. Won't you please get dressed, Carmen?'*[3].

This appeal to 'professionalism' is Marlowe's way of expressing the values which define his work: trust, loyalty, compassion, and generosity in a world where all such qualities are at a premium. Of course, sometimes kindness and compassion have to be suspended in the pursuit of truth. In *Farewell My Lovely*, for instance, his search for Moose Malloy's ex-girlfriend, Velma, requires him to deceive Mrs Florian whose husband once ran a club that employed Velma by plying her with liquor knowing of her predilection for alcohol. After gaining the information he wanted from the encounter, Marlowe reflects on the incident:

> *A lovely old woman. I liked being with her. I liked getting her drunk for my own sordid purposes. I was a swell guy. I enjoyed being me. You find almost anything under your hand in my business, but I was beginning to be a little sick at my stomach*[5].

This ironic soul-searching occurs throughout the novels; it seems to be Chandler's way of telling us that – in spite of outward appearances – his PI is decent, honest and capable of other-regarding values. Indeed, Marlowe's interactions with women throughout the novels represent a palimpsest of his moral code. The detective engages fully and genuinely with the narratives of the central female characters rather than objectifying them. Episodes involving enigmatic and troubled women reveal Marlowe's deep-seated empathy, positioning him as – not just a detective in search of truth and justice – but also, perhaps, as a defender of lost and vulnerable souls[14].

The perennial tensions between Marlowe's moral code and the quest for truth are foregrounded in Chandler's novel*The High Window*[6] in which the PI is drawn into the investigation of a stolen rare coin – the Brasher Doubloon – leading him to a web of deception involving the wealthy Abernathy family. As he delves deeper, it becomes evident that the 'crime' is not merely concerned with theft; it is inextricably tied to greed, infidelity and even murder. Marlowe's pursuit of truth puts him at odds with, not only the criminals involved in the stolen coin affair, but also those claiming to be the upholders of law and order. As he remarks to the Doubloon's owner:

> *'The law, whatever it is, is a matter of give-and-take, Mrs Murdock. Like most other things. Even if I had the legal right to stay clammed up – refuse to talk – and got away with it once, that would be the end of my business' (ibid., p.113).*

The occupational hazards – the uneasy tension between the prudential and the ethical – of being a private investigator are well illustrated in *The Lady in the Lake*[7] in which Marlowe is hired to investigate the disappearance of a woman. His discovery of a dead woman prompts him to confront the moral ambiguity which suffuses the relationships of those involved in the affair. On discovering that the woman he had been searching for had been murdered by a police officer,

Degarmo, who, as the PI remarks 'was too much of a cop to let her get away with more murders, but not enough of a cop to pull her in and let the whole story come out' (ibid., p.379). Throughout his investigation, Marlowe is, not just seeking to solve a case, but, rather, engaging with the complex motives which drive the actions of the characters involved. The main actors in this drama serve to reveal a moral turpitude which masquerades as personal loyalty, a theme which challenges the detective's conception of trust.

In a similar vein, in *The Little Sister*[8] the undercurrents of familial loyalty and betrayal create a scenario in which Marlowe's moral stance is tested to the limits. In his investigation of the disappearance of a young woman, Marlowe repeatedly puts himself at risk – physically and emotionally – because he believes that every individual deserves justice, regardless of their flaws. As he observes about the central female character, Little Orfamy, she was 'slim, dark, and lovely…but utterly beyond the moral laws of this or any other world I could imagine' (ibid., pp.593-4). As in the other novels, Marlowe's sense of duty in the case evolves into a personal mission to right the wrongs of a world which often refuses to acknowledge its moral failings.

Chandler's final Marlowe novel written the year before his death –*Playback*[10] – again finds the PI seeking the whereabouts of a missing woman, this time one trying to escape from powerful people she has known in her job as personal secretary to a Washington lawyer. On discovering that the woman in question is vulnerable, frightened and under threat of blackmail, the detective maintains his interest in the case even when his original client has paid him off and told him that the case is closed. Marlowe refuses to take money from the woman he was original following, Betty Mayfield, though still intending to help her to deal with the blackmail threats. As he declares to her:

> *'For Pete's sake. You've already given me more than I'd keep. It isn't money I want. It's some sort of understanding of what the hell I'm doing and why. You must have heard of professional ethics. Some shreds still stick to me' (ibid., p.148).*

In reality Marlowe's professional ethics are far more deep-seated than his ironic reference to the 'shreds'. It is typical of the private eye that he insists on having full information about any case that he is asked to undertake so that he can provide the best service possible in the pursuit of truth and justice.

This final novel from Chandler is fascinating in that it contains a number of interesting and telling digressions from the main plot in which Chandler reveals his own values and, *ipso facto*, the values of his eponymous creation. The concern for the underprivileged and socially ostracized members of LA society are treated with understanding and compassion. Marlowe's reflections on the tragic life of an impoverished drug addict who has hanged himself (ibid., pp.143-5) is one such instance, as is the detective's musings about the position of Jewish people at the time. Unrelated to the central plot, Chandler puts the following words into the mouth of a citizen of Esmeralda, the town Marlowe has followed Ms Mayfield to:

> *A Jew is supposed to give you a sharp deal and steal your nose. That's all bunk. A Jew enjoys trading; he likes business but he's only tough on the surface. Underneath a Jewish businessman is usually real nice to deal with.*

> *He's human. (ibid., pp.152-3).*

A clue to the humanist ethical code that undergirds Chandler's, and through him, Marlowe's approach to the moral life is well illustrated in another, superficially insignificant, incident involving an elderly guest at the hotel Marlowe has under surveillance in his attempt to help his client, Betty Mayfield. Having failed to get the information he is seeking from the hotel staff, the detective is beckoned over by an elderly guest sitting in the hotel lobby. It transpires that this old gentleman knows quite a lot about the situation Marlowe is trying to unravel, and after providing this information he asks the detective – in an apparent *non sequitur* – 'Do you believe in God, young man?', to which the PI replies:

> *'If you mean an omniscient and omnipotent God who intended everything exactly the way it is, no?', to which the guest responds at some length, 'But you should, Mr Marlowe. It is a great comfort. We all come to it in the end because we have to die and become dust…Is God happy with the poisoned cat dying alone in convulsions behind the billboard? Is God happy that life is cruel and that only the fittest survive? The fittest for what? Oh no, far from it. If God were omnipotent and omniscient in any literal sense, he wouldn't have bothered to make the universe at all. There is no success where there is no possibility of failure, no art without the resistance of the medium. Is it blasphemy to suggest that God has his bad days when nothing goes right, and that God's days are very, very long?' (ibid., pp.132-4).*

Chandler's inclusion of this long digression unrelated to the plot surely says something about the author's personal philosophical stance on life and, incorporated within this, we can discern Marlowe's own value system and what motivates him in his work as a detective. It is essentially a pragmatic philosophy which owes little or nothing to fixed supernatural beliefs but everything to a form of natural altruism which motivates compassion towards the vulnerable, suffering and deluded victims of an imperfect and often amoral society.

In all the novels, Marlowe's investigative work is a testament to the enduring struggle between personal integrity and societal decay. Through his relentless pursuit of truth and justice, Marlowe stands out as an archetype of the detective genre, reflecting the aspiration that – even in the darkest of times – we can seek the light of moral righteousness. His journey through the mean streets of Los Angeles invites readers to engage with their moral dilemmas and challenge the status quo, making Chandler's Marlowe an enduring figure in the literary landscape.

4. Key Characteristics of Marlowe's Moral Code

In a fascinating study of Chandler's work against the background of Modernism, 19th century German philosophy and the Expressionist movement, Caitlin Coulter[15] writes:

> *Chandler took the form of the detective genre but imbued it with Nietzschean philosophy and Gothic imagery, producing novels that hold their own alongside Mann within the literary tradition of German Expressionism… This*

> *Modernism, overlapping with German Expressionism and underpinned by the Gothic, is a structuring force in the work of Raymond Chandler and can be traced in the destabilization of traditional moral schematics which occurs so often throughout his Marlowe canon. Chandler's writings continue the work of his influencers and call readers to rise above the herd's mask of morality. Raymond Chandler writes this challenge into the very plot and prose and dares his audience to "live beyond the old morality" as Marlowe's sardonic voice asks, "Can I go on being a son of a bitch, or do I have to become a gentleman (pp.57-58).*

This is a very interesting analysis, but I think that Coulter has here mistaken the nuanced surface of Marlowe's ethical code for its underlying structural form. Marlowe *is* a gentleman in the old fashioned 19th century sense we find in Austen's novels[16] but – as explained in earlier sections – he can never openly admit to being guided by an orthodox moral code in the squalid, unreflectively cruel and corrupt world he inhabits or he would never survive. This is nicely illustrated in *Playback*[10] in which his client, Betty Mayfield, asks of Marlowe, 'How can such a hard man be so gentle?', to which he replies:

> *If I wasn't hard, I wouldn't be alive. If I couldn't ever be gentle, I wouldn't deserve to be alive' (ibid., p.180).*

Moreover, rather than Nietzchean ideals, Marlowe's morality seems to have more in common with Aristotle's virtue ethics which emphasizes the development of moral character by facing difficult choices in ambivalent situations[17][18]. Aristotle's 'doctrine of the mean'[19] – which consists in finding a middle way between, for instance, rashness and cowardice, resulting in courage; or between vanity and modesty, leading to magnanimity – aligns well with Marlowe's pragmatic approach to moral dilemmas, as does Aristotle's notion that we become virtuous by performing virtuous acts.[20]. In addition, just as there are connections between virtue ethics of this kind and Buddhist principles[21] so certain commentators have noted an unlikely link between Marlowe's behaviour and the ethical lessons taught by the Buddha, with Buschel[22] describing Marlowe as a 'Zen Master' and a 'true American bodhisattva' (Buddhist saint). There is also the important factor relating to Chandler's love of the medieval chivalric code which leads Rachel Sherlock[14] to describe Marlowe as a 'knight in shining armour'. As she explains:

> *Chandler goes far beyond sprinkling his texts with offbeat medieval references. Rather, he places romantic ideals of chivalry at the very core of his books. His leading man, Philip Marlowe, may have many of the vices and flaws so characteristic of hardboiled detectives, he is world-weary, alcoholic, and reclusive, but through the cigarette smoke and grimaces, Marlowe manages to emerge as a knight in shining armour. Against the backdrop of the urban underbelly of 1940's L.A., Chandler's Marlowe brings a surprisingly old-world chivalric heroism to bare. Surrounded by crime and corruption, Marlowe maintains a moral high ground. He refuses to accept jobs that he considers unethical, he keeps a clean mouth, and an empty bed. These characteristics, along with his loyalty, determination, and sense of duty, soon become an almost photo finish for the code of chivalry. Marlowe may not be the exact medieval ideal of a goodly and chaste knight, serving his liege lord, embarking on quests to defend a lady's honour, but he's certainly not far off (pp.2-3).*

The moral character of this modern-day virtuous knight has much to offer as material for moral education theory and practice.

5. Literature, Ethics and Moral Education

The use of literature in general as a vehicle for moral instruction or the analysis of ethical concepts and problems has a long and established history[23][24][25]. Robert Eldridge (1989), discussing the place of ethics in literature, writes that:

> *a person's moral understanding cannot be captured by general theories, but must be developed and sustained by an awareness and relation of her story to the stories of others, an awareness that literature is peculiarly well placed to articulate and extend (p. 20).*

Megan Laverty[26] has noted the fact that 'virtue ethicists assume that literature is a legitimate and, in some cases, a superior enactment of philosophical enquiry' (p.576). In a similar vein, Martha Nussbaum[27] argues, 'certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist' (p.5).

As indicated in the Introduction above, Chandler's work is now acknowledged as worthwhile, authentic literature to be considered alongside the writings of other prominent authors of 20th century fiction. Dilys Powell called his writing a 'peculiar mixture of harshness, sensuality, high polish and backstreet poetry', and Elizabeth Bowen described him as 'a craftsman so brilliant, he has an imagination so wholly original, that no consideration of modern American literature ought to exclude him' ([3], Introduction). In a similar vein, W.H. Auden thought that Chandler's books 'should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art', and Anthony Burgess remarked that 'Chandler is an original stylist, creator of a character, Philip Marlowe, as immortal as Sherlock Holmes' ([6], Foreword).

Moral education programmes based on theoretical models derived from the work of Piaget and Kohlberg on ethical development may often seem too abstract and theoretical to engage fully the imagination of students[28]. Moreover, as James Wilson[29] has argued, certain well-used thought experiments - Peter Singer's "Shallow Pond" and Philippa Foot's "Trolley Problem" are cited in particular – fail to meet the internal/external validity criteria and, moreover, 'unavoidably depict worlds that are under-described' (p. 13). Suggestions for enhancing the quality and validity of such experiments include the move from a top-down linear model of reasoning to a 'translational model' drawing on social science which concentrates on the practical applications of ethical theory, and the idea of seeing such experiments as 'artworks' which may provide ethical insights in the way that works of fiction can do (pp.21-22).

I would suggest that such 'artworks' should legitimately include – alongside Jane Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, Shakespeare, and similar representatives of the canon[16][20] – the works of Raymond Chandler discussed above. Marlowe is indeed a 'man of honour'[1] and his struggle to maintain decency and morality in a corrupt world is as relevant today as it was in the 1930s and 1940s. Chandler's own description of his famous creation provides an apt conclusion:

> *The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, the world would be a safe place to live in, without becoming too dull to be worth living in. Such is my faith (ibid., p.7)*

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