



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

The Long Goodbye

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Leigh Brackett was one of the few women to publish science fiction in the pulp magazine era, albeit under a gender-neutral byline. She was also unusual among contributors to *Amazing Stories*, *Planet Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction* in working as a screenwriter; her contributions to fantasy cinema extend eccentrically from *The Vampire's Ghost* (1945), an unusual B-picture based on John Polidori's seminal story 'The Vampyre', to the first draft of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). However, the oddest book-ends to her complicated career are that she has script credits on Howard Hawks's *The Big Sleep* (1946) and Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* (1973). Thus, Brackett helped adapt the 1939 and 1953 novels in which Raymond Chandler introduced and bade farewell to private eye Philip Marlowe (though Chandler dragged Marlowe out again for the hasty *Playback* in 1958 and the uncompleted fragment *The Poodle Springs Story*).

In 1973, the conventional reading of Altman's *The Long Goodbye* was that it was a critique of Chandler's worldview, just as Robert Aldrich had turned Mickey Spillane's fascist bully hero Mike Hammer inside out in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955). Altman's film is set in the smoggy, muted colour 1970s, photographed through a suitable haze by Vilmos Zsigmond, rather than the gorgeous, rainy noir-look monochrome 1940s of *The Big Sleep*.

Hawks casts Humphrey Bogart as Chandler's white knight of the mean streets. The star plays the role with a lip-curl and a smart mouth, trading sexually charged banter with every dame in sight – even a female cabbie perks up when Bogey slides into her back seat – and finally hooking up with innocent party Vivian Rutledge (Lauren Bacall) in a reprise of Hawks's earlier *To Have and Have Not* (1945) and the couple's real-life romance.

Altman's Marlowe is a shabby-suited, mumbling insomniac played by Elliott Gould, who can't even keep a cat, is treated as asexual by the stoned nude hippie chicks who live in the apartment opposite and is tagged as 'a born loser' by his only friend, who has ruthlessly exploited him to get away with murder. Bogart is always in control and keeps running into characters who engage in flirtatious tough talk with him as if they were playing verbal chess. Gould can't get anyone to play with him, except perhaps the security guard of a gated community (Ken Sansom) who only lets through people who identify his impersonations of old movie stars. On the few occasions Gould uses a Chandler line (cornered by two cops, Marlowe says: 'Is this where I'm supposed to say, "What is all this about?"' and he says, "Shut up, I ask the questions.") no one pays attention. Gould's Marlowe keeps muttering, and people ignore him or talk over his head or behind his back. If he went down a mean street, he'd step in something.

Brackett must have noticed Hawks and Altman both set out to betray Chandler in similar ways, transforming the author's distinctive world into playgrounds for auteur visions. Altman uses the script as a launch pad and encourages improvisation, highlighting random overheard snatches of talk (his sound mixes are fiendishly contrived to seem casual) at the expense of plot details. Crucially, both films tinker with the mysteries. Hawks was prevented by the Hays Office from having Vivian's nymphomaniac junkie sister Carmen turn out to be the killer – as that would have made Vivian, Marlowe's lover, an accessory to murder, which breached the production code – and calmly pinned the crime on someone else.

Altman, presumably not pressured by censorship, also exonerates Chandler's chosen culprit – in almost all the Marlowe books, the strongest female character turns out to be the killer, which eventually devalues them as whodunits – and makes the wretched Terry (Jim Bouton) guilty of murdering his wife, though Marlowe has suffered for believing in his innocence. Like Bogart, Gould shows a vigilante streak – personally and shockingly gunning down the hammock-lounging lunk, then dancing off to 'Hooray for Hollywood' on the assumption he can't be charged with murdering someone who has already faked their death and doesn't legally exist.

The oddest reaction to Altman's film, expressed in almost all contemporary reviews, is the assumption that updating Marlowe to the 1970s is somehow a radical notion. Only four years earlier, Paul Bogart's *Marlowe* (1969) was taken as a regular adaptation, though that has James Garner's tan proto-Rockford Marlowe share office space in the Bradbury Building with a gay hairdresser and set loose in a contemporary, counterculture-inflected LA he surveys with amused detachment.

Altman lacks Chandler's puritanism, but his Los Angeles is closer to the author's city than any other director. It's a world of all-night thrift markets that don't stock the brand of cat food Marlowe's choosy pet insists on, freeways stretching between distant nowhere-in-particular locales, enclaves of the unhappy and violent rich, crooked drying-out clinics where alibis can be purchased for a cash down-payment, crowded and scuffed police stations full of irritable folk (including David Carradine, busted for possession and ranting, 'Someday all the pigs gonna be in here and all the people gonna be out there').

John Williams (before he went over to the Dark Side) and Johnny Mercer provide a song that is literally heard throughout, in arrangements from muzak to Mexican funeral band, creating an unshakable earworm. An indulgence in the novel is Chandler's self-portrait in the person of alcoholic novelist Roger Wade. Altman compounds this by casting Sterling Hayden – an actor who was also a drunk, a novelist and a seaman, and who was wracked with lasting guilt over his showing before the House Un-American Activities Committee – and allowing him to write or improvise his own scenes, hijacking a section of the film for an unflinching self-portrait.

Altman teases readers familiar with the book by pausing briefly in a party scene where Chandler has Marlowe meet the major characters Linda and Dr Loring. The director holds the camera on two extras (one is Carl Gottlieb, screenwriter of *Jaws*) we might take to be the Lorings, only to move on before they get a word in, shedding another whole strand of Marlowe's life (in *Poodle Springs*, Marlowe is married to Linda) while Wade/Hayden makes a scene. Gangster Marty Augustine (Mark Rydell) makes a point by smashing a bottle in his girlfriend's face and telling Marlowe, 'That's someone I love. And you I don't even like,' while diminutive quack Dr Verringer (Henry Gibson) slaps six-foot-six hulk Wade across the face in public and cows the bullish giant into paying a debt... these instances of facial assault, practically the only violent moments in the film before the punchline, echo the photos we don't see of what was done to the murder victim Sylvia Lennox and serve to ground the movie, making it hard to enjoy in the way we all love *The Big Sleep*. Hawks could poison Elisha Cook Jr, but he'd never have smashed a bottle into Dorothy Malone's face, forcing her to be masked and braced in later scenes. Jo Ann Brody, bleeding profusely, drifts through, not understanding what has happened, like some refugee from *Carrie*.

And yet, 40 years changes things. *The Long Goodbye* is a key film in Thom Andersen's montage movie *Los Angeles Plays Itself* and Gould's lost world has accrued its own nostalgic appeal – the apartment Augustine sneers at seems a desirable space, even without the sweet hippie neighbours – which mingles with nostalgia for a Hollywood that would greenlight such an odd project. Glimpsed among Augustine's gang of hoods is a young, unbilled Arnold Schwarzenegger – he strips off his shirt to show his pecs to balance the scenes in which Marlowe's neighbours do nude yoga in long-shots. Along with Williams and Gottlieb, the body-builder would ride changes in the movie business that made films like *The Long Goodbye* much harder to find within a few years of its release.

Kim Newman, *Sight & Sound*, February 2014

THE LONG GOODBYE

Directed by: Robert Altman
©: United Artists Corporation
Production Companies: United Artists Corporation, Lion's Gate Films
Presented by/Executive Producer: Elliott Kastner
Produced by: Jerry Bick
Associate Producer: Robert Eggenweiler
Production Assistant: Jean D'Oncieu
Assistant Director: Tommy Thompson
2nd Assistant Director: Alan Rudolph
Script Supervisor: Adele Bravos
Screenplay by: Leigh Brackett
From the novel by: Raymond Chandler
Photographed by: Vilmos Zsigmond
Camera Operator: Joe Wilcots
Key Grip: Ken Adams
Electrical Gaffer: Randy Glass
Edited by: Lou Lombardo
Assistant Film Editors: Scott Conrad, Tony Lombardo
Property Master: Sidney Greenwood
Make-up: Bill Miller
Music by: John Williams
Sound Engineer: John V. Speak
Dubbing Mixer: Richard J. Vorisek
With Special Remembrance for: Dan Blocker

uncredited

Production Company: Elliott Kastner Corporation
Casting Director: Joan Tewkesbury
Men's Wardrobe: Kent James
Women's Wardrobe: Marjorie Wahl
Hairstylist: Lynda Gurasich

Cast:

Elliott Gould (*Philip Marlowe*)
Nina Van Pallandt (*Eileen Wade*)
Sterling Hayden (*Roger Wade*)
Mark Rydell (*Marty Augustine*)
Henry Gibson (*Dr Verringer*)
David Arkin (*Harry*)
Warren Berlinger (*Morgan*)
Jo Ann Brody (*Jo Ann Eggenweiler*)
Jim Bouton (*Terry Lennox*)
Steve Coit (*Detective Farmer*)
Jack Knight (*Mabel*)
Pepe Callahan (*Pepe*)
Vince Palmieri (*Vince*)
Pancho Cordoba (*doctor*)
Enrique Lucero (*Jefe*)
Rutanya Alda (*Rutanya Sweet*)
Tammy Shaw (*dancer*)
Jack Riley (*Riley, piano player*)
Ken Sansom (*Colony guard*)
Jerry Jones (*Detective Green*)
John Davies (*Detective Dayton*)
Rodney Moss (*supermarket clerk*)
Sybil Scotford (*Sybil Tooksbury, real estate lady*)
Hubie Kerns (*Herbie*)

uncredited

Leslie Simms (*Olive*)
Leslie McRay (*Lucille*)
David Carradine (*prison cellmate*)
Arnold Schwarzenegger (*muscle man*)
Kate Murtagh (*nurse*)
Danny Goldman (*bartender*)
Tracy Harris (*detective*)

USA 1973©

112 mins

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Chinatown

Mon 18 Oct 14:15; Sun 24 Oct 11:50;
Wed 27 Oct 14:15; Sat 20 Nov 20:30

Inside Man

Mon 18 Oct 17:50; Mon 8 Nov 20:30;
Thu 25 Nov 14:30; Tue 30 Nov 20:20

House of Bamboo

Mon 18 Oct 18:00; Thu 4 Nov 20:50;
Thu 11 Nov 14:30; Mon 15 Nov 18:10

Heat

Tue 19 Oct 14:00; Sun 24 Oct 14:30;
Sat 13 Nov 16:30; Mon 15 Nov 13:40

Kiss Me Deadly

Tue 19 Oct 18:00; Fri 5 Nov 20:40; Sat 20 Nov 18:00; Sat 28 Nov 12:15

Devil in a Blue Dress

Wed 20 Oct 17:55; Thu 28 Oct 20:50; Wed 17 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by
Empire Magazine Contributing Editor Amon Warmann)

Un Flic

Wed 20 Oct 18:10 (+ pre-recorded introduction by film critic
Christina Newland); Fri 22 Oct 14:20; Tue 23 Nov 20:45;
Mon 29 Nov 20:55

The Long Goodbye

Wed 20 Oct 20:50; Wed 10 Nov 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Sat 27 Nov 20:40

The Manchurian Candidate

Thu 21 Oct 14:15; Sun 21 Nov 14:50

Illustrious Corpses (Cadaveri eccellenti)

Thu 21 Oct 20:30; Mon 25 Oct 14:15; Fri 19 Nov 20:40; Sat 27 Nov 18:10

Murder on the Orient Express

Sat 23 Oct 17:30; Sun 7 Nov 18:10; Tue 16 Nov 14:15

Blue Velvet

Tue 26 Oct 14:30; Tue 2 Nov 18:00; Sat 13 Nov 20:45; Sun 21 Nov 17:40

Dirty Harry

Wed 27 Oct 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by film scholar Hannah Hamad,
Cardiff University); Sun 14 Nov 18:20; Fri 26 Nov 20:45

The Silence of the Lambs

Fri 29 Oct 20:40; Wed 3 Nov 19:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by Professor
Yvonne Tasker, author of BFI Film Classics *The Silence of the Lambs*);
Thu 18 Nov 14:40

No Country for Old Men

Sat 30 Oct 11:00; Mon 1 Nov 20:30; Wed 24 Nov 18:00 (+ intro by
Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

In the Cut

Sun 31 Oct 18:30; Tue 30 Nov 18:10

Zero Dark Thirty

Sat 6 Nov 17:30; Tue 9 Nov 14:15; Sun 28 Nov 15:20

Shaft

Fri 12 Nov 20:50; Tue 23 Nov 18:20

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We're also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

Notes may be edited or abridged. Questions/comments? Email prognotes@bfi.org.uk

The British Film Institute is a charity registered in England and Wales No. 287780