

## REALISTIC IMAGERY IN CHANDLER'S "RED WIND"

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(1) Raymond Chandler's realism often has a startling effect. He is, in fact, so successful with realism that his writing often leaves the reader in a sombre, dissatisfied mood. This is the desired effect; Chandler did not merely write detective stories, he wrote realistic social commentaries. In his short story "Red Wind," Chandler's realism comes alive through an adroit use of imagery. The story's most prevalent image, one which connotes an underlying theme of moral degeneration, is the wind itself. Other images, however, are subtly and deftly inserted in order to establish a mood which remains with the reader at the end of the story.

(2) Chandler begins the story with a description of the wind: ". . . it was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that . . . curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch." From the beginning Chandler assaults the reader with images intended to create a feeling of restlessness. The sense of tension increases as the plot unfolds. Chandler continues to portray the wind as an evil force, something to be wary of. When the action begins, Marlowe, the detective, is having a drink in a new bar across the street from the apartment house in which he lives. Marlowe has no idea that he is about to witness a murder, but the wind appears as an ominous harbinger of the grisly events to come: ". . . the kid came back and put more beer in my glass. Outside, the wind howled. Every once in a while it blew the stained-glass door open a few inches. It was a heavy door."

(3) At this early point in the story, the wind makes itself known to Marlowe and to Chandler's reader as a prominent and undeniable presence. In the end of Chapter Two, Marlowe is conducting a suspenseful interview with an unknown damsel in distress as the "hot wind" blows against the closed windows. Chandler writes, ". . . windows have to be shut when a Santa Ana blows, heat or no heat."

(4) By now the wind has become apparent as the central thematic image of the story. As the story progresses, however, the wind's role seems more and more prominent, with the wind developing a character, a personality all its own. For example, in Chapter Six, Marlowe is confronted by Copernik, the corrupt cop. Copernik, holding a pistol, is on the verge of giving in to the incredible temptation to kill Philip Marlowe. Marlowe is aware of the wind's presence, even now: ". . . Far off I could hear the wind booming. It seemed like the sound of guns." Fortunately, Copernik's honest partner, Ybarra, convinces him to put down the gun. Ybarra shrugs off the unpleasant incident and adds to the idea of the wind's identity: "It's the hot wind, Sam. Let's forget it."

(5) Copernik symbolizes corruption just as the wind portrays evil and wrong. His character is built before us slowly, so that we may see clearly the stuff of which he is made. When Copernik first comes on the scene, he grins at Marlowe and Chandler writes that his teeth have a "freckled look," and that he has a "long mean horse face." When Marlowe is lucky enough to encounter Copernik again, Copernik is planning to take all the credit for Marlowe's capture of a criminal. He leans close to Marlowe to establish false details. Marlowe comments, "His breath was bad. It would be."

(6) Throughout the story, Copernik personifies a corrupt society. By cleverly using descriptive imagery, Chandler makes the reader hate not only Copernik, but the corruption he stands for. In the same way, Chandler uses the wind to symbolize a dying society: a dirty, destructive, drying wind which symbolizes a society that is withered and decaying.

(7) At the end of the story, Marlowe's job is over. The world is not restored to law and order, but Marlowe has solved the puzzle he had set out to solve. Appropriately, when the case is solved, the wind disappears and the sky becomes "close and comfortable and gray." But the wind has accomplished its purpose. Just as it stirred up the dust and litter and corruption in Marlowe's section of Los Angeles, it agitates Chandler's reader and brings him to a new awareness. Chandler's vivid imagery leads his readers to an abrupt, face-to-face meeting with an all too grim reality.