

Example of book review on the big sleep: use of symbolism

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The Big Sleep, by Raymond Chandler, is a story about a private detective, Philip Marlowe, who was tasked to help figure the problems of a wealthy family, the Sternwood family. In his role as detective, Marlowe becomes entrenched in an intricate web of problems troubling the Sternwoods. Although the initial issue focuses on the disappearance of one of General Sternwood's employees, Marlowe realizes that as he uncovers one problem after another, each one is directly related to the other. Each character has a story to tell and various angles arise that contribute to the thickening plot. In addition, the novel presents various symbolisms that further add a layer of meaning to the texts to enhance the story, such as the occurrence of a storm to signify the presence of elevated energy, conflict, or high emotions. Another example of symbolism is the transition from night to day or the turning of seasons, which could suggest a change from evil to goodness or desolation to hope. The Big Sleep is a cornucopia of symbolisms that represent loneliness and sorrow, chivalry, honesty, and integrity, and duality of personality.

One of the major symbols used in the novel is the use of changing weather in the story, which is a representation of human emotions as depicted by the characters. For instance, as Chandler mentioned in the first few sentences in the novel, the sun was not shining, instead, there was the presence of a "look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills" (3). At first glance, sunshine or rain does not present any significance at all as it could be perceived only as part of the setting. However, considering that the primary setting of the story is in Southern California where rain is not a normal happenstance, then more than providing a backdrop for the book, the

changing weather conditions represent the shifting of emotions and the impending incidence of evil or good. Rain could also signify darkness, misery, sadness, depression, or frustration. On the other hand, it could also symbolize a form of rebirth and cleansing as symbolically, it could mean washing away of loneliness and sorrow.

Another symbolism that constantly appears in the book is the knight as shown in the stained glass window (4). Appearing at the beginning of the story while at the house of the Sternwoods, Marlowe sees the stained glass window and cannot help but empathize with the knight, which he perceived as himself rescuing a lady in distress. A knight signifies defense or protection, which Marlowe does in the book as he tries to protect one of the Sternwood daughters, Carmen, from aggressors. His chivalrous stance, that is, protecting Carmen from captors, is what qualifies Marlowe as Carmen's knight in dark armor. The irony of this knight connection is how, instead of using a shining armor which is typical of knights, the stained glass window featured a dark armor for the knight. This representation goes against Marlowe's character considering that he is considered honest and a man of integrity. As he becomes embroiled in the Sternwood family drama, his role as a knight does not change as he continues to rescue Carmen from evil. But his character somehow changes as he deviates from his characterization of an honest and man of integrity individual. Therefore, the knight using a dark armor could represent that although Marlowe was able to solve the problem, in the end, he still kept some important details from authorities.

Another symbolism for the knight occurred when Marlowe was confronted by a naked Carmen in his room. Following his characterization of honesty and

integrity, he opted not to sleep with Carmen and asked her to get dressed and leave his room. He initially moved the knight in the chessboard, but realized that whatever situation he is in at the moment, it was not a place for a man like him. In a society where people such as the Sternwoods mingle, Marlowe can easily lose himself if he is not a high-principled man. Being surrounded by people whose lives center around power and money, one can easily lose himself in the system. With this realization, he moved the knight back to its original place, which means his resolve not to take advantage of Carmen and how out of place he is in a society that the Sternwoods interact. Finally, there are also the orchids housed inside the greenhouse. While orchids are commonly considered rare and beautiful, the story recognizes the duality of purpose of the orchids. Despite its beauty, in *The Big Sleep*, orchids emit a foul odor representing the duality in nature of the setting, which is LA. Although it looks alive and fun considering the lavishness in the city, it is also a place where murder and corruption thrive. Marlowe then recognizes how different he is from others considering his powerlessness to fit in a society that emulates greed and corruption. The greenhouse, on the other hand, represents the whole of LA, which serves as the umbrella for all the sordid activities and occurrences that the Sternwoods and their type live in.

Works Cited

Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. New York: Vintage Books, 1939. Print.