

On Ross Macdonald
Robert S. Griffin
www.robertsgriffin.com

I'd read here, there, and everywhere about what a world class writer Ross Macdonald (1915-1983) was. From a *New York Times* critique: "He brought the tragic drama of Freud and psychology of Sophocles to detective stories, and his prose flashed with poetic imagery." Among his tons of admirers were Nathaniel West, Joan Didion, James Elroy, Eudora Welty, Reynolds Price, and Iris Murdoch. The renowned screenwriter William Goldman called his Lew Archer books "the finest series of detective novels ever written by an American.

I had never read anything by Macdonald and picked *The Chill*, published in 1964, which is ranked high on the "Macdonald's best" lists. "A detective novel of nerve-racking suspense, desperately believable characters, and one of the most intricate plots ever spun by an American crime writer." I had myself primed for a treat.

What a letdown! One pedestrian conversation followed by another and another and another and another and another and another and another. Nothing insightful or literary. Contrived, arbitrary. A modest confection at best, and to me snooze-inducing. I hung on until the end for the big finish I had been promised by the blurbs and reviewers, which turned out to be a such a stretch I went "Who cares?"

When I finished the book, I wasn't interested in what went on in the book—certainly not that—but rather in what was going on, and still is, with the people of stellar reputation who puff up Macdonald to the heights, and with me; am I that far of it that I'm missing Macdonald's greatness?

