John Paul Athanasourelis’s *Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe: The Hard-Boiled Detective Transformed* examines Chandler’s detective with relation to his place in the hard-boiled literary tradition. Athanasourelis correctly observes that critics often categorize hard-boiled detectives as a largely homogenous group who, following in the wake of frontier heroes of nineteenth-century popular fiction, are twentieth-century urban manifestations of American Rugged Individualism. He convincingly argues that Chandler’s detective is constructed along different lines—less an avenger than a negotiator, less a character that stands Byronically aloof from a debased society and more one that engages that compromised society’s activities, hoping to productively negotiate its tensions. Athanasourelis does this under the template of John Dewey’s notion of individualism and its shift from nineteenth-century rugged individualism to a more socially engaged twentieth-century cooperative or liberal individualism.

*Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe* traces the origins and development of the hard-boiled detective nicely, though along traditional lines, from the works of Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett to those of Chandler, Mickey Spillane, and Ross Macdonald. The book’s main contribution lies in separating Chandler’s work from that of others by noting his aversion to employing the redemptive violence commonplace in the genre and in outlining Marlowe’s role not as a righteous avenger but rather as a negotiator, one who is willing to acknowledge flaws in himself and tolerate them in others. Where Daly’s Race Williams, Hammett’s Continental Op, and Spillane’s Mike Hammer sadistically slaughter criminals to whom they feel morally superior, Marlowe is more likely to view them as part of a complex social fabric and come to terms with them. Athanasourelis notes that, where the body count is often high in much of hard-boiled fiction, Marlowe only kills one person in the seven novels in which he appears.

The character of Marlowe is certainly a fertile topic for exploration. His popularity has made his name (with Hammett’s Sam Spade) a generic term for all hard-boiled private detectives, one that has had numerous manifestations in fiction, film, radio, television, and graphic novels over the past seventy-five years. He has been widely imitated and frequently parodied. The character’s cultural circulation is so extensive that people who have never read Chandler’s novels often categorize all hard-boiled detectives as “like Marlowe.” Furthermore, popular writers have written new works featuring Marlowe in what they consider Chandler’s mode. Robert P. Parker expanded a fragment left at Chandler’s death into *Poodle Springs* (1989) and, later, wrote *Perchance to Dream* (1991) as a sequel to Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*. In *Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe* (1990), twenty-three popular writers contributed a “new” Marlowe story.

The book does a nice job in underscoring the errors in the “one size fits all” depictions of hard-boiled detectives but, in differentiating Marlowe from such characters, implies that “one size fits all” applies to most other detectives in the genre, which is not the case. The book also does not explore related and influential components of the genre, such as hard-boiled writers who do not specialize in a popular detective, like James M. Cain or Cornell Woolrich, women hard-boiled writers like Patricia Highsmith, or those of color like Chester Himes and Walter Mosley, or account for cultural changes in the genre over time. Although the genre remains robust, Athanasourelis’s survey largely ends with Ross Macdonald in the 1970s.

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Even within its main area of focus, American hard-boiled detective fiction from the 1920s to the 1960s, Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe could benefit from a greater sophistication of its analytical bases. While it can be argued that the Continental Op and Mike Hammer are rugged individualists, they are very different characters who inhabit very different social environments. The Op is a company man who works for and is largely loyal to the powerful Continental Detective Agency’s San Francisco office; Hammer works defiantly alone. The Op often works hand in hand with the police; Hammer seldom does. The 1920s US world of wildcat capitalism and private armies that appears in the Op stories and novels is very different from the Cold War paranoid and misogynistic world of Hammer.

The book outlines a few contexts for the character of Marlowe but they are thin. Athanasourelis depends primarily on overly extensive plot summary and character description to support his observations, often developing them within too narrow a context. Some of his comments on the social implications of the hard-boiled tradition impinge on areas that have been richly developed in Marxist-influenced criticism, but when he briefly mentions such criticism by critics like Ernest Mendel and Frederic Jameson, it is largely to disparage it. He dismisses the “negative” Frederic Jameson criticism in favor of the “positive” liberal humanism of John Dewey.

Athanasourelis repeatedly tries to force his observations about Marlowe into illustrations of Dewey’s notions of individualism, even at one point describing Marlowe as a “teacher” of social integration. This is not an illegitimate line of inquiry, but simply too limiting and reductive for an entire book. Even if one cares little for Marxist analysis, there are many other areas in which the character of Marlowe can be fruitfully explored: the book says little about Chandler’s style, about his depiction of Los Angeles as a cultural environment, about his construction of modern masculinity, about the social causes and manifestations of crime, about the place of hard-boiled fiction within that of literary Modernism, particularly urban dystopian writings, or about transformations in these things over the past century. In discussing the origins of hard-boiled fiction, the book deals with a few of the canonical authors but says little about the scores of others who published widely in the “pulp” magazines like Black Mask, Detective Fiction Weekly, and Dime Detective.

Many of the book’s areas devoted to extensive plot summary could be replaced by a more broad-based development of literary and cultural issues. In addition, Athanasourelis speaks of the character of Marlowe, who appears in seven novels over nearly twenty years, as if he remained an unchanged essence, which is not the case. Chandler’s depiction of Marlowe altered considerably from 1939 to the late 1950s.

Although his book could benefit from a strong editorial hand, Athanasourelis makes some useful observations, shows a genuine enthusiasm for Chandler’s work, and should be applauded for engaging it.

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The edition quantities for Elizabeth Singer Rowe’s epistolary fictions offered in Paula Backsieder’s study are striking. Rowe’s Letters (1734), which added the Studies in the Novel, volume 45, number 2 (Summer 2013).