

Chicago Dreaming: Midwesterners and the City, 1871–1919. By *Timothy B. Spears*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. xxiii + 322 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. Cloth, \$50.00; paper, \$20.00. ISBN: cloth, 0-226-76873-2; paper, 0-226-76874-0.

Reviewed by Timothy J. Gilfoyle

Chicago conjures up many images: “the Second City,” “the Windy City,” “city on the make” (Nelson Algren), “the City of the Century,” “the City in a Garden,” “the shock city of nineteenth-century America,” “the gargantuan abattoir by Lake Michigan” (H. L. Mencken), and, the one most often cited, Carl Sandburg’s “the city of big shoulders.” All these representations speak to a metropolis defined by aggression, growth, industry, energy, and, frequently, violence. And they extend far beyond Chicago. “There is a Chicago that lives in the minds of young people all through the Middle West,” wrote novelist Floyd Dell in 1913, “a Chicago that exists by virtue of their aspiration and their need, and that begins to die with their first sight of the town” (p. xiii).

Timothy Spears successfully challenges the pervasive “big shoulders” leitmotif that resonates through most of the literature on Chicago. For Spears, Chicago possesses a divided consciousness. On one side is the vainglorious, devil-may-care metropolis of chaos and disorder; on the other is the city of small-town, midwestern provincials. The former is a fixture, if not a stereotype, in studies of Chicago. The latter, until *Chicago Dreaming*, has remained virtually unexplored.

Spears contends that Chicago’s social and literary cultures were shaped by a largely unrecognized rural migration. Urban reformers like Jane Addams (of Cedarville, Illinois), robber barons like John Glessner (of Springfield, Ohio), and writers such as George Ade (of Kentland, Indiana) epitomized Chicago’s evolution into a cosmopolitan political, economic, and literary center. Yet, however sophisticated and “modern” were their contributions, few shed their rural roots. Reformers like Addams sought to replicate rural villages in the city, exemplified by the promotion of summer camps, their fears of saloons and sex (such as “white slavery”), and their emphasis on play. Novelists, beginning with Hamlin Garland’s *Rose of Dutcher’s Coolly* (1895), not only treated the transition and migration to the city as the defining element of American literary realism;

they also believed that hinterland provincials migrating to Chicago counted most (p. 62). Some, like Henry Blake Fuller, openly lamented the lack of cosmopolitanism among Chicago residents. Chicago experienced an urban migration, concluded Fuller, but failed to produce a sophisticated urban culture, with the result that Chicago was just a country town grown big (p. 66).

Spears convincingly argues that rural people and provincial thinking were paradoxical but critical elements in the creation of the multiethnic metropolis. Just as European immigrants established their own social institutions, benevolent societies, and religious traditions, hinterland migrants did the same. Writers like George Ade emphasized the tensions of internal migration, introducing a public discourse showing how regional connections shaped Chicago's cultural hierarchy. For Ade, Chicago's urban order was marked by the persistence of small-town perspectives (p. 96). More specifically, institutions like the Indiana Society of Chicago (founded by Ade and cartoonist John McCutcheon) illustrated how nostalgia was a marker of urbanity: in order to become a Chicagoan, one also had to become a Hoosier (pp. 76–77). Such organizations simultaneously extolled the past and surveyed the future (p. 122). Hinterland culture was thus the seedbed for ethnic pluralism and pragmatic thinking (p. 165).

Numerous migration narratives of the 1880s and early 1900s suggested that midwestern literature evolved out of the movement of creative energies from the hinterland to Chicago. Modernism emerged out of emotions associated with crossing or transgressing the border of one culture to reach another. Often this passage was from rural to urban. Some, like Edgar Lee Masters, complained about “the village mind which curses Chicago in every department of life.” More common, however, were novels like Floyd Dell's *Moon-Calf* and *The Briary-Bush*, or Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg*, which recognized that the hinterland was a reflection of urban emotional life. Spears strengthens his argument by showing how less well-known works—Will Payne's *The Story of Eva* (1901), George Barr McCutcheon's *The Sherrods* (1903), and Brand Whitlock's *The Happy Average* (1904)—were influenced by and centered their narratives in the romance of urban–hinterland migration.

The achievement of *Chicago Dreaming* is twofold. First, Spears skillfully integrates social and cultural history. At one point, the author demonstrates how migration imagery transcended literary and intellectual genres in ways seldom recognized in previous scholarship. For example, the University of Chicago's Robert Park, one of the founders of urban sociology in the early twentieth century, deployed many of the naturalistic images found in Garland's *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* or Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* to describe migration.

Second, Spears presents a new, more complicated vision of Chicago. Chicagoans' interior worlds—their dreams—were full of paradox and juxtaposition: provincial and cosmopolitan, immigrant and native-born, rural pioneers and urban multiethnics. In ways little acknowledged in previous examinations of Chicago literature, Spears convincingly maintains that numerous novels often tried to balance the artistic and economic potential of Chicago against the equally strong desire to uphold rural values (p. 136). As a frenetic, chaotic, expanding urban community, Chicago was shaped by not just material conditions but also by memory, nostalgia, and emotions. For native-born urbanites, progress meant looking backward.

*Timothy J. Gilfoyle is professor of history at Loyola University Chicago. He is the author of A Pickpocket's Tale: The Underworld of Nineteenth-Century New York (2006), Millennium Park: Creating a Chicago Landmark (2006), and City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920 (1992).*