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Andreas Hübner

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- 1 Michelle E. Moore, *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism. Cather, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald in Conflict*
- 2 London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. Pp. 247. ISBN: 9781350018037
- 3 Andreas Hübner, Leuphana University Lüneburg
- 4 American modernist writers are rarely associated with turn-of-the-century Chicago and its literary scene. In the decades after the Great Fire of 1871, the city built a profit-centered reputation modernist writers were typically trying to resist. In Chicago, patronage and commercial boosterism lingered alongside evangelicalism and provincialism, even as city leaders envisioned a “higher life”: a spiritual, physical, and artistic evolution of Chicago. Art and literary projects were to showcase the city’s cultural progress; museums, symphonies, and operas to improve the city’s status. In this atmosphere, literary realism began to flourish in Chicago, thrived during the days of the World’s Columbian Exhibition of 1893, and continued to reign thereafter, with writers such as Theodore Dreiser and Henry Blake Fuller at the forefront.
- 5 Unsurprisingly then, in the field of American Studies, most scholars have focused on Chicago’s urban realism. Among others, Carl Smith, Ronald Weber, Carla Cappetti, and Lisa Woolley have explored the multifaceted ways of Chicago’s literary productions and literary complexities.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the path-marking works of authors Hamlin Garland, Robert Herrick and other protagonists of the so-called “Midland realism,” Carlo Rotella once suggested the study of a *long* “Chicago Literary Renaissance” that considers Chicago literature from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> With *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism*, Michelle E. Moore now adds to this scholarship and discusses “how American writers had to think about Chicago, its literature and its

industry, in order to construct a new American modernism that speaks to the new European avant-garde while remembering the recent struggles of establishing an American literature apart from Europe” (5). Modernist writers like Willa Cather, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and F. Scott Fitzgerald stood in conflict with the Chicago literary scene and the literary urban realism well-rooted in the city. Moore acknowledges this fact and means to understand “how Chicago and the idea of Chicago influenced, for better and for worse, American literary modernism” (9).

- 6 *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism* is divided into two parts, “The Fire, The Columbian Exhibition, and The Boosters” and “Making Modernism Out of Chicago.” Each part assesses a group of writers more or less closely connected with Chicago and its literary scene. In Part One, Moore addresses the writings and actions of Henry Blake Fuller, Harriet Monroe, Edgar Lee Masters, and Sherwood Anderson. Fuller, a “Midland realism” protégé, who spent his life in Chicago, showcases Moore’s line of argumentation: On the one hand, the city elite regarded Fuller’s works as “exactly the right kind of art to promote” (16), on the other hand his writings stood at the beginning of a radical critique of the Windy (16ff). The analysis of Fuller’s life and works also sheds light on the networks of Chicago-based writers: Moore digs deeply into the literary and personal connections that lie amid the city’s salons and magazines. Fuller, Monroe, Masters, and Anderson were well-connected in the city. They joined meetings of literary and social societies and founded civic art organizations like the Little Room, the Cordon Club, or the Cliff-Dweller’s Club, and they published with locally produced but nationally acclaimed periodicals such as *Poetry*, the *Little Review*, and the *Dial*, to mention but a few. Moreover, examining the case of Harriet Monroe, Moore successfully delineates the role of women in the Chicago literary scene—be it as writers, editors, reviewers, or political activists.
- 7 Part Two is dedicated to the Chicago legacy of Cather, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald. Hemingway seems an easy to understand choice. Although his years in Chicago are often overlooked, Hemingway is well-described as a character who had internalized the Chicago idea of being a “good businessman” (99), while he sought to earn a reputation as a serious modernist. Cather, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald are less associated with the city. Moore includes this prominent group of American modernist writers into her study, claiming their works reflect on Chicago’s peculiar business and artistic environment. Cather’s *The Song of Lark*, she argues, can be read as a well-informed reference to Henry Blake Fuller’s novel *The Cliff-Dwellers* (76f) and, more generally, as a “subtle yet biting” critique of the Chicago literary scene (93). Faulkner, who never set foot in Chicago, is quoted calling Chicago artists “puppets” who, as Moore points out, “with few exceptions, leave Chicago and then write endlessly about the city from other places” (134). Stressing Faulkner’s relationship with Sherwood Anderson, Moore examines allusions to Chicago in *Mosquitos*, *Sanctuary*, *The Wild Palms* and in an unpublished introduction of *The Sound and the Fury*. Each of these novels, she notes, reveal Faulkner’s aesthetic opposition to Chicago’s (literary) capitalism (148). The same, of course, can be said for Fitzgerald. Turning to his short stories and novels, Moore surveys the variety of Chicagoan characters in Fitzgerald’s works and demonstrates how the New York-based writer dissects the connections between money, love, art, and business in Chicago. In Fitzgerald’s oeuvre, Moore concludes, “the habits, fashions, and ideologies of the very rich Chicago families have had a destructive impact

on Americans, because their ideologies became the ideologies of the intellectual elite [...]” (167).

- 8 It is both its strength and weakness that each chapter of *Chicago and the Making of American Modernism* may well be read (and treated) as if constituting a single case study. The individual chapters provide an in-depth analysis of Chicago’s literary networks and the editing and publishing processes at work in the city. Moore offers thought-provoking readings and pursues different modes of literary criticism. She convincingly shows that, in their relation to Chicago, writers like Fuller, Monroe, Cather, and Hemingway were balancing the ambivalence of wanting to sell books and becoming distinguished and intellectually respected writers. However, Moore’s analysis is at times limited. Her assumptions are restricted to Chicago. For instance, she repeatedly reduces American modernism to a critique of Chicago-style patronage, boosterism, and literary commodification. Unlike other recent works, Moore does not employ interdisciplinary and transatlantic approaches to place the Chicago establishment within the larger framework of modernism and the European avant-garde.<sup>3</sup> Also, Moore does not offer a conclusion and thus misses the chance to add some conceptual coherence and precision to her argument. This criticism aside, Moore has produced a thoroughly researched and eloquently written monograph that traces the influences of Chicago on American modernist writers and invites future studies to leave the beaten track and to venture into new ways of researching literary modernism in the Midwest.

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## NOTES

1. Cf. Carla Cappetti, *Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel* (Columbia University Press, 1993), Carl S. Smith, *Chicago and the American Literary Imagination, 1880–1920* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), Ronald Weber, *The Midwestern Ascendancy in American Writing* (Indiana University Press, 1992), and Lisa Woolley, *American Voices of the Chicago Renaissance* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2000).

2. Cf. Carlo Rotella, “Chicago Literary Renaissance,” in *The Encyclopedia of Chicago*, ed. James R. Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, and Janice L. Reiff (University of Chicago Press, 2004): 143–144.

3. Cf. Liesl Olson, *Chicago Renaissance: Literature and Art in the Midwest Metropolis* (Yale University Press, 2017).