



## Chicago: A Novel of Prohibition

*David Mamet*

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## **Chicago: A Novel of Prohibition** David Mamet

Mike Hodge-veteran of the Great War, big shot of the Chicago Tribune medium fry-probably shouldn't have fallen in love with Annie Walsh. But then maybe the guys who killed Annie Walsh shouldn't have messed with Mike Hodge... In Chicago, David Mamet has created a bracing, kaleidoscopic page-turner that roars through the Windy City's underground on its way to a thunderclap of a conclusion. Here is not only his first novel in more than two decades, but the book he has been building up to for his whole career. Mixing some of his most brilliant fictional creations with actual figures of the era (among them Al Capone), suffused with trademark "Mamet Speak," richness of voice, pace and brio, and exploring--as no writer can--questions of honor, deceit, revenge and devotion, Chicago is that rarest of literary creations: a book that combines spectacular elegance of craft with a kinetic wallop as fierce as the February wind gusting off Lake Michigan.

## **Chicago: A Novel of Prohibition Details**

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Author : David Mamet

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## From Reader Review Chicago: A Novel of Prohibition for online ebook

### Michael says

My review for this book was published in the Feb. 1, 2018, edition of *Library Journal*:

In his first novel in more than two decades, legendary playwright Mamet (*Glengarry Glen Ross*) picks up where his Oscar-nominated screenplay for *The Untouchables* left off, with a panoramic portrait of the Chicago underworld during Prohibition. Mike Hodge, veteran of the Great War, is a 30-year-old newspaperman at the Tribune, working with his partner Parlow to find out who murdered mobbed-up restaurateur Jackie Weiss and courting the sweet Irish lass at the local floral shop, Annie Walsh. But when his beloved is killed in a post-coital ambush, Mike has more reason than professional curiosity to uncover the truth. The story is fast-paced and violent but often difficult to latch onto because of Mamet's infamously dense and jagged dialogue, which is on ample display throughout. Like the late novelist George V. Higgins, Mamet prefers to let his characters tell the story with a minimum of omniscient narration, trusting the reader to work out the plot through the lies and banter. **VERDICT** A hard-edged, though elusive return to form from the Pulitzer Prize winner.

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### Anthony Crupi says

"You're saying what, you're saying *this Mamet, his dialogue*, you're saying *Chicago*, you're saying *fuckin' A right and rat-a-tat-tat*, Al Capone, all that Tommy Gun period frippery. And I'm now saying I don't want to be an absolute ingrate, one of them assholes who use this, this forum as a means to turn sweetmeats into ground fuckin' *glass*, I mean, who needs it? Right? But this, and I'm sorry, but I cannot brush this off, this book, this *dreck* I gotta drop \$26.99 to read this, this nowhere Hardy Boys grift? That I do not countenance, no, and I say it plain: You want to spend that kind of scratch on an *exercise*, some fuckin' ventriloquism shit, may as well get "GULL" inked into your forehead. You stooge. You dupe. You chump. All I'm saying is, some asshole—and they got all kinds in publishing, believe you me—I'm of the opinion that some asshole, *somebody* owes me my \$26.99. Somebody owes me my two hours of *time* I spent with this, this gangland puppet show. Because I want to tell you something now. A guy goes around, he hears a lot of shit—a LOT of shit, pal, a *lot* of it, a surfeit—but there's, what, there's period pieces and then there's *this*, and there is no nutritive value to any of this. Is what it comes down to. [pause] I'm telling you, do what you gotta do, but I'm you, I steer clear of this one. Not that it's any of my business. [pause] I could use some eggs. Some fuckin' *waffles*. ... I don't know anymore."

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### Faith says

This was not what I was expecting. There was a tremendous amount of dialogue but no action. More about newspapers than gangsters, at least in the part of the book that I managed to read. I also got no feel of the period from this book. Abandoned.

## Joe Kraus says

This has to start with the dialogue, with the things these characters say and write. After all, it's Mamet, and no one has a better ear for making music out of the hunger to sound tough.

Consider, for instance, the way our journalist-protagonist Mike Hodge puts it in one news story, "Jackie Weiss had died of a broken heart, it being broken by several slugs from a .45." Yeah, that's funny, and yeah, it's in bad taste. But that just makes it funnier.

At one level – the level of the blurb on the back – this is a story of Hodge looking to get revenge on the gangsters who kill his girlfriend. [SPOILER] And that level works well enough as tight noir: her murder is parallel to but ultimately separate from a Syndicate consolidation around the murders of a pair of Jewish gangsters – Jackie Weiss and Morris Teitelbaum – but it turns out to be tied even more tightly to an IRA plot to steal tommy guns for its rebellion. Hodge goes from potential source to potential source, learning things he doesn't want to know and getting slowly closer to figuring out whom he ought to try to kill himself.

Most of this book turns out to be conversation, though – from Hodges's extended philosophical and artistic disputes with his friend and colleague Parlow, to his seeking information from his wise African-American madame friend Peekaboo, or his encounters with one after another underworld character who might be able to help him. In the hands of a lesser writer, it would get boring quickly, and the eventual resolution wouldn't carry much weight. In Mamet's hands, though, we get gems like these:

+ The first phrase he'd heard, in basic training, was that those looking for sympathy could find it in a dictionary, between "shit" and "syphilis."

+ Peekaboo explains why a cheating husband should go to exceptional lengths to pretend innocence to his wife. "She knows the truth. She needs to be assured her husband is observing the proprieties."

+ A friend observes to Ruth, moll to one of the murdered Jewish gangsters, that knowledge is power. Ruth answers, "Power is power. People say differently don't understand power. Or knowledge. Knowledge is what gets you killed."

+ A tough old detective type tells Hodge that the Chinese invented gunpowder "to foil the evil spirits." "The question is, then" Mike said, "what is evil?" "Well, that is decided," Doyle said, "by the fellow holding the gun."

+ In the wake of Annie's murder, Hodge descends into serious alcoholism. "He comprehended perfectly the concept that time would heal grief, but had lost all understanding of 'time.'"

+ Parlow tries at one point to rally him. "You were humbled by your love, you were humbled by her slim white body, you are humbled by death, but real humility is nothing to be proud of. And you, full stop, stink."

+ When he returns to The Tribune and hands in a sob-sister type story, his editor responds with, "You either go out and drink less, or drink more. Something. But don't break my heart come in here with this fucking valentine to your long-lost talent. Because someone at Hull House may care, but I've got to write a newspaper."

+ Or the same editor later in his rant, "I don't understand writer's block. I'm sure it's very high toned and

thrilling, like these other psychological complaints. I, myself, could never afford it. As I had a Sainted Mother at home who, without my wages, would have been hard put to drink herself to death. Further: I think, if one can afford it, but one has nothing to say, one should not write. This is not writer's block but common courtesy."

+ Or, as a kicker, "Like most men who think they understand men," Mike thought, "this man only understands fools."

That's a lot of top-shelf quotes, but I've restrained myself from others. As I say, it's the dialogue – the particular Mamet poetry – that makes this go.

I can see the appeal of Prohibition Chicago for Mamet – who's celebrated the sleaze of the city going back over the most recent half-century in works that stand among the best plays of our era. In many ways Chicago toughness came to a head in Capone's city – a point Mamet helped to cement in contemporary readers' imagination with his writing the screenplay for Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*.

In that regard, the tone here is just right. This is a way of looking back at the events of the 1920s with the sharper-edged language of today to shine light into corners the real journalists of the time allowed to remain dark. As such, this is solid historical fiction, work that gives you a fresh sense of the era, a book that makes you think your grandparents may not have been as sweet as they seemed when your parents bundled you up to see them in their retirement homes.

I feel a bit compelled to point out that this is not particularly good history. Dean O'Banion is somehow still alive after the St. Valentine's Day Massacre. And Nails Morton, long dead, would not have had the sort of residual gang that turns out to be responsible for blackmailing out IRA partisans.

I'll acknowledge those points as the bugaboos of my work as a gangster historian, though. I won't let those cultivated inaccuracies or the sometimes winding plot stand in the way of the general excellence of the prose here.

Mamet knows his way around a typewriter like few people, and it's great to see him taking on the tommy gun era – with the tommy gun famously called a "Chicago typewriter" – in a way that makes it fresh and makes it sing. This may not be his best work, but even second-tier Mamet is worth celebrating.

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## **Brenda says**

I thought, from the title, this book would be more about prohibition than it was. It was more of a gangster/murder story. I had a hard time following this book. Seemed jumpy and choppy at times. I could not finish it. Sorry! Thanks to Goodreads and publisher for an Advanced Reader Copy. I gave it a good shot, but I just could not get into this book.

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## **Josh says**

This book was disappointing. Don't be fooled by the title and synopsis; Chicago, has little to do with gangsters in the windy city during the prohibition era, rather, author David Mamet focuses his slow moving

and oftentimes sleep-inducing plot on a former WWI pilot, now journalist, Mike, who pines for an attractive florist only to lose her in a hail of bullets.

Dialogue heavy, the audiobook was hard to follow at times; there are a number of bit players who pop up and then disappear, adding nothing but confusion and contributing to the boredom.

My rating: 2/5. The pieces were there but the puzzle just didn't come together. I liked the sudden impact of the murder of Annie Walsh, Mike's love interest and the thin connections to organised crime but didn't enjoy the journalistic focus and tedious pace.

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### Γεώργιος Κατσοφλάς says

Το αστυνομικό δράμα μυθιστορήμα του Ντιβιντ Μάμετ και δυστυχώς θεατρικών καταβολών παρουσιάζεται σήμερα στο μπλογκ

<https://georgekatsoulas.blogspot.com/...>

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### Joseph Carano says

I won an advance reader's copy of this novel on the Goodreads site. The title of this novel was a bit misleading in that it had more to do with newspaper reporting than it had to do with prohibition. The characters were interesting and original and the plot was engrossing. The problem I had with the novel was the vocabulary. I am not an extremely educated man and do not enjoy having to look up a word or two on every page in the dictionary. I realize this is the style of prose Mr. Mamet uses and looking at his success, it definitely works for him. However, speaking for myself, it seemed to take away from the story. In my humble opinion, simple is better and that cost David Mamet my 5 star rating.

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### Ron Charles says

David Mamet's "Chicago" is featured on the latest episode of the Totally Hip Video Book Review: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/...>

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### George K. says

Η βαθμολογία του βιβλίου στο Goodreads είναι απίστευτα χαμηλή, με λίγες εκατοντάδες αξιολογήσεις. Το βιβλίο το έχω σταμπάρει πριν καν κυκλοφορήσει στο εξωτερικό, ήταν μάθα τι θα το βάλουμε στα ελληνικά, τότε που δεν υπήρχαν ακόμα κριτικές. Μάχρη να κυκλοφορήσει στη χώρα μας όμως (πριν λίγες μέρες δηλαδή), στο μεταξύ κυκλοφόρησε στο εξωτερικό, και δεν ήρghσαν οι αναγνώστες να αρχίσουν να το αξιολογούν. Η απίστευτη βαθμολογία

του δεν κατ'εφερε να μου αλλ'ξεί την απ'φάση να αγοράσω και να διαβ'σω ?μεσα το βιβλ'ο. Αντ'θετα, θα ?λεγα ?τι μου κ'νησε ακ'μα πιο πολ' το ενδιαφ'ρον - ?θελα να δω γιατ' τ'σες μ'τριες κριτικ'ς.

Αν μη τι ?λλο, πρ'κειται για ?να ιδι'ρρυθμο νου?ρ μυθιστ'ρημα. Η πλοκ' γενικ' ε?ναι μ?λλον αδ'ναμη και δεν προσφ'ρει πρωτοτυπ'ες, αν και οφε?λω να παραδεχτ' ?τι κατ'εφερε να μου κρατ'σει το ενδιαφ'ρον απ' την αρχ' μ'χρι το τ'λος. Πως κι ?τσι; Θα ?λεγα χ'ρη στους τρελο?ς διαλ'γους, που ε?ναι στοιχε'ο που χαρακτηρ'ζει ?σο τ'ποτε ?λλο τη γραφ' και τον τρ'πο σκ'ψης του Ντ'ιβιντ Μ'μετ (?λλωστε υπ'ρχει και ο ?ρος "Mamet Speak"), ?πως επ'σης χ'ρη στην ?λη φοβερ' ατμ'σφαιρα του Σικ'γου της δεκαετ'ας του '20 και την κυνικ' ματι' του συγγραφ'α. Ο Μ'μετ ξεφε?γει σε δι'φορα σημει'α της πλοκ'ς, αλλ' και με κ'ποιους διαλ'γους του. Μ?λιστα, σε ορισμ'να σημει'α μπορε? να πει κανε'ς ?τι χ'νεται και λ'γο η μπ'λα (ειδικ' στην αρχ'). Αλλ', να π'ρει η ευχ' να π'ρει, αυτ' ε?ναι και η μαγε'α του. Οι ολοζ'ντανοι δι'λογοι, ο ?ντονος κυνισμ'ς του, η μα'ρη α'σθηση του χιο?μορ, οι χαρακτ'ρες που μερικ'ς φορ'ς δεν μιλ'νε σαν κανονικ' ?νθρωποι αλλ' ?χει πλ'κα να τους "ακο'ς", οι λιτ'ς αλλ' γραφικ'ς περιγραφ'ς του, ο ?λος τρ'πος γραφ'ς του...

Γενικ', δηλ'νω ικανοποιημ'νος. Το "Οικ'πεδα με θ'α" με ξετρ'λανε, το "Αμερικ'νικος βο?βαλος" με κο?ρασε λιγ'κι, εδ' μπορ' να πω ?τι αν μη τι ?λλο π'ρασα ωρα'α. Πραγματικ' καταλαβα'νω ?σους δι'βασαν το βιβλ'ο και δεν τους ?ρεσε, μιας και ε?ναι ιδι'ρρυθμα γραμμ'νο, εν? και η πλοκ' αυτ' καθ'αυτ' δεν λ'ει και πολλ' πρ'γματα. Ας πο?με, αν επιθυμε?τε να διαβ'σετε ?να αστυνομικ' νου?ρ με σφιχτοδεμ'νη πλοκ' και καλ' σκιαγραφημ'νους χαρακτ'ρες, καλ'τερα να διαβ'σετε ?να ?λλο βιβλ'ο (π.χ. του Τζ'ιμς Ελρ'ι). ?μως, αν θ'λετε κ'τι με ιδια'τερο στιλ, με ευρηματικ'ς διαλ'γους και με μια ενδιαφ'ρουσα ματι' στον κ'σμο της Αμερικ'νικης δημοσιογραφ'ας και τον κ'σμο του οργανωμ'νου εγκλ'ματος στο Σικ'γο της δεκαετ'ας του '20, τ'τε το βιβλ'ο αυτ' ε?ναι μια καλ' επιλογ'. Μπορε? στην αρχ' παραλ'γο να με "χ'σει", μετ' ?μως το συν?θισα και μπορ' να πω ?τι ?ρχισα να γουστ'ρω κι?λας! Οπ'τε... τ'σσερα αστερ'κια!

## Dave says

Mamet's latest work takes us back to Chicago during post-WWI prohibition. Mamet is primarily a playwright by profession and this work is all about capturing the authentic voices of newspapermen, gangsters, madams, and policemen. The focus, like in an Elmore Leonard novel, is on dialogue. You feel that you are in the next booth listening to a couple of guys shoot the bull or in the parlor overhearing conversations. What comes out of their mouths is not necessarily telling a story in order, but filled with jokes, good natured ribbing, raw language, and reminisces. It might take a little bit to get into this novel as it is structured so differently than other novels, but it brings the characters to life.

At its heart is the story of Mike Hodge, newspaperman, his history fighting in France, his romance with the Irish girl who works in the flower shop, his long conversations with the local madam whose coarse way of putting things zeroes in on reality, his curiosity about local beefs and who got shot for not making the vig, and his coming to terms with some of life's lemons, what's real, and what matters.

Than you to Harper Collins for providing a copy for review.

## Scott Hitchcock says

1,5\*'s

I get he was going for Glengary Glen Ross meet Goodfellas but this felt so forced and fell so flat. The dialogue was choppy and the analogies mostly cheesy. In short a huge disappointment.

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## Emma says

This is a meandering tale about reporters, murders, and the mob. It wants to be a thriller but moves too slowly to generate suspense. The story is told primarily through dialogue between the main character, Mike, and his friend Parlow with little to no exposition.

If you don't mind your historical fiction with a heavy dose of what I can only call Literary Elements then perhaps *Chicago* is for you. As it is, I finished the story frustrated and wishing I'd just read a Raymond Chandler novel instead.

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## Corey says

It's gangsters. It's Mamet. What else do you wanna know?  
Review to come at [memphisflyer.com](http://memphisflyer.com)

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## TJ says

I did not finish this one. It was a frustrating read. It's very dialogue heavy, which would be fine, but the dialogue is awkward and unrealistic. It took far too long to glean some semblance of a story and by then I was just annoyed. I enjoy some of David Mamet's other work, but after a couple hours in on this one, I just was not enjoying it.

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