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Carl Sandburg as a Poet of Chicago and the Middle West

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CARL SANDBURG AS A POET OF CHICAGO AND THE MIDDLE WEST

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by

Howard R. Richardson

THESIS

It shall be my thesis to show that Carl Sandburg, as a poet of Chicago and the middle West, has made a vivid and picturesque word study of the immigrant, working class of people and of the industrial aspect which is responsible to and for these people.

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1932

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INTRODUCTION

"The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbour and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on." (1)

As well as I remember, this brief little gem first attracted my attention to Carl Sandburg. It was striking because it so clearly suggested the muffled grey silence which accompanies fog. From this beginning, I was led to read more of his poetry and thus came to feel that I could attempt to interpret him and his work.

After becoming more familiar with Carl Sandburg, one finds that he seems to be trying to interpret the industrial spirit of the West and to portray a cross section from the lives of the laborers. "As magazine and newspaper writer and editor in Milwaukee (1910-1912) Sandburg had ample opportunity to acquire the sympathy with the underlings of modern civilization and the knowledge of its ironic contrasts that distinguish his verse. His bludgeon-like phrases alternating with lovely, singing lines, his vivid etchings of the unbroken prairie and the fretted sky-lines of the industrial cities, together with unaffected humanitarianism, won him several prizes for his verse." (2) I have found that very little has been written on the subject of Carl Sandburg as a Poet of Chicago

(1) Sandburg: Fog
(2) Encyclopedia Britannica Page 935

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and the Middle West. Sandburg has written for the popular taste, and it is doubtful if his work will survive very long after the present age. I am not, however, engaged upon a critical treatise but shall try to find, in his work, Chicago, as he presented it.

Carl Sandburg, the man, is so much a real part of his poetry and writings that one should not overlook his life history when thinking of his work. Sandburg himself realized this fact.

"I saluted a nobody

I saw him in a looking-glass.

He smiled-so did I.

He crumpled the skin on his forehead,

frowning-so did I.

Everything I did he did.

I said, 'Hello, I know you.'

And I was a liar to say so.

Ah, this looking glass man!

Liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor,

Soldier, dusty drinker of dust.

Ah! he will go with me

Down the dark stairway

When nobody else is looking,

When everybody else is gone.

He locks his elbow in mine,

I lose all-but not him." (1)

(1) Carl Sandburg: Chicago Poet

In order to present a background for his work, we shall very briefly consider here the main facts in Sandburg's life. He was the son of a Swedish immigrant, who changed his surname from the prosaic Johnson to Sandburg to prevent his pay check from going to another man. Carl was born in Galesburg, Illinois, in the year 1878. His achievements in public school were meagre and indifferent. He went to work at the age of thirteen. In rapid succession he served as milk-wagon driver, barber-shop porter, scene-shifter in a local theatre, laborer in a brick kiln, laborer in the Kansas wheat fields, dishwasher in a Denver hotel, and painter's assistant in Galesburg. During the time he was engaged in the latter occupation, he joined the army and served with the first company to land in Cuba during the Spanish-American war. After the war, he made an unsuccessful attempt to enter West Point. Failing in this, he returned home and worked his way through Lombard college. He began his literary career at college by writing for the town paper and the college paper. Amy Lowell says of him at the time he left college: "He was a thinking man, with a brain charged with ideas and emotions, determined to do his part in bringing about the millenium. For Carl Sandburg, like so many poets, is a revolutionary: he must push the world to where he is convinced it ought to be." (1)

(1) Amy Lowell: Tendencies in American Poetry P-118

I do not think, however, that Sandburg is as anxious for changes in the world as he is anxious for readers to understand "his people".

Since leaving college, he has served the world as newspaper reporter, magazine writer, war correspondent, personal secretary to the Mayor of Milwaukee, special correspondent, and poet. He is now working on the staff of the Chicago Herald Tribune. When he goes on the stage to read his poetry, he appears more anxious to amuse than to edify. His work is rank free verse, and he does not try to force it on the public as poetry. His idea of poetry is to describe the world as it appears to him. (1) It seems that he is reluctant even to call his work poetry. In Chicago Poems he calls it "writings". In the collection entitled Cornhuskers he calls it "things."

Truly Carl Sandburg is a poet of our modern Middle West with an especial love for the clanging frenzies of commercial Chicago. He is deeply interested in the laborers, who inhabit the industrial and farming territory of greater Chicago and the Middle West.

Some writers have concerned themselves with showing an analogy between the works of Whitman, Sandburg, and Masters. (2) I have investigated this line of thought and found the analogy so feeble as to be uninteresting.

- (1) Sandburg: What is Poetry? (Article) Pictorial Rev. Je-'30
 (2) Walter Yust (Article) Bookman Jan. 1921

It is true that they bear a resemblance to each other in their style. I have concluded that the interest in the matter might well end by saying just that. To many people the words Chicago and Sandburg bring to mind similar thoughts. It is with this analogy that I shall be concerned.

"Through him, as largely as through any living man, the map of the Central States begins to have some of the cloudy, mysterious poetry, the immanent romance it had in the eighteen-twenties and thirties. The Continental Chart begins to show faintly colored spots. Names like Omaha and Medecine Hat and Kenosha, homely falt-ringing names, begin to sound a little softly, a little delicatdy, through him.....Sandburg has been feeling the beauty in the town of the middle border, where beauty never before was felt.....names of raw dun places start exquisite reverberations in his breast.....He apprehends the Western scene, not merely intellectually, but with his entire man. He has been born on the Prairie." (1)

This note of Mr. Rosenfiel's is very true in that it places Carl Sandburg as a writer from and of the Middle West. Sandburg's philosophy is western, but at the same time his thoughts are applicable to life anywhere. Charles H. Compton writes that he has found that people who call for Sandburg's work at the library, for the most part, have street addresses that parallel the street addresses of Sandburg's created characters. In the conclusion of his article he states that, "Sandburg, in his language,

(1) Paul Rosenfiel: Carl Sandburg Bookman June 1921

limits himself to the Middle West, but in his love for mankind he circles the globe." (1)

It is reported that Carl Sandburg was treated as an uncouth and unpardonable upstart in England until Miss Rebecca West collected a volume of his works. She prefaced this volume with a description of Chicago real enough to furnish for Sandburg a background which was clear to the English mind. (2)

Miss West says of him, in her preface, "He is the voice of this region. Just as Robert Burns expresses the whole life of the Lowlands of Scotland, so Carl Sandburg expresses the whole life of the Middle-West today." (3)

Sandburg came up from the ranks of this hard working people and has discovered the Middle-West of the twentieth century for the people of the twentieth century. He came at the dawn of the transition into a new era. He saw the West as it had appeared, and with this knowledge as a background, he could readily look forward to the new day and feel the impulse of growth. His life has peculiarly fitted him for such a task. However small or large his claim to poetic immortality may be, there is one thing for which he will be always noted. He will be remembered as having been a chronicler of the Middle-West and as having glorified its belching

- (1) C. H. Compton: Who Reads Carl Sandburg South Atlantic Monthly. 4-'29
 (2) Century Magazine: 9-'23
 (3) Rebecca West: Selected Poems of Carl Sandburg P-24

smokestacks, rumbling wheels, and husky laborers. When Sandburg studies Chicago and the West, he looks under the rubbish heaps, in red light districts, in unfrequented alleys, out on the great open swaying oceans of wheat, on the lake shore, in the skyscrapers, and everywhere he finds his people living. What he sees he tells, regardless of whether it reflects credit or dishonor upon his native home. He establishes himself and his mission in the little poem Horse Fiddler.

"First I would like to write for you a poem to be
shouted in the teeth of a strong wind.

Next I would like to write one for you to sit on a
hill and read down the river valley on a late
summer afternoon, reading it in less than a whisper
to Jack on his soft wire legs learning to stand
up and preach, Jack-in-the-pulpit.

As many poems as I have written to the moon and
the streaming of the moon spinners of light, so
many of the summer moon and the winter moon I
would like to shoot along to your ears for nothing,
for a laugh, a song,

for nothing at all,

for one look from you,

for your face turned away

and your voice in one clutch

half way between a tree wind moan

and a night-bird sob.

Believe nothing of it all, pay me nothing, open your
window for the other singers and keep it shut
for me.

The road I am on is a long road and I can go hungry
again like I have gone hungry before.

What else have I done nearly all my life than go
hungry and go on singing?

Leave me with the hoot owl.

I have slept in a blanket listening.

He learned it, he must have learned

From tow moons, the summer moon,

And the winter moon

And the streaming of the moon spinner of light." (1)

(1) Carl Sandburg: Horse Fiddler

Chicago: its laborers, its streets, its buildings,
and its commerce.

Should one be called upon to think of a place which epitomizes the Middle West, he would think of Chicago. Chicago is somewhat a mystery city to the world. In a general way it is known as the metropolis of the Middle West. It is a city which has grown up, almost over night, to take a major place in the world as a metropolitan area. Chicago is Mistress of the Great Lakes, Queen of the Mississippi, and Gateway to the romantic West. Both the glamour of the Golden West and the squalor of the dingy "East-Side" meet in Chicago. This great overgrown city is the adopted home of Carl Sandburg, and it is his painted word pictures of the spirit and majesty of Chicago which have impaled, for all time, its secrets, its beauties, its ugliness, its joys, and its sorrows for mankind to look upon.

In the following pages I shall present a running account of what I have found to be Sandburg's central theme.

For the first discovery of Chicago Sandburg gives credit thus:

"The lean hands of wagon men
put out pointing fingers here,
picked this cross way, put it on a map,
set up their saw bucks, fixed their shotguns,
found a hitching place for the pony express,
made a hitching place for the iron horse,

the one-eyed horse with the fire-spit head,
 found a homelike spot and said, 'Make a home,'
 saw this corner with a mesh of rails shuttling
 people, shunting cars, shaping the junk of
 the earth to a new city." (1)

Even before the discovery of the cross-roads spot,
 the river, for which Chicago was named, was given an Indian
 name. Sandburg has hunted into Indian lore and found that
 the word Chicago has a very unsavory history and very
 "Sandburg-like" he gives out the whole story.

"Long ago we laughed and said: 'You? Your name is Chicago.

Early the red men gave a name to a river
 the place of a skink,
 the river of the wild onion smell,
 Shee-caw-go." (2)

In this instance Sandburg has found a fact and has
 passed it along to the world as it came to him. The idea
 is unromantic and almost sickening. Yet, it gives Chicago
 a virile place in the scheme of things. This idea of virility
 is one of Sandburg's favorite themes. He seems to feel that
 Chicago may be excused for anything that does not savor of
 weakness. To prove that there is rugged strength, rather than
 rot, he lets the city speak for itself:

"Out of the pay-day songs of steam shovels,
 Out of the wages of structural iron rivets,
 The living lighted skyscrapers tell it now as a name,
 Tell it across miles of sea-blue water, grey-blue land:

(1)(2) Sandburg: The Windy City

I am Chicago, I am a name given out by the
 breaths of working men, laughing men, a
 child, a belonging." (1)

Chicago is the magic city, and Carl Sandburg has found how it came to be. He has discovered how it came into being and how it grows. The dynamic potency behind it is not mystery to him, for he finds that, in the great plan of empire, instructions were given for the building of Chicago.

"Put the city up; tear the city down;
 put it up again, let us find a city.
 Let us remember the little violet eyed
 man who gave all, praying, 'Dig and
 dream, dream and hammer, 'till your
 city comes.'" (2)

Neither is the phenomenal growth of Chicago magic to him. It is the result of hard toil and constant striving. Sandburg sees the Chicago laborer as a man who labors more to satisfy an inner urge than for monetary gain. The poet seems to feel sorry for these people as they toil away. Yet, he revels in their devotion to the blind urge to build.

"Forgive us if we work so hard
 And the muscles bunch so clumsy on us,
 And we never know why we work so hard-
 If the big houses with little families
 And the little houses with big families

(1) (2) Sandburg: The Windy City

has made possible her own creation as the industrial hub of the nation....The present annual manufacturing volume produced in the Chicago region amounts to \$5,000,000,000.00. This represents 8 per cent of the total wealth of the nation." (1)

I find also that during the year 1931 about \$75,000,000.00 in large new public improvements are planned. (2)

Out of all this titantic industrialism Sandburg has found that Chicago has a spirit and a will of her own. He seems glad to ring the tocsin for it.

"Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of

Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog

Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player

With Railroads and Freight Handler to the nation." (3)

This piece, by which he is best known, shows Sandburg's attitude toward the city. He finds that there is an appropriate motto for Chicago. Just as the flower of ancient knighthood pridefully waved aloft their standards, Sandburg wants the world to know of the motto which Chicago has. He wants to show just how appropriate it is.

"Go to it and remember

this city fished from its

depths a text: ' independent

(1) Reprint from Silver Anniversary Number-Chicago Dec.7, 1929

(2) The Chicago Visitor April 1931 Page 2.

(3) Sandburg: Chicago

as a hog on ice." (1)

Sandburg tries also to tell from what materials Chicago is made.

"The city is a tool chest opened every day,
a time clock punched every morning,
a shop door, cinders and overalls
counting every day.

The city is a balloon and a bubble plaything
shot to the sky every evening, whistled in
a ragtime jig down the sunset.

The city is made, forgotten, and made again,
trucks hauling it away haul it back
steered by drivers whistling ragtime
against the sunsets." (2)

In this case again we find that Sandburg sees Chicago not as a city but as a striving, restless, and changing spirit of growth. He does not make mention of anything that can be considered a finished product. His sole idea is that the physical aspect of the city is but a modern ephemeron.

".....the city would fall to pieces
and die and be dust in the wind.

If the people of the city all move away and leave no
people at all to watch and keep the city." (3)

He sees the streets, buildings, trucks, and wagons,
but they appear to him as only parts in the endless moving

(1)(2)(3) Sandburg: Windy City

plan of work.

"All the crazy wonderful roar of the street." (1)

And:

"Six street ends come together here.

Wheels, wheels, feet, feet, all day.

In the false dawn when the chicks blink.

In the time when only one milk wagon crosses.

The triangle banks and drug stores rest.

The owl car flutters along in a walk." (2)

Now, let us wander through the tenement district, where the scum of society is gathered. To Sandburg, it is the most vital part of Chicago. It is the section of the city which most strongly appeals to him. He is plainly the friend and spokesman for the horde of laborers who live there. The fact that vice is assembled there is no reason for Sandburg to pass by. He must see it all, and to him it is a vivid, colorful, and stirring scene. He gives us a picturesque description of one of the "red light" districts of Chicago.

(1) Sandburg: A Teamster's Farewell

(2) Sandburg: Blue Island Intersection

"If cripples sit on their stumps
 And joke with newsies bawling,
 'Many lives lost! many lives lost!
 Terrible ac-ci-dent! many lives lost!'
 If again twelve men let a woman go,
 'He done me wrong: I shot him-'
 If the blood of a child's head
 Spatters on the hub of a motor truck-
 Or a 44-gat cracks and lets skylights
 Into one more bank messenger-
 Or if boys steal coal in a railroad yard
 And run with humped gunny sacks
 While a bull picks off one of the kids
 And the kid wriggles with an ear in cinders
 And a mother comes to carry home
 A bundle, a limp bundle,
 To have his face washed, for the last time,
 Forgive us it it happens-and happens again-." (1)

This picture is gruesome. We should hate to think that it is what one would find in a casual stroll about Chicago. Yet, it is a part of the Chicago which Sandburg presents with emphasis.

It is not strange that such conditions would be found in a city populated as Chicago is populated. The census of

(1) Sandburg: The Windy City

1930 credits Chicago with having a total population of 3,376,438 persons. This figure represents an increase of almost a million since 1920. Out of the thirty-five districts in the city proper, eighteen have a predominant foreign element. For instance, in district eleven, which is in the center of the city, geographically speaking, 38.95% of the people are Polish and only 7.47% American. (1) These figures do not represent an isolated case but are representative of the districts where the immigrants have settled. In two districts the Polish people represent over 60%. It is reasonable to suppose that in a city of such a large foreign population there would be many of the laboring class. Where so many people have come together in a strange environment, one expects to find a wide variety of social customs and living conditions. These are the people whom Sandburg has called "My people" and for whom he seeks forgiveness. Yet, that is not the whole story. By way of contrast, he offers a more refreshing scene. Sandburg wanders down through the tough, rat-hole districts and presently comes to the lake-side. The air he smells there is in no wise tainted. It is like an invigorating sea breeze. The experience must be refreshing, for he revels in the cool, clean wholesomeness of it.

(1) Chicago Chamber of Commerce: Population in Chicago

"Passing through the huddled and ugly walls
 By doorways where women
 Looked from their shadows of hunger-hands,
 Out from huddled and ugly walls,
 I come sudden, at the city's edge,
 On a blue burst of lake,
 Long lake waves breaking under the sun
 On a spray-flung curve of shore:
 And a fluttering storm of gulls
 Masses of grey white wings
 And flying white bellies
 Veering and wheeling free in the open." (1)

While one revels in this "burst of blue", there is another inspiring sight which one may see. This sight epitomizes the city.

"By day the skyscraper looms in the smoke and sun
 and has a soul,
 Prairie and valley, streets of the city, pour people
 into it and they mingle among its twenty floors
 and are poured out again back to the streets,
 prairies and valleys.
 It is the men and women, boys and girls so poured in
 and out all day that give the building a soul of
 dreams and thoughts and memories.
 (Dumped in the sea or fixed in a desert, who would
 care for the building or speak its name or ask

(1) Sandburg: The Harbor

a policeman the way to it?)

Elevators slide on their cables and tubes catch letters
and parcels and iron pipes carry gas and water in
and sewage out.

Wires climb with secrets, carry light and carry words,
and tell terrors and profits and loves-curses of
men grappling plans of business and questions of
women in plots of love.

Hour by hour the caissons reach down to the rock of
the earth and hold the building to a turning
planet.

Hour by hour the girders play as ribs and reach out and
hold together the stone walls and floors.

Hour by hour the hand of the mason and the stuff of
the mortar clinch the pieces and parts to the shape
an architect voted.

Hour by hour the sun and the rain, the air and the
rust, and the press of time running into centuries,
play on the building inside and out and use it.

Men who sunk the pilings and mixed the mortar are
laid in graves where the wind whistles a wild
song without words.

And so are men who strung the wires and fixed the
pipes and tubes and those who saw it rise floor
by floor.

Souls of them all are here, even the hod carrier begging at back doors hundreds of miles away and the bricklayer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.

.....

Spelled in electric fire on the roof are words telling miles of houses and people where to buy a thing for money. The sign speaks till midnight.

Darkness on the hallways. Voices echo. Silence holds....Watchmen walk slow from floor to floor and try the doors....Revolvers bulge from their hip pockets....Steel safes stand in corners. Money is stacked in them.

A young watchman leans at a window and sees the lights of barges butting their way across a harbor, nets of red and white lanterns in a railroad yard, and a span of glooms splashed with lines of white and blurs of crosses and clusters over the sleeping city.

By night the skyscraper looms in the smoke and the stars and has a soul." (1)

Thus, in the day time we see the sky-reaching towers of the modern city. Sandburg sees them as beautiful buildings but also thinks of their utility and of their place in business. They are the gossamer thread of dreams and the riven secret of striving toil. The average person

(1) Sandburg: Skyscraper

would think of this skyscraper as a wonderful monument to engineering genius, but to Carl Sandburg, the poet, it is a story and a song, wrought out in the lives of men and women.

Then, as we come away from these majestic views at the lake side, we again find stark reality. In true Sandburg form we have a view of just what can be found.

"Armour Avenue was the name of this street,

and door signs on empty houses read, 'The Silver Dollar,' 'Swede Annie' and the Christian names of madams such as 'Myrtle' and 'Jenny.'

Scrap iron, rags and bottles fill the front rooms hither and yon and signs in Yiddish say Abe Kaplan & Co. are running junk shops in whore-houses of former times.

The segregated district, the Tenderloin, is here no more; the red lights are gone; the ring of shovels handling scrap iron replaces the banging of pianos and the bawling songs of pimps." (1)

Yet, with all of its majesty, its pathos, its smiles, and its garish evils, Chicago has a human heart and touch. The city seems to have a benign countenance for some. For those upon whom it does not cast its

(1) Sandburg: Real Estate News

benignant smile, it has an excuse and a word of advice and warning.

"Forgive us.....if a boy and a girl

hunt the sun with a sieve for sifting smoke-

Let it pass-let the answer be-

'Dust and a bitter wind shall come."

As we have seen, great sections of the city are settled by immigrant laborers. To these people, Chicago is a relentless city. These immigrants have come to America to find wealth and freedom. Some of them have found these things but the majority of them have had to struggle and toil for a mere livelihood. It is from these people that Sandburg came. They are the ones he can call his own. It is for them he speaks. He knows their joys and their sorrows. Sandburg shows the pathos of their lives in the following vigorous and picturesque manner:

"New neighbors came to the corner house and Congress and Green streets.

The look of their clean white curtains was the same as the rim of a nun's bonnet.

One way was an oyster pail factory, one way they made candy, one way paper boxes, strawboard cartons.

The warehouse trucks shook the dust of the ways loose and the wheels whirled dust-there was dust of hoof and wagon wheel and rubber tire-

dust of police and fire wagons-dust of the winds
that circled at midnight and noon listening to
no prayers.

'O mother, I know the heart of you,' I sang passing
the rim of a nun's bonnet-~~O~~white curtains-
and people clean as the prayers of Jesus here in
the faded ramshackle at Congress and Green.

Dust and the thundering trucks won-the barrages of
the street wheels and the lawless wind took their
way-was it five weeks or six the little mother,
the new neighbors, battled and then took away
the white prayers in the windows?" (1)

As Sandburg puts his ear to the ground, he hears
the voice of the city speaking to the three million
souls who toil there for livelihood. The voice is a
threat and at the same time a promise. It is a mother
speaking to wayward children when they cannot do with-
out her.

"I will die as many times
as you make me over again,
says the city to the people,
'I am the woman, the home, the family,
I get breakfast and pay the rent;
I telephone the doctor, the milkman, the undertaker;
I fix the streets
for your first and your last ride-

Come clean with me, come clean or dirty,
 I am stone and steel of your sleeping numbers;
 I remember all you forget." (1)

After all, the world which man tries to conquer and subdue is but a part of himself. He stands apart and sees Chicago, the precocious boy-giant of the West. Yet, when Sandburg looks into the heart of the giant, he finds the pulse-beat of man's life. He finds a heart-beat which makes it impossible for this great city to be considered an automaton or a mechanical robot. He finds this strange stir of life and inquires into its cause.

"Every day the people get up and carry the city,
 carry the bunkers and balloons of the city,
 lift it and put it down." (2)

Sandburg is perhaps most often thought of in connection with the lurid, clashing, crashing, roaring broadside picture of the "Windy City" which he has called Chicago.

"Hog Butcher for the World,
 Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
 Player with Railroads and the Nation's
 Freight Handler;
 Stormy, husky, brawling,
 City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked, and I believe them; for I
 have seen your painted women under the gas lamps
 luring the farm boys.

And they tell me you are crooked, and I answer: Yes, it
 is true I have seen the gunman kill and go free to
 kill again.

And they tell me you are brutal, and my reply is: On
 the faces of women and children I have seen the
 marks of wanton hunger.

And having answered so I turn once more to those who
 sneer at this my city, and I give them back the
 sneer and say to them:

Come show me another city with lifted head singing
 so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and
 cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on
 job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against the
 little soft cities:

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning
 as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,

Shoveling,

Wrecking,

Planning,

Building, breaking, rebuilding,

Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with
 white teeth,

Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young
 man laughs,

Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has
 never lost a battle,
 Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse,
 and under his ribs the heart of the people,

Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of
 Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog
 Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player
 with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation." (1)

And then, while we are beginning to feel that perhaps
 this great city is, after all, only a youthful, boasting,
 and stupendously energetic giant, we find that it has festering
 sores.

"I heard a woman's lips
 Speaking to a companion
 Say these words:
 "A woman what hustles
 Never keeps nothin'
 For all her hustlin'.
 Somebody always gets
 What she goes on the streets for.
 If it ain't a pimp
 It's a bull what gets it.
 I been hustling' now
 Till I ain't much good any more.

(1) Sandburg: Chicago

I got nothing to show for it
 Some man got it all,
 Every night's hustlin' I ever did.'" (1)

In just this way Sandburg found the most interesting thing in Chicago--its people. I shall now try to give Sandburg's impressions of these people. What we find will be the heart beats of the metropolis, the soul of the city. At times it is beauty that we find.

"I wander down Clinton Street south of Polk
 And listen to the voices of the Italian children
 quarreling.

It is a cataract of coloratura." (2)
 At other times he gets an impression of a crowd.

"Hats, where do you belong?
 What is under you?
 On the rim of a skyscraper's forehead
 I looked down and saw: hats; fifty thousand hats:
 Swarming with a noise of bees and sheep, cattle
 and waterfalls,
 Stopping with a silence of sea grass, a silence
 of prairie corn.

Hats: tell me your high hopes." (3)

It is interesting to find that Sandburg occasionally brings out the romantic side of his peoples lives. Like

- (1) Sandburg: Harrison Street Court
 (2) Sandburg: Clinton South of Polk
 (3) Sandburg: Hats

anything else extraneous to actual living, romance is a very infrequent note in his work. The novel way in which he brings it out is both refreshingly picturesque and poignantly sincere.

"Shake back your hair, O red-headed girl.

Let go your laughter and keep your two proud freckles
on your chin.

Somewehre is ~~a~~man looking for a red-headed girl and
Some day may be he will look into your eyes for a
restaurant cashier and find a lover, maybe
Around and around go the thousand men hunting a
red-headed girl with two freckles on her chin.
I have seen them hunting, hunting.

Shake back your hair; let go your laughter." (1)

Thus, Sandburg has made the restaurant cashier a rhapsody of reality. Where there is romance and the high hopes of youth there is also the plain and the common-place.

"There is a woman on Michigan Boulevard keeps a
parrot and gold fish and two white mice." (2)

Around these common place pets Sandburg has painted a vivid picture of people who live now in memory of better days. It furnishes a scene of decadent gentility. Such scenes are common to old city streets, which have lost most of their residents in favor of "Sunset Hills."

Around the corner from this scene, there is likely to be

- (1) Sandburg: Red-Headed Restaurant Cashier
(2) Sandburg: White Ash

a house which bespeaks utter poverty. This dwelling is a sad reminder of the inexorable passage of time. Once it probably housed good substantial people, and now it is the object of Sandburg's pity.

"If houses went on crutches
 this house would be
 one of the cripples." (1)

As if he feared that the world would think him untrue to the city, as the newspapers have pictured it, Sandburg discloses the underworld, in his characteristic, naive manner.

"They were calling certain styles of whiskers by the
 name of 'lilacs.

And another manner of beard assumed in their chatter
 a verbal guise

Of 'mutton chops,' 'galways,' 'feather dusters.'

Metaphors such as these sprang from their lips while
 other street cries

Sprang from sparrows finding scattered oats among
 interstices of the curb.

Ah-hah these metaphors-and Ah-hah these boys-
 among the police they were known

As the Dirty Dozen and their names took the front
 pages of newspapers.

And two of them croaked on the same day at a 'neck-
 tie party'....if we employ the metaphors of
 their lips." (2)

- (1) Sandburg: Neighbors
 (2) Sandburg: Alley Rats

And now we find a composite mosaic of the entire colorful mass of people who are Chicago. Sandburg thinks of these ordinary people as the real city. He displays a very intimate knowledge of the common people and revels in their very prosaic existence.

"Nobody home? Everybody home?

.....

Mamie Riley married Jimmy Higgins last night: Eddie Jones died of whooping cough: George Hacks got a job on the police force: The Rosenheims bought a brass bed: Lena Hart giggled at a jackie: A push cart man called, 'toma y t o es, toma y t o es'".

THE MIDDLE WEST: Its wheatfields, its
colorful settings, its enter-
prises, and its farmers.

While Chicago is Sandburg's adopted home and while he seems to revel in his great opportunity to reveal it and to make it a reality for the world, he yet finds joy in the golden splendor of the American West. He loves to ride on trains which pass along through the great vistas of western magnificence. He has written a masterful panorama of the West in his poem Slabs of The Sunburnt West. Even the title of this piece is fraught with the spirit of the romantic West. The piece is a wonderful introduction to the West, as it is revealed through this ex-wheat hand.

"Into the night, into the blanket of night,
 Into the night rain gods, the night luck gods,
 Overland goes the overland passenger train.
 Stand up, sandstone slabs of red,
 Tell the overland passengers who burnt you.
 Tell 'em how the jacks and screws loosened you.
 Tell 'em who shook you by the heels and stood you on
 your heads,
 Who put the slow pink of sunset mist on your faces.
 Panels of the cold gray open night,
 Gates of the Great American Desert,
 Skies keeping the prayers of the wagon men,
 the riders with picks, shovels, and guns,
 On the old trail, the Santa Fe trail, the Raton pass

(1) Sandburg: Eleventh Avenue Racket

Panels, skies, gates, listen to-night while we send up
 our prayers on the Santa Fe trail,
 Into the night the overland passenger train,
 Slabs of sandstone red sink to the sunset red,
 Blankets of night cover 'em up,
 Night rain gods, night luck gods, are looking on.

.....

The fingerbone of a man
 lay next to the handle of a frying pan
 and the footbone of a horse,
 'Clean, we are clean, ' the winds whimper on a noisy night.

.....

Into the blanket of night goes the overland train,
 Into the black of the night the processions march,
 The ghost of a pony goes by,
 The wagon tongue of a prairie schooner
 And the handle of a Forty-niner's pickax
 Do a shiver dance in the desert dust,
 In the coyote gray of the alkali dust,
 And-six men with cigars in the buffet car mention
 'civilization, 'history, 'God.'

.....

2

A blue jay blue
 and a gray mouse gray

ran up the canyon walls.
 A rider came to the rim
 Of a slash and a gap of desert dirt-
 A long legged long-headed rider
 On a blunt and a blurry jackass-
 Riding and asking, 'How come? How come?'

.....

3

Good night; it is scribbled on the panels
 Of the cold grey open desert.
 Good night; on the big blanket over the
 Santa Fe trail it is woven in the oldest
 Indian blanket songs.

.....

The runaway stars say
 you shall never die at all,
 never at all." (1)

As he caused the West to unfold before the eyes of the passengers, he was not satisfied to picture only mere beauty. He has, rather, shown the West to be builded upon the bleached bones of pioneers and ready to stand alone, in splendid self-sufficiency. This theme is one of his favorites.

It is improbable that anyone could be so closely

(1) Sandburg: Slabs of the Sunburnt West

attached to a section of the world and not try to interpret it. Sandburg has done this for the West. He has volunteered to act as mouthpiece for the prairie garden of America and to speak its philosophy. For its great grass covered plains, he gives a code.

"Part of the valley is God's

And part is man's." (1)

From the horizon bound prairie, he has a message of the sturdy protection which she provides for the men who live upon her breast.

"I am the prairie, mother of men, waiting.

They are mine, the threshing crews eating beefsteak, the farm boys driving steers to the railroad cattle pens.

They are mine, the crowds of people at a Fourth of July basket picnic, listening to a lawyer read the Declaration of Independence, watching the pin wheels and Roman candles at night, the young men and women two by two hunting the by paths and kissing bridges.

They are mine, the horses looking over a fence in the frost of late October saying good-morning to the horses hauling wagons of rootabaga to market.

They are mine, the old zig zag rail fences, the new barb wire." (2)

- (1) Sandburg: Joliet
 (2) Sandburg: Prairie

At the close of this piece, he gives his attitude toward the prairie. In it we find that he feels himself to be a real part of her existence.

"O prairie Mother, I am one of your boys.

I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot
full of pain over love.

Here I know I will hanker after nothing so much as
one more sunrise or a sky moon of fire doubled
to a river moon of water." (1)

If the great West is part man's and part God's—a
mother of men—, then it is also a business enterprise for
man.

".....the daily melodrama of this hum-

drum rhythms of heads, hides, heels, hoofs hung up." (2)

Sandburg's West is not only gossamer shadow but a very solid and substantial world. It is not moved by the whimsicalities and foibles of changing times. It does not cater to things which are unnecessary to life. To Sandburg, the West is like steel. It is hard, but it can be changed and made into useful substance; it is abiding but useless except in the care of laboring manhood.

"A bar of steel sleeps and looks slant-eyed

On the pearly cobwebs, the pools of moonshine;

(1) Sandburg: Prairie

(2) Sandburg: The Windy City

Sleeps slant-eyed a million years,
 Sleeps with a coat of rust, a visit of moths,
 a shirt of gathering sod and loam.

.....

The wind never bothers.....a bar of steel.

The wind picks only.....pearl

cobwebs.....pools of moonshine." (1)

Smoke is a by-product of fire and steel. Steel is made to support civilization. Men give their lives virtually into the making of steel, and then in turn steel is used to take the lives of others. In Sandburg's West, steel is an integral part of the great cycle of life. It is not the thread stuff of fancy, but it is the unchanging, the strong, and the abiding backbone of life.

"Fire and wind wash at the slag.

Box-cars, clocks, steam-shovels, churns, pistons,
 boilers, scissors.

Oh, the sleeping slag from the mountains, the slag-
 heavy pig-iron will go down many roads.

Men will stab and shoot with it, and make gutter and
 tunnel rivers, and mow hay in swaths, and slit
 hogs and skin beeves, and steer airplanes across
 North America, Europe, Asia, and round the world." (2)

In his imagination, Sandburg sees a modern "Childe Roland" come through the West, in the form of a pioneer. His "Childe Roland" discovers that the new generation has

(1) Sandburg: Smoke and Steel

(2) Sandburg: Buffalo Dust

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taken the smoke and the steel and has builded with it.
They have builded strongly on the foundation laid down
by pioneers.

"And he goes on and on-and
nothing happens-and he
comes to a horse's skull,
dry bones of a dead horse-
and you know more than
ever it's all lonesome and
empty and nobody home." (1)

To some people, the West is yet associated with the
idea of wild Indians and buffalo herds. Sandburg dis-
pels this thought in a few words. He tells the story
of the old wild West and at the same time gives a
note of sadness that so colorful a generation should
have passed away.

"Those who saw the buffaloes are gone
and the buffaloes are gone." (2)

In order to make a connecting link between the buffalo
days and the industrial days we should glance into the
interior of a typical western saloon. The saloon of
the "forties" and "fifties" was an institution. We
should not like to pass over the West of that period
without a knowledge of one of these great "joints."

- (1) Sandburg: Manitoba Child Roland
(2) Sandburg: Buffalo Dust

We open, then, the swinging doors to "Jungheimers."

".....a saloon with a soul,
 soft red lights, the long curving bar,
 The leather seats and dim corners,
 Tall brass spittoons, a nigger cutting ham,
 And the painting of a woman
 half-dressed thrown
 reckless across a bed
 after a night of booze and riots." (1)

Yet, not all is given over to the satiation of the rougher sensibilities of men in the West. To one who loves the West in all of its moods, as Sandburg does, there is lyric beauty and a certain mellowness in an understanding view of the great prairie lands.

"Under a prairie fog moon
 A few lonesome dogs scraping thongs,
 Midnight is lonely; the fog moon midnight
 Takes up again its even smooth November." (2)

At times there is a drowsy, languid peacefulness, such as one thinks of finding in the old South.

"It is too much for the long
 willows when low laughter
 of a red moon comes down;
 and the willows drowse

- (1) Sandburg: Jungheimer's
 (2) Sandburg: The Windy City

and sleep on the shoulders
of the running water." (1)

Sandburg seems never to overlook the commercial possibilities and factors in a scene. This note more often than not creeps in when he stops to admire the view.

"Out from the window.....prairie lands
Moon mist whitens a golf ground.
White yet is a limestone quarry.
The crickets keep on chirping.
Switch engines of the great Western
Sidetrack box cars, make up trains
For Weehauken, Oskaloosa, Saskatchewan;
The cattle, the coal, the corn, must go
In the night,.....On the prairie lands." (2)

In this piece, Sandburg seems to gloat over the fact that, in his West, nature has been so good that men take it for granted. Instead of standing to gaze in rapt wonder at the "moon mists," the men strive only to keep open the great traffic lines. It is truly a story which could grace the pages of the most romantic of story books.

When Sandburg thinks of the romantic past of the great American West, his heart is stirred with pathos

- (1) Sandburg: Prairie Waters By Night
(2) Sandburg: The Windy City

and wonder. He cannot forget the splendor of the Indian kingdoms. He becomes almost cynical when he considers some of the people who have supplanted the Indians.

"It is easy to sit listening to a boy babbling
of the Pottawattamie moccasins in Illinois,
how now the roofs and smoke stacks cover miles
where the deerfoot left its writing
and the foxpaw put its initials
in the snow....for the early moccasins....to read.

It is easy for the respectable taxpayers to sit in the
street cars and read the papers, faces of burglars,
the prison escapes, the hunger strikes, the cost of
living, the price of dying, the shop gate battles of
strikers and strike breakers, the strikers killing
scabs and the police killing strikers-the strongest,
the strongest, always the strongest." (1)

And thus we find Sandburg, the visionary, sitting at the
feet of past greatness, and marveling at the products of
twentieth century progress, and dividing the strength
which is the support of both.

Besides being a poet discoverer of the West, Sand-
burg is a seer of western industrialism. The country
is always to him a forest of smokestacks and gigantic

(1) Sandburg: The Windy City

warehouses, filled to the bursting point. Its over shadowing grain elevators, endless railroads, and boundless grain fields have transmitted to him the very essence of its industrial commercialism.

"Omaha, the roughneck, feeds armies

Eats and swears from a dirty face.

Omaha works to get the world a breakfast." (1)

"I have loved the red gold smoke of your sunsets:

.....

I have loved the white down frost of early winter silver.

And purple over your railroad tracks and lumber yards."(2)

And even on the tossing blue waters of Lake Michigan he finds the same thing.

"Steel ore-boats bring the loads clawed from the earth."(3)

As I have shown, Sandburg does not write often about a scene from nature merely to show its beauty. Yet, one can find that, in his rough, boisterous way, he has a soft spot in his heart for nature. In particular, we find that he is impressed with the serene beauty of night and the whisper of breezes. I have found many references in his works to his impressions of the different types of breezes with which he has come into contact. He has evidently felt the heart

- (1) Sandburg: Omaha
 (2) Sandburg: Kalamazoo
 (3) Sandburg: The Sins of Kalamazoo

throbs of the man who stands under the boundless canopy of a star-spangled night and sees the infinite aspects of the universe. Then again, he feels the cool winds which come in laden with the golden dust of the wheat fields, or the salty, cool breezes which have kissed the white caps of Lake Michigan. We stand with him and watch the passing of day.

"The river of gold under a sunset of Illinois.

It is a molten gold someone pours and changes.

A woman mixing a wedding cake of butter and eggs

Knows what the sunset is pouring on the river here.

The river twists in a letter S.

A gold S now speaks to the Illinois sky." (1)

"The five-o'clock prairie sunset is a strong man going to sleep after a long day in a corn field.

The timberline turns in a cover of purple. A grain elevator humps a shoulder. One steel star whisks

out a pointed fire. Moonlight comes on the stubble."(2)

The same sort of scene which seemingly inspired Gray to write, "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day," prompted Sandburg to write the following:

"Red gold of pools

Sunset furrows six o'clock,

And the farmer done in the fields

(1) Sandburg: Letter S

(2) Sandburg: Rusty Crimsons

And the cows in the barns with bulging udders.

Take the cows and the farmer.

Take the barns and bulging udders.

Leave the red gold of pools

And sunset furrows six o'clock." (1)

After the day has then gone to rest and the calm
majesty of night has come, we discover a western evening.

"In the moonlight under a shag-bark hickory tree
Watching the yellow shadows melt in hoof-pools,
Listening to the yes and no of a woman's hands,
I kept my guess why the night was glad.

The night was lit with a woman's eyes,
The night was crossed with a woman's hands,
The night kept humming and undersong." (2)

"The sheets of a night mist travel a long valley." (3)

And on the prairie he feels the inspiration of night.

"So near you are, sky of summer stars,
So near a long arm man can pick off stars,

.....

So near, strumming, strumming

So lazy and hum strumming." (4)

- (1) Sandburg: Harvest Sunsets
(2) Sandburg: Shag-Bark Hickory
(3) Sandburg: Mist Forms
(4) Sandburg: Summer Stars

And the lakes are shrouded in darkness,

"The lake by night is a lonely woman....." (1)

We have only to turn around to lose this spell of nature,

In its place we find the commercial song of the night,

"Hammers, shovels of work gangs sleep in shop corners

When the dark stars come on the sky and the

night watchmen walk and look." (2)

As Sandburg travels about over the country, he sees the great business enterprises. He hears their noise and sees their smoke. But the laborers and their gropings for the essence of life impress him above it all.

"By day....tireless smokestacks....hungry

smoky shanties hanging to the slopes....

crooning: 'We get by, that's all.'

By night....all lit up....fire-gold bars, fire-

gold flues....and the shanties shaking in

clumsy shadows....almost the hills shaking

....all crooning:

By God, we're going to find out or know why." (3)

The average visitor to the West would look at a great sea of corn-tassels, marvel at its golden splendor, and go on remembering only the wonder of the corn. Of a poet, who would interpret the West, we should expect more than that. Indeed, Sandburg would visualize more

(1) Sandburg: Night Stuff

(2) Sandburg: Night Gangs

(3) Sandburg: Five Towns on The B. and O.

than the corn and would tell what he saw.

"Tall timber stood here once, here on a corn belt farm along the Monon.

Here the roots of a half mile of trees dug their runners deep in the loam for a grip and a hold against wind storms.

Then the axmen came and the chips flew to the zing of steel and handle-the lank rail splitters cut the big ones first, the beeches and the oaks, then the brush. Dynamite, wagons and horses took the stumps-the plows sunk their teeth in-now it is first class corn land-improved property-and the hogs grunt over the fodder crops.

It would come hard now for this half mile of improved farm land along the Monon corn belt, on a piece of Grand Prairie, to remember once it had a great singing family of trees." (1)

Thus, the swaying expanse of Corn is not a phenomenon of chance but is the finished product of a desperate struggle. Men have not only cleared the land until it is pleasant to look at, but they have made it provide sustenance for a virile civilization.

After Carl Sandburg had discovered the new West of the twentieth century and shown it to be builded of flimsy flowers and hard steel, he needs must people it with the

(1) Sandburg: Improved Farm Land

men and women who have conquered the wilderness and who will go on making it greater every day. It is in this sphere of his explorations and disclosures that he has felt very much at home. Sandburg is one of these people by right of his birthplace and by right of his labor on their wheat-fields and railroads. We see from the following piece that he regards these people as his very own:

"My people.....
 I call them beautiful,
 and I wonder where they are going.

 People singing.....
people who must sing or die;
 these are my people." (1)

And while he wonders whence they came and whither they are going, he recognizes the finger of destiny as an answer to his thought. He seemingly stands apart and sees a panoramic view of the countless thousands of men who have conquered, subdued, and made tenable the resplendent West. From it all he sees the indomitable spirit of American manhood and womanhood building an empire from raw material.

(1) Sandburg: My People

"The strong men keep coming on
 They go down shot, hanged, sick,
 broken.

They live on fighting, singing,
 lucky as plungers.

.....

The strong mothers pulling them
 from a dark sea, a great prairie,
 a long mountain.

Call hallelujah, call amen, call
 deep thanks.

The strong men keep coming on." (1)

It is very seldom that Sandburg meditates upon the men and women of wealth and social prestige. He passes by these people, saying that however glittering may be their horde of gold or the trappings of their power, they eat soup as the common laborer does. In one piece he depicts several men who have high stations in life. He then tells of a man in the slum district who makes musical instruments with loving care. This almost pathetic old fellow is presented as a man who works only for the love of his trade. He is, to Sandburg, a sort of ideal workman. Such a true artist as this man touches Sandburg's heart while the poet passes over the more socially prominent people with a mere shrug of his shoulder. Of the man he writes:

(1) Sandburg: Upstream

".....he is the only Chicago citizen

I was jealous of that day." (1)

Cold facts depict Chicago as a truly great city and as a center of wealth, commerce, and industry. (2) There are, of course, many very wealthy men in Chicago. It is true also that Sandburg, during his earlier years especially, did not have an opportunity to know that class of people except from a great distance. I do not feel that Sandburg is bitter or resentful toward the wealthy people. He seems rather to feel a significant disinterest in them and the trappings of their power.

We then go with him out on the prairie lands to see who inhabits them. In Illinois Farmer he tells of a man who spent his life surrounded by the prairie corn fields. This man was accustomed to stand and listen to the wind as it whispered gently through the yellow corn tassels. After death the farmer still dreamed of his beloved home and the caressing whisper of the Indian summer breezes.

"The same wind will now blow
over the place where
his hands must dream
of Illinois corn." (3)

(1) Sandburg: Fellow Citizens

(2) In the year 1927 the Bank clearings of the Chicago district were almost \$36,000,000,000 and there was on deposit in Chicago banks \$2,729,556,449. (Chicago Facts--a bulletin of Chicago chamber of commerce.--1931, Page 27)

(3) Sandburg: Illinois Farmer

Induced perhaps by the close contact with nature, we find that the prairie farmer lives in harmony with his own people. From Sandburg's presentation, it appears that life on the prairie is indeed a peaceful and productive existence.

"The farmer and his wife
talk things over together." (1)

In his poem, Onion Days, he gives the life history of Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti. She works on the onion farm of Jasper. This onion farmer is very penurious. He is represented as being a man who would gladly fatten himself at the expense of his laborers. Her life is a tale of pathos and of humanity fighting in vain for better life. At the same time, she sometimes has happiness, fun, and contentment. Sandburg sums up the whole story in a few simple words.

".....There's no dramatist
living can put old Mrs.
Giovannitti into a play....." (2)

He speaks of the entire mass of immigrant workmen. In a few terse words, we find the hopes and cherished ideals of these foreigners.

"One of them said: 'I like my job....'
One: 'I got a girl, a peach.....'" (3)

- (1) Sandburg: Illinois Farmer
- (2) Sandburg: Onion Days
- (3) Sandburg: Smoke and Steel

".....they ask their wives
 to fix burnt holes in the knees
 of their trousers; their
 necks and ears covered with
 a smut;they are brothers of cinders." (1)

"Ten murmur 'Oh, it's a hell of a job.'

Ten others, 'Jesus, I wish I had a job.'" (2)

Yet, withal, these men are human and this is the side
 of their lives which calls forth Sandburg's best work.

"I know him for a shovel man,

.....

And a dark-eyed woman in the
 old country dreams of him...." (3)

There are the boy and the girl who left the farm
 to go to the city. First, we shall see the boy.

"Can a man sit at a desk in a

skyscraper in Chicago

And be harness maker in a corn
 town in Iowa,

And feel the tall grass coming
 up in June.

And the ache of cotton wood trees

singing with the prairie wind?" (4)

- (1) Sandburg: Psalm of Those Who Go Forth Before Daylight
 (2) Sandburg: Muckers
 (3) Sandburg: The Shovel Man
 (4) Sandburg: Portrait

Next we shall see the girl.

"Mamie beat her hands against

the bars of a little Indiana town...." (1)

After the girl gets to the city, two courses are usually open to her. She can become a woman of the street.

Sandburg thinks of her lot as pathetic indeed.

"Somebody always gets

What she goes on the street for...." (2)

If the girl is luckier and more industrious, she can find a place in the great industrial machines of the city.

"Each morning.....I feel a wonder

About where it is all going, so

Many with a peach bloom of

Young years on them....." (3)

And thus has Carl Sandburg, the poet, investigator, and observer, given to the world his discoveries of the great city of Chicago and the western prairie lands, which surround the metropolis. He has presumably presented these observations as they appeared to him. I have tried to get the essence of his ideas concerning the people, buildings, and business of the region.

- (1) Sandburg: Mamie
 (2) Sandburg: Harrison Street Corner
 (3) Sandburg: Working Girls

C O N C L U S I O N

In the running account of Carl Sandburg's poetry which I have given is found the chief basis for the proof of my thesis that he has sought to portray the activities of the industrial life of Chicago and the Middle-West, the life of the laboring class of that section, and scenes of that region. I expected to find proof of Miss West's statement that he expresses "the whole life of Chicago" (page 12) when I first began this investigation. But, on the contrary, I have found that he has not written about all phases of Chicago life. In his work, there is no reference to the Chicago millionaire; to Chicago as a city of education, art, and music; to the millions of middle class folk who live there; or, in fact to anything at all which would not be subject to, or incidental to, the life of the very humble laborers.

I have concluded, further, that Sandburg is not such a strong revolutionary as many people would call him. He may feel that the life of his people is not altogether what it should be, but he is not the sort of poet who would feel himself burning with indignation over their condition. When he seems to plead for these people, he is anxious that his reader see the wholesome beauty of their toil. He is not socialistic in his viewpoint. He expects life to be hard on an immigrant laborer.

Sandburg, as a poet, may look forward to a doubtful place in the hall of fame. His work is uncouth, but, nevertheless, it is rugged and dramatically expressive. I do not know whether he adopted his loose style through preference or because he could use no other style. Whatever may be the reason for his choice, the medium suits the subject matter, and both are a part of the "Sandburg effect."

Of course, not all of Sandburg's work is on subjects which are primarily western, but the Chicago and western note so often is a basis for his subjects that one easily concedes it to be his central theme.

Sandburg's work is what one would expect from a busy newspaper man. His pointed and sharp diction bears a distinct newspaper flavor which makes his work more realistic and modern.

A glance at the titles of his collected works gives us a general idea of the trend of his central theme. Some of these titles are as follows: Chicago Poems, Cornhuskers, Smoke and Steel, Slabs of the Sunburnt West, and Good Morning, America. These volumes contain the bulk of his discoveries and revelations of life in Chicago and the Middle West. The first and second volumes listed above deal more especially with Chicago. Again, we find a reflection of his value, as an interpreter, in the titles to some of his pieces: Chicago, The Shovel Man, Fish Crier, Picnic Boat, Muckers, Blacklisted,

Mag, Onion Days, Working Girls, Ice Handler, Fog, Prairie,
Laughing Corn, Ca_hboose Thoughts, Manitoba Child Roland,
Buffalo Bill, Joliet, Work Gangs, and Buffalo Dusk.

I have examined the poems in the collections Cornhusker,
Smoke and Steel, Slabs of the Sunburnt West, and Chicago
Poems determine what their subject matter is. I have
classified them as follows: Prairie and western scenes-42,
laborers of Chicago and the Middle West-45, nature scenes- 28,
scenes of Chicago-18, poems of industrialism-12, street women-
8, underworld scenes and characters-6, miscellaneous-115. Of
course, it is impossible to draw a sharp distinction of class
between some of the poems. But, as a whole, I have found it
possible to classify them under these headings. After classi-
fying the pieces, I found that his most frequently recurring
topics are scenes of the West, the western laborer, and the
nature scenes. We might reasonably assume that most of the
nature scenes are western. Those which I have classed as
nature scenes, however, do not contain definite evidence that
they are western scenes. Almost all of these twenty-eight
poems evidence either a sense of night-beauty or the caress
of breezes.

The miscellaneous poems cover a wide range of subjects.
All of them are concerned with scenes not mid-western. The
tabulation, then, proves that Sandburg was not interested in
the wealth and society of Chicago. There are no poems which
even mention this phase of Chicago life.

I have studied the field of writers who might be classed in the group with Sandburg. Chief of these writers are Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Frank Norris, Upton Sinclair, and Robert Herrick. I have touched upon the case of Masters previously. He writes of the western villagers in a very frank way but is primarily interested in the stories to be found in their lives. Sandburg, on the other hand, is interested only in brief, almost exclamatory sketches from the lives of his subjects. Upton Sinclair has written one novel, The Jungle, which treats of the immigrant Chicago laborer. It, however, was obviously written for the purpose of exposing the evils of the stock yards. In subject matter it somewhat resembles Sandburg's work, but it lacks the spirit of understanding which Sandburg shows for these people. Anderson, Norris, and Herrick have touched Chicago life only incidentally and not at all with Sandburg's fervor. Their work on the subject has not been confined to the laborer and industry. Of all these modern writers, Sandburg is the only one who has specialized in the industrial life of Chicago and the immigrant laborers of the Middle West. Because he confines himself to these topics, Sandburg is one of this group of writers, and, yet, he is altogether different.

Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago has spent her life working with and writing about this same laboring class of people. It has been interesting to see some of them from her viewpoint. She, however, writes only about the ones who

have been in need of her wonderful social work. She is touched with compassion over the plight of the poorest and worst of these people. Sandburg shows a trace of sorrow over the few social derelicts about whom he writes, but he more often revels in their restless, soul-stirring work and achievements.

Carl Sandburg is often thought of as a pupil of Walt Whitman. It is possible that Sandburg might consider himself Whitman's pupil, although there is no direct proof of this fact. Both writers have chosen to write in very rank free verse. Whitman's work is more musical and its movement more sweeping than Sandburg's. Sandburg's style, although it is free verse, is more blatant, rugged, and harsh. Whitman is a poet of the western pioneer; Sandburg treats of a later generation.

By way of summary, I should like to recapitulate briefly the main facts I have established. First, Sandburg has definitely pictured Chicago and the Middle West from the standpoint of the immigrant laborer; second, he is not a rank revolutionary; third, he is one of a class of writers whom we may call Middle Western, but he is unique in that class; fourth, his work is of doubtful quality as poetry.

V I T A

- Writer: Howard R. Richardson.
- Birth: February 3, 1904, at Waverly, Virginia.
- Education: Primary and Elementary-Waverly, Virginia.
High School-Suffolk High School 1918-1922.

Undergraduate-Elon College (A. B. Degree)
1923-1927.

Graduate-College of William and Mary
Summer terms: 1927, 1929, 1930, 1931.
- Occupation: Since September 1927, I have been principal of
the Thomas Jefferson School at Suffolk, Virginia.
My duties are primarily supervisory and adminis-
trative.
- Miscellaneous: Married to Virginia Elizabeth Snow (A. B.
Westhampton-1929) June 6, 1931.

General Excellence Medal-Suffolk High School-1922.
Varsity Football letter-1923, '24, and '25.
Editor College paper-1925-26.
Editor College Annual (Phippsicli) 1926-27.

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