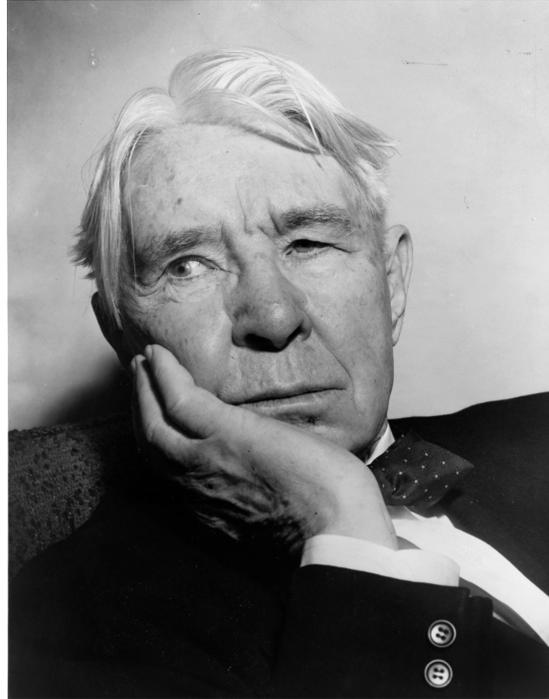


The People's Poet

Carl Sandburg was the people's poet, and he was a poet who believed in the people. He wrote about farmhands, street vendors, garment workers. He wrote about cracked hands and sore feet. And he wrote about them in a language those workers would have recognized.

Sandburg came from the working class. His parents were immigrants; his father worked on the railroad. Sandburg had to drop out of school to earn money delivering milk. He believed that the people – “the mob, the crowd, the mass,” as he affectionately called them – were America. He believed that all the greatness and potential of the country he loved were embodied by the stockyard sweepers and the salesgirls, the onion pickers and the shovelmen.



In a long and prolific career, Sandburg wrote about these people and the landscape they lived in. He wrote about cities and prairies, war and industry, love and childhood. He wrote about the dream of America and what it meant to be American. At Sandburg's memorial service, Lyndon Johnson showed up unannounced to say, “Carl Sandburg was more than the voice of America, more than the poet of its strength and genius. Carl Sandburg was America.”

That tells you something about the place of his work in our national imagination, but it also tells you something about his place in the popular culture. During his life, he was celebrated not just in the pages of magazines and the ledgers of publishing houses, but on the Ed Sullivan Show and in the halls of Congress. He was a troubadour who traveled the country singing folk songs and reading poems. He won Pulitzer Prizes for his poetry and for his biography of Lincoln. The NAACP called him a “prophet of civil rights,” and MGM offered him a contract. His work and his world view reached into a lot of corners of American life and shaped the way we see ourselves as a nation.

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Grass

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.
Shovel them under and let me work—
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

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 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 and 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.

Child of the Romans

The dago shovelman sits by the railroad track
Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna.

A train whirls by, and men and women at tables
Alive with red roses and yellow jonquils,
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
Strawberries and cream, eclairs and coffee.

The dago shovelman finishes the dry bread and bologna,
Washes it down with a dipper from the water-boy,
And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's work
Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils
Shake hardly at all in the cut glass vases
Standing slender on the tables in the dining cars.

"Fog" • *Chicago Poems* (1916)

"Grass" • *Cornhuskers* (1918)

"Chicago" • *Chicago Poems* (1916)

"Child of the Romans" • *Chicago Poems* (1916)

Speaking to Sandburg
Poets Writing Today

“The Futility of Protesting Near
Bustling Cemeteries”
Faleeha Hassan

“The End and the Beginning”
(from *Miracle Fair*)
Wisława Szymborska

“Eulogy”
(from *Here, Bullet*)
Brian Turner

“The War in Colors”
(from *Iraqi Nights*)
Dunya Mikail

“Declaration”
Phillip B. Williams

“Hogbutcher for the World”
(from *People’s History of Chicago*)
Kevin Coval

“We Are Not Responsible”
Harryette Mullen

“Self-Portrait as Exit Wounds”
(from *Night Sky with Exit Wounds*)
Ocean Vuong

“In Response to the Question,
‘Where Are You From’”
Natalie Richardson

Songs from Carl Sandburg’s American Songbag
April 4 • 7 p.m. • Woodstock Public Library

La Poesia por Hispanohablantes
April 5 • 9:30 a.m. • Woodstock Public Library

Poetry Writing Workshop
with Mojdeh Stoakley, National Poetry Slam
April 5 • 7 p.m. • Ethereal Confections • \$25

Sandburg Speaks to the Present:
Reading & Discussion
April 11 • 7 p.m. • Read Between the Lynes

Enhancing Mental Health with Poetry
April 14 • 10 a.m. • Woodstock Public Library

It’s Time to Rhyme
April 14 • 2 p.m. • Woodstock Public Library

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Woodstock Celebrates National Poetry Month

The Day Carl Sandburg Died (documentary)
April 17 • 6:30 p.m. • Woodstock Public Library

Sandburg Storytime
April 21 • 10:30 a.m. • Read Between the Lynes

Woodstock Folk Festival Invitational
featuring a reading of Sandburg poems
April 22 • 2 p.m. • Unity Spiritual Center • \$10

Woodstock Wild Walks: The Land Speaks in Verse
April 28 • 10 a.m. • Donato Conservation Area • \$5

Live and Local:
Shoulder to Shoulder with Sandburg
April 28 • 7 p.m. • Old Courthouse Arts Center

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Sandburg Speaks to the Present: Reading & Discussion
April 11, 2018 • Read Between the Lynes
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