



The Early Poetry of Carl Sandburg - Chicago Poems

Carl Sandburg

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This was Carl Sandburg's breakthrough book. It is easy to see how it draws directly on Sandburg's life in Chicago, because it speaks powerfully of the specific character of that city and, indeed, begins with his famous poem that names Chicago as the "City of the Broad Shoulders". His poetry is deeply aware of the inner life of the city, from a homeless woman freezing in a doorway to the lifestyles of the rich and powerful. Sandburg, even in his poetry, is in many ways the quintessential newspaperman, constantly present, constantly observing, constantly taking a stand.

So, what are we to make of the poems in this volume that don't fit that model? The poems that operate on a universal level, seemingly independent of location? As you listen to these poems, listen for Sandburg's involvement with the concept of the city as something itself universal, something that seeks the truth of the city as a human institution and human environment beyond the life of one city, Chicago. Sandburg here writes of urban humanity in its essence, not merely the urban life of one city on the shore of Lake Michigan. The city of Chicago, for Sandburg, is all cities; the lake, for him, is the sea, the universal sea.

In these poems, Sandburg truly finds his voice, and brings us the universal city in all its ramifications. Enjoy!

A note to the listener: This book was written in 1916 and uses the common language of that time. That includes a very few instances of words referring to African-Americans and people of Central European ancestry that are today unacceptable. We do well to listen to the way even our great poets once spoke, so that we do not forget that we once spoke that way.

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