



Selected Poems

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This new collection of Sandburg's finest and most representative poetry draws on all of his previous volumes and includes four unpublished poems about Lincoln. The Hendricks' comprehensive introduction discusses how Sandburg's life and beliefs colored his work and why it continues to resonate so deeply with Americans today. Edited and with an Introduction by George and Willene Hendrick.

Selected Poems Details

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Judy says

Sandburg paints a different hue on my slow-growing poetry bank of knowledge. Of those I've read, he comes the closest to Frost in style. Instead of focusing on nature and the outdoors like Frost, Sandburg focuses more on the nature of people and leaders. He is atune to the political climate of his day. Although I hate reading about politics, it is interesting to see the world through his retrospective eyes. His discernment in regards to *big business* and Billy Sunday as *big business religion* were particularly entertaining. Some of my favorite poems were: *The Windy City*, *Billy Sunday*, *Smoke and Steel*, and *Lawyer*.

mwpm says

From *Chicago Poems* (1916)...

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 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 brick-layer who went to state's prison for shooting another man while drunk.
(One man fell from a girder and broke his neck at the end of a straight plunge--he is here--his soul has gone into the stones of the building.)

On the office doors from tier to tier--hundreds of names and each name standing for a face

written across with a dead child, a passionate lover, a driving ambition for a million dollar business or a lobster's ease of life.

Behind the signs on the doors they work and the walls tell nothing from room to room.
Ten-dollar-a-week stenographers take letters from corporation officers, lawyers, efficiency engineers, and tons of letters go bundled from the building to all ends of the earth.
Smiles and tears of each office girl go into the soul of the building just the same as the mastermen who rule the building.

Hands of clocks turn to noon hours and each floor empties its men and women who go away and eat and come back to work.
Toward the end of the afternoon all work slackens and all jobs go slower as the people feel day closing on them.
One by one the floors are emptied. . . The uniformed elevator men are gone. Pails clang. . .
Scrubbers work, talking in foreign tongues. Broom and water and mop clean from the floors human dust and spit, and machine grime of the day.
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.

- **Skyscraper**, pg. 19-21

From *Cornhuskers* (1918)...

I too have a garret of old playthings.
I have tin soldiers with broken arms upstairs.
I have a wagon and the wheels gone upstairs.
I have guns and a drum, a jumping-jack and a magic lantern.
And dust is on them and I never look at them upstairs.
I too have a garret of old playthings.

- **Upstairs**, pg. 65

From *Smoke and Steel* (1920)...

There will be a rusty gun on the wall, sweetheart,
The rifle grooves curling with flakes of rust.

A spider will make a silver string nest in the
darkest, warmest corner of it.
The trigger and the range-finder, they too will be rusty.
And no hands will polish the gun, and it will hang on the wall.
Forefingers and thumbs will point casually toward it.
It will be spoken among half-forgotten, wished-to-be-forgotten things.
They will tell the spider: Go on, you're doing good work.

- **A.E.F.**, pg. 87-88

From *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922)...

1
Roll open this rug; a minx is
in it; see her toe wiggling;
roll open the rug; she is a
runaway; or somebody is trying
to steal her; here she is;
here's your minx; how can we
have a play unless we have
this minx?

2
The child goes out in the storm
stage thunder; "erring daughter,
never darken this door-sill again";
the tender parents speak their curse;
the child puts a few knick-knacks in
a handkerchief; and the child goes;
the door closes and the child goes;
she is out now, in the storm on the
stage, out forever; snow, you son-of-a-gun,
snow, turn on the snow.

- **Props**, pg. 116

From *Good Morning, America* (1928)...

The green bug sleeps in the white lily ear.
The red bug sleeps in the white magnolia.
Shiny wings, you are choosers of colour.
You have taken your summer bungalows wisely.

- **Small Homes**, pg. 119

From *The People, Yes* (1936)...

"The people is a myth, an abstraction."
And what myth would you put in place of the people?
And what abstraction would you exchange for this one?
And when has creative man not toiled deep in myth?
And who fights for a bellyful only and where is any name worth remembering for anything else
than the human abstraction woven through it with invisible thongs?
"Precisely who and what is the people?"
Is this far off from asking what is grass? what is salt? what is the sea? what is loam?
What are seeds? what is a crop? why must mammals have milk soon as born or they perish?
And how did that alfalfa governor mean it: "The common people is a mule that will do
anything you say except stay hitched"?

- **The People, Yes**, 17, pg. 124

From *Complete Poems* (1950)...

I have seen
The old gods go
And the new gods come.

Day by day
And year by year
The idols fall
and the idols rise.

Today
I worship the hammer.

- **The Hammer**, pg. 132

Mary says

This collection does not contain *The Junk Man*. And all I could think about throughout this book was the first time I read *The Junk Man*. It was sent to me by a friend in Texas, now long lost, now just one of those people I used to know. She was beautiful and strong and over Ani DiFranco and Pinot she opened my world to poetry. Her wife is a lucky lady. And Sandburg's voice still takes me back to the late 90's and *The Junk Man*. Funny, how words can do that.

Colton says

Some of the best poetry I've read. Different in the fact that it's very earthy and humanistic, focused on workers and cities at the onset of the 20th century and the waking nightmare of World War II. Sandburg perfectly evokes everything from the sand on the beaches of Normandy to the smog and steel of Chicago, but always puts the humans at the forefront and refuses to get lost in supercilious verbiage for the sake of poetics. Very distinctly and unashamedly American - not chintzy, flag-pin, red hat patriotism, but honest love and compassion for the modest people who wake up and make this country run every single day.

Janet Carter says

These deserve to be read aloud.

Cynthia says

Carl Sandburg was not one of my favorite poets, but I'd been in the mood for some early 20th century poetry, so I requested this book from the library. His only poem I'd remembered was "Fog," which I think every schoolchild learned in my day. But I found some new Sandburg poems to love, one of which is "Mill-Doors." If you're familiar with the history of textile mills in Sandburg's time and the way they mercilessly turned young girls into aged women, you'll appreciate the emotion he wrote into that poem.

Joe Brunory says

This is our Chicago poet. He is us, every man. His poetry is 100 years old now and speaks clearly, inspiring and exciting our sensibilities. Sandburg shows us that we are so much more than ourselves. His style is as genuine as a heartbeat, each word like a defined hot cell of human blood forced through ventricles chambered and waiting for the pulse of their next arrival.

Evelyn says

I honestly don't like poetry...but Carl Sandburg's poems are more like prose, stories told in only a few lines. I love his stuff.

In this book, my favorites are *Under III*, *Who am I?*, *Government*, *I am the People*, *the Mob*, *The Junk Man*, and *To Whom My Hand Goes Out*. These particular poems either spoke to me or made me laugh.

The beautiful thing about Carl Sandburg's poems is that there's something for everyone. If you look hard enough, you'll find at least one that will speak to you.

Kristin says

These poems made me feel as though I were walking through the streets of America during another time, each poem a snapshot of this country and its people.

gautami says

Haunts

There are places I go when I am strong.
One is a marsh pool where I used to go
with a long-ear hound-dog.
One is a wild crabapple tree; I was there
a moonlight night with a girl.
The dog is gone; the girl is gone; I go to these
places when there is no other place to go.

~Page 70, Selected Poems of Carl Sandburg

Starting with Chicago, this short book of poetry takes us to the real word of the working class. There are no embellishments but these poems speak of the struggle undergone by that class without whom the world cannot move. The poems depict straight from the heart emotions of what he observed and yet contains that mystical, mysterious element. Each poem makes us think and savour the beauty found in the mundane, normal word of the working class, but retains the mystery and needless to say he makes one think. Poetry ought to be like that.

Here I cite few of his poems. See for yourself what do they make you feel and think.

Cool Tombs

When Abraham Lincoln was shoveled into the tombs he forgot
the copperheads and the assassin . . . in the dust, in the
cool tombs.

And Ulysses Grant lost all thought of con men and Wall Street,
cash and collateral turned ashes . . . in the dust, in the
cool tombs.

Pocahontas' body, lovely as a poplar, sweet as a red haw in
November or a pawpaw in May, did she wonder? does she
remember? . . . in the dust, in the cool tombs?

Take any streetful of people buying clothes and groceries,
cheering a hero or throwing confetti and blowing tin
horns . . . tell me if the lovers are losers . . . tell me if any
get more than the lovers . . . in the dust . . . in the cool
tombs.

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

I Am the People, the Mob

I am the people--the mob--the crowd--the mass.
Do you know that all the great work of the world is
done through me?
I am the workingman, the inventor, the maker of the
world's food and clothes.
I am the audience that witnesses history. The Napoleons
come from me and the Lincolns. They die. And
then I send forth more Napoleons and Lincolns.
I am the seed ground. I am a prairie that will stand
for much plowing. Terrible storms pass over me.
I forget. The best of me is sucked out and wasted.
I forget. Everything but Death comes to me and
makes me work and give up what I have. And I
forget.
Sometimes I growl, shake myself and spatter a few red
drops for history to remember. Then--I forget.
When I, the People, learn to remember, when I, the
People, use the lessons of yesterday and no longer
forget who robbed me last year, who played me for
a fool--then there will be no speaker in all the world
say the name: "The People," with any fleck of a
sneer in his voice or any far-off smile of derision.
The mob--the crowd--the mass--will arrive then.

Some of those poems blew me away completely and made me want to read more of his works. Simply look at this:

Pool

Out of the fire
Came a man sunken
To less than cinders,
A tea-cup of ashes or so.
And I,
The gold in the house,
Writhed into a stiff pool.

Anne says

If there's one thing that I find very hard to do, it's reviewing poetry books. This collection by Carl Sandburg is no exception, of course. But this has to be one of the books that hold a very special place in my heart. The poems changed me more than I could imagine possible. This book got me into writing poetry again, more than poetry guidebooks did. Carl Sandburg taught me that, as a poet, I shouldn't merely focus on intensely personal topics. On the other hand, I should look at the people's needs as well. I became more critical of the problems surrounding my country and other nations; and that awareness led me to write more poems. Poems that have an intrinsic value, in my opinion, because they don't only concern me. They concern everyone else. I don't think I can ever let go of this book - it's too special for me. I love that he used free verse: I saw different ways to make use of this freedom, and I suppose that really made me appreciate poetry all the more.

Dale Jr. says

Sandburg is the eloquent voice of the working man. Those who toil in dust and mortar. The men and women who find happiness in the fact that they've made it to another tomorrow. He speaks for those who have no voices and those whose voices are lost.

This is the first collection of poems I've read from the man and I'm only ashamed I had not gotten to him earlier. His free-verse style is one that I myself delight in and, to me, always comes off as the most genuine and honest form of poetry.

It amazes me just how much some of the poems contained within this collection resonate today. Especially in the Chicago Poems and War Poems. If you've not read Sandburg, do yourself a favor and pick up a collection of his as soon as possible.

J. Alfred says

Rebecca West, whom I've recently heard is worth looking into in her own right, nails the introduction to this volume, saying that Sandburg doesn't work the way that we think poetry should work if we're thinking in terms of Yeats or Eliot: he needs 100 poems to get you the impression that he's trying to get. And with that in mind, this collection is breathtaking. It gives you a Whitmanic version of America and the Common Man doing their thing in a way that is touching and hard to let go of. And of course you think you've got all you need of Sandburg once you know "Chicago" and "Grass" but there's more to him than that. This guy is worth a spot on your shelf.

Peter Wolfley says

Carl Sandburg is one of America's most under-appreciated poets. He has a distinct voice that reminds me a lot of the great folk singers like Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Bob Dylan. I especially like the poem "Fog." It's short and sweet but there is no better imagery than "The fog comes on little cat feet."

I appreciate the accessibility of Sandburg's writing although many critics find it to be pedestrian.

Now I just need to muster the courage to start reading his biography of Abe Lincoln.

Tim Weakley says

My second book of Sandburg poems now. I still seem to like his Chicago poems, and soldier poems best of all. I think it's the portraits of simple people in their everyday world that draw me.
