

# Carl sandburg's chicago

[Experience](#), [Laughter](#)



The poem Chicago by Carl Sandburg is a depiction of how the city really looks like. It is a picture not just of an imaginary location but a total imagery of how everyday Chicago is. There is an attempt to elucidate in the reader's mind the general description of Chicago, as well as the subtle references to specific elements that govern the whole of the poem. Sandburg also tries to commend Chicago in high reverence, with respect to other cities that the readers may give value to.

He uses figures of speech to strengthen his presentation of the poem into an appealing one, something that could easily captivate the attention of the readers. Also, very simplistic and ordinary wordings were used that the poem could be grasped in an almost literal manner. The first three lines of Sandburg's poem is a call to the citizens of Chicago, specifically the workmen or the so-called proletarians. He refers to the hog butcher, tool maker, wheat stacker, railroad player, and freight handler – all but the men who do the (literally) dirty jobs in the agricultural, manufacturing, and transportation sectors.

Why then was he referring to these men who could be considered of “ lower status” in contrast to the doctors, engineers, or lawyers, or the ones with titles before their names? Perhaps this is symbolism for the physicality of Chicago. Chicago is considered as “ stormy, husky, [and] brawling” (Sandburg 1, line 4). It is called the “ city of the big shoulders” (line 5) because of the people that inhabit it. The rise of industrialization paved way for the generation of many an industries such that the labor force is centralized on what needed strength more – construction work, manufacturing work, and the likes.

The big-shouldered are indeed the main characters that make Chicago turn, and Sandburg's call to these characters makes an analogy of Chicago in a whole. He typifies this call in the context that personifies Chicago in a way as though he was really talking to it. He used several pronouns, like those in the sixth line " They tell me you are wicked and I believe them" (Sandburg 1) which relate to " they" as an allusion of an outside persona and is absent in the conversation; " you" is being referred to the personification of Chicago; and " I" is used to depict the poet himself.

The pronouns were not only used to illustrate personification, but it is also used to differentiate the personas or characters in the poem. Several other characters used in the poem create further imagery, like the painted women (who are prostitutes), the gunman (who killed without being imprisoned), and the women and children (who were marked with hunger) (lines 7, 9, 11). The " archetypal industrial city in which large numbers of jobs were available" (Koval and Fidel 100) seems not a haven for these people, but still a place for struggle from poverty and its breeds.

Sandburg used this irony to give twist to his work: that while there is wickedness, crookedness, and brutality in Chicago, he still considers it as proud, alive, strong, and cunning which cannot possibly be paralleled by another city. There is no point in comparing, as Sandburg might mean, in his depiction of Chicago as " a tall bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities" (line 18). He identifies Chicago as a slugger, a fighter that strikes from side to side in his combat.

He also used several words that repeat, if not strengthen, the vividness of Chicago in a macho way: fierce, cunning, “bareheaded, / shoveling, / wrecking, / planning, / building, wrecking, rebuilding” (lines 21-25). There was a sequence in his words, playfully revolving around the process of building and rebuilding, or making and unmaking, which connotes further to how a strong character (here, Chicago) undergoes a process of growing.

Sandburg's last lines in the poem repeatedly use “laughing:” “laughing with white teeth” (26), “laughing as a young man laughs” (27), “laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs” (28), “bragging and laughing” (29), and “laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth” (30). In essence, the “laughter” which he repeatedly used, is symbolic of triumph over the city's languid background. He maintains that there is victory underneath the notions of smoke, burden, and battle.

The atrocities felt by Chicago in its experiences of “dust all over [its] mouth” (line 26) or “the terrible burden of destiny” (line 27) cannot thwart away the known success it has in its continual fight for everyday survival. Chicago is juxtaposed to its people: the harder their everyday experiences are, the stronger they become. Hawkins-Dady describes Sandburg's work as a conscious work that relates not merely to aesthetic means but which displays historical, economic, and ideological designs (678).

Sandburg repeats his first lines at the end part of the poem, but supplying a complete difference in the tone of the presentation. In the introduction of the poem, there seemed to be a brusque, if not antagonistic, characterization of Chicago and its people. Thus, the last lines prove to be a turnaround in the

sense that the poem connects laughter in its personification of Chicago's working masses.

The turnaround is an effective way of ending the poem since it suggests a positivist point of view, a rather agreeable analogy from dimness to light. The poem Chicago by Carl Sandburg is considered as a piece of work that not only illustrates the intermingling of both simple and complex correlations to Chicago's people, but it also suggests the underlying strength of this city that makes it grow amidst the seemingly muddled background.

Sandburg closes his poem in these words: " 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. (lines 30-33). With such references to Chicago, Sandburg is definitely saying that he himself is a proud son to the City of the Big Shoulders.