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Politické tendence v poezii Carla Sandburga

Political tendencies in Carl Sandburg's poetry

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(supervisor):
doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

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Zpracovala (author):
Jolana Dragounová

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Podpis

Abstrakt a klíčová slova

Za poezií Carla Sandburga, který je dnes básníkem mnohdy podceňovaným a považovaným za nevýznamného, se skrývá silný politický hlas, který svou přímočarostí se zaměřením na prostý styl a obraznost všednosti podněcuje rozmanité otázky. Ačkoli na první pohled Sandburgova poezie může vypadat jasně a jednoznačně, kritici diskutují nad jejím skutečným záměrem. Z tohoto důvodu je tedy při analýze jeho díla nutné vzít v úvahu i jeho osobní život a politické názory, neboť výrazně ovlivnily jeho dílo. Cílem této práce je analyzovat poezii Carla Sandburga z období dvacátých a třicátých let dvacátého století a popsat, jaký vliv mají jeho politické názory na jeho dílo a jakým způsobem se v něm odrážejí.

Jeho politický život nám ukazuje poměrně pestrý obraz. V počátcích jeho kariéry jsme mohli v jeho poezii zaznamenat levicové tendence, které ale vyvrcholily v dospělosti, kdy se Sandburg stal členem Sociálně demokratické strany. V průběhu svého života si jako žurnalista všiml nespravedlnosti nejen vůči mužům a ženám dělnické třídy, ale také vůči dětem a měl obavu z jejich špatných pracovních podmínek. Kromě přispívání do novin *International Socialist Review* také pracoval na politických kampaních pro představitele Socialistické strany. Ve své eseji “You and Your Job” uvádí, že “důvod, proč jsem socialistou, je, že socialisti byli první, kteří bojovali za zrušení dětské práce, a i dnes je Socialistická strana jediná, která se odvážila prohlásit ve svém programu, že jde neústupně proti práci dětí a že udělá vše, co je v jejích silách, aby odstranila všechny podmínky, které umožňují, aby lidské bytosti kdekoli byly podvyživené a přepracované.”¹ V době dvacátých let dvacátého století se jeho poezie stala velmi kritickou vůči současné politice a po přestěhování do Chicaga vydal sbírku básní *Chicago poems*, kde vyjádřil svou fascinaci tímto městem a zároveň svůj nesouhlas vůči sociálním podmínkám.

¹Carl Sandburg, *You and your job* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1908) 12. [překlad vlastní]

Jeho socialistická ideologie ale nabrala mnohem radikálnější obrátky, když Sandburg začal podporovat ruský komunistický Bolševismus. Tato náklonost ke komunistické ideologii způsobila, že byl sledován státními tajnými bezpečnostními službami. Důkladná studie jeho FBI složky ukazuje, že po jeho příjezdu do New Yorku ze Švédska později roku 1918, byl Sandburg vyslýchán vojenskou zpravodajskou službou, která ho obvinila z dovážení Bolševické propagandistické literatury a finančních prostředků Finské komunistické skupině v USA, což ani on sám nevyvracel. Vstupem Spojených států do první světové války ale strana zanikla a stejně tak se odmlčel i Sandburg.

Později, v době, kdy psal biografii Abrahama Lincolna, Sandburg projevil sympatie vůči prezidentu Rooseveltovi a stal se tak zastáncem politiky New Deal. Spojené státy procházely ekonomickou a kulturní krizí a Sandburg se místo původní politické a sociální kritiky snažil o nalezení nové americké identity. Nový entuziastický a patriotický pohled se odrážel v jeho díle, které se místo současnosti zaměřovalo nejen na minulost, historii a dědictví Ameriky, ale také na její budoucnost, což znovu ukazovalo Sandburgovu proměnnou identitu.

Kontrast mezi radikálním, dokonce propagandistickým Sandburgem a patriotickým Sandburgem je v jeho poezii nejvíce viditelný v letech mezi dvacátými a třicátými lety dvacátého století. Pomocí analýzy vybraných básní tohoto období v návaznosti na Sandburgovu biografii je cílem této práce ukázat rozdíl mezi těmito dvěma Sandburgovými identitami, vyjádřit se k politickým aspektům, které je formovaly a určit, zda je jeho poezie považována spíše za patriotickou či propagandistickou.

Klíčová slova: Carl Sandburg, poezie 20. století, politická poezie, politika, propaganda, patriotismus, Sociální demokracie, New Deal

Abstract and Key words

Behind the poetry of Carl Sandburg, a poet often underestimated and perceived as insignificant, hides a strong political voice that raises various questions due to its directness and straightforwardness with focus on plain style and everyday imagery. Though at first glance, Sandburg's poetry may seem transparent and frank, critics debate over his true intent. On that account, it is necessary not to disregard his personal life and political beliefs in the analysis of his work for it had a significant impact. The aim of this thesis is to analyze Carl Sandburg's poetry during the period of the 1920s and 1930s and describe the influence and reflection of his political views on his work.

His political life provides quite a colorful picture. In the beginnings of his early career, we could notice his leftist tendencies in his poetry, which peaked in his adulthood, particularly when Sandburg became a member of the Social-Democratic Party. During his life as a journalist, he paid attention to the injustice inflicted on working-class men, women and even children, and he was concerned about their insufficient working conditions. Apart from contributing to socialist newspaper *the International Socialist Review*, he was also working on political campaigns of socialist leaders. In his essay "You and Your Job," he stated that "one reason I'm a Socialist is because the Socialists were the first to fight to abolish child labor, and today the Socialist Party is the only one that has dared to declare in its platform that it is unalterably opposed to child labor and that it will do all in its power to remove all conditions that make it possible for human beings anywhere to be underfed and overworked."² In the period of 1920s, his poetry became very critical towards the current politics. After relocating to Chicago he published *the Chicago poems*, where he expressed his fascination with the city and also his objections towards the social conditions.

² Carl Sandburg, *You and your job* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1908) 12.

His socialist ideology, however, took a more radical turn, when supporting the Russian Bolshevik Communist program. This affinity towards Communist ideology caused him being surveilled by the state security services. A careful study of his FBI file shows that after his arrival to New York from Sweden in late 1918, Sandburg was interrogated by army intelligence who accused him of importing Bolshevik propagandist literature and funds to a Finnish Communist group in the US, and he himself did not deny such accusations. With the United States entry to the World War I, the Socialist Party ceased to exist, and Sandburg's voice fell silent as well.

Later, while writing a biography of Abraham Lincoln, Sandburg started to sympathize with President Roosevelt and became a supporter of the New Deal. While the United States were going through an economic and cultural crisis, Sandburg was attempting to establish a new American identity instead of his previous political and social critique. His new enthusiastic and patriotic view was even reflected in his work. Now instead of focusing on the present, it focused also on the past, history, and legacy of America and also on the future. This once again showed Sandburg's changeable identity.

The contrast between "radical or even propagandist" Sandburg and "patriotic" Sandburg is in his poetry most visible during the period of the 1920s and 1930s. Through analysis of selected poems of this period with reference to Sandburg's biographical features, the objective is to discuss the differences between Sandburg's two identities, comment on the political aspects that formed them, and determine whether his poetry is considered patriotic or rather propagandist.

Key words: Carl Sandburg, 20th-century poetry, political poetry, politics, propaganda, patriotism, Social-Democracy, New Deal

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1. Introduction

The 1950s was a period of prosperity and a booming economy in the United States of America, but it was also a period of social injustice, civil rights movements and a power struggle. The United States were the world's strongest military power, but they also began to be extremely distrustful towards the expanding Soviet Union resenting the US power. America was threatened by the Soviet Union and many Americans believed that the threat of communism was not only real but rising and were worried that communism could destroy American society. This marks the beginning of a struggle for the control of the world and the era of rejecting communism and the communist ideology in the US. These political attitudes shaped not only the domestic policy but by extension the literary world as well.

Similarly to the US administration, the attitude towards literature was changing as well. After World War II, the poetry became more lyrical instead of overtly political. Politics was still present in literature, but "the tone had shifted away from the class-conscious, leftist writing of much literature marked as 'political' in the generation before."¹ Because of the Soviet Union threat, "we find the general tone slightly tempered by the Red Scare."² The working-class problems were not the objective of poetry anymore, but rather the voices of social injustice of oppressed minorities. Also, poets had a growing interest in inventing new forms and innovating the American poetry, and as result "a few established poets like Robert Frost and Carl Sandburg could still attract a handful of readers, but serious poetry held little popularity appeal in the 1950s."³ With changing tendencies of American society and literature, the political tendencies in American poetry were changing as well.

¹ Steven Belleto, *American Literature in Transition, 1950-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 87.

² Belleto 87.

³ William H. Young and Nancy K. Young, *The 1950s* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004) 144.

Although Carl Sandburg enjoyed great popularity in the 1920s and the 1930s, his reputation had a declining tendency due to the changing nature of poetry, especially in the 1950s, which can be characterized as “cerebral, dense, and intricately allusive under the influence of Pound and Eliot.”⁴ Even though during the 1920s and 1930s, “no other American writer was at the same time so widely read and heard,”⁵ in the 1950s Carl Sandburg inherited the status of an outsider. His serious poetry from the period before the Second World War had no place and understanding in the 1950s. The decline of Carl Sandburg’s poetry is marked by his publication of *Complete Poems* in 1950, containing the six books of poems that had been published before, that started a wave of reviews. Even though his poetry had much success in its peak, it did not suit the later society of the 1950s because of Sandburg’s “irreverent attitude toward the art of poetry.”⁶ Though, as David Orr states, “rare is the poet who doesn’t view himself as deeply invested in political life,”⁷ Sandburg’s poetry was criticized for being too political.

With closer examination of Sandburg’s poetry, it is evident that his work was never apolitical and that his personal life and political beliefs had a significant impact on his work. From ancient times, literature has always been closely connected to politics, expressing attitudes towards society and reacting to social changes. Literature represents not so much this ability to express opinions, ideas, and wills as it displays “the character of time or a society.”⁸ Literature itself is mirroring the state of things and society as much as it is “revealing the signs of history”⁹ and social changes. Therefore, the question we should ask is not whether poetry is political but in what way politics affect poetry. In the perspective of The New Criticism that

⁴ Gay Wilson Allen, *Carl Sandburg* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972) 34.

⁵ Allen 34.

⁶ Allen 34.

⁷ David Orr, “The Politics of Poetry,” *Poetry* 192.4 (2008): 410, JSTOR <www.jstor.org/stable/20608250> Accessed 19 May 2019.

⁸ Jacques Rancière, “The Politics of Literature,” *SubStance* 33.1 (2004): 19, JSTOR, <www.jstor.org/stable/3685460> Accessed 19 May 2019.

⁹ Rancière 19.

emerged right after World War I, in analysis, all irrelevant attributions should be excluded from consideration. The New Critics concentrated only on the poem itself and perceived each poem as having “an independent existence apart from its author, society, etc.”¹⁰ Based on this scheme, in the evaluation of Sandburg’s poems appeared to be “no formal aspects to his poetry, no tight organizations of techniques, no innovations in style and language.”¹¹ In the *Collected Poems*, instead of taking the chance to evaluate his whole career as a poet, “their reviews gave the impression that Sandburg was still the ‘Chicago poet’ of 1916”¹² meaning “that he had not grown or changed significantly.”¹³

However, the opposite was true, and as Allen states, “evidently it was easier to fall back on the old clichés and stereotypes than to read (or re-read) these more than seven hundred poems—seventy-two in a ‘New Section,’ some published for the first time anywhere.”¹⁴ Despite these evaluations, Carl Sandburg’s work then was and now still is highly relevant for its directness and straightforwardness. Sandburg’s work is incredibly complex and has many forms because he was not only a journalist, but he was the poet of the people, a patriot, a socialist, a democrat, a propagandist. This thesis will show that we should regard politics in Sandburg’s work rather as a privilege and less as a disadvantage. This thesis will prove that following the 1950s, his work was left out on the basis of misreading and that it was incorrect to dismiss and classify him as an unimportant poet. It was only because his work did not suit the strong political agenda of the 1950s, that he inherited a caricature of a propagandist.

The main aim of this thesis is to closely examine the relationship between politics of the era and Carl Sandburg’s work by presenting the three stages of his poetry at his peak. To show his significance in the literary world, Carl Sandburg’s work is analyzed in three phases of his

¹⁰ Harry Golden, *Carl Sandburg* (New York: Fawcett World Library, 1962) 135.

¹¹ Golden 136.

¹² Allen 35.

¹³ Allen 35.

¹⁴ Allen 35.

political and literary development in chronological order. The first chapter examines Sandburg's work from its starting point in his early adulthood when his political ideology began to form. It discusses the main influences that contributed to his leftist tendencies in the early phase of his literary career, such as the politics of the 1900s, his family background and his college years. Also, the analysis of his first book of poems *In Reckless Ecstasy* already shows central themes that Sandburg continues to develop in the following phases. The second chapter examines the period of Sandburg's involvement with the Social-Democratic party, from its optimistic beginning until its end, as he followed the political situation in the industrial period of the 1910s and 1920s. Focusing on the political situation, this chapter critically examines the subsequent books of poems inspired by his move to industrial Chicago, *Chicago Poems* and *Smoke and Steel*, up to a point when he was viewed as a radical poet and propagandist and he exited the Socialist party of America. The third chapter deals with the period of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the New Deal in connection to Sandburg's rising sympathy towards Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Democratic party agenda. This shift, captured in his poetry, is described as a patriotic phase as he reminisces over the past and looks further into the future. The chapter describes Sandburg's vision of America, as his attitude shifts from being the poet of the common man to the poet of the people. Influenced by one of the greatest American poets, Walt Whitman, his nationalist spirit awakens as it is showed in the analysis of *Good Morning, America* and *The People, Yes*.

2. Leftist Tendencies

2.1. The Political Situation in the 1900s

With the turn of the 20th century, the United States of America had already established themselves as a world power. With the acquisition of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam, and the later annexation of Hawaii, the United States also set themselves up as an imperialist power. The country was quickly growing and underwent a vast transformation as a reflection of the expanding economic life. People were replacing their rural agricultural lives in countries for vibrant industrial lives in urban industrial areas. The establishment of electricity contributed to this change as people were moving away from countries to cities, “especially in the big cities of the Northeast and Midwest, where factories and power stations lined waterways and the landscape became crisscrossed by railroad tracks.”¹⁵ With this transformation, the cities were expanding with the rush of new inhabitants enabling the formation of a new wealthy industrial class and the rise of a growing middle class. By 1900, “the number of city dwellers had grown to nearly 40 percent more than 30 million people out of the total population of 76 million”¹⁶ and with the completion of the transcontinental railroad linking nearly every larger city, the country was connected from coast to coast. The industry was growing, the supply of oil and steel was endless. Although, after the Civil War, the South was still “completing Reconstruction-both physical and psychological,”¹⁷ the West with “the expansion of an interstate railroad system and discovery of important natural resources boosted trade and created an explosion of economic growth and job opportunities.”¹⁸

However, this development also caused various problems for the American nation. As a downside to the economic boom and industrial growth, the class struggle arose. Millions

¹⁵ J. Bonasia, *American Politics in the 20th Century* (San Mateo, CA: Bluewood Books, 2000) 34.

¹⁶ Bonasia 34.

¹⁷ Bonasia 34.

¹⁸ Bonasia 34.

of laborers, many of whom were immigrants or children, were working in extremely unsafe conditions and were not given many rights. Not only did the United States transform demographically but also politically. During the first decade of the 20th century, in charge with President Theodore Roosevelt, that “disdained the new class of capitalists who had risen to power through exploitation of the poor,”¹⁹, the political situation contributed to the rise of the first labor unions, who “clashed with powerful business leaders.”²⁰

Also, as a response to capitalism, this contributed to the creation of the Progressive movement, that “believed that businesses overemphasized profitability at the expense of human welfare and dignity.”²¹ This change in economic climate led to the establishment of the Social Democratic Party of America, who opposed the corporate capitalist economy exploiting workers. Their primary goal was to remove the causes of the class struggle inherent in the capitalist system through collectivization. Socialism was not a new phenomenon in American history. Although unsuccessful, there were several attempts in bringing more parties to power and replacing the two-party system that has dominated in the United States for over two hundred years. This is especially evident when “American labor activists formed the Workingman’s Party of the United States,”²² later named the Social Democratic Party. “Its chief significance was in inaugurating political socialism in this country”²³ that focused on the elimination of class differences and the protection of the average working American.

The average working American was the center of attention not only in politics but also in the literary politics of the era. The new century introduced new technological and scientific inventions that had a huge impact not only on art but also on the literary world and

¹⁹ Bonasia 34.

²⁰ Bonasia 34.

²¹ Bonasia 34.

²² Bonasia 43.

²³ Harold Underwood Faulkner, *American Political and Social History* (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1939) 590.

they challenged artists to confront the previous ideas of reality. In the course of the nineteenth century, modernism was “the consequence of the transformation of society brought about by industrialism and technology”²⁴ representing “a break with the past.”²⁵

2.2. Shaping Sandburg’s Political Views

The period of class struggles formed Carl Sandburg’s view on politics in many ways. The problems of working-class were very close to him because he himself was from a working-class family of immigrant descent. Not only did he notice the injustice towards working-class men and women with his journalist’s eye, but he became fully committed the idea of changing their working conditions. The circumstances of his earlier life led him to sympathize with the socialist ideology early on. When we analyze Sandburg’s political views, it is necessary to regard it in connection with his roots. His ideological beliefs derive from his childhood and the environment that surrounded him. Sandburg was born as one of seven children in a working-class family in the town of Galesburg. Regarding his family, his parents were Swedish and neither of them “learned English thoroughly and the father always spoke with a slow Scandinavian accent.”²⁶ Though “Sandburg was the son of immigrants,”²⁷ “he has never been an expatriate.”²⁸ Due to his family’s conditions, Sandburg learned a valuable lesson, when “at fifteen Sandburg finished the eighth grade and the family budget at the moment did not allow him to go to high school. So he went to work.”²⁹ This experience had a very powerful impact on him and “when he left school at thirteen, his main goal seems to have been to find a steady job at something he did not hate”³⁰ as he experienced a series of

²⁴ Emory Elliott, et al., *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. (Columbia University Press, 1988) *EBSCOhost*. 695.

²⁵ Elliott 695.

²⁶ Golden 29.

²⁷ Golden 28

²⁸ Golden 28.

²⁹ Golden 31.

³⁰ Philip Yannella, *The Other Carl Sandburg* (Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi, 1996) 3.

jobs. He switched between several professions ranging from the army and a fire-department job to a janitor, but as “he was heading for the place where he could work with his brain instead of his muscles as his immigrant father has done,”³¹ he enrolled at Lombard College. Later, he found his vocation in writing. Though Sandburg entered college but never finished, Philip Yannella comments on his development in the following manner:

When he entered Lombard in 1899, he was a working-class boy who looked to be a ‘proletariate’ youngster, a ‘rough featured, healthy boy,’ to the man who became his favourite professor. When he left in 1902, he was a cultivated gentleman, as fine an example of well-behaved, well-spoken, proper-thinking, socially concerned young person as higher education could produce.³²

Besides his ancestry, another factor that influenced his early work was the college environment, namely his college Professor Philip Green Wright. He “taught English, mathematics, astronomy and economics at Lombard College”³⁴ and “organized the ‘Poor Writer’s Club,’ a select group of budding literary talents who met with him weekly”³⁵ to read and recite. Professor Philip Green Wright and Sandburg shared a strong need to change the society and help establish new social order as they were both “imbued with an intense social consciousness.”³⁷ Though they “satisfied their curiosity about Socialism by reading Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*,”³⁸ Sandburg “was never a Marxist.”³⁹ Professor Philip Green Wright affected Sandburg’s early adult life and was instrumental in his career because he found it obvious that “young Sandburg was endowed with creative talent.”⁴⁰ Apart from being “the editor of college monthly, the ‘Cannibal,’”⁴¹ Sandburg with the guidance of Professor Wright

³¹ Gladys Zehnpfennig, *Carl Sandburg, Poet and Patriot*. (T.S. Denison, 1963) 87.

³² Yannella 4.

³⁴ Golden 46.

³⁵ Golden 46.

³⁷ Golden 47.

³⁸ Golden 47.

³⁹ Allen 15.

⁴⁰ Zehnpfennig 89.

⁴¹ Zehnpfennig 88.

in 1904 published his first book of a “liberated, romantic pose,”⁴² *In Reckless Ecstasy*, which marks the beginning of his literary career.

2.3. Sandburg’s *In Reckless Ecstasy*

Sandburg’s early work differed from his later work not only because it was published under the name of Charles Sandburg, but also because of its “poetic reasoning,”⁴³ themes and composition. *In Reckless Ecstasy* was composed in a “classical, formal style”⁴⁴ and consisted of several poems whose subject is the depths of life “that logic cannot sound.”⁴⁵ Although Sandburg was still developing his style in these early years, many of the central themes that would continue later in his work already appeared in *In Reckless Ecstasy*. Sandburg’s leftist tendencies were already slightly visible in his first book *In Reckless Ecstasy* on following levels. In this philosophical phase of his life, *In Reckless Ecstasy* provided satisfaction for “a rudimentary hunger for self-expression,”⁴⁶ but still he was “torn between doubt and belief”⁴⁷ about the quality of his work. In the introductory poem “And a Man’s Fool,” he responded to his own doubts as well as others’ as to whether writing can provide a sufficient source of livelihood. He is asking himself whether “to poetize”⁴⁸ is only “the childish play of a childish man.” (4) He answers his own doubts later in the book with “Experience” that shows rather a positive view on his previous fears. In “Experience” he is certain and determined to “range on the roads of achievement,” (15) and cries out: “This is the way! This is the way I will go.” (15) After receiving a rather positive response to his poems, “Sandburg made frequent trips

⁴² Yannella 9.

⁴³ Zehnpfennig 92

⁴⁴ Zehnpfennig 92

⁴⁵ Zehnpfennig 92

⁴⁶ Penelope Niven, *Carl Sandburg: A Biography* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons Maxwell Macmillan, 1991) 91.

⁴⁷ Niven 92.

⁴⁸ Charles A. Sandburg, *In Reckless Ecstasy* (Galesburg, Asgard P, 1904) 4. All subsequent quotations in this chapter are from this edition and are placed in parentheses in the text.

to Chicago in 1905, making the rounds of magazines”⁴⁹ and he “hoped that *In Reckless Ecstasy* was ‘revolutionary enough to gain admittance to their catalogues.’”⁵⁰ Although the theme of self-doubt and the conceptual themes of Youth, Life, Death and Time appear frequently in his earlier poems, “the earliest and most central theme that appears in *In Reckless Ecstasy* is a strong, deep interest and respect for the common laboring man.”⁵¹ As we can see in his poem “To Whom My Hand Goes Out”, Sandburg expresses his concern about the common working-class men that experience “the dust and smoke of unrewarded toil” and shows appreciation towards “the unapplauded ones who bear / no badges on their breasts” (18) and “yet somehow feel the sacredness / of grime upon the hands.” (18) As Allen commented on Sandburg’s development, “Sandburg’s fierce sympathy with poor people, the oppressed and the exploited, which was to find expression in all his writing—in fact, was often the main reason for his writing at all.”⁵⁵ However, apart from the image of a common man that suggested a political critique, the poems that appeared in *In Reckless Ecstasy* were not as overtly political as we recognized in Sandburg’s later work.

Therefore, inspired by romanticism, instead of engaging with concrete images, he was focusing on rather abstract matters such as “Complacency, which “warns us against status quo,”⁵⁶ and “Austerity, how few dost thou bring to thy cold, pure presence.” (13) He also commented on “Vengeance, the sister of justice” (14) and Pity that does not “leap headlong / while Anger and Resentment ride the heart.” (14) These four poems thus represented two departures from his earlier poems, as stated by Penelope Niven: “The assertion of a social or

⁴⁹ Niven 94.

⁵⁰ Niven 94.

⁵¹ Evert Villarreal, “Recovering Carl Sandburg: politics, prose, and poetry after 1920”, Doctoral dissertation, (Texas A&M University, 2006). <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/4167>. Accessed 25 May 2019. 9.

⁵⁵ Allen 15.

⁵⁶ Niven 75.

philosophical viewpoint growing from his conscience, and the use of free verse.”⁵⁷ He was further touching on historical subjects, addressing “Charles XII. of Sweden,”

Immortal Swede! Across the years
There comes to us a glint
Of how man should laugh at luck (17)

He reminisced about his ancestral roots and “admired and tried to emulate the ‘noble self-denial’ and ‘sublime self-confidence’ he perceived in Charles XII.”⁵⁸

Regarding the form of the poems, in his rather short book, we can find a variety of traditional poetic forms, including quatrain and other rhyming patterns. Despite “the awkward structures and melodramatic language”⁵⁹ *In Reckless Ecstasy* showed Sandburg’s passion and drive by the “ache to utter and to see in word / The silhouette of a brooding soul.” (4) Mostly, the poems were composed in a regular meter, but as stated before, the free verse could appear occasionally. As Gladys Zehnpfennig commented, “if he had continued to develop his early style, he might have become a distinguished poet in the formal, traditional sense.”⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, in this period Sandburg was still developing as a poet, but by 1916 when he published *Chicago Poems* he already “had found his-free verse style and his subjects—working-class people struggling with the harsh realities of daily life.”⁶¹

⁵⁷ Niven 75.

⁵⁸ Niven 65.

⁵⁹ Niven 91.

⁶⁰ Zehnpfennig 92.

⁶¹ Niven 70.

3. Social Democracy

3.1. The Political Situation in the 1910s and 1920s

By 1910, the population of the United States increased “to more than 91 million people”⁶² escalating the conflict between labor and business, as well as the tension between the Conservatives and the Progressives. The Progressive movement as well as the Socialist movement was hoping to give voice to the people and was focused on class politics. The conditions seemed promising for the Socialist movement in the United States before World War I as vast immigration and rapid expansion of the economy contributed to the popularity of the Social Democracy. Socialism grew to become a significant part of the political discourse in the period between 1901 and the breakout of World War I in 1914.

The Social Democratic Party originated in the late nineteenth century as the Socialist Labor Party “as a strategy to improve rather than replace capitalism.”⁶³ Later in 1901, was formed the Socialist Party by a merger of the previous right and left wings of the Socialist movement. Though it was initially intended that they keep the name in the newly formed “Social Democratic Party,” after a few delegates raised concerns about potential confusion with the Democratic Party, it was agreed that the new united party would be known as the Socialist Party.⁶⁴ From its establishment in 1901, the Socialist Party enjoyed success particularly in the industrial areas of Midwest and the West, where the party membership rates were the highest. The great centers of the moderate wing of Socialists were New York City and Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee, it essentially started in the 1890s under the leadership of Victor Berger with a number of factors that led to the formation of the Socialist Party. Milwaukee

⁶² J. Bonasia, *American Politics in the 20th century* (San Mateo, CA: Bluewood Books, 2000) 50.

⁶³ Lane Kenworthy, *Social Democratic America* (Oxford University Press, 2014) 13.

⁶⁴ Jack Ross, *The Socialist Party of America: A Complete History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015) 58.

was a refuge to many German immigrants that even before their arrival to the United States already sympathized with Socialism. They provided the leadership for the Socialist Party in the beginnings and soon the Socialist Party “expanded in Milwaukee to six branches and began promoting its message through German, Polish and English newspapers.”⁶⁵ Milwaukee represented a “promising terrain for the Socialists, with its large German and working-class population, and in the past decade, multiple city officials in both major parties had been indicted on various corruption charges.”⁶⁶ Also, in the late 19th century, Milwaukee with its numerous factories around the city became a “machine shop” for the United States and the world. The city was crowded with largely immigrant industrial workers, who were receptive to the Socialist message that promised to benefit the working-class. The class differences were evident as there was a wide gap between the owners of the shops and the workers, who were hoping Socialists could make their working conditions and their life better. Socialists claimed that “capitalism created society that divides itself into exploiting versus exploited classes and they believed it was up to the exploited workers—who were the victims of this oppression—to assume power and do away with the existing system.”⁶⁷ They pledged “for the complete overthrow of modern plutocracy”⁶⁸ and promised to combat “not alone the conditions which exploit and oppress the wage-working class, but every kind of exploitation, whether directed against a class, a party, a sex or a race.”⁶⁹

Due to these conditions, Social-Democracy achieved tremendous success in Milwaukee, and it became “the scene of the party greatest success.”⁷⁰ Milwaukee developed

⁶⁵ Edward A. Benoit, “A Democracy of Its Own: Milwaukee’s Socialisms, Difference and Pragmatism” (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2009) 2.

⁶⁶ Ross 117.

⁶⁷ Bonasia 52.

⁶⁸ Socialist Party (Wis.), “Milwaukee Municipal Campaign Book 1912, Social-democratic Party (Co-operative Printery, 1912) 15.

⁶⁹ Socialist Party (Wis.) 16.

⁷⁰ Golden 97.

into a “‘convinced Socialist city,’ its politics ‘saturated with Socialist doctrine.’”⁷¹ The year 1910 marked a Socialist victory as “Milwaukee’s Social Democrats swept to municipal power in impressive fashion, their victory cause for celebration among municipal Social Democrats worldwide.”⁷² They won the control of the city hall when Emil Seidel was elected Mayor of Milwaukee, appointing “Carl Sandburg his secretary.”⁷³ Milwaukee Socialists put the party on the national political map winning seats in the county and state, electing Victor Berger to Congress.

However, “outside Milwaukee Socialists never made great headway until 1918, when they got the votes of many people of German descent who opposed America’s entry into World War I.”⁷⁴ The popularity of Socialism was in decline. In the presidential election of 1912, the “two years before the break of the war in Europe,”⁷⁵ Social Democracy suffered a major defeat when “the Socialist candidate ‘Eugene Debs’ ran for presidential elections, yet obtained only 6% of the votes.”⁷⁶ The Socialist party had argued emphatically against involvement in World War I and after “government repression during the First World War was followed by a split in 1919 that formed the American Communist Party,”⁷⁷ the glory of the Socialist Party faded. With the Sedition Act and the Espionage Act known as the Red Scare, it became very difficult and very unpopular to be a Socialist, which along “with the election of 1920”⁷⁸ contributed to the collapse of the Socialist Party.

⁷¹ Donna T. Haverty-Stacke, Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Rethinking U.S. Labor History: Essays on the Working-Class Experience, 1756-2009* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2010) 97.

⁷² Haverty-Stacke, Walkowitz 98.

⁷³ Golden 98.

⁷⁴ Golden 99.

⁷⁵ Mohamed I. Sabry, *The Development of Socialism, Social Democracy and Communism: Historical, Political and Socioeconomic Perspectives* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2017) 249.

⁷⁶ Sabry 249.

⁷⁷ Ross xix.

⁷⁸ Ross xix.

3.1.1. Literary Politics

In the same manner, literature was also affected by the economic conditions of the 1910s and the 1920s as the population was moving to the cities and the urban centers were becoming the hearts of modernity. In the literary world, two modern revolutions happened in the 20th century. The first was optimistic and happened prior to 1914. The second one was less optimistic and occurred after the World War I when the chaos after the war seemed endless. The transformation of society in the midst of the industrial revolution and technological progress brought a break with the past. Similarly to the contrast between economic development in Europe and in the United States, the literary tendencies differed in both parts of the world. While Europeans were concentrating on “confrontation of the past with the present”⁷⁹ and expressing the “whole experience of modern life,”⁸⁰ “no American may be said to have done what is characteristic of some of the greatest European modernists.”⁸¹ European modernists focused on the profound cultural change, while “our early American modernists are far less enclosed by the awareness of changes in society, and rather more likely to echo the mid-nineteenth century focus on the human condition.”⁸²

3.2. Sandburg’s Socialism

3.2.1. Sandburg’s Involvement

Socially conscious poets, including Carl Sandburg, became extremely aware of these conditions and this social change became the topic of many works of the poets who were not trying to turn away from the social and political issues. Through the 1920s and 1930s “socially and politically engaged poetry continued to diversify and to be intensely debated”⁸³ and as Cary Nelson stated,

⁷⁹ Elliott 698.

⁸⁰ Elliott 698.

⁸¹ Elliott 698.

⁸² Elliott 699.

⁸³ Elliott 717.

Like that of many activist poets, Sandburg's aim was to articulate and humanize certain socially constituted subject positions, to depict types not individuals. He sought to make these types available to popular audience-not so they could be regarded with self-congratulatory empathy but so they could be reoccupied with a newly politicized self-awareness. Critics who fault him in this endeavor may feel uncomfortable with the argument that what we are as people has as much to do with our socioeconomic status as with any unique individuality we may possess.⁸⁴

One of the first encounters with Social Democracy happened in 1905 when Sandburg "was intrigued by the radical conversation and writing in progress at Kerr's and the *International Socialist Review*."⁸⁵ However, Sandburg's awareness of social conditions started even before his involvement with Social Democracy. The first period in Sandburg's career was based on the time when he was a regular contributor to *To-Morrow* magazine in Chicago between the years 1905 and 1906.⁸⁶ During this period, he continued to work as a fireman in his home city Galesburg and he started to be closely interested in socialist ideology. His "argument against the capitalist system was the same argument proposed by philosophers, sociologists."⁸⁷ He began to read *The Worker*, "the leading journal of the socialist party of New York city and state, and the *Milwaukee Social Democratic Herald*,"⁸⁸ as well as the classic socialist authors such as Marx and Engels. In 1907, as a socialist journalist, Sandburg was approached by the Milwaukee branch of the Socialist Party and was offered the position of a District Organizer for the Social Democratic Party in Wisconsin, which was the center of the Socialist Party, marking the second phase of his career.⁸⁹

This offer played a huge role in his life, because "the Social Democratic Party was especially strong in Wisconsin just before the United States entered World War I"⁹⁰ as "many of the citizens were German immigrants who opposed American entry into war against their

⁸⁴ Elliott 915.

⁸⁵ Niven 94.

⁸⁶ Niven 94.

⁸⁷ Golden 94.

⁸⁸ Golden 94.

⁸⁹ Yannella 10.

⁹⁰ Zehnpfennig 104.

Fatherland”⁹¹ turning for support to “the Socialists, as avowed pacifists.”⁹² During these times, Sandburg still contributed to journals. He paid attention to the injustice inflicted on working-class men, women and even children, and he was concerned about their insufficient working conditions. In his pamphlet *You and Your Job*, he documented the key issues of the Socialist campaign. He explained that

one reason I’m a Socialist is because the Socialists were the first to fight to abolish child labor, and today the Socialist party is the only one that has dared to declare in its platform that it is unalterably opposed to child labor and that it will do all in its power to remove all conditions that make it possible for human beings anywhere to be underfed and overworked.⁹³

The socialist campaign was crucial for Sandburg. Not only from the ideological point of view but also with respect to his personal life. Besides entering the Social-Democratic Party in 1908, a subsequent important milestone in his life took place in Milwaukee—meeting his future wife Lilian Steichen. She was “a devout young socialist who was closely connected to Milwaukee’s party leaders.”⁹⁴ Besides their political views, they also shared love for writing. Steichen was a teacher at Princeton and a “spare-time writer herself”⁹⁵ and she encouraged Sandburg in his writing. From 1910 to 1912, apart from contributing to socialist newspapers, he was also working on political campaigns of socialist leaders and he “served as a secretary to Emil Seidel, the socialist mayor to Milwaukee,”⁹⁶ where the Social Democratic party received an immense success. Similarly to Sandburg, who “believed in change through legislation, in this democracy of ours,”⁹⁷ the Socialist Party was also “dedicated to achieving social reforms through electoral successes.”⁹⁸ They articulated that “better working and living

⁹¹ Zehnpfennig 104.

⁹² Zehnpfennig 104.

⁹³ Yannella 10.

⁹⁴ Yannella 10.

⁹⁵ Yannella 10.

⁹⁶ Zehnpfennig 103.

⁹⁷ Zehnpfennig 97.

⁹⁸ Zehnpfennig 97.

conditions” could be achieved by electing the proper candidates to Congress”⁹⁹ without the use of force or protests. Of those who could give appropriate responses to these new challenges at this time of change, “none were more committed than Carl Sandburg,”¹⁰⁰ who was taking a variety of jobs while making his way through the West and finally returning to Chicago in 1912.

3.2.2. Sandburg’s Chicago

“Chicago and Carl,” said Paula Sandburg, “were made for each other.”¹⁰¹

On the verge of the 1910s, nothing represented the new industrial face of the United States better than the new thriving metropolis, Chicago. During the first 20 years of the 20th century, Chicago experienced its own renaissance, when journalists, writers, and poets narrated their stories, focusing mainly on working-class heroes and the street slang. Chicago represented the period of Sandburg’s both political and personal development, which began with Sandburg’s relocation from Milwaukee to electric and vibrant Chicago in 1912. It was then followed by a period of working as a journalist, writing for several newspapers, such as *Evening World*, *System: The Magazine of Business*, *The Day Book*, *The American Artisan* and *Hardware Record*. He reported and wrote columns under pseudonyms and “after the day’s salaried job was finished, he worked for hours late into the night on poetry and prose.”¹⁰² Sandburg was sending many of his poems to magazines, that kept rejecting him. In contrast to Milwaukee, where “Sandburg had been a visible, successful politician and journalist, and secondarily a poet,”¹⁰³ in Chicago “he was doing hack work on a hardware journal to pay his bills, barely getting by.”¹⁰⁴ However, this new experience strengthened him and “in Chicago,

⁹⁹ Zehnpfennig 97.

¹⁰⁰ Gray 216-217.

¹⁰¹ Golden 146.

¹⁰² Niven 231.

¹⁰³ Niven 234.

¹⁰⁴ Niven 234.

he wrote with a new commitment, making poetry out of the city, its crowds of nameless faces, its buildings and statuary, its industry, crime and suffering.”¹⁰⁵ Even though the publication of *In Reckless Ecstasy* was considered the beginning of his literary career, his literary recognition did not appear until 1914 when his poems were published in “an ambitious, fledgling Chicago magazine,”¹⁰⁶ *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, founded and edited by Harriet Monroe.

In comparison to his previous poetry, Sandburg broke old barriers and being influenced by free verse started using “personal rhythms which fit the expansive sweep of his subjects rather than constricting them into conventional meters, for his subjects were unorthodox themselves.”¹⁰⁷ He focused on what may seem as ordinary images, presenting Chicago, the “City of the Big Shoulders,”¹⁰⁸ as he saw it:

laughing the storky, 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.¹⁰⁹

The city inspired the emergence of a radical journalist and poet. In his poem “Chicago” “he also took up some of the major issues raised in contemporary discussions of the American city, what it represented, and what it gave its residents.”¹¹⁰ This inspiration with the city is not only evident in its title, but also the poem itself “unfolded as alternative views of the city.”¹¹¹ On one hand, Sandburg was praising Chicago with “catchy phrases defining Chicago’s economic functions and character:”¹¹²

Hog Butcher for the World
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,

¹⁰⁵ Niven 234.

¹⁰⁶ Niven 235.

¹⁰⁷ Niven 244.

¹⁰⁸ Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* 1.

¹⁰⁹ Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* 2.

¹¹⁰ Yannella 56.

¹¹¹ Yannella 56.

¹¹² Yannella 56.

Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler¹¹³

He “pictured his mysticised Chicago as the essence of manliness”¹¹⁴ and showed “the creativity, integrity, joy, and sweet simplicity of ordinary people.”¹¹⁵ Especially in portraits of a “Fish Crier” “evincing a joy / identical with that of Pavlowa dancing”¹¹⁶ whose face “is that of a man terribly glad to be selling fish”¹¹⁷ or “Two Neighbors” who “both are happy.”¹¹⁸ Sandburg is celebrating “great men, pageants of war and labor, soldiers and workers, / mothers lifting their children”¹¹⁹ in “Masses”. According to Yannella, thematically, ‘Chicago’ was an orthodox radical statement about labor as the creator of wealth. Visually, Sandburg’s myth man was a perfect replica of the Adonis-like American worker depicted in cartoon and poster art in left magazines and organizing propaganda.¹²⁰

On the other hand, Sandburg referred to the city from the point of view of its complainers, “from their perspective, the city was ‘wicked’, ‘crooked’, and ‘brutal,’”¹²¹ where women “looked from their hunger-deep eyes.”¹²² As Harry Golden explains, “the poem ‘Chicago’ is Carl Sandburg’s affirmation and accusation of America,”¹²³ because for him “the face of America is the city, and it is a face more wicked, more crooked, more brutal, and more sinful, but at the same time a prouder, coarser, stronger, and more cunning face.”¹²⁴ His complex political ideology is evident, as he is looking at Chicago through “the eyes of the common people, the workers, the builders and producers, going about their business by night

¹¹³ Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 1.

¹¹⁴ Yannella 57.

¹¹⁵ Yannella 67.

¹¹⁶ Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 7.

¹¹⁷ Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 7.

¹¹⁸ Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 22.

¹¹⁹ Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 2.

¹²⁰ Yannella 56.

¹²¹ Yannella 57.

¹²² Sandburg, *Chicago poems* 3.

¹²³ Golden 116.

¹²⁴ Golden 116.

and by day.”¹²⁵ The people that would otherwise be invisible to poetry, yet here “these doggedly brave people are lifted up,”¹²⁶ because “here are immortalized the shovel men, the teamster, the fish crier, the cripple, the stockyards hunky, the shop and factory girl, the children with faces pinched with hunger, the workers in their short hours of happiness and long hours of toil.”¹²⁷ In *The Chicago Poems*, he is undoubtedly touching on the tenets of the Social Democracy, whether it is the recurring interest in the common man that we have already seen in *In Reckless Ecstasy* or the disapproval of child labor as seen in the poem “They will say” in *Chicago Poems*:

Of my city the worst that men will ever say is this:
You took little children away from the sun and the dew,
And the glimmers that played in the grass under the great sky,
And the reckless rain; you put them between walls
To work, broken and smothered, for bread and wages,
To eat dust in their throats and die empty-handed
For a little handful of pay on a few Saturday nights.¹²⁸

Therefore, the *Chicago Poems* present the city as “a bold enterprise on the part of men,”¹²⁹ yet at the same time corrupted. In this view of American industrial society, “where the making of money is paramount”¹³⁰ and “the desire for exploitation leads to the denial of human worth,”¹³¹ Chicago is the symbol. Like so many of Sandburg’s poems, *Chicago Poems* are not only “a description of the newly emergent economic center of the Middle West and a celebration of the common people, its inhabitants,”¹³² but it is also a direct criticism of America in general and a testimony to its cruel political situation.

¹²⁵ Zehnpfennig 111.

¹²⁶ Zehnpfennig 112.

¹²⁷ Zehnpfennig 112.

¹²⁸ Sandburg, *Chicago Poems* 3.

¹²⁹ Golden 116.

¹³⁰ Golden 117.

¹³¹ Golden 117.

¹³² Gray 216-217.

3.2.3. Sandburg's Propaganda

From the beginning of World War I, the government arrested thousands of radical leftists, including Eugene Debs, who in the previous period ran for President as a Social Democratic candidate. However, Sandburg was not one of those arrested, even though he was viewed as a propagandist due to his opinions stated in his poetry. If we respond to the argument whether or not Sandburg is a propagandist in his poetry, as Harry Golden states, “he is”¹³³ as all other influential artists of the past—“Leonardo Da Vinci, Mark Twain, and Dante,”¹³⁴ a propagandist. In this claim, it is necessary to realize what is the subject of the propaganda, because “the issue about propaganda is not whether a man is or isn’t propagandizing, but what he propagandizes for and what he propagandizes against.”¹³⁵

However, his propaganda caught the eye of the state security services, that were conducting surveillance on people involved with the radical left. In 1918, Sandburg was asked by the Newspaper Enterprise Association to “go to Stockholm and report on the Finnish Revolution.”¹³⁶ He went there and was approached by a man named Berg, who “had later adopted the Bolshevik code name of Borodin.”¹³⁷ Before Sandburg’s return to the United States, Berg asked him to carry back revolutionary literature printed in Russia and a check which Carl was supposed to deliver to Finnish revolutionist active in America.¹³⁸ Due to a long term surveillance of Sandburg, Sandburg’s Military Intelligence file shows that “during his stay in Stockholm, division agents apparently kept close track of his activities”¹³⁹ In late 1918, on his arrival back to New York from Sweden, Sandburg was interrogated by army intelligence who accused him of importing Bolshevik propagandist literature and funds to a

¹³³ Golden 117.

¹³⁴ Golden 117.

¹³⁵ Golden 117-118.

¹³⁶ Golden 103.

¹³⁷ Golden 104.

¹³⁸ Golden 104.

¹³⁹ Yannella 124.

Finnish Communist group in the United States. He did not reject such accusations, even though by that time he was no longer politically involved in Socialism. Though Sandburg was a subject of great interest to the Military Intelligence Division and was even bureaucratically convicted, he was fortunate enough that the matters did not go further.¹⁴⁰ As Yannella explains, “fortunately for Sandburg, prosecution was not a possibility because Russia still enjoyed diplomatic recognition by the United States, not having been declared as enemy nation despite the secret war.”¹⁴¹

Even though after the outbreak of the World War I, Sandburg never renewed membership in the Social-Democratic Party when he left Milwaukee, still his “political concern was as strong as ever, but he articulated it from the wider, more objective angle of the journalist and commentator rather than the immediate involvement of the activist and partisan.”¹⁴² Social Democracy with the beginning of the World War I noted a huge step down as “the national membership in the Socialist Party had diminished by thirty-five thousand names, a decline of nearly thirty percent since the peak membership year of 1913.”¹⁴³ Despite his reverent absorption in journalism, “in 1918, Carl Sandburg proved that he loved the country as much as the city,”¹⁴⁴ when he observed the prairies with “the running water babbled to the deer, the cottontail, the gopher.”¹⁴⁵ After that, “most of Sandburg’s energy in 1919 and 1920 apparently went into the writing of *Smoke and Steel*, his third book of poetry.”¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, *Smoke and Steel* was published a long time after Sandburg’s withdrawal from Social Democracy, the book still addressed “all the social policy issues he

¹⁴⁰ Yannella 114.

¹⁴¹ Yannella 127.

¹⁴² Niven 285.

¹⁴³ Niven 285.

¹⁴⁴ Zehnpfennig 119.

¹⁴⁵ Carl Sandburg and Archibald MacLeish, *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970) 80. All subsequent references are from this edition and are placed in parentheses in the text.

¹⁴⁶ Yannella 139.

had taken up over the past few years: the butchery of the Great War; the beauty, creativity and potential power of the people; their harsh working and living conditions; the violence of the race riots; the rapacity of the wealthy; Bolshevism and the counterrevolutions.”¹⁴⁷ According to Yannella, “*Smoke and Steel* also contained more than two dozen poems in which Sandburg returned to his core subject, workers and working-class culture.”¹⁴⁸ Sandburg was portraying men and steel as “simultaneously tools and symbols of the industrial society:”¹⁴⁹

The anthem learned by the steel is:
Do this or go hungry.
Look for our rust on a plow.
Listen to us in a threshing-engine razz. (154)

At the same time Sandburg is reflecting on “the transience of the lives of men, and the useless, rusty permanence of the artifacts they leave behind”¹⁵⁰ with

a bar of steel sleeps and looks slant-eyed
on the pearl cobwebs, the pools of moonshine;
sleeps slant-eyed a million years,
sleeps with a coat of rust, a vest of moths,
a shirt of gathering sod and loam. (155)

Though *Smoke and Steel* repeated “the pattern Sandburg established with ‘Chicago’ in *Chicago Poems* and ‘Prairie’ in *Cornhuskers*, the poems in *Smoke and Steel* differed fundamentally from the earlier ones”¹⁵¹ especially in theme and form. Apart from the propagandist elements in the previous books, “*Smoke and Steel* also contained nature lyrics, domestic poems”¹⁵² and music, that “found its way into *Smoke and Steel*, especially blues and jazz.”¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Yannella 140.

¹⁴⁸ Yannella 143.

¹⁴⁹ Niven 355.

¹⁵⁰ Niven 355.

¹⁵¹ Yannella 145.

¹⁵² Yannella 139.

¹⁵³ Niven 354.

Given these points, “*Chicago Poems*, *Cornhuskers* and *Smoke and Steel* were in their era highly original, forceful reflections of the soul and experience of one ‘common’ man, metaphorically revealing in portraits of working people the problems of contemporary life and the universal themes of existence—love, joy, loss, pain, death, war, betrayal, transcendence.”¹⁵⁴ According to Niven, “until 1920 he had thrown himself into the fray of American life, trying to communicate all he discovered and believed.”¹⁵⁵ Though “in 1920 Carl Sandburg was becoming a literary celebrity,”¹⁵⁶ it is safe to say that “together with the two poems in *Slabs of the Sunburnt West*, the volume published in 1922, the poems he wrote on these subjects provided a clear summary of his positions as his radical phase came to an end.”¹⁵⁷ Since 1917, Sandburg has been independent and “never again affiliated with a political party,”¹⁵⁸ although, as a matter of fact, he has been an active supporter of the Democratic Party and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s politics of the New Deal.

¹⁵⁴ Niven 354.

¹⁵⁵ Niven 362.

¹⁵⁶ Niven 371.

¹⁵⁷ Yannella 140.

¹⁵⁸ Niven 285.

4. New Deal

4.1. The Political Situation of the 1930s

The world was changing with the Great Depression and the literary world evolved alongside with it. Whereas the literature of the previous decades depicted the economic stability and prosperity of the United States, the period of the 1930s registered its downswing. Inspired by the economic and political rise, Sandburg was not an exception in this matter. While the economy was booming in the 1920s, there was an accompanying downside in the form of social problems. They were most visible in the cities, where a sudden influx of people was causing differences between classes and their living conditions. As the country was striving for an improvement economically, it was necessary to show what can be done differently in order to improve society. Although Carl Sandburg had leftist tendencies from the beginning of his career, his support of Socialism was most visible in the period of 1920s. When viewed contextually, at the beginning of the century, the rapidly changing and thriving country made it possible to challenge the social order and the ideology. At the time, Sandburg was right in the heart of this stream and receiving the praise he deserved.

However, when in the 1930s the Great Depression hit, the literature of this period changed focus towards the hopeful and optimistic countryside instead of focusing on the class struggle and discrepancies. Carl Sandburg followed the same shift, not only in his personal ideology, where he started sympathizing with the Democratic party, but also in his literary output. While the previous periods gave way to his leftist tendencies, in the period of 1930s, Sandburg showed his other side. Instead of expressing opinions on the present time and place, he started to focus on establishing the American identity through the past. From this moment onward, his focus moved from criticizing American society and its discrepancies towards praising the American country, history, religion, and nature, but still maintaining ordinary people as his main subject. He always followed the needs of the people and his focus seemed

to shift in accordance with the needs of the general population. When during the industrial revolution, people were living and working in bad conditions, they needed a change of the domestic policy. For Sandburg the solution was Socialism. However, in times like the Great Depression, people needed hope and it was necessary to invoke their nationalist spirit and to re-establish what it means to be an American.

As the nineteen-twenties began with a depression, they also ended with one. The end of the most prosperous decade so far is marked by the stock market crash that shook the fundamentals of the country leaving people without homes and jobs. The situation escalated, with the following decade and the United States expected a political overturn. In 1933, the newly elected president Franklin D. Roosevelt was facing an extremely difficult challenge. His new policies were keenly awaited as he was expected to put the United States economy back on its feet. His new legislative acts came to be known as the “New Deal”.¹⁵⁹ The administration was dealing with poverty and mass unemployment with efforts to stimulate the industrial recovery. In this period of crisis, unemployed people were looking back to what they lost, and they were worried about the future of their children. As people were losing their homes and were suffering from mass unemployment and, their faith in the nation was diminishing.

The Great Depression had a significant impact on the cultural values of the United States. In the previous period, most of the production was exported to the countries participating in World War I. However, in the 1930s, the market was more localized and concentrated on the United States of America. The legislation “extended greatly the government’s supervision over, control of, and participation in the economic life of the nation,”¹⁶⁰ but it was not the only economy that was affected by the government’s influence, it was also the American culture. In the midst of the national crisis, people were questioning

¹⁵⁹ Faulkner 685.

¹⁶⁰ Faulkner 690.

what America has become and needed not only encouragement, but they also needed to restore their faith in the nation. In order to awaken the nationalist spirit, they needed to define America, not only in terms of their national heritage or community but also in terms of their democratic establishment. To revive the nationalist spirit, the government employed many instruments “to unify a disintegrating society”¹⁶¹ and many of the efforts “to rescue the American culture resulted in an outpouring of literature, films, recordings, graphic art, photography.”¹⁶² Therefore, the 1930s are marked with growing nationalism that affected every branch of American public affairs and arts, including literature. The New Dealers saw the American cultural nationalism as locally and regionally heterogenic, which “constructed America as a ‘nation of communities’”¹⁶³ and their “cultural vision of ‘America’ allowed it to be diverse and united simultaneously.”¹⁶⁴

4.2. Sandburg’s Involvement

With the outbreak of World War I, the Socialist party was suffering as they registered a decline “of nearly thirty percent since the peak membership of 1913.”¹⁶⁵ With many people leaving, the party itself ceased to exist with the United States entering into the war, because they strongly opposed such US involvement. Carl Sandburg was not an exception and was one of many other supporters who left the party. In 1916, he “broke with the Socialists in order to support Woodrow Wilson.”¹⁶⁶ Sandburg supporting a democratic candidate in 1916 election started a new phase in his political life—a democratic one. From that moment onward, he was no longer politically involved with the Socialists. Although, he never returned to the Socialist Party, “he remained personally loyal to Debs and invited him to his home in suburban

¹⁶¹ Elliott 750.

¹⁶² Elliott 750.

¹⁶³ David Eldridge, *American Culture in the 1930* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008) 171.

¹⁶⁴ Eldridge 171.

¹⁶⁵ Ross 285.

¹⁶⁶ Golden 121.

Chicago after Debs was released from prison.”¹⁶⁷ After his involvement with the Socialist Party, he never again openly affiliated with any political party.¹⁶⁸ According to Golden, “Sandburg has been a political independent and millions of Americans identify him as a symbol of the independent voter.”¹⁶⁹ His detachment was fundamental for Sandburg and as “his identity and visibility as a journalist grew nationally, his detachment from party politics was essential to his credibility.”¹⁷⁰

Considering that Sandburg was a supporter of a liberal cause all of his life, he did manage to stay out of politics for quite some time and focus on his work as a biographer of Abraham Lincoln. In 1933, Franklin Roosevelt introduced his solution for the Great Depression and with the proposal of the New Deal. Sandburg once again showed his strong compassion and sense of equality, based on his political values. His idea of a functioning state is one that is helping the people rather than exploiting them. Even though he never became a member, it does not mean that “Carl isn’t an active supporter of the Democratic Party. Indeed he is.”¹⁷¹ He involved himself in the Democratic party by campaigning “vigorously for Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1936 campaign”¹⁷² and even later, “President Roosevelt warmly thanked him for a radio broadcast endorsing his policies and candidacy for a second term.”¹⁷³ Although the economic depression “did not seriously affect Sandburg’s personal life or literary plans,”¹⁷⁴ as he started supporting Roosevelt and the New Deal, Sandburg became involved in the political sphere, though less than in the previous phase. As a result, Sandburg lost not only the friendship of Robert Frost,¹⁷⁵ who did not share the same political views but also his previous radical stance on America. His response now differed to the previous

¹⁶⁷ Allen 16.

¹⁶⁸ Ross 285.

¹⁶⁹ Golden 109.

¹⁷⁰ Ross 285.

¹⁷¹ Golden 109.

¹⁷² Allen 17.

¹⁷³ Allen 16.

¹⁷⁴ Allen 31.

¹⁷⁵ Allen 16.

Socialist America. This time, he addressed America directly and instead of criticizing it, he was celebrating the American nation. His attitude was characterized as patriotic and so was his work.

4.3. Patriotic Sandburg

4.3.1. Sandburg's America

All these hardships that many Americans had to face after the Wall Street Crash of 1929 were mirrored in the literature produced in the 1930s. Even earlier, in the 1920s, the literary focus slowly shifted from industrial cities towards the country, and as a result, small towns became the main topic of literature. One of the reasons the small town became the center of attention was the fact that many new American writers came from there and they felt the need to express their version of the story. The question they asked themselves was whether the small town represented only the remnants of the previous way of life before people started moving to the cities, or whether it still could serve as the source of true American values. The Modernity and the post-war boom were changing the nation so quickly, that its original character vanished. As the industry was flourishing, the age of mass communication was born and for the first time, instead of looking into the future, Americans were looking back and reminiscing about what they had lost or left behind. On the one hand, they could see tremendous progress, but on the other hand, there was nostalgia. During the hardship of the Great Depression, people were remembering their past lifestyle in the country, where they were more connected to nature, God and the American nation. Carl Sandburg felt the same way, as we have discussed previously, and after his engagement with the vibrant Chicago in the 1920s, his focus shifted to times past and moves towards a more peaceful setting—the countryside, “the places where the winds begin.”¹⁷⁶ As a result of the surge of nationalism after the Depression, people were asking “What now?” A new identity of the nation was being

¹⁷⁶ Sandburg, *The People*, Yes 3.

established and “writers were giving a new resonance to phrases like ‘the American way of life’ and ‘the American dream,’ as well as ‘the people.’”¹⁷⁷ One of them being Carl Sandburg who, unlike others, always advocated and believed in the importance of “the people.” In his writings of the 1930s, he once again paid tribute to America and to the resilience of the ordinary American man.

In *Good Morning, America*, he juxtaposes both of his views—the city and the country, but the idea behind it is even broader. On one hand, in an evening setting, the main focus stays on the city with its skyscrapers. Here, we can see a pattern of a social critique, similar to *Chicago Poems*. Once again, he is centralizing the man and his ability to destroy and build:

With his two hands, with shovels, hammers, wheelbarrows, with engines,
Conveyors, signal whistles, with girders, molds, steel, concrete-
Climbing on scaffolds and falsework with blueprints, riding the beams
and dangling in mid-air to call, Come on boys— (320)

We could assume that the skyscrapers reaching to the skies are a characteristic of capitalism, this time it represents all mankind. It is because “the little two-legged joker, Man” (320) has the capability to construct as well as tear down. Sandburg showed not only the strength and the multitude of man but also the undeniable lust for more as he is describing that “one tall skyscraper is torn down / To make room for a taller one to go up.” (321)

On the other hand, he compares the artificial to the nature that surrounds us, indestructible as it is “nailed down, fastened to stay.” (321) His new approach is reminiscing the old times and celebrating nature, suggesting a contrast between the cycle of life, inevitably fast in the city and peacefully slow outside of it. Although the city is “the design and the line, the shape written clear,” (321) he continues with a warning about the hardships that the common man encounters:

¹⁷⁷ Elliott 751.

Then come more, then come blood and sweat.
Then come pain and death, lifting and groaning,
And a crying out loud, between paydays. (321-322)

Man is looking to God for an acknowledgment because just as skyscrapers are reaching up, the man is trying to say “hello to the open sky.” (322)

Nevertheless, not only do we see different approach towards the setting of the poems in Sandburg, but also, for the first time, Sandburg is including America in the dialogue, commenting on the history, praising God, celebrating the nation and, most importantly, addressing America directly. As a matter of fact, *Good Morning, America* “was a more thoughtful, more tranquil work than those produced before.”¹⁷⁸ As the poem progresses, he is personifying America and looking back at its birth, just as all “nations begin youth the same as babies.” (325) He is proposing that America is a nation of a new identity, one that people can say “This is Me, Us.” (323) Sandburg is also advocating that America is a new country. Instead of looking back to its Anglo-Saxon history, the nation should be confident and “look itself in the face” (327) and answer a question of who they are without excuses. Americans should not follow old traditions, but build their own, because “now is the time for America to break new paths and find new mistakes, new cures for the old”¹⁷⁹ as he expresses in:

And so, to the pavilion of the four winds
Came the little one they called America,
One that suckled, struggled, toiled, laughed, grew.
America began young the same as a baby.
The new little republic had its swaddling cloths,
Its child shirt, its tussle to knit long bone joints.
 And who can read the circle of its moons now?
 And who shall tell beforehand the secrets or its
 salts and blood? (325)

¹⁷⁸ Golden 120.

¹⁷⁹ Henrietta Sadler, “A Comparison of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg,” *Master's Theses* (University of Richmond, 1945) 72.

Sandburg is only reminding the nation of what they already know, their country underwent a transformation and is not a “No Man’s Land” (327) anymore, but “standing establishments with world ambassadors.” (327)

This collection takes a panoramic view of America, not only of its past but also of its present and future. It presents a lyrical optimistic view of what America brings for future generations and raises questions about its identity. Also, it offers encouragement for cohesion as “we is you and me all of us in the United States of America,” (322) though advises to act independently. While Sandburg was preoccupied with the effort to chronicle the American history, he became “the Poet of the People en masse rather than the spokesman to and for the individual,”¹⁸⁰ as reveals the title of his following books of poems *The People, Yes*, where this aspect is most visible.

4.3.2. The Poet of the People

The people, yes,
Out of what is their change
From chaos to order
And chaos again?¹⁸¹

After World War I, Carl Sandburg refused to engage in any realities of the present times. Although, he was involved in politics before, “after World War I Sandburg had deliberately turned away from the heartbreaking realities of his time.”¹⁸² He was spending most of this decade with Lincoln and writing American folk music.¹⁸³ Still, as a man with a social conscience, during the Depression, he was not indifferent towards the millions of unemployed people in the United States. In history, he found not only refuge, but also parallels “to illuminate the harrowing drama of the Depression.”¹⁸⁴ His nature once again, led him to

¹⁸⁰ Niven 467.

¹⁸¹ Carl Sandburg, *The People, Yes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964) 58.

¹⁸² Niven 491.

¹⁸³ Niven 491.

¹⁸⁴ Niven 491.

be vocal, and of course, he “could not keep silent during the American ordeal of the 1930s.”¹⁸⁵ Watching the American Dream being destroyed by the dreadful times of the Depression, the Poet of the People awoke. Thus, “while many other writers went to Europe, Carl Sandburg stayed behind to write about America,”¹⁸⁶ because he felt this to be the place, he is most needed.

Even though he was not a socialist organizer anymore, he sympathized with the suffering common American, because he himself experienced what it was like to be “penniless, hopeless, emasculated by events beyond his control.”¹⁸⁷ By the time he had written *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* and *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Sandburg was so deep down in writing the biography of Abraham Lincoln that one might wonder “if Carl Sandburg absorbed so much of Lincoln’s point of view that it became part of his own personality, his own character.”¹⁸⁸ As a matter of fact, Sandburg’s work started to take a patriotic turn that reflected in his poetry. In examining Lincoln, he was examining the nation’s past as well. He saw many similarities and parallels with the past and the present, or more precisely, with Lincoln’s presidency and Roosevelt’s. He once stated that Roosevelt “was the best light of democracy that has occupied the White House since Lincoln.”¹⁸⁹

The Poet of the People was resurrected by his compassion towards the common American in crisis and as a result, he wrote *The People, Yes*. Though the “initial opinion had it that in the book was a sociological and political declaration,”¹⁹⁰ *The People, Yes* differed from his previous book in many ways. It was also affected by Sandburg’s search for parallels with the past and the present. Sandburg raises many essential questions as his book contains

¹⁸⁵ Niven 493.

¹⁸⁶ Golden 121.

¹⁸⁷ Niven 493.

¹⁸⁸ Zehnpfennig 167.

¹⁸⁹ Niven 491.

¹⁹⁰ Golden 122.

one rhetorical question after another: “Who are you?”¹⁹¹ “Where are you from Stranger?”¹⁹² “Why is this what it is?”¹⁹³ “Precise who and what is the people?”¹⁹⁴

Unlike his previous collections of poetry, he now touched on the all of the fundamentals of American discourse, a few of them being: God, everyman, myth, multiple cultures, money, individualism; but mainly “the people” that are resonating nearly in every poem of the book. According to Reed,

Its first third tends to look back to the mythic past, whether that be biblical or historical, especially the initial setting of North America by white colonists. The last third takes up the question of the future “the people,” with a repeated refrain of “Where to? What next?”¹⁹⁵

He repeatedly focuses on the people, proposing to “Let the argument go on / Let the people listen.”¹⁹⁶ In comparison to his previous poems, his purpose “was not to set forward an economic or political program,”¹⁹⁷ but rather to encourage people, because this time “Sandburg’s commitment to ‘the people’ was not a political commitment but a spiritual commitment.”¹⁹⁸ In every poem, people are regarded differently. They are not perceived as individuals anymore, rather as uniform bodies that are reduced to their labor-status and marching on as one. America too is portrayed uniformed, just like the people. Instead of focusing on just one place, as before, he is concentrating on America as a whole. His approach is therefore not only spiritual but also geographical. This approach also shows in the form of the poems. In contrast to his poems in the 1920s that contain rather short lines precisely articulated with expressions that are strikingly unique, *The People, Yes* includes over one hundred poems that are unified and not even titled. As the poems are united, similarly the

¹⁹¹ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 4.

¹⁹² Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 26.

¹⁹³ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 258.

¹⁹⁴ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 30.

¹⁹⁵ Brian M. Reed, “Carl Sandburg’s *The People, Yes*, Thirties Modernism, and the Problem of Bad Political Poetry,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 46.2 (2004) 191.

¹⁹⁶ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 281.

¹⁹⁷ Golden 122.

¹⁹⁸ Golden 122.

American people also need to stand together as the nation of the United States of America. More than before, Sandburg's poems are showing his ideals of America. His concern is not only "the workers" or any other closed group, but the people of America altogether. They are "the unemployed," "everyman," "women," "soldiers," "jobhunters," "walkers," "shopping crowds," "bystanders," etc. Though there may be hardships on the way, he sees them moving forward. To him, "the people speak and prove that this is a democracy"¹⁹⁹ for the people are the essence of the American Dream.

4.3.3. Whitman's Influence

During his patriotic phase, Sandburg's influence by Abraham Lincoln was evident in his democratic thinking. However, Lincoln was not the only one that influenced Sandburg in this period. When we think of America in connection to poetry, the first name that ought to come to mind is Walt Whitman. Sandburg has been an admirer of Walt Whitman since he first read his poems in his college years. Sandburg was inspired by Whitman and his strong advocacy for independent America. Also, as Lincoln's contemporary, Whitman had been affected by Lincoln's assassination and dwelled on this subject for quite some time. Sandburg and Whitman were profoundly connected as they shared not only similar ideas towards the nation but also a deep respect for Abraham Lincoln.

To Whitman and Sandburg, poetry grows out of their love for their nation, America. In their eyes, America is the democratic ideal, "the hope of mankind, politically, creatively, scientifically, educationally"²⁰⁰ and spiritually. As Whitman argues, "The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem"²⁰¹ to what Sandburg says: "we is you and me and all of us in the United States of America." (332) They both share the passion for their

¹⁹⁹ Zehnpfennig 184.

²⁰⁰ Sadler 44.

²⁰¹ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The Original 1855 Edition* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2007) 3.

native soil and manifest American values of unity, tradition, and religion, along with the proposition that America should not repel its past. Also, they both “write poetry not to please the ear or eye, but poetry with a message, an urgent message which would not be denied.”²⁰²

But, the main inspiration Sandburg had in Whitman is the fact that the language of poetry should belong to the people. Sandburg, in fact, includes the language of the common man in

The People, Yes:

Aw nuts go peddle yer papers
Where did ja cop dat monkeyface
Jeez ja see dat skirt
Did ja glom dat moll
Who was tellin you we wuz brudders
How come ya get on dis side deh street
Go home and tell yer mudder she wants yuh²⁰³

Sandburg writes about different types of people living in America, similarly to Sandburg, Whitman also expresses this idea and mentions every type of “the people;” “the sleepers,” “the learned and unlearned,” “the hunters,” “the fishers,” “the philosophers,” “the priests.”²⁰⁴

For both, poetry should pose questions about the nation’s future. In their view, poetry is not supposed to plainly entertain people or only be the means of self-expression. Poetry for them signifies a medium through which they can carry a message, which it is supposed to raise questions. As Sandburg says in his *Good Morning, America*: “Poetry is a series of explanations of life, fading off into horizons too swift for explanations.” (318) They are asking the people not only “Where are we going?” but also “Why?” Both Carl Sandburg and Walt Whitman pose these questions because they “think that the business of the poet is to help search for the answers.”²⁰⁵ In *The People, Yes*, Carl Sandburg offers his prophetic answer, but leaves the rest to the reader: “You do what you must—this world and then the next—one

²⁰² Sadler 6.

²⁰³ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 130.

²⁰⁴ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass: The Original 1855 Edition* (Mineola, N.Y: Dover Publications, 2007) 69-116

²⁰⁵ Sadler 24.

world at a time.”²⁰⁶ Though centuries apart, Sandburg and Whitman do not lose faith in the American people. They encourage them to consider all aspects of the American nation. They believe that their unity and independence will bring them a bright future, and they chose poetry as the medium to articulate their message. Although, both Whitman and Sandburg shared hope for the American nation, their politics differed. While Whitman founded and defined the concept of American democracy, Sandburg had a different task before him. He was attempting to define American identity in times of economic depression.

During the years of the Great Depression, the country suffered, and the consequences of the crisis did not impact only people’s lives, but also the political and cultural values of the United States. With Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration proposing the New Deal as a way to regulate the system, stimulate the industrial recovery and deal with poverty and mass unemployment, the nationalist spirit was awakened. As some American writers were reminiscing over past, Sandburg was looking into the future. He suddenly changed the setting from celebrating the urban to disillusionment with the city. This “conflict in Sandburg’s own work reflects a modernist struggle between the romance of rural life and the allure of technology and the city.”²⁰⁷ In comparison to his previous phases, in the 1930s, Sandburg was advocating independence, democracy, but most importantly appealing to the people, instead of promoting political ideas or criticizing the political situation. As the cornerstone of the nation is a democracy, no person should be excluded from it. People, both as the main subject and audience, are being encouraged to have faith and hope in America, but also not to be blind to the faults of the nation, and to recognize them in order to achieve a better future. Sandburg thus recognizes that the future of America lies in the people.

²⁰⁶ Sandburg, *The People, Yes* 47.

²⁰⁷ Brian M. Reed, “Carl Sandburg’s *The People, Yes*, Thirties Modernism, and the Problem of Bad Political Poetry” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 46.2 (2004): 181, JSTOR <www.jstor.org/stable/40755409> Accessed 5 May 2019

While promoting democracy, influenced by thoughts of Abraham Lincoln, Sandburg is analyzing America spiritually, historically, geographically, but most importantly sociologically. In contrast to his previous poetry, in the 1930s, he is less concerned of the present issues. However his poetry rather engages with the climate of the 1930s era not only by its reminiscing over the past but also through its hope for the times ahead. In the hopelessness of economic failure, he was attempting to establish American identity through the medium of poetry, pointing out the country's legacy and potential. In the context of the 1930s depression, Sandburg was no longer a political activist. Instead of proposing an abstract doctrine, his poetry is affected by the strive for new beginnings and nation-building. As America was changing, so was the role of a poet. During the period of cultural instability, while modernist poets were experimenting in a desire for finding new and unprecedented forms, themes and expressions, Sandburg continued to write about what he knew best—the American people.

5. Conclusion

All things considered, the evidence presented above has shown that during more than thirty years of his literary career, Carl Sandburg underwent a vast transformation. Not only as a politically involved person but mainly as a poet. Growing up as a child from a working-class family of Swedish descent, he transformed to a leftist university student, then to a Socialist supporter and journalist, and finally into a patriotic Democrat. The changing politics of the country along with his own developing political ideas were the main factor that influenced his work. Politics have a significant meaning for Sandburg as he engages with his main subject—the people. With a closer examination of Sandburg’s poetry, it is evident that his work was never apolitical and that his personal life and political beliefs had a significant impact on his work.

Sandburg’s poetry is clearly closely connected to his political beliefs along with the political situation in the country. In that regard, the thesis divided the most productive years of his career into three phases where the influence by the contemporary political situation is the most evident.

The first phase, that established the base for his leftist political tendencies, was characterized by the experiences he encountered during his childhood and early adulthood. The environment of a working-class family enhanced his experience of child labor, so that he has been influenced by it ever since. His admiration and respect towards laboring common man remained present in his work even after that. Although his first book of poems, *In Reckless Ecstasy*, still mirrored some of the traditional romantic forms and ideas, his politics and interest in the American people were emerging. His work was already very socially conscious, but at this point, it lacked his political critique that he developed later in his work.

Sandburg’s narrative changed after he became a member of a Social-Democratic party, which marks the beginning of the second phase of his career. His relocation to Chicago

played a significant role. He became captivated by the city and the people that lived there to such a radical extent that his poetry became propagandist. As a socially conscious poet with a journalism and political background, he could not be immune to the impacts of industrialization on the population of the city inhabitants, including social changes, vast class differences, and bad working conditions. Sandburg's most important work in this phase became *the Chicago poems* that celebrated the city and presented Chicago through the eyes of the common man. The poems presented the principles of Social-Democracy, such as rejection of child labor or the acknowledgment of the common man. In this phase, the peak of his career, America received a direct criticism from Sandburg, which along with his sympathy towards Bolshevism contributed to him being investigated by the intelligence agencies. Although Sandburg was no longer a member of the Social-Democratic Party with the beginning of the World War I, his book *Smoke and Steel* still addressed social issues presented in his previous work, for example his reflections on workers and the culture of the working class.

The thesis then drew attention to his third phase, that began with a significant economic shift. Not only was American politics under scrutiny after the Wall Street crash of 1929, but also the Great Depression that followed was debilitating the whole American nation. This appalled to Sandburg's social conscience, and as he stepped out from the company of Abraham Lincoln and delayed work on his biography to help the common laboring man. After a period of indifference towards politics, he once again became the Poet of the People, supporting democracy and the New Deal. Influenced by Walt Whitman's view of the American nation, his poems took a patriotic turn as he was promoting the true American values in an attempt to establish a new American identity. Instead of criticizing, he was praising America, sharing his faith in the future of the American people.

All these factors contributed to the popularity of Carl Sandburg until 1950s when his popularity deteriorated. As a political poet, Sandburg was merely reflecting the political and social climate of the time in the United States of America. The close connection between the transformation of politics and society of the country led to the immediate transformation of the literary narrative of the time. As this thesis illustrates, literature was the means of reaction to social and political changes, which he reacted to at the time. Therefore, the evidence stated in this thesis shows that literature cannot be contextualized without its own broader history. If we dismiss historical and political context in modern poetry, we might forfeit ourselves of many incredible authors voicing the spirit and realities of each period, as was the case for Carl Sandburg. Hence, we should not disregard poets reflecting on specific realities of their era on the basis of relevance, let alone Carl Sandburg, who was merely mirroring the politics of the era.

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