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David D. Anderson

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PREFACE

As in the past, _Midwestern Miscellany_ makes another appearance as another year draws to a close, the seventh in the Society's existence, and enough interesting, amusing essays have accumulated to justify its appearance. Two of these essays were given as papers at programs sponsored by the Society during the past year; the others are the product of inspiration and interest. We welcome more of both for future issues of the Miscellany, and we will be pleased indeed to find it necessary to issue more than one during the coming year.

David D. Anderson
November, 1977

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CARL SANDBURG AS POET -- AN EVALUATION

Frederick C. Stern

When, as a teen-aged youngster, I first became aware of any significant American poetry of my own time, or, indeed of any significant American poetry at all, the names that made me aware were Langston Hughes and Carl Sandburg. Living on the edge of Harlem, swimming at the Harlem "Y", had something to do with the former, being involved with the then-existing political and cultural left, with folksinging and its political variants in the heated atmosphere of the anti-fascist early 40's, with the latter. Thus, my interest in Carl Sandburg is a highly personal one, for it is on Sandburg's poetry that I cut my aesthetic eyeteeth -- from Sandburg that I was led backwards in time to Whitman and Dickinson, and on to other poets of my time, from Karl Shapiro, Delmore Schwartz and Walter Lowenfels to Ezra Pound and Marianne Moore. In Sandburg I saw, not only what seemed to me "the best of American culture" -- the democratic dream, a poetry "the masses" could understand, an involvement in folk materials which recalled the existence of a rich tradition, calls to action for social change, and, above all, at that time when German Nazism was so palpable a threat, a sense of hope in "the people" -- but also a kind of literature which seemed to me aesthetically superior to, or at least more useful than the difficulties of Eliot or the beauties of Wallace Stevens, or even the massive density of Whitman.

But it is three decades later now. Much poetry, much politics, much of my life has passed, and so I return to Sandburg to ask, how good a poet was my early poetic hero?

I will attempt, then, to explore in this essay the nature of Sandburg's contribution to American poetry, to explore his poetry, and not the man as biographer, novelist, public figure, folksinger or poet-priest. For Sandburg is now dead, and, contrary appearances not withstanding, so are the thirties and forties. It is time for me, at least, to try to understand what the poet gave us.

* * * *

I

One is struck, in a review of the literature, with the scant attention Sandburg has received from American literary scholarship in the last decade or so. Especially striking is the contrast between the attention paid to Carl Sandburg and that paid to the name that seems almost inevitably mentioned with his, that of Robert Frost. Only four dissertations related to Sandburg's poetry had been produced by American students of American literature prior to 1966, while sixteen have been produced which deal in some significant way with Frost's poetry.[1]

Of the books written about Sandburg, only Richard Crowder's Carl Sandburg[2] is a literary study, concerned with Sandburg as poet and prose writer, rather than a biography of Sandburg. The most recent work about him, North Callahan's Carl Sandburg, Lincoln of our Literature,[3] has a chapter entitled "The Poetry", which is only of little value. Crowder describes the chapter accurately, when he writes in a recent review: "Callahan's comparisons of Sandburg with other poets -- Lindsay, Masters, 'Edward' Arlington Robinsin -- are derivative and sophomoric....This is an easy book to pass up."[4]

Most of the other published books deal with the poetry, if in more profound then not in much more thorough fashion. This is not to say that there is a paucity of books about Sandburg -- books about his life, about his world, about the past

from which he sprang in Galesburg and elsewhere, and, of course, books of photographs, inspired by the subject's marvelous face and by Steichen's great camera studies of his brother-in-law -- but very little else of book length about Sandburg _qua_ poet.[5] One is tempted to think, because of this paucity of scholarly and critical output, that Sandburg has generated far more interest as a personality, as a prototype of the poet-myth in the American imagination, than as an actual writer of moving, thought-provoking, discussable verse. Nothing published more recently, either in book form or in articles in scholarly journals dispells this impression. Whatever has been published is only rarely concerned with Sandburg's verse, but is much more likely to be memoire or appreciation, or a discussion of Sandburg's prose, or his possible use as a poet for the secondary schools.[6] Only Herbert Mitgang's excellent collection of Sandburg's letters[7] escapes such description, and it casts more light upon the life than it does upon the verse.

In addition to Crowder's thoughtful 1964 work, the most provocative treatment of Sandburg's poetry I have found is now considerably more than a decade old. It comes, not surprisingly, from Walt Whitman's perhaps most important biographer, Gay Wilson Allen.[8] It is Allen, I believe, in a 1960 essay, who makes the most meaningful and significant effort to establish Sandburg's poetic role. It is Allen's essay, above all others, which must be considered as the closest thing to a definitive effort to explain Sandburg's unique contribution to American poetry.

Both Crowder and Allen seem to feel that there is a danger that Sandburg's work may be undervalued in an appraisal of twentieth century American poetry, or indeed that it may even be lost. It is certainly true that the reputation of Sandburg's _poetry_, regardless of the reputation of the man or of his non-poetic work, has not grown since his death. Indeed, though still anthologized, he is not nearly as often or as extensively anthologized as he was in the forties or fifties. Though mentioned, he is far more infrequently read in, for example, college classes in American literature, than he was even when Crowder and Allen were writing. His reputation is really threatened.

One possible cause for the diminution of Sandburg's reputation ought here to be considered. There can be no question that Sandburg's political sympathies have always been liberal and left. Early in his career he was an organizer for the Social-Democratic Party in Wisconsin, and though his views over the years certainly mellowed, they never completely changed. Crowder points out that in 1957, during a week-long Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry-sponsored celebration of "Chicago Dynamic," his views were still clear when "...he said that he was glad that America was prosperous, but that he always had in mind the twenty million Americans who were too poor to maintain even what the rest would call a normal standard of living."[9] Not till Michael Harrington's 1962 _The Other America_, was American political life to pay really serious attention -- or at least lip service -- to these twenty million and more poor. Crowder cites other instances of Sandburg's ongoing and outspoken liberalism.

Such a stance was hardly popular during the 1950's. In discussing what he thinks of as a liability in Sandburg's poetic equipment, Allen points out that the poet was surely the victim of politically inspired trends in taste: "...in the 1930's, when proletarian sympathies were valued more than artistry or universal truth, Sandburg's reputation reached its highest point -- though later surpassed by his fame as the biographer of Lincoln. In the 1950's, when social protest was less popular or even suspect, most serious critics simply ignored Sandburg" (p. 318). It is certainly true that political influences help to shape literary tastes, and that Sandburg's popularity dimmed in the reactionary years of the Cold War, McCarthyism, House Un-American Activities Committee hearings and the Hiss trial.

But if this were the major cause for the decline in interest in Sandburg, then surely one might expect a rise in that interest in the more radical sixties and early seventies, which saw massive attention paid to the Communist Bertolt Brecht, and revivals of such American radicals as Michael Gold. No such phenomenon has as yet occurred, and none seems likely. The diminution of the reputation of Sandburg's poetry, though influenced during the fifties by political and critical standards which were inimical to his world view, is of a more permanent nature. The sources of that decline must be found elsewhere than in conservative political trends. It is to these other sources of critical decline, as compared to claims for the poet's importance, that I wish now to turn.

II

Allen and Crowder make essentially four arguments for the merits of Sandburg's verse.

1. He has developed a decided and original verse form, adopted less from Whitman than from French verse libre (whether Sandburg was conscious of this source or not), and has thus made a genuine contribution to American letters. Allen writer: "At some period between 1904 and 1912 Sandburg adopted the newer phrasal prosody, in which neither number of syllables or counting of accents determined the pattern. The line might be a complete statement, as in 'They tell me you are wicked...'...or it might be a single word" (p. 320).

2. Sandburg has a distinct and distinguished sense of structure in his verse. Allen defines "structure," as opposed to "form." in a footnote which says "As used here, 'structure' applies to the various parts that fit together to create the whole poem, which is then said to have a 'form'" (n. 6, p. 331). He then analyses Sandburg's sense of 'form,' and gives him credit for a good deal:

> The free verse poet must weave his basket while he picks his apples, and this requires considerable legerdemain....Beginning with the Chicago Poems and continuing through to his latest compositions, Sandburg has always created a new form -- or at least format -- for each poem, not counting the unconscious repetition of trivial mannerisms. He is, in fact, one of the most formal of all free verse poets,...(p. 326).

Allen then attempts to demonstrate this by examining the careful structuring of several of Sandburg's early poems.

3. He has an extremely good sense of phrasemaking, one similar to, and perhaps influenced by Japanese Haiku. Allen says:

> Many times it [Sandburg's poetry] can still cause the reader to listen, see, hear and wonder; and curiously, this is precisely the highest function of poetry according to the theory of a poet quite unlike Sandburg -- John Crowe Ransom.... The poet makes a statement which in the realm of nature is impossible, yet may convey the "truth" which the poet intended. "It suggests to us that the object [i.e. the poetic "object" which may be a sentiment or a conviction rather than a physical thing] is perceptually or physically remarkable, and we had better attend to it." [This definition] works admirably for Sandburg, as in his imagistic fog that "comes on little cat feet," or the "Stuff of the moon," in "Nocturne in a Deserted Brickyard...." (pp. 321-22; Material in the second set of square brackets is Allen's. The quotation is from Ransom).

Allen then points out that, though he never made a formal study of Chinese or Japanese poetry, Sandburg could write in a style similar to these traditions, and did have an acquaintance, as several of his writings show, with the work of Hokusai. "What is frequently overlooked," Allen concludes, "is not simply his delicacy, and his painting with a few deft strokes, like the Chinese or Japanese artist, but his oblique approach and (paradoxically) deeply etched implication" (p. 323).

4. Sandburg has kept a kind of liberal, populist faith in the people, which, though never profound, is rich and meaningful. Though aware of Sandburg's limitations, Crowder sums up what he considers the poet's contributions to American verse by saying: "Nothing in Sandburg's verse equals the best poetry yet written in America -- for example the best of Robinson or Frost, of Wallace Stevens or of William Carlos Williams. But one can say with confidence that to have read Sandburg is to have been in the company of a profoundly sincere American and of a craftsman capable of communicating pity, scorn, brawn, beauty, and an abiding love."[10]

Allen considers Sandburg's view of "the masses" and of man a liability rather than an asset. He charges him with "propaganda and sentimentality," an acceptance of a rather unreal midwestern myth, and, even more serious, of "...his own private myth, in which only the poor and oppressed have souls, integrity, the right to happiness and the capability of enjoying life....Certainly a poet has a right to his sympathies, perhaps even a few prejudices -- in which no poet could rival Pound. What is objectionable in Sandburg's attitudes and choice of subject in his early poems is his use of stereotypes and cliches" (pp. 317-18). Thus, while Allen seems to have little respect for the depth -- or even the content -- of Sandburg's ideology, Crowder is impressed with his ongoing faith in the people, his populist convictions.

Several other critics have suggested a variety of contributions Sandburg might have made.[11] But these suggestions are in the main peripheral to an evaluation of the poet. His reputation must stand or fall, I believe, on his accomplishments as a developer of new poetic methods and structures, as a word-smith who gives us memorable language, and as a supporter of a policical-social point of view which in American poetry has, until recently in this century, been too rarely defended.

III

There is nothing to quarrel with, in my opinion, in Allen's and Crowder's description of Sandburg's innovations as a writer of free verse. But what is the magnitude of the achievement they describe? After all, the problem is not whether Sandburg was or was not an innovator -- there can be no doubt that he was -- but whether his practice in his innovations gives us poetry which can be read with the utmost profit and pleasure. Wyatt and Surrey surely were innovators in the art of the sonnet, yet who would allege they wrote sonnets which were that form's finest representatives; who would give them credit for equalling the achievement in that form of Sidney, Spenser, or Samuel Daniel -- to say nothing of Shakespeare?

Sandburg lacks the precision of word choice which makes free verse at times so exciting a form, and thus fails to use the form to its fullest. Randall Jarrell has voiced this problem when he writes:

> Carl Sandburg's poems, generally, are improvisations whose wording

is approximate, they do not have the exactness, the guaranteeing sharpness and strangeness of real style. Sandburg is a colorful, appealing, and very American writer, so that you long for his little vignettes or big folk editorials, with their easy sentimentality and easy idealism, to be made into finished works of art; but he sings songs more stylishly than he writes, he says his poems better than they are written -- it is marvelous to hear him say "The People, Yes," but it is not marvelous to read it as a poem. Probably he is at his best in slight pieces like "Grass" or "Losers," or in such folkish inventions as:

> tell me why a hearse horse snickers
> hauling a lawyer's bones.[12]

It is difficult, of course, to prove such an idea. The corpus of Sandburg's poetry is so large that no doubt there are fine, exact, "sharp" poems, as Jarrell's last sentence indicates. But if one examines the work of other practitioners of free verse, contemporary with or subsequent to Sandburg, one finds that his practice is, for the most part, easy and facile rather than precise, sharp, clear and deep. Comparisons between two similar poets are difficult to make, but the sharpness of a free verse poem, like Jarrell's own "For An Emigrant," on a subject, if not a theme, akin to many of Sandburg's poems, will make the point more effectively than any further assertion. As a practitioner of free verse, then, Sandburg was certainly an innovator, but he did not bring the innovation to its highest, or even to a very high, peak of accomplishment.

One can make similar statements about Sandburg's "form," to use Allen's term. Though Allen is certainly right when he says that Sandburg is a highly formal poet, who structures his poetry with care, by and large the "structures" and "forms" have not worn very well. Perhaps an examination of one poem can make the point more effectively here.

Though both Crowder and Allen cite Sandburg's elegy for Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "When Death Came April Twelve, 1945"[13] as an example of his best later work, one can find little in the structure or form of the poem which gives it the special appeal of previous great elegies. The intended incantatory quality of the poem is carried for the most part by the repeated interrogatory line "Can a bell ring in the heart?" The first four-line stanza, which begins with that phrase, leads us to time, stillness, and the conclusion, "and now never come morning." The next stanza, beginning with "Now never again come morning," refers to blossoming nature, and then

> to the music of dust to dust
> and the drop of ashes to ashes
> he returns and it is the time,
> the afternoon time and never come morning
> the voice never again, the face never again.

The next stanza suggests the memory of the dead President, as he was perceived by Americans, and in the next two stanzas it is the burial ceremony of the President as military leader, the flowers given to "The Commander," that are evoked. He is further shown as one who has joined "...the whitening bones of men at sea bottoms/or huddled and mouldering men at Aachen." The next four lines repeat the tolling bell, this time "proud" in the heart, and the poet asks if the bell can be heard over the voice, the face "over a shadow alive and speaking/over echoes and lights come keener, come deeper." In the final stanza, the poet asks if the bell can ring in time with the headlines, the high fidelity transmitters,

the somber consoles rolling sorrow,
the choirs in ancient laments -- chanting'.
"Dreamer, sleep deep,
Toiler, sleep long,
Fighter, be rested now,
Commander, sweet good night."

The structure of the poem is really quite simple: Sorrow and loss, nature, life, memory, relationsip to the war and burial and other warriors, the force of the dead leader's personality even in the face of the paraphernalia of modern communications, and consolation -- all the more or less standard materials of the elegy. The two unifying devices of the poem, other than its thematic unity, come from the pharases, repeated with some variation, "Can a bell ring in the heart," and "never again come morning," which separate the poem into its various sections and unite it from one section to the other. These, as well as several other lines, however, such as "the music of dust to dust," "the whitening bones of men at sea bottoms," and especially the Hamlet-echoing, final "Commander, sweet good night," lack any freshness, and certainly fail to enhance the poem by recalling other deaths or other verse about death. They invoke nothing new or fresh. The repeated tolling of the bell, surely one of the most standard ways to announce death ever conceived in English letters, is another example of the lack of precision to which Jarrell refers. Yet this is the central image, the most important structural device tying the poem together. The poem fails, among other reasons, because this phrase is not very strong.

Finally, the last four lines of the poem, set off by quotation marks and by indentation, are meant to be a coda of sorts, introduced by the bell ringing in the heart and the question can the bell ring "in time with the tall headlines/the high fidelity transmitters?" The imagery of the bell ringing <u>in time</u> with the size of the headlines is, when thought about, one of those gaffes which trouble much imprecise poetry. But more important, the coda itself, serving the resolving and consoling function which must take place somewhere in each elegy, gives us not the figure of the President, except in the phrase "Commander" perhaps, but nouns which one might apply to almost any important figure. Thus here too we find that lack of precision, of bulls-eye-striking language, which is essential to all good poetry, but especially to free verse, in which the poet must "weave his basket while he picks his apples."

Allen describes this poem by saying: "The elegy for the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt has the simplicity, depth of feeling, and strong conviction of the early Sandburg, but everything is under better control" (p. 330). I do not agree. Though control there may be, it is hardly the control over imagery or language -- and there is certainly not the force -- which I find in the poem which this one immediately recalls, Whitman's elegy for Lincoln. This is especially important to me because I can well remember my own deep emotion when FDR died. Yet Sandburg's poem holds little except factual memory for me now. The memory of a death I experienced, as evoked in this poem, is less powerful than the memory of a death I did not experience, as in "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," or in the best of Tennyson's <u>In Memoriam</u>. Such personal testimony as to one reader's response to a poem is, of course, only of very limited value, but it does buttress the point I am attempting to make -- that Allen's own charge against another Sandburg work, <u>The People, Yes</u>, is equally valid when applied to "When Death Came April Twelve, 1945." This poem also suffers from "...the loss of concentration, the diffusion of emotion, the general arousing of prosaic connotations" (p. 324). On the count, then, of Sandburg's use of "Structures," which lead to "forms" which have merit, it seems to me that the poet, while certainly competent, is never outstanding, never able to evoke the marvelous gasp of joy which the reader feels when he encounters a really fine poem.

I have no disagreement at all with the notion that Sandburg is at times a fine phrasemaker, an epigrammatist of considerable power. There is general agreement that he is at his best in the short poem, and it is here that his use of folk speech and folk imagery have gained him genuine stature. Few other American poets have used "the language really spoken by men" as effectively, few have steeped themselves as deeply in and used as successfully the folklore of the nation. Like Charles Ives in American music, like Ralph Vaughn Williams in English music, Sandburg has tapped a rich vein of folk material which is too often lost or ignored by more academic poets. He has smelted the ore he has thus mined with his own indubitable skill at making memorable phrases. Citation of many examples would exhaust too many pages, but it is probably true that more students can remember "the fog on little cat feet" from their high school English classes than almost any other line of poetry to which they were exposed, and that much that is in <u>The People, Yes</u> is of this epigrammatic, easily memorized, pleasure-giving sort. It is this very skill with language which has made Sandburg's <u>Rootabaga Stories</u> such superb fiction to read aloud to children.

The often-quoted last lines of <u>The People, Yes</u> are a fine example of Sandburg's skill of this sort:

> In the darkness with a great bundle of grief
> the people march.
> In the night, and overhead a shovel of stars for
> keeps, the people march:
> "Where to? what next?"[14]

One must, of course, share some of Sandburg's political views to make these lines come fully alive, a problem for any poet with a strong point of view, something which ought not to be a liability in and of itself. And yet, it is finally Sandburg's "philosophy," his view of life, in which I find his greatest failure. I must here repeat -- keeping in mind the importance of the point of view of the observer, as modern physics has taught us to understand it -- that my own politics and my own view of needed social change are much closer to those of Sandburg than of, say, Eliot, not to mention Pound. Indeed, Sandburg's liberalism and socialism seem rather mild to me in our own '70's. I think of him as one whose views were part of the left side of America's political spectrum, a side with which I have deep, ongoing, extensive personal sympathies and connections.

But being on the side of the angels is not quite enough for a poet. Sandburg's conception of "the people," his concept of social justice and of what it might take to achieve social justice, is too simplistic to be convincing. He seems to consider "the people" a source which is the force for good in history without any apparent awareness of complexity, without any awareness of the evil that even "the people" can do, with not much more content to his historical meliorism than a conviction that the long-suffering people will somehow come out "all right." He seems satisfied to posit evil men as the cause of social problems, and never to move seriously to institutions. Even when he deals with institutions, there is little either of powerful satire or of profoundly rendered aversion. His strongest statements fall afoul of the generality which Jarrell has pointed out.

It seems to me that Sandburg's faith in "the people" cannot move us now -- after the German holocaust, after all we have learned of the nature of racism in the United States -- as it might have moved us in the heady aura of the thirties, and as it did indeed move me during the years of World War II. For we have learned too much of the possibility of horror in mass man during an age of mass control, and of the difficulty of changing those inhuman institutions which profoundly affect man.

That is not Sandburg's fault, entirely. He was echoing, in The People, Yes and in most of the rest of his work, a faith held by many, a faith indeed characteristic of much of the proletarian writing of the thirties. Furthermore, he has by and large clung tenaciously to this faith. Thus, the following from the "Wind Song" portion of the Complete Works' "New Section, which, copyright figures indicate, was published as late as 1958 and 1960:

EVER A SEEKER

The fingers turn the pages.
The pages unfold a scroll.
There was the time there was no America.
Then came on the scroll an early
America, a land of beginning,
Then came a later America, a seeker
and finder, yet ever more seeker
than finder, ever seeking its way
amid storm and dream.[15]

Perhaps I only reveal here my own unpleasant scepticism. Perhaps Archibald MacLeish, whose memorial tribute to Sandburg supports his vision of the people, is right. MacLeish ends his speech by saying:

> What Sandburg knew and said was what America knew from the beginning and said from the beginning and has not yet, no matter what is believed for her, forgotten how to say: that those who are credulous about the destiny of man, who believe more than they can prove of the future of the human race, will make that future, will shape that destiny. This was his great achievement: that he found a new way in an incredulous and disbelieving and often cynical time to say what Americans have always known.[16]

I wish I could agree with MacLeish, or with Sandburg. But I think most of us, in the years of the war in Viet Nam, in the years of the balance of power based on the deterrent force of total self-annihilation, in the Watergate years, find it impossible to accept so relatively easy a notion. I have not given up hope for, or action towards significant social change, and I continue to believe in the possibility of "the people," but I find a Brecht's, or a Quasimodo's or a Neruda's much more complex, tough-minded approach more realistic, truthful and finally profound.

Sandburg was no Brecht and did not share his experiences, and that, perhaps, tells much of the tale in so far as Sandburg's "Philosophy" is concerned. Never a Marxist, despite his socialist convictions, never exposed to the horror of Nazi Germany or of the decadence preceding Nazism in the German twenties, he kept a faith in "the people" which has proven too simple to explain the recent past too easy for the modern world.

How much more aware of complexity, of difficulty -- one is tempted to say of reality -- a Quasimodo, a Brecht, a Neruda are is readily perceived in any even cursory reading of their verse. Sandburg never developed the tougher, harder, more realistic and yet no less fervent philosophical and ideological force developed by his European and Latin American counterparts. Therefore, he remains more sentimentally dedicated to an unreal myth of "the people" than to a profoundly involved understanding of the nature of man and of the nature of men and

women in society. He emerges vaporously "liberal" rather than profoundly radical. Sandburg's time over-ran him, as it has over-run so much that so many believed in that surprisingly hopeful period of America's greatest economic despair, the thirties.

* * * * *

How, then, to answer the question with which I began this essay? What is Sandburg's contribution to American poetry? He was an innovator in form, but he did not bring the forms he innovated to anything like their highest achievement. He was an epigrammatist of the first order, giving us occasional lines, bits and pieces of verse rather than whole poems, which can continue to give pleasure of a high degree, which can, for a brief moment, give us that flash of the power of language which illuminates the landscapes of the mind. He helped us to recover or retain, for poetry, a folk tradition and folk speech which were in danger of being lost under the ascendancy of poets who had more influence on poetry in general than did Sandburg. He was a "good" man, as MacLeish has said, a man whose "...subject was belief in man."[17] But his belief was too facile, too easy, too unaware of the great obstacles of evil institutions, and of evil forces in men which must be overcome if that belief is to be realized.

Sandburg will continue to be read. He will help many another youngster, as he helped us those thirty years ago, to come to a poetry much greater than his own, and so he will still be taught. He will continue to be admired for his very goodness, his very naivete, the very charm of his belief.

I feel disloyal in writing so unflattering an evaluation of my former poetic hero. Thus, I love Sandburg's poetry still, and love some few lines of it very much -- but I admire it, think about it, and read it, much less than I love it.

University of Illinois at Chicago Circle

NOTES

[1]James Woodress, Dissertations in American Literature, 1891-1966, rev. (Durham,N.C.: Duke U. Press), Sandburg--items 2321-2323 & 1799; Frost--items 1012-1027. Among the more interesting of the dissertations concerning Sandburg are: Perry Edmund Stroud, "Carl Sandburg: A Biographical and Critical Study of His Major Works," Northwestern U. 1956; Hazel B. Durnell, "The America of Carl Sandburg," Geneva, 1963; Jerome Green, "Carl Sandburg as Poet: A Study of the Criticism and Other Factors Contributing to His Reputation as a Poet Through 1960," New York U., 1963.

[2]Richard Crowder, Carl Sandburg (New York: Twayne, 1964).

[3]North Callahan, Carl Sandburg, Lincoln of Our Literature (New York: New York U. Press, 1970).

[4]Richard Crowder, "14. Poetry: 1900 to the 1930s," American Literary Scholarship An Annual/1970, ed. J. Albert Robbins (Durhan, N.C.: Duke U. Press, 1972), pp. 304-05.

[5]Among the most useful recent bibliographies about Sandburg are: Richard Crowder, "Secondary Sources" (see n. 2 above), pp. 165-68; Hazel B. Durnell, "A Selective Bibliography of Publications on Carl Sandburg," The America of Carl Sandburg (Washington, D.C.: The University Press of Washington, D.C., 1965), pp. 225-29. The latter is a reworking of Durnell's diss. (see n. 1 above).

[6]E.g. Jay Monaghan, "The Carl Sandburg I Knew," Soundings: Collections of the University Library, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1 (1969), 20-28; Mark Van Doren, Carl Sandburg: With a Bibliography of Sandburg Materials in the Collections of the Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1969): Carl Sandburg, The Chicago Race Riots: July, 1919. Pref. Ralph McGill, introd. Walter Lippman (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969); Michael J. Quigley, "A Study of Carl Sandburg: A Major Writer for the Secondary School of Today," diss. Ohio State U. 1969 (DA 31, 1767 A).

[7]Herbert Mitgang, ed., The Letters of Carl Sandburg (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968).

[8]Gay Wilson Allen, "Carl Sandburg Fire and Smoke," South Atlantic Quarterly, 59 (1960), 315-31. Since I quote frequently from Allen, further citations from this essay will be given parenthetically in my text.

[9]Crowder, Carl Sandburg, p. 154.

[10]Ibid., p. 157.

[11]See Kenneth S. Rothwell, "In Search of a Western Epic: Neihardt, Sandburg and Jaffe as Regionalists and 'Astoriadists'," Kansas Quarterly, 2 (1970), pp. 53-63; James Bruce Anderson, "Frost and Sandburg: A Theological Criticism," Renascence, 19 (1967), 179 ff.

[12]Randall Jarrell, The Third Book of Criticism (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Noonday, 1971), p. 298.

[13]Carl Sandburg, The Complete Poems, rev. & expanded ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1970), pp. 637-38.

[14] Ibid., p. 617.

[15] Ibid., p. 744.

[16] Archibald MacLeish, "A Memorial Tribute to Carl Sandburg," The Massachusetts Review, 9 (1968), 44. Italics are MacLeish's. This was an address delivered on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Sept 17, 1967, as part of the Sandburg Memorial Tribute. Other speakers were Mark Van Doren and President Lyndon B. Johnson, and the Chairman was Chief Justice Earl Warren.

[17] Ibid., p. 42.

WHY RICHARD GREAVES?

Victor H. Jones

Biographical accounts of George Barr McCutcheon (1866-1928) in the New York Times, Literary Digest, and Twentieth Century Authors report that some friends of the author bet him that his novel, Brewster's Millions (published by Herbert S. Stone), would not sell as well as The Sherrods (published by Dodd and Mead) if it didn't have the reputation of the author to fall back on. McCutcheon accepted the challenge, adopting the pen name Richard Greaves for Brewster's Millions and keeping his own for The Sherrods, both novels being published in 1903. McCutcheon won the bet, for Brewster's Millions outsold The Sherrods by a considerable margin. A year later, when the case was clear, McCutcheon permitted the publishers to identify him as the author of Brewster's Millions.

This interesting story may be an error; it most certainly contains exaggerations that ought to be corrected.

Oddly enough, the story surrounding the adoption of the pen name probably did begin with McCutcheon. He once said, "When I wrote 'Brewster's Millions,' I had it published under an assumed name. My principal reason was to see whether the book would sell without the reputation of 'Graustark' to back it up" (Indianapolis News, Oct. 24, 1928, p. 16).

The reader will notice that McCutcheon, in this account, mentions nothing about a bet with friends and that his primary motive for using the pen name "was to see whether the book would sell." There is a good chance that other motives for the assumption of the pen name also exist, motives suggested by his brother John in "Brothers Under the Pen," Collier's, April 11, 1925, p. 14.

John Tinney McCutcheon, a famous political cartoonist and writer in his own right, reports that his brother "felt it would have been unfair to Dodd, Mead & Co. to have another of his [brother's] books to compete with 'The Sherrods.' Stone & Co. pleaded with him, and in gratitude for having given him his first chance he agreed to write a story under an assumed name. 'Brewster's Millions," by Richard Greaves, was the result."

Stone and Company gave McCutcheon his first chance to publish when they paid him $500.00 for Graustark. The company later sold its rights to Dodd and Mead. With Dodd and Mead Graustark was an enormous financial success. Dodd and Mead made a re-adjustment to George McCutcheon that gave him a part of this profit, although they were under no legal obligation to do so. McCutcheon may have been grateful to Dodd and Mead, too, refusing to compete with them with another novel and so adopting a pen name.

It may well be that McCutcheon did make the bet with friends. Surely, however, the bet was only one of the reasons for the pen name, the other considerations being suggested by the author's curiosity about the American reading public and his unwillingness to cut into the profits of either of the companies that had treated him with respect and consideration.

Indiana State University

Brand Whitlock's Popular Political Reality

David D. Anderson

When Brand Whitlock died on May 24, 1934, the obituaries and eulogies that appeared on the front and editorial pages of newspapers throughout America and Europe, and particularly in Belgium, paid tribute to his career as Minister to Belgium during World War I and as reform Mayor of Toledo, Ohio, between 1906 and 1914, and to his lifelong concern with human justice tempered by compassion. Only incidentally did they acknowledge that he had also pursued a successful career as a writer who had produced more than twenty volumes of novels, short stories, biographies, and memoirs as well as hundreds of articles and poems.

Perhaps a more serious omission from those obituaries and eulogies is their neglect of the fact that Whitlock's careers as political activist, internationally noted statesman, and dedicated, professional man of letters complemented each other, that in each he sought to transmute the Jeffersonian political ideology of the eighteenth century into a practical political reality in the twentieth. Remarkably, too, is their failure to note that in all three careers he very nearly succeeded.

In spite of his success as a practical politician in Toledo and as a widely honored statesman in Belgium, Whitlock preferred to think of himself as a man of letters, and he was determined to be a successful, perhaps even a great novelist. That he attained only a modest success in his writing is unfortunate, and it is idle to speculate whether greatness may have eluded him because his humanitarian and reform instincts may have absorbed the energy and dedication that he might have devoted to writing.

Nevertheless, Whitlock is little more than a footnote in the literary history of this century, a fact that unfortunately is likely to remain unchanged. His writing, he felt, was of the literary school and philosophy dominated by his friends Henry James and William Dean Howells, just as his political philosophy was close to that of his friends John Peter Altgeld and Woodrow Wilson. Just as, in the last decade of his life he felt that literature had surrendered to vulgarity and self-pity and politics to self-righteousness and pious cynicism, both realism in literature and progressivism in politics have come to be regarded as old hat, and there is no reason to expect drastic revisions of either or both attitudes in our time.

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that Whitlock is rarely remembered today either as a political activist or a writer--not long ago at dinner in Cambridge, England, I met a Belgian academic who lived on Avenue Brand Whitlock in Brussells and who knew vaguely that Whitlock was a political figure but had no idea he was also a writer--he has much to say to this generation as well as he had to his own. His work is preoccupied with the nature of justice not merely as an abstraction, perhaps, Whitlock knew, its weakest dimension, but most importantly as a human reality that rarely if ever coincides with legal statutes.

Neither a polemic nor a propagandist, Whitlock as a man of letters had too much respect for the art of writing and the craft of fiction to use his works as a medium for the expression of his political ideas; however, in his fiction and particularly in that which deals with political subject matter, his political philosophy provides the thematic structure of works in which subject matter, technique, and theme are integrated into an artistic whole. While some of his readers in the first decade of this century found his subject matter offensive and many--the same or others--disagreed with his politics, the artistic integrity of the works saved them from relegation to the fate that, justified or not, usually awaits the product of the propagandist. Whitlock was a popular writer, his novels selling well and his short stories appearing regularly in popular magazines. He was read in the past and should be read today because his

peculiar vision, compounded of reality and compassion, transcends both partisanship and fashion, in the process giving us insights into the human condition as valid and yet ignored as often in the last decades of the twentieth century as they were in the first.

Particularly relevant in these years of what we like to think of as the post-Watergate morality are Whitlock's two political novels, The Thirteenth District (1902) and Her Infinite Variety (1904) as well as the political short stories collected in The Gold Brick (1910). The first, Whitlock's first published novel, is a study of grassroots politics in rural Illinois; the second is a comedy of manners that explores the feminist issue; and the third is a collection of stories that explore various dimensions of Midwestern turn of the century politics in both the city and the small town. The three combine to produce a clear insight not only into Whitlock's interpretation of the nature of politics but also the political reality of the time, a period not as different from our own as we like to think.

The Thirteenth District, which is still a fine study of the effects of the political system on human character, has another important dimension: as his focal point Whitlock uses that peculiar weakness in the democratic system that enables incompetent and unworthy candidates to become elected public officials. In particular, Whitlock concentrates upon the nature of partisan politics as parties--and Whitlock sees no concentrations of virtue or vice in either Democratic or Republican but a bleak sameness--conspire to place such men in power and then keep them there regardless of the price paid by individuals or the public at large.

The central character in The Thirteenth District is Jerome Garwood, a handsome young lawyer from the town of Grand Prairie in the Illinois Lincoln country. Garwood aspires to a political career; the party bosses accept his candidacy, and he is nominated for Congress by the county convention and then elected. However, the novel is neither the story of Garwood's Congressional career nor of his increasing alienation from his wife who, like his constituents, had been attracted to him by his "magnificient facade"--ironically an anticipation of the Presidency of Warren G. Harding, who in effect was to end Whitlock's diplomatic career twenty years later--and by his naivete. Instead the novel is essentially the story of the grassroots political system in which Jefferson had placed his faith as the means by which virtuous and capable men might be elected to public office and the failure of the system through party politics.

In the novel Garwood is unable to respond to the demands and temptations of public office with intelligence, integrity, and loyalty, but, Whitlock insists, the failure is not Garwood's; it is that of the system that elected him to office, the system that permits a pious mediocrity or a handsome facade rather than the Jeffersonian natural aristocrat to rise in an open society. The failure of the system brings personal tragedy to Garwood and his wife and it brings public tragedy in the corruption that ensues.

In keeping with his Jeffersonian philosophy, however, Whitlock makes clear his conviction that democracy itself has not failed; rather, it is the abuse of democracy made possible by the growth of political partisanship, and the implications are clear: if democracy is to be saved, the system must be reformed. In the novel, the solution was simple. By replacing the party convention system with direct primaries, at the same time insuring that the people are aware of their obligations rather than their self interest, Jefferson's open society became a reality in the Thirteenth Congressional District of Illinois. Garwood was not only rejected by the people, but he was saved from the effects of his stupidity; and the democratic system was both saved and vindicated.

However, Whitlock does not oversimplify either the shortcomings in a system that

permits the Garwoods of America to become public officials, nor does he oversimplify the means by which reforms may be effected. As he examines the political structure in terms of both the society of which it is a part and the men who have constructed it and use it for their own ends, in keeping with his realistic philosophy, he withholds his judgment, presenting the evidence with honesty, compassion, and objectivity. Judgement concerning the system and the men is the province of the reader, based on the facts presented in the novel.

The society portrayed in the novel is simple and unsophisticated, accepting the repetition of platitudes as truth, and Jerome Garwood is, as a product of that society, neither malicious nor intrinsically dishonest. He too, accepts the platitudes, and just as the townspeople accept his appearance as substance, Garwood is unable to determine the objective standards of value that lie behind appearance. Given the values that exist, Whitlock makes clear his conviction that man's laxity had permitted the system to become corrupt, and he makes clear too his faith in man's ability to reconstruct it if natural aristocrats, in Jefferson's terms, come forward to provide the leadership that will appeal to the innate good sense of the electorate and the reason by which the system will be reconstructed. Whitlock's evidence is detailed, thorough, and convincing.

The Thirteenth District is a simple (but not simplistic), serious, and successful triumph of reason and virtue; Her Infinite Variety, Whitlock's second novel and second political novel, published in 1904, is quite different. Set in the Illinois capitol as a bill supporting women's suffrage is about to be debated in the legislature, it is complex and light, and reason fails in the novel largely because of the ironies of society and biology and the difficulty of perceiving the reality that lies beyond appearance.

While the foreground of the novel is occupied by the political machinations inevitable in such a debate, the substance is the unpredictable nature of human beings: the young state senator who champions the bill because he believes that his fiancee will take an interest in politics; his sweetheart Amelia who takes an interest--in defeating the bill; the leader of those opposing it, a society woman born to be chairman of a state central committee, but miscast by fate; the very feminine lady lawyer who supports the bill; the old-line boss who is converted to its support; the crank of the House, traditionally opposed to everything, who supports it.

The bill is defeated through the trickery of the women who oppose it, further adding to the unpredictable nature of human beings that Whitlock emphasizes. The women defeat it by using the same deplorable tactics they insist they abhore, tactics, they maintain, that will destroy femininity if women are given the right to vote. At the end, however, Whitlock suggests that although the bill is defeated, the cause for its defeat lies in circumstance, confused roles, and a very dim vision of the nature of the bill by those who support it as well as those who oppose it. Eventually, he suggests, confusion will be replaced by reason, men and women will find that the roles ascribed to them by society are largely appearance, and political equality will then be a reality.

Whitlock's delightfully light touch is probably the only approach possible to such a controversial topic in 1904, yet its lightness does not obscure the novel's serious purpose. Although the novel is a comedy of manners, drawing heavily on the irony of reversed positions, resulting in a good deal of humor, it provides serious consideration of the ambiguity of the double standard that denies women their rights as citizens and their opportunities to develop their potentials as human beings. The double standard, Whitlock makes clear, is ridiculous, and his humor shows it for what it is.

Whitlock's last works of political fiction are among the twelve short stories collected in The Gold Brick, published in 1910. Each of them previously published in a popular magazine, the stories are not only related by their political subject matter; they are more closely related by theme. In each Whitlock focuses upon corruptiblity, a characteristic of weakness, and honesty, a quality inherent in strength. But again in many of the stories, the appearance of either of the qualities may not indicate its substance, and the stories are, consequently, of individuals who happen to be involved in politics rather than stories of politics per se.

The stories transcend political parties, issues, or identities, and they are set in Chicago, Springfield, and rural Ohio, providing a cross-section of American politics that suggests the universality of confusion and corruption in the political system. In each locale he characterizes dishonest politics through images of grossness and ugliness--usually institutional--against which the good politician, who may or may not be so characterized by society, spends much of his time struggling. However, as in The Thirteenth District, he does not condemn either forces or men; instead he attempts to define them clearly, so that they may be understood.

In the stories Whitlock focuses upon the contrasting natures of corruption and integrity, of compassion and lack of feeling; of true reform and its inept counterfeit. Problems in the stories are personal and moral rather than pragmatic, but often it is difficult if not impossible for his characters, particularly the young and inexperienced, to tell the difference easily, in fact, sometimes not until it is too late.

Some of the stories--"The Gold Brick," which deals with a young newspaper cartoonist who chooses unemployment rather than draw a vicious cartoon; "the Has-Been," in which an old ex-politician who has paid the ultimate price for corruption saves his young counterpart; and "What Will Become of Annie?," which portrays a kindly old priest who outsmarts a group of politicians in order to care for the widow of one of their number--are sentimental, in the style of the times, and they depend too heavily upon O. Henry endings, but two of the stories are particularly significant because they provide insights into John Peter Altgeld, Whitlock's friend and mentor, as Whitlock saw him in office and ultimately in defeat. These are "A Secret of State" and "The Pardon of Thomas Whalen."

In both stories Whitlock presents the ideal politician as he saw the ideal in Altgeld's performance and later attempted to emulate it during his four terms as non partisan reform mayor of Toledo. In "An Affair of State" the governor receives word late at night that the state treasurer has died, and he goes to the capitol to carry out his constitutional duty to seal the state vaults until an audit is made and a new treasurer appointed. Meanwhile, the governor's political enemy, the attorney general, receives the same news with alarm. He had borrowed money from the state funds, replacing it with a personal note. He borrows the money, gets to the state house, replaces the money, and secures his personal note. At the entrance to the vault he meets the governor, and in the encounter drops the note. The governor, aware of what had taken place, nevertheless picks up the note and without comment hands it back unread.

"The Pardon of Thomas Whalen" is a revision of Whitlock's first published story, a thinly-disguised version of Altgeld's pardon of the men convicted and imprisoned in the Haymarket case. In the story a man is convicted in a notorious murder case, and the public is satisfied. Later a woman confesses to the murder because the victim had abused her. The governor pardons the man while refusing to make public either the confession or his reasons, knowing that his act will be unpopular. The resulting public abuse destroys his career.

Other stories are lighter in touch, particularly the confusion inherent in

"Macabee's First Campaign," set in rural Ohio, "The Colonel's Last Campaign," and "Malachi Nolan," in which an old politician demonstrates the combination of pragmatic instinct, kind heartedness, and strength necessary at the political grass roots if government is to function as an instrument of the people.

The stories are, on the whole, weaker than Whitlock's political novels. Each of them, as Whitlock candidly admits, was written for a popular commercial market. Yet even in the worst of them Whitlock raises questions and describes issues that transcend commercial considerations, and he provides sharp glimpses of the American political system in operation, particularly as it faces the perennial threat of individual or collective corruption.

Interestingly, many of these stories were written while Whitlock occupied the office of Mayor of Toledo, a time during which he, like his ideal characters, was attempting to draw a stormy but acceptable balance between compassion and legality, trying in the process to define the nature of justice. In all of his fiction, as in office, he attempted to define the elusive nature of justice, the inherent human weakness and short-sightedness that preclude reaching the democratic ideal, and the difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality. Perhaps in his fiction Whitlock made one of his most important contributions as, in these popular if less than perfect works published during a period in which the relationship between government and the governed was being most closely scrutinized and revised, he made clear his conviction that justice untempered by compassion is not justice but legality, that the search for understanding rather than condemnation is the path by which we may ultimately attain the democratic ideal.

Michigan State University