

**The Secret Faces of Inscrutable Poets**  
**in Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make***

by

**Jeff McMahon**

May 20, 2002

Advisor: Professor Janice Knight  
Preceptor: Anthony Raynsford

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts  
MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN THE HUMANITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



*Algren revising **Chicago: City on the Make***

“I don’t think anything’s true that doesn’t have it —  
that doesn’t have poetry in it.”

— *Nelson Algren*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My gratitude falls like a lake-effect snow upon:

Professor **Janice Knight** for lighting not only this thesis but also my return to Chicago, and for sympathetic advice peppered with epiphanies;

Professors **Candace Vogler** and **Ian Mueller**, for guidance into interpretive theory and for their infectious enthusiasm for interdisciplinary studies in the humanities;

Writing Program Director **Larry McEnerney** for his polite skepticism, his generosity with time and ideas, and for sharing his expert eye for style;

Professor **David Wellbery**, for an erudite introduction to narrative theory that provided a lifetime of methods;

Professor **Bill Savage** of Northwestern University, for offering such a warm welcome to the community of Algren scholarship and for his continuing live annotations;

**Tony Raynsford**, for applying the requisite pressure gently enough, and for finding leaks in the plumbing of language and argument;

The **Maphiosi** — students, staff, mentors — for brilliance and lunacy and the unity of the two in a sense of belonging that has been, for many of us, our first;

Finally, to **Nelson Algren** for letting this husky brawling city rage within him in spite of the personal cost, and for lending voice to the helpless useless nobodies nobody knows.

**“There, there beats Chicago’s heart.”**

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	3
The Secret Faces of Inscrutable Poets.....	5
<i>Figure 1: Slugger/Poet System in "One Man's Chicago"</i> .....	14
<i>Figure 2: Slugger/Poet System in Chicago: City on the Make</i> .....	16
<i>Figure 3: The Street Lighting System</i> .....	17
<i>Figure 4: The Sandburg Systems</i> .....	18
<i>Figure 5: The Cardiac System</i> .....	34
Bibliography .....	37
Appendix I: <i>A Barthesian Analysis of the Opening Passage</i> .....	41
Appendix II: <i>Carl Sandburg's "Chicago"</i> .....	44
Appendix III: <i>Ben Maddow's "The City"</i> .....	45
Appendix IV: <i>"Laughter in Jars"</i> .....	47
Appendix V: <i>Algren's Styles</i> .....	48

Nelson Algren's *Chicago: City on the Make* arrived to mixed reviews in the city of its focus, but the essay has survived its detractors, surpassed its admirers, and redefined the city. In 1951 the Chicago Daily News greeted it as "a case for ra(n)t control," but fifty-one years later the Daily News has vanished from Chicago, its wall signs along the El tracks faded to mere tracings on the brick, while readers, writers, and scholars continue to celebrate *City on the Make* for its vision of Chicago's dichotomy, for its grasp of the city's slums as well as its towers, its alleys as well as its boulevards, its tramps as well as its entrepreneurs. Algren's successors have canonized the essay as a standard to which they aspire. Studs Terkel calls it "the best book about Chicago,"<sup>1</sup> and contends: "In this slender classic, Algren tells us all we need to know about passion, heaven, hell and a city."<sup>2</sup> Terkel describes his own *Chicago* as a long epilogue to *City on the Make*,<sup>3</sup> but Terkel's book has lapsed from print while a fresh edition of *City on the Make* sits on the city's bookstore shelves. The University of Chicago Press promotes the latest edition as a classic that "captures the essential dilemma of Chicago: the dynamic tension between the city's breathtaking beauty and its utter brutality, its boundless human energy and its stifling greed and violence."

Scholars of Chicago literature recognize the essay as a definitive portrait of the city, though not all believe it *should* reign definitive. At the University of Illinois, James Hurt attacks the tenacious machine-gun mythology of Chicago that Algren codifies in *City on the Make*.<sup>4</sup> But in complaining that Algren overshadows deserving successors like Terkel, Hurt just emphasizes Algren's height. Carlo Rotella of Lafayette College credits Algren for capturing not just

---

<sup>1</sup> Terkel quoted in Beuttler.

<sup>2</sup> See Terkel's introduction to the fourth and subsequent editions.

<sup>3</sup> Terkel, 131.

<sup>4</sup> Hurt, 102, 141.

Chicago, but the essential post-war American city.<sup>5</sup> And while Algren won the first National Book Award in 1949 for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, Northwestern's William Savage pins his reputation to the essay he penned the following year: "We read Algren today because no one captured the spirit of Chicago better than he did in *Chicago: City on the Make*."<sup>6</sup>

Why does Algren's textual Chicago continue to resonate with Chicago readers today? In sentences that assess Algren's legacy as a Chicago writer — sentences in which *Algren* serves as subject, *Chicago* as object — one verb often recurs. As Mike Royko writes in "Algren's Golden Pen," *Algren captures Chicago*.<sup>7</sup> From the discourse on this essay emerges the argument that the text contains some captured aspect of Chicago that still applies to the city today. No one has shown how it accomplishes this. Instead, critics have attributed the essay's success to the author's unique genius, personal experience, or poetic syntax.<sup>8</sup> In *The New York Times*, Budd Schulberg attributes Algren's achievement to imagination: "Algren's Chicago, a kind of American annex to Dante's inferno, is a nether world peopled by rat-faced hustlers and money-loving demons who crawl in the writer's brilliant, sordid, uncompromising and twisted imagination."<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Rotella, *October Cities*. Rotella offers the most thorough reading, but his contention that Algren captures a historic moment — a post-war "decline" in American cities — cannot explain why Algren's essay endures in a city transformed again by affluent in-migration, gentrification, falling crime rates, the economic boom of the 1990s.

<sup>6</sup> Savage, "Nelson Algren: For Keeps and A Single Day." Savage argues elsewhere that Algren's reputation should also rest on *The Man With the Golden Arm*. His 1992 PhD dissertation argues that paperback marketing techniques and conformist politics in the 1950s robbed Algren of a reputation as a novelist on par with "the Modernists to whom he should be compared—Hemingway, Ellison, Faulkner."

<sup>7</sup> Royko, p. 147. Royko's column first appeared May 13, 1981.

<sup>8</sup> An analysis of style reveals the melody of the work — its sequential structure — but not the harmony — its vertical layering of signification. Mikhail Bakhtin's comments about style in the novel apply as well to this narrative essay: "All the categories and methods of traditional stylistics remain incapable of dealing effectively with the artistic uniqueness of discourse in the novel." Bahktin, "The Dialogic Imagination." For more on the vital role of poetic syntax in this essay — Algren's *style* — please see **Appendix V**.

<sup>9</sup> A contemporary of Algren's, Schulberg wrote several urban novels and the screenplay for "On the Waterfront" (1954). His 1951 review of *City on the Make* argues — or rather, *assumes* — that Algren's portrait of Chicago is an unfair but worthy distortion.

Imagination, genius, experience all reside in the author's brain where they remain mysterious, mystical, dark to science. As explanations, they recede into a fog of psychology.

In 1968, Roland Barthes warned against further examinations of the author's brain. He insisted we examine more tangible grounds — the text, the language, the space where text and language resonate: “We know now that a text consists not of a line of words, releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning, but of a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash: the text is a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture.”<sup>10</sup> In his 1970 book, *S/Z*, Barthes demonstrates a method for unraveling the fabric of quotations in a story by Honoré de Balzac.<sup>11</sup> He describes the reader as a similar collection of quotations, and locates the effect of literature in the resonance between the texts-within-the-text and the texts-within-the-reader.<sup>12</sup> The text and reader replace the author as sites for examination because “a text consists of multiple writings... but there is a site where this multiplicity is collected, and this site is not the author, as has hitherto been claimed, but the reader.”

The reader of *City on the Make* collects a fabric of quotations that weave a *counterofficial* portrait of Chicago. We can imagine the official version, the Chicago portrayed in, say, a Visitors and Conference Bureau pamphlet. Celebrating tower, boulevard, and entrepreneur, this official portrait might be titled *Chicago: City on the Lake*, for along with bluster (Windy City), industry (the City that Works), and inferiority (Second City), the lake has long appeared in the city's promotional epithets. In his 1893 record of the World's Columbian Exposition, Hubert

---

<sup>10</sup> Both quotes in this paragraph come from Barthes, “Death,” p. 53-4..

<sup>11</sup> Please see **Appendix I** for a Barthesian analysis of the opening passage of *City on the Make*.

<sup>12</sup> “This ‘I’ which approaches the text is already itself a plurality of other texts.” Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 10.

Howe Bancroft refers to Chicago as "Lake City" and "the queen city of the lakes." He describes the fair's opening day:

*It was one of those bright October days, perhaps the most perfect weather witnessed in the city by the lake, and brightly shone the temples of the Fair in the mellow autumn sunlight, amid flutter of streamers and pennants from flagstaff, dome, and turret.*<sup>13</sup>

Algren offers not an opposite view, but a streetwise view:

*An October sort of city even in Spring. With somebody's washing always whipping, in smoky October colors off the third-floor rear by that same wind that drives all the yellowing comic strips down all the gutters that lead away from home. (72)*

Algren's text notices the tower but tours the slum, notes the boulevard but lingers in the alley, nods to the entrepreneur but hails the tramp. It emphasizes a counterofficial view to balance the weight of an official tradition of boosterism. This emphasis on the city's nadir may have rankled the civic boosters at the Daily News, but the essay includes the city's zenith, too, by virtue of comparison. To travel from the boosters' *City on the Lake* to the hustlers' *City on the Make*, we need but transpose a single letter: L/M. A perfect right angle, the 'L' reflects Chicago's best face: the skyscraper against the inland sea, the Michigan Avenue cliff. Algren offers 'M' instead, a landscape of ups and downs — and honestly, mostly downs. Barthes found a similar hinge in Balzac's "Sarrasine," in which the work's principle duality announces itself in the title's one-letter difference from the standard French spelling of Sarrazine.<sup>14</sup> The point of this observation is

---

<sup>13</sup> This epithet was still active when Algren was writing in the early 1950s. Emmot Dedmon used it in his 1953 history, *Fabulous Chicago: A Great City's History and People*: "A new kind of commerce animated Chicago. From the prairie states that produced the grain and livestock which funneled through Chicago for the East came a sudden outpouring of writers, all of them attracted by the vigor and promise of the young *city by the lake*." Dedmon, the Tribune's assistant Sunday editor, was the sort of booster Algren harpoons in *City on the Make*.

<sup>14</sup> Barthes' argues that the missing Z — emphasized by its absence and implying the stinging slash of knife or sword — evokes castration, the mediation of the duality of masculinity and femininity (*S/Z*, p. 106-7).

not to celebrate the author's ingenious creation of a one-letter signifier, but to demonstrate the seminal presence of a fundamental duality in the text's very first words — its title.

The essay's title supplies its question and answer, its subject and predicate, an equation factored by the remaining 12,800 words: *Chicago is a city on the make*. But an answer supplied is not a mystery solved unless we know all it means to be “on the make.” The phrase connotes manufacture, dubious commerce, social climbing, sexual conquest.<sup>15</sup> Barthes would pose a more precise question: What mechanisms swing the L to an M in the title's one-letter hinge? Like Balzac's story, Algren's essay develops through references to culture — literature, history, street lore — and links those references from other texts to an underlying symbolic structure that works in concert with its narrative sequence. *Chicago: City on the Make* sets out, its title tells us, to portray a city differently, and it depends upon textual cities for the manner of that portrayal.<sup>16</sup> The essay “captures” Chicago by capturing references to Chicago culture and consolidating them in a new mythos for Chicago.

Barthes supplies a means to excavate these references. Subsequent theorists including Wolfgang Iser have developed ways of showing the systems that *emerge* from them to produce the text's cumulative effect. For example, *City on the Make* contains references to other Chicago writers. Barthes allows us to view each of these references as a signal of cultural code, and Iser's

---

<sup>15</sup> Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner began researching their *Dictionary of American Slang* in the late 1940s and published it in 1960. It documents popular use of the phrase “on the make” between 1935 and 1957 to connote ruthless ambition and sexual conquest.

<sup>16</sup> According to Rotella, textual cities descend from both real cities and from “other texts, since writers read one another and swim in the greater sea of culture, assemble repertoires and influences, repeat, revise.” Rotella, 3. But what is a real city, in any case, but a collection of signs built and beheld by the human eye? As Jacques Derrida argues in “Of Grammatology,” experience itself is an originary writing. Real Chicago is thus a textual city too, but unlike textual cities preserved on paper, the textual city that was real Chicago in 1950 is largely unavailable for examination. Scholars like Rotella who compare Algren's textual Chicago to the real Chicago of 1950 first must be able to describe a real city in truth, a task that could not succeed even if the city were present.

emergence theory allows us to view them together as a system of literary reference. Each reference not only refers to an outside text, but also refers retroactively to prior references of the same kind within the primary text. As a reader encounters more and more references to Carl Sandburg, for example, she not only absorbs each reference, she also develops an increasingly rich sense of the essay's dialogue with Sandburg. This sense attests to the system at work as a whole.<sup>17</sup> Because individual elements refer to each other as well as to external texts, emergence theorists depict systems by drawing loops between individual elements.<sup>18</sup>

Iser finds particular value in the loops connecting literary and cultural references; he believes these references serve a crucial function in literature by allowing the text to change the object to which it refers.<sup>19</sup> We have found the purpose of Algren's essay in its title — to redefine Chicago — and we find it again by looking where Iser points: at a field of reference rich in Chicago literature, history, and street lore. Iser describes a text's field of reference as its *repertoire*: “The repertoire consists of all the familiar territory within the text. This may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged.” This familiar territory proves interesting not because it is familiar, Iser says, but because it is to lead in a new direction: “the repertoire presents existing norms in a state of suspended validity — thus turning the literary text into a kind of halfway

---

<sup>17</sup> A founder of emergence theory, physicist P.W. Anderson writes, “We can see how the whole becomes not only more than, but very different from the sum of its parts.” Anderson wrote this sentence concerning the behavior of inert gasses, but his words have followed emergence theory into the humanities, where they apply equally to systems of reference. Anderson, p. 395.

<sup>18</sup> An important contributor to emergence theory, legal scholar Gunther Teubner: “Emergence appears when self-referential circles loop together in such a way as to form new elements which constitute a new system.” Teubner, 43. See also cognitive scientist Douglas Hofstadter in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*: These “strange loops” allow “a system to ‘perceive itself’, to talk about itself, to become ‘self-aware’, and in a sense it would not be going too far to say that by virtue of having such a loop, a formal system acquires a self.” A text acquires autonomy, even from its author.

<sup>19</sup> “Those elements selected for reference are not intended to be a mere replica. On the contrary, their presence usually means that they undergo some kind of transformation.” Iser, 370.

house between past and future.”<sup>20</sup> *City on the Make* engages Chicago culture in order to redefine it. It suspends its cultural sources in Iser's “halfway house between present and future,” and then recasts Chicago in a compelling new form. Out of old Chicagos, a new Chicago.

Carl Sandburg's “Chicago” proves to be the old Chicago that contributes most to Algren's new Chicago. *City on the Make* grapples intimately with the poem, the textual “city of big shoulders” that has defined Chicago since its publication in 1914<sup>21</sup>. Algren's text suspends Sandburg's Chicago in complex systems of reference, links it to an underlying symbolic structure, alters it across a narrative sequence to produce a Chicago based upon it but different from it.<sup>22</sup> The voices of other poets, even poets of other cities, chime into this effort. Algren's Chicago includes bits of Baudelaire's Paris, a slice of Yeats' Irish sky. The inspired author of *Genesis* provides a garden setting, but an obscure New York poet, Ben Maddow, emerges chief among the extramural influences. This textual Chicago develops primarily through triangulation: one author (Algren) transforms the vision of another (Sandburg) by applying themes and metaphors derived from a third (Maddow). But the text leaps from temporal description to timeless portrayal by making a grand reference to yet another poet: Walt Whitman not only emerges through Algren, but sings of himself in the intertexts Algren derives from Sandburg and

---

<sup>20</sup> Iser, 370.

<sup>21</sup> Sandburg's poem topped all Chicago texts in Algren's eye, and it remains tops in the city today — as shown by endless references to it, including the Chicago Public Library's current effort to transform Chicago into a “city of big readers.” Please see **Appendix II** for the full text of Sandburg's “Chicago.”

<sup>22</sup> Harold Bloom contends in “The Anxiety of Influence,” that each poet must slay his poetic father, must revise some precursor to create historical space for his own work. Without endorsing Bloom's Oedipal interpretation of literary relationships, this paper employs terms his work has defined usefully for intertextual analysis: revision and influence. “What is revisionism? As the origins of the word indicate, it is a re-aiming or looking-over-again, leading to a re-esteeming or a re-estimating. We can venture the formula: the revisionist strives to see again, so as to esteem and estimate differently, so as then to aim ‘correctively.’ Thus, Algren *revises* Sandburg by correctively re-aiming his Chicago, and Sandburg *influences* Algren, but not necessarily as a person. Bloom's influence as a relationship between texts: “These relationships depend upon a critical act, a misreading or misprision, that one poet performs upon another, and that does not differ in kind from the necessary critical acts performed by every strong reader upon every text he encounters.” *Misreading*, 3-4.

Maddow. The play of these poetic references creates the sense readers describe when they say, in the absence of a better explanation, “Algren captures Chicago.” Algren composes a familiar and resonant textual city by orchestrating chords that virtuoso poets have struck in his readers before.

**A**lgren names many Chicago writers in *City on the Make* — Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, Sherwood Anderson, Vachel Lindsay, Richard Wright, Edna Ferber<sup>23</sup> — but none stand as tall and bold in the text as Carl Sandburg.<sup>24</sup> Algren dedicated the first edition to Sandburg; he echoes Sandburg throughout the text; he evokes Sandburg by name and by epithet — “the white-haired poet.” But it was not always so. Algren first wrote the essay as an article for a special edition of *Holiday* magazine devoted to Chicago, and Sandburg appears only twice in that article, and only near the end. Algren worked on the *Holiday* article during the autumn of 1950, then continued to revise the essay in the Spring of 1951 after Doubleday agreed to publish it as a hardcover book. The editors of *Holiday* inexplicably ignored Algren’s revisions, and published an early draft under the title “One Man’s Chicago” in May 1951.<sup>25</sup> Doubleday printed the hardcover first edition of *City on the Make* the following October. A comparison of these two

---

<sup>23</sup> Algren mentions “Edna Millay” in his list of Chicago giants (52), but he almost certainly means Ferber, who lived and wrote in Chicago and won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1925. Edna St. Vincent Millay (who won the Pulitzer for poetry in 1923) had little connection to Chicago other than a relationship with *Poetry* magazine and the visits and readings typical of many writers.

<sup>24</sup> Sandburg’s comparative importance in the text conforms to Algren’s view of Sandburg’s influence: “Other than Sandburg, I never felt any impact from Anderson, Farrell, Dreiser or any of the others.” Cox and Chatterton, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> See Drew, p. 231, for Algren’s letter chiding *Holiday* associate editor Harry Nickles for ignoring revisions. Editing also accounts for some of the differences between the magazine article and the book. *Holiday*’s editors disclaimed themselves of any culpability in the article’s content with their title, “One Man’s Chicago.” They likely influenced an opening paragraph that pays “full respect” to the city’s founders. And they may have excised some of Algren’s vitriol. But little else in the body of the essay varies in tone from the book, and it is unlikely that *Holiday*’s editors could be responsible for such latent and subtle differences as the extent of the essay’s systems of reference. *Holiday*’s issue is dated October 1951, but Algren’s correspondence with Nickles shows it was completed in May.

texts — or rather, of this one text at two stages in its development — captures the emergence of systems of reference to Sandburg. It allows us to see references emerging, replicating, pointing both outside of the text and back to themselves within it, forming systems we can envision as patterns of loops.

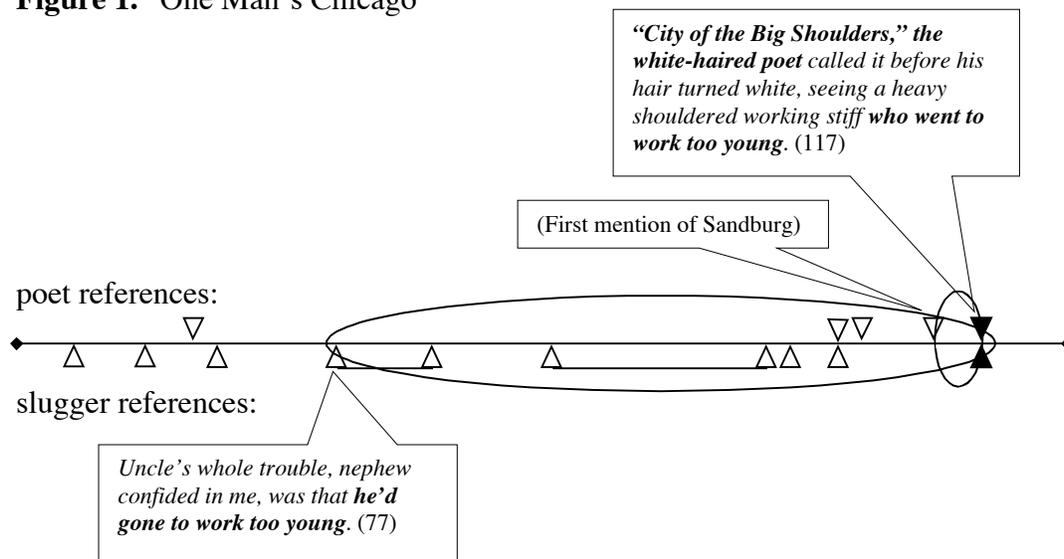
A minimal system of reference to Sandburg emerges near the end of “One Man’s Chicago” and becomes an elaborate system in *City on the Make*. In the *Holiday* article, a sequence of *slugger*<sup>26</sup> references proceeds through the text seemingly unrelated to a simultaneous series of *poet* references until, very near the end, the two types of references interact. A bar fighter who first appears on page 77, Uncle Johnson, becomes on page 117 the bearer of the big shoulders that Carl Sandburg attributes to the city in his poem “Chicago.” Prior references gain significance generated by this interaction: Uncle Johnson no longer signifies only what he did when the reader first encountered him; now he doubles for the city. According to Iser, “The respective order arrived at feeds back into the components which will not stay the same as they were when initially encountered by the reader. The components that made something happen are retroactively changed by what they made happen.” Significance loops backward to enrich prior references, and emergence theorists plot these loops on narrative sequence to depict the resulting systems of reference (**Figure 1**).<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> In the early 1950s, the term slugger connoted baseball players, boxers, bar fighters, hard drinkers, (Wentworth, 489) and — through the slang term *slug* for bullet — muggers, gangsters, gunmen, and other hoodlums.

<sup>27</sup> This graphic depiction rests on precedent: The narrative sequence appears as a line because it accounts for the passage of time. Literary critics since Aristotle have envisioned narrative sequence as a linearity. Self-referential loops between elements such as poet and slugger occur outside of time, like Barthes’ symbolic code, Claude Levi-Strauss’ paradigmatic codes, and Yuri Lotman’s notion of cyclical time in myth. Literary critics envision symbolic events as vertical breaches of the horizontal line. Iser: “If linear systems have a certain telos, the realization of which is intended by the workings of the systems concerned, nonlinear systems, through the strange loops among their factors, levels, and whatever else is fed into them from outside, are a source of emergent phenomena. Thus, non-linearity becomes the wellspring of emergence” (Iser, *Range*, 150). In this case, we envision the narrative sequence

**Figure 1.** "One Man's Chicago"



**Slugger/Poet System in the Narrative Sequence of “One Man’s Chicago”**

*Arrows above the line depict references to poets. Arrows below the line depict references to various types of sluggers, as the term was used at the time of the writing. Two internal narratives appear in the chart as two arrows joined with a line — the story of bar fighter Uncle Johnson and the story of the 1919 White Sox. The themes of poets and sluggers merge near the end of the narrative generating new significance that loops backward to enrich two prior references.*

The emergence of this rudimentary Slugger/Poet System in “One Man’s Chicago” presages a proliferation of slugger references, poet references, and new connections between them in *City on the Make*. Algren’s street toughs find welcome territory in Sandburg’s “Chicago.” In the final draft, sluggers connect to Sandburg not only at the big shoulders, but also at lines that describe “a tall bold slugger set vivid against the soft little cities,” and a city “laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has never lost a battle.” *City on the Make* includes a new character, Terrible Tommy O’Connor, a death-row escapee who embodies another line from Sandburg: “I have seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.” Many

---

as a horizontal line dividing unrelated sequences of references to poets and sluggers. The line is breached when the two sequences interact, significance loops backward, a self-referential system emerges.

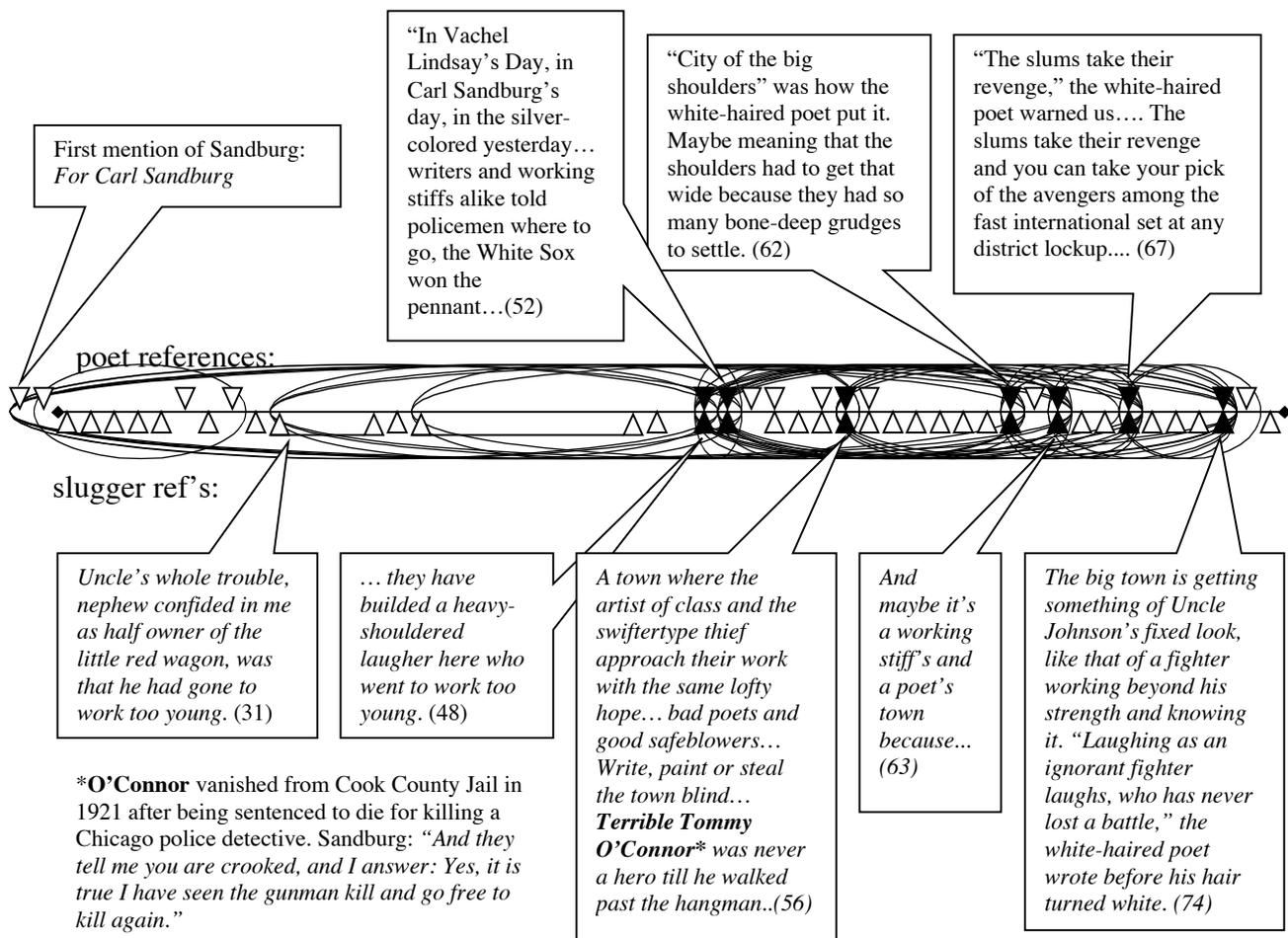
slugger and fighters and laughers now double for the city, including the first-person narrator himself (**Figure 2**).

These symbolic characters define the city through their nature and actions. The story of each character elaborates the story of a city, and the story of the city elaborates the story of each character. Sandburg provides the appropriate *repertoire* for these connections because his well-known poem personifies Chicago. Sandburg describes Chicago in generic human forms: a worker with big shoulders, a laughing fighter, a tall bold slugger. Algren incarnates those forms with detail; he gives them faces. Sandburg's slugger thus becomes Uncle Johnson, a punch-drunk bar fighter too dumb to fall down, a victim of capitalism who went to work too young. Because Sandburg casts the whole city in the image of the slugger, the whole city becomes, in Algren's treatment, a punch-drunk bar fighter who went to work too young. Algren often portrays these characters striving to achieve the best of Sandburg's Chicago, trying to be the tall bold slugger or the laughing fighter in the City by the Lake, but finding themselves undermined, betrayed, forsaken by the backsliding nature of the City on the Make. Uncle Johnson is forsaken not only by God (he's a "Godforsaken spastic," with a nose like a "forsaken moose"), but also by his own nephew, who encourages a little tough fighting his uncle: "Finish the Clown off!" Nephew encourages The Cap softly. That's the kind of family it was," Algren writes, letting his metaphor say: that's the kind of city it is. In the next internal narrative, the narrator himself takes a turn as Sandburg's slugger when, as a 10-year-old sandlot sprout armed with a Louisville slugger, he moves from the South Side to the North Side where he ought by rights to stand tall and bold among the soft little Cubs fans. He makes his stand by identifying with White Sox shortstop Swede Risberg, but the Swede forsakes him later that summer when the news breaks

that he and seven other members of the "Black Sox" took bribes and threw the 1919 World Series. As Iser predicts, Algren suspends Sandburg's "Chicago," transforms it, and it leads in a new direction.

**Figure 2. Slugger/Poet System in the Narrative Sequence of *Chicago: City on the Make***

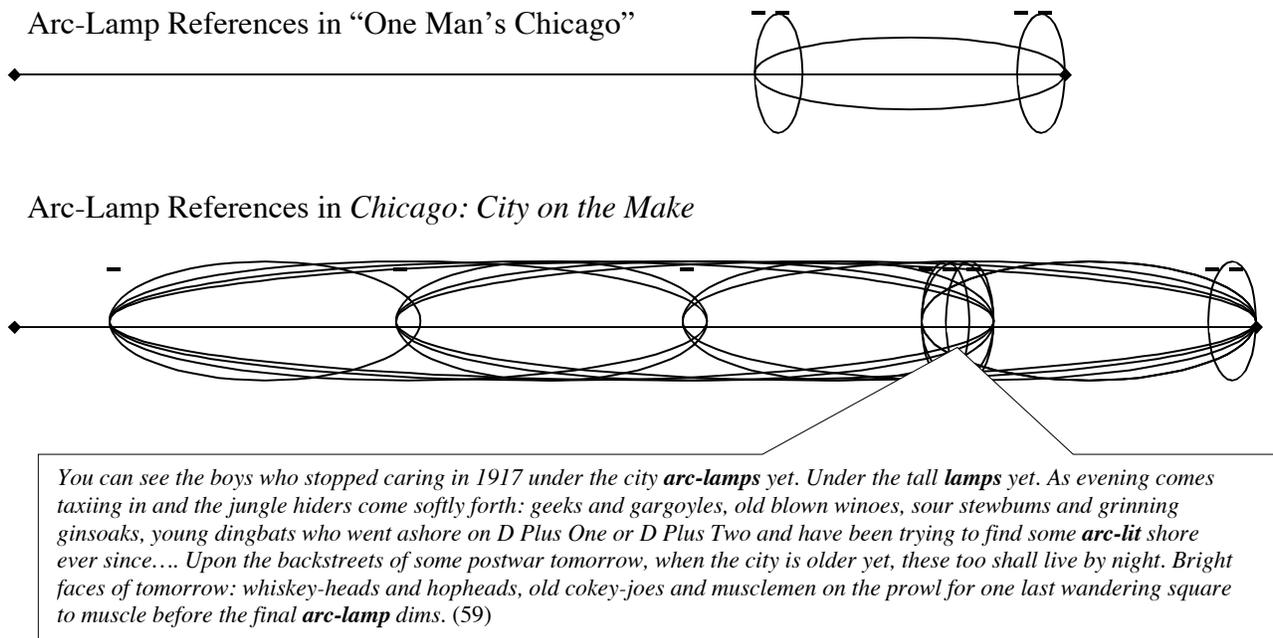
*Sandburg figures more prominently in Chicago: City on the Make than he did in "One Man's Chicago." He appears first in the dedication, and the text repeatedly names the poet, evokes him by epithet, or quotes one of his lines. Slugger references have also proliferated, and the two types of references now connect at seven major nodes instead of only one. Only the most prominent loops of this extensive system appear below:*



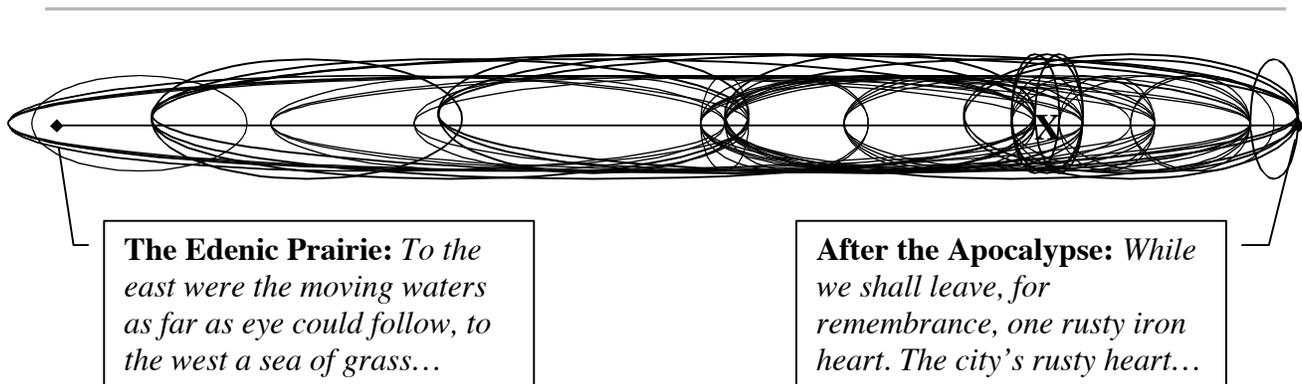
*City on the Make* activates several systems in dialogue with Sandburg; the Slugger/Poet System is only the most prominent. Sandburg's Chicago and Algren's Chicago both have a Street-Lighting System. Gas lamps illuminate wickedness in Sandburg's "Chicago," and arc-lamps emerge in the same role near the end of "One Man's Chicago." (Figure 3) Like the Slugger/Poet System, this system replicated during revision. *City on the Make* has more and earlier references, adding complexity to the network. Like street lights in real-world Chicago, arc-lamps appear evenly spaced in Algren's text. The spacing creates expectation — one arc lamp about every 16 pages — but suddenly arc-lamps proliferate at a critical moment to illuminate a subject akin to Sandburg's painted women and farm boys. Like police lights turned down dark alleys, they reveal the city's secret shame — its addicts and lunatics and desperados.

**Figure 3. The Street-Lighting System**

*"They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys."* — Carl Sandburg, "Chicago"



These Sandburg systems — so important to Algren's revision of Chicago — cooperate with the essay's narrative structure. Following the narrative pattern of the Bible, the essay proceeds from creation in an Edenic prairie to apocalypse. An arc-lit climax arrives near the end of Chapter Five, when the apocalyptic ending is foretold — “upon the backstreets of some postwar tomorrow” — and the essay delivers (twice, lest you miss it) its most potent line: “Every day is D-day under the EI” (59, 60). Iser tells us emergent systems of reference spur a narrative toward the realization of its end.<sup>28</sup> Those coordinated efforts can be seen in **Figure 4**:



**Figure 4.** *The Sandburg Systems cooperate with narrative structure. X marks the climax.*

The Sandburg systems increase in complexity from beginning to middle; they attend the climax with a frenzy of symbolic action; they taper off in denouement. But they do not merely serve the narrative; the narrative supplies the vehicle for their symbolic redefinition of Chicago. The text does not travel from creation to apocalypse to record Chicago during that span of time; it travels from creation to apocalypse to define Chicago's timeless nature. The Sandburg systems simultaneously transform Sandburg's Chicago and prod the narrative toward its end, uniting linear and non-linear forces in a single purpose — to redefine Chicago as a city on the make.

<sup>28</sup> Please see note 27.

However, the Sandburg systems, taken by themselves, effect only a portion of Algren's transformation of Chicago. *City on the Make* goes beyond incarnating Sandburg's generic characters, updating his street lights, and illuminating a more modern wickedness.<sup>29</sup> The essay achieves profound thematic and ethical transformations, but to do so it requires other poets, other texts. We can document Algren's discovery and employment of those texts by digging deeper into the history of his essay.

Algren had reconsidered Sandburg's Chicago once before. In July 1947, he published a brief article in *Chicago Sun Book Week*, "Laughter in Jars — Not as Sandburg Wrote of it" (**Appendix IV**), which contains the seeds of the symbolic transformation of Chicago that he executes in *City on the Make*. Algren quotes two lines — "Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs/ Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who never lost a battle" — and he laments that Chicago is Sandburg's Chicago no more:

*The quality of that laughter has altered since 1914; it has been replaced by something that sounds more like a juke box running down in a deserted bar. Instead of an unbeaten fighter, its profile is rather that of a prematurely aged adolescent with a gin-fizz hangover lugging Saturday night's empties toward that same abandoned bar — offering only a morning-after snicker, in the hope of a refund on the bottles, and conscious of no larger a destiny than of getting the price of an eye opener. Chicago's laughter has grown metallic and its smile has deteriorated into a complacent smirk.*

---

<sup>29</sup> *City on the Make* evokes several Sandburg poems other than "Chicago." The El trains that wind through *City on the Make* echo the street cars and owl cars that travel Sandburg's poems. Algren's "straphangers to success" (p. 44) answer Sandburg's call in "Halsted Street Car" to "hang on a strap with me here." They also appear in Algren's 1939 poem, "Makers of Music." The city's apocalypse in perpetual October follows a preference among Midwestern poets for this amber month, and it directly evokes "And This Will Be All?" a 1922 poem by Sandburg. The text makes reference to this poem on page 72: "By days when the wind bangs alley gates ajar and the sun goes by on the wind." Sandburg: "And this will be all? And the gates will never open again? And the dust and the wind will play around the rusty door hinges and the songs of October moan." (October also comes to *City on the Make* through William Pillin, a Chicago poet whose 1939 book "Poems" portrays Chicago in autumnal light. Algren gave the book a mixed review in 1941, but he borrows its imagery for poems of his own that later feed *City on the Make*. Pillin's "Fragments in October" influenced Algren's 1939 poem "Travelog," which contains the phrase "fragments of old October." Although "Travelog" takes Kentucky as its setting, it supplies key images to *City on the Make*, including "moving waters," the "tethering" of moonlight, and these fragments of October from Pillin.)

Algren overtly redescribes Sandburg's laughter with none of the sophistication or success he shows in *City on the Make*, but this article shows Algren rethinking Chicago within Sandburg's personified metaphors. The article contains other seeds that bloom in the book. Algren criticizes Chicago's greed, telegraphing his future portrayal of the city as Hustlertown in *City on the Make*. He quotes Simone de Beauvoir, with whom he had recently commenced an affair:

*"The cult of money which one encounters here does not spring from avarice or meanness," the distinguished French playwright and novelist, Simone de Beauvoir, observed on a recent tour of Chicago: "Making money is the only aim one can set one's self in a world in which all aims have been reduced to this common denominator."*

Three years later, Algren writes that common denominator into *City on the Make*: "Everybody's out for the buck. Even big leaguers" (39). He may not have envisioned his essay, initially, as a transformation of Sandburg's Chicago, since the poet seems little more than an afterthought in the early draft. But what occurred at that moment in the writing, that moment of *emergence* when Uncle Johnson borrowed the poet's big shoulders? From that moment the essay begins to blossom with ideas first expressed not in "One Man's Chicago," but in "Laughter in Jars."

Algren must have consulted his old newspaper article during the revision. Several lines from "Laughter in Jars" leapfrog "One Man's Chicago" but land safely in *City on the Make*:

**Algren, "Laughter in Jars":**

*For the city has lost its value along with its laughter. It asks only of its dead: "Was your income tax listed and did you own a Nash?"*

**Algren, *City on the Make*:**

*The slums take their revenge.<sup>30</sup> How much did he have, is what we demand to know when we hear good old Joe Felso has gone to his reward. Never what was he, in human terms.*

---

<sup>30</sup> "The slums take their revenge": Algren attributes this phrase to Sandburg in 1919. It is most likely a paraphrase of Sandburg's main point in *The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919*.

*Was his income listed publicly? Was there a Ford in his future at the very moment he was snatched? (74)*

The quote from de Beauvoir also wiggles into the book, though their affair had cooled by 1951 and he describes her only as “one European observer.” And “Laughter in Jars” contains another vital link to *City on the Make*. Algren ends the article by quoting an unnamed poet whose elegiac vision of the city would supply crucial metaphors for Algren’s transformation of Sandburg’s Chicago. It is in this article for the *Chicago Sun* that Algren first considers poetry a tool to revise another poet’s textual Chicago. It is in this article that Algren first considers revising a textual Chicago by applying metaphors borrowed from a textual New York.

**R**eal-world cities share knowledge and systems — transportation, finance, public works — so why should textual cities not share descriptions and metaphors? *City on the Make* refers to many non-Chicago writers, leaving most unnamed, and alludes to their portrayals of distant places both urban and rural:

**Algren:** *To the east were the moving waters as far as eye could follow. To the west a sea of grass as far as wind might reach. (11)*

**Whitman:** *By the old lighthouse, nothing but sea-tossings in sight in every direction as far as eye could reach.<sup>31</sup>*

**Algren:** *To reveal our backstreets to the indifferent stars. (16)*

**Yeats:** *The peasants of that land... left her to the indifferent stars...<sup>32</sup>*

**Algren:** *For hospitals, brothels, prisons and such hells, where patronage comes up softly, like a flower. (25)*

**Baudelaire:** *With heart at rest I climbed the citadel's steep height, and saw the city as from a tower: hospital, brothel, prison, and such hells, where evil comes up softly, like a flower.<sup>33</sup>*

---

<sup>31</sup> Walt Whitman, “Specimen Days.”

<sup>32</sup> W.B. Yeats, “A Dream of Death.”

None of these poets have as profound an influence on the structure and symbolism of Algren's Chicago as the unnamed poet quoted at the end of "Laughter in Jars."

From 1939 to 1942, Algren expressed his vision of the city through poetry, publishing regularly in *Poetry* magazine, *The New Anvil*, and *Esquire*. In the midst of that effort a vivid poem called "The City" led the January 1940 issue of *Poetry* (**Appendix III**). The editors awarded it the Harriet Monroe Memorial Prize as the best poem of that year. It appeared under the byline of David Wolff, a pseudonym for a Columbia University graduate and New York social worker named Ben Maddow. Maddow would eventually make a name for himself as a Hollywood screenwriter; he collaborated with John Huston on the screenplay for "The Asphalt Jungle" in 1950 and later wrote for urban-themed television programs such as "The Untouchables" and "Naked City." From 1934 to 1942, Maddow wrote screenplays and commentaries for a socialist collective, Frontier Films, that specialized in documentaries. Despite his Monroe Prize and inclusion in some mid-century anthologies, Maddow/Wolff never achieved much fame as a poet, but Algren had many potential reasons to find his poetry compelling: artistic, topical, political, philosophical, and biographical reasons. Algren and Maddow were the same age, writing about different cities at the same time, both from a leftist viewpoint, both submitting their efforts to *Poetry*. Both viewed poetry as a source of truth:

**Algren:** "I don't think anything's true that doesn't have it, that doesn't have poetry in it."<sup>34</sup>

**Maddow:** "The closer to this kind of inexplicable, irrational poetry a film is, the closer to a film poem it is, then the better the documentary film it is, the closer it is to a true documentary."<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Charles Baudelaire, draft "Epilogue" to *Flowers of Evil*. The translation Algren uses remains a mystery. It may have come to him through de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, whose essay "Baudelaire" appeared in English in 1950.

<sup>34</sup> Donohue, p. 274.

Maddow, who produced only the written portions of films — scripts, commentaries, and original poems to be recited by the narrator — sees poetry as the source of documentary truth. Algren, writing a prose-poetic documentary about Chicago, infuses it with “truth” not only through the poetry of his style, but also by borrowing liberally from poets like Maddow.

Maddow’s poetry first emerges in Algren’s work in 1947, when Algren quotes two stanzas as an epilogue for *The Neon Wilderness*, a collection of urban short stories. He then quotes different lines in “Laughter in Jars,” that *Chicago Sun* eulogy for Sandburg’s Chicago. The sub-headline reads, “Two Poems Show How Chicago Has Changed.” By starting that article with two lines from Sandburg and ending it with five from Maddow, Algren nominates Maddow’s vision of the city as a successor to Sandburg’s. Yet Algren keeps the successor’s identity to himself, leaving the New York poet unnamed as he applies his lines to Chicago:

*The young return, —but cold with skin-tight mask,  
seeing this city honors the most false:  
where the painter hangs for sale beside his work;  
the critic, the peddler, and the smiling acrobat;  
toady and plagiarist for the price of one;  
and a masked surgeon offering jars of happiness.<sup>36</sup>*

Maddow re-emerges three years later in the text of *City on the Make*. Maddow’s city is a “wilderness of hands,” while Algren’s Chicago forges “out of steel and blood-red neon, its own peculiar wilderness.” Following Maddow’s example, Algren portrays the city as wilderness, while Sandburg’s big-shouldered laughter is “pitted against the wilderness.” Another theme in Maddow’s poem, the duplicity of commerce, emerges as a principle theme in Algren’s essay. Algren had toyed with that theme before — writing in 1939 of “Sears & Roebuck

---

<sup>35</sup> Campbell, p. 355, note 40.

<sup>36</sup> Maddow, p. 34. Algren compiles this stanza from parts of two stanzas in Maddow’s original, and he slightly mangles the second line. Please see **Appendix III** for the complete and correct text of Maddow’s poem.

sleepwalkers”<sup>37</sup> — but he never expressed it so deftly nor so thoroughly as he did after absorbing Maddow’s poem. Maddow’s city “brands the false face on the living flesh of the child” and wedges the self into a crevice “between the inner and the outer face.” Algren’s Chicago “forever keeps two faces,” a metaphor he explores in parallel syntax for 50 lines: “One for winners and one for losers. One for hustlers and one for squares.” As this extended parallelism names Chicago’s dichotomies, it alludes several times to Maddow’s poem, as it does here:

**Algren:**

*And one for midnight subway watches when stations swing past like Ferris wheels of light, yet leave **the moving window wet with rain or tears.** (23-24)*

**Maddow:**

*I, who all night restive in the sleeping rain, awoke and saw **the windows covered with tears.***<sup>38</sup>

Elsewhere Algren borrows Maddow’s description of the city’s “broken horizon” and makes sophisticated references that testify to the presence of Maddow’s poem:

**Algren:**

*Now it's the place where we do as we're told, **praise poison, bless the F.B.I...** — and applaud the **artist, hanging for sale beside his work, with an ancestral glee.** (33)*

**Maddow:**

*where **the painter hangs for sale beside his work...** He who can feign desire, **praise poison, or hang by his teeth, lives well...***<sup>39</sup>

We can only speculate why Algren keeps the source of these references to himself. He never names the poet nor the poem, never uses quote marks to alert the reader to the presence of another author’s voice. But Maddow has none of Sandburg’s famous relevance to Chicago.

Sandburg is the best-known Chicago poet, writing about his city; Maddow is an unknown New

---

<sup>37</sup> Algren, “Makers of Music.”

<sup>38</sup> Maddow, p. 33.

<sup>39</sup> Maddow, p. 34, 36. Among the more subtle allusions: Algren writes of “the afternoon at the zoo washed into mists of remembrance by a sudden warm, still rain,” while Maddow writes of “the deep smile, and the simple day at the zoo, the voices over the bay.” Algren: “open-eyed children of the thousand-windowed office buildings.” Maddow: “children of the cold sun and the broken horizon.” In this last line Algren merges Maddow with William Pillin’s “Fragments in October”: “a million lighted windows shining through the mist of the city.”

York poet, writing about *his* city<sup>40</sup>. Sandburg qualifies as a character in, as well as a source of, Algren's Chicago. Nor are casual readers likely to recognize Maddow references that have escaped the notice of Algren's reviewers, critics, scholars, and biographers for 50 years. It makes little sense to draw charts that document potential avenues of reader response to unannounced, invisible references. We can study the quiet gears of the Maddovian systems, nonetheless, by examining the impact of Maddow's themes — falseness and duality — on Algren's text.

Maddow addresses his poem to the city's children, whom he envisions as “discolored twins born to neglect.” The twins face the “double wilderness” of desire, which they pursue eagerly until struck down in punishment. They turn inward then and develop two faces, an inner and an outer face. Wearing the skin-tight mask of the outer face, they see that “the city honors most the most false.” Falseness governs civic commerce — lies, flattery, empty promises, miracle products like jars of happiness. Falseness rules the home as well, where families dine together in daily hatred. An “immense, proud fraudulence,” the city perverts by money and vacillates between another false duality — posed hysteria and idiot calm.

A rudimentary duality already exists in Sandburg's “Chicago,” where the city is wicked, crooked, and brutal but proud, alive, and cunning. As we have seen, Algren exploits this duality by developing characters whose proudest efforts in the City on the Lake are betrayed by the City on the Make. However, Algren has deeper transformations in store for Sandburg's duality.

Algren borrows Maddow's bifocals to see in a new light the two sides that Sandburg sees to Chicago. The two sides become two faces. The city has two faces, and its characters have two

---

<sup>40</sup> Ben Maddow dropped the pseudonym David Wolff and achieved his measure of fame not as New York poet David Wolff, but as Hollywood screenwriter Ben Maddow. *Poetry* magazine never revealed Wolff's true identity, nor did Maddow claim ownership of his poem publicly until 1991, when he published a slim volume of collected poetry in the last months of his life.

faces: "For always our villains have hearts of gold and all our heroes are slightly tainted" (21). Algren also transposes the duplicity of commerce from Maddow's city to Chicago. The essay's first line mentions a mysterious eye: "To the east were the moving waters, as far as eye could follow." Whose eye? The reader soon discovers the eye belongs to "marked-down derelicts with dollar signs for eyes" who settle Chicago and establish its tradition of hustling (11). Later, in the textual present, new outlaws have replaced the old, and the newcomers resemble Maddow's "immaculate imbeciles" and "ugly clerks." Algren: "an outlawry whose colors, once crimson as the old Sauganash whiskey-dye, have been washed down, by many prairie rains, to the colorless gray of the self-made executive type playing the percentages from the inside" (18).

However, Algren goes beyond either source poet in weaving duality into the structure of his text. A multiplicity of dual systems similar to the Slugger/Poet System emerge out of a structural coupling of individual sets of references.<sup>41</sup> Since sluggers are physical, poets mental, they seem opposite, yet they meld. Like the Balzac story examined by Barthes, Algren's narrative activates a complex symbolic order of antithesis constructed of opposites that meet or merge or cross. Slugger/Poet is only one, and probably not the most important, dual system. Many others reverberate in the text: hustler/square, Christian/infidel, church/tavern, prairie/lake, prairie/city, slum/citadel, alley/boulevard, North Side/South Side. Each pair has a locus of crossing or mediation where the individual references couple and gain significance from their interaction. Even the city's combatants (hustlers vs. squares, Christians vs. infidels) consort in several places. These opposites all meet in a city itself depicted as a junction of opposites — a swamp, a wallow, a portage — a meeting of land and sea, mediated by wind.

---

<sup>41</sup> Iser, 145: "The recursive loop became prominent when... composite systems emerged out of a structural coupling of systems."

Inspired to duality by Sandburg, encouraged in it by Maddow, the text begins to play with duality itself: Where it chooses an indiscriminate number, it usually chooses two. Where it mentions some corner of the baseball diamond, it usually mentions second base. Chicago is not just two-faced, it's a "two-timing bridegroom." Its lake, "a secondhand sea." Its streets lead to the "double-walled dead-end" of tavern and church. Quintessential New Yorker A.J. Liebling takes credit for dubbing Chicago "The Second City" with a book of that title in 1952, but Liebling's title may amount to little more than an intertextual reference to the complex dualities in the book Algren published a year earlier. For just as New York remains first by reassuring itself of Chicago's secondness, Chicago has always reflected upon itself in comparison to New York. It did not cease to be Second City when Los Angeles passed it in the census. Its skyscrapers continued to race New York to the highest place in the sky, as if in sibling rivalry. Algren uses New York poets to revise Chicago, and while they remain hidden, they also remain appropriate in that role, for Chicago exists in duality with New York. From whom is Sandburg defending his city in "Chicago"? Who are "those who sneer at this my city" if not its persistent critics, its Lieblings — New Yorkers?

Algren's Chicago remains grounded in Chicago through its overt dialogue with Chicago culture, and particularly with Sandburg, who substantially defined the popular character of the city with the flood of adjectives (wicked, crooked, brutal, proud, husky, cunning...) and gerunds (brawling, laughing, building, breaking, rebuilding...) in his poem. But Algren's Chicago alters the popular character of the city through its covert dialogue with New York poets. An innocuous adjective in Sandburg — husky — comes to echo “hustling” in Hustlertown, which Algren builds on the model of Maddow's two-faced commercial New York. Sandburg celebrates the worker, but his noble slugger becomes a victim of commerce when Algren views him through Maddow's harsher socialism.

Algren attempts the same depiction of Chicago in his poetry in the late 1930s, but the essay gives it new force through its borrowings from Maddow's poem. It is that New York influence, that covert New York intertext, that stunned some Chicago readers when *City on the Make* reached market in 1951. No one had so effectively described the Second City to itself in that New York light.<sup>42</sup> So the Daily News called for the “revocation of the author's poetic license,” setting the stage for a strange 50-year argument that the essay actually loves its city.<sup>43</sup> Strange because the text declares its love in its epigraph from Baudelaire and in several avowals:

*Yet once you've come to be part of this particular patch, you'll never love another.  
Like loving a woman with a broken nose, you may well find lovelier lovelies. But  
never a lovely so real. (23)*

---

<sup>42</sup> A Chicago poet had portrayed a city in similar fashion before — a city led by commerce to apocalypse — but the city he portrayed was New York. See Vachel Lindsay's “A Rhyme About an Electrical Advertising Sign.”

<sup>43</sup> See Algren's 1961 Introduction (now the Afterword) for his (perhaps exaggerated) assessment of Chicago's reaction to *City on the Make*.

Some readers overlook those scant declarations under the weight of thousands of lines of reproach,<sup>44</sup> so the essay's defenders have repeatedly reframed the essay in terms of love. Studs Terkel has presented that argument many times, most recently to *Chicago Magazine* in 2001: "It's a love poem. And I think that epigraph of Baudelaire, about Paris, applies to Nelson: 'I love thee, infamous city!'"

Those defenders are on the hunt, astutely, for the essay's vital element, for love binds the essay, love completes the essay, love brings the essay's wayward arguments home. The love runs deeper, however, than either overt declarations or caring criticisms. The love arrives through a system built upon a grand reference to another New York poet — Walt Whitman.

Many critics have looked for love in all the wrong places. They have deduced the text's obvious sympathy for the hobo and the rascalion, and ended their quest there. "Algren is ostensibly on the side of Johnson," Hurt writes, "and of all the derelicts, prostitutes, and 'working stiffs' he stands in for — but his sympathy is often tinged with contempt, and we sense an admiration, somewhat repressed, for the wised up hustler."<sup>45</sup> Algren argued throughout his career that writers should befriend the downtrodden, repeatedly citing Whitman as the authority on both American society and American literature. In his introduction to *The Neon Wilderness*, Algren quotes Whitman — "I will not have a single person slighted or turned away. I am not the poet of goodness only, I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also." Then he applies

---

<sup>44</sup> Critics who fail to grasp the love inevitably interpret the essay's criticism in the harshest terms. Hurt, for example, sees Uncle Johnson as "pathetic drunk" who never wins a battle. In fact, Uncle Johnson never loses a battle either; he just keeps standing. He figures in the text as a *sympathetic drunk*, a victim of capitalism who went to work too young. "Maybe we all went to work too young," says the 10-year-old narrator, who watches Uncle Johnson fight during a pause from his own job selling the *Saturday Evening Blade*. Uncle Johnson, a slugger, stands in for Chicago, and so does the narrator himself. As several critics have noted, the narrator also doubles for leftists, like Algren and Maddow, who faced persecution during the McCarthy era.

<sup>45</sup> Hurt, 103.

Whitman's exhortation to himself: "Here among West Division Street drinkers I felt that, did I deny them, I denied myself."<sup>46</sup> Algren draws from the same section of "Song of Myself" in his 1961 Introduction (now printed as an afterword) to *City on the Make*: "When Whitman wrote that 'there shall be no difference between them and the rest' he made the great American beginning for a literature expressing an exuberant good humor: which yet sought darkly for understanding of man" (89). This Whitmanian ethic exalts the text's counterofficial emphasis on tramp over entrepreneur, alley over boulevard, lending ethical force to its practical role of balancing the official tradition of boosterism. As the text applies this ethical force, it equates it to love: "It isn't hard to love a town for its broad and bending boulevards but you never truly love it till you can love its alleys too" (25). Some of the essay's love for Chicago consists in this Whitmanian devotion to have-nots, but the love in this essay surpasses that trace. Both Whitman's influence and the essay's heart prove more profound.

Whitman also comes to the text through Sandburg and Maddow. Sandburg's debt to Whitman is well known. "Sandburg's poetry is sometimes referred to as a continuation of the Whitman tradition," writes Hazel Durnell, who goes on to describe the many ways Whitman speaks through Sandburg.<sup>47</sup> Sandburg's biographer, Penelope Niven, finds Whitman too easily in Sandburg's early work: "Like most artists finding their way, Sandburg often created by some kind of osmosis, unaware himself, no doubt, of the other voices lurking in his work. One poem in particular is a smorgasbord of influences... Its chief influence, however, is Whitman's 'Passage to India.'" Importantly, Niven sees a broader reach to Whitman's influence than intertextual

---

<sup>46</sup> Algren, *Neon*, 10.

<sup>47</sup> Durnell, 57-60.

echoes: "Whitman gave him a model for social idealism, poetry, the life of the soul."<sup>48</sup> A social worker, Maddow shared these politics, and his poetry also echoes with Whitman's textual and ethical voice. The opening lines of "The City" evoke Whitman in many ways:

*Children of the cold sun and the broken horizon,  
O secret faces, multitudes, eyes of inscrutable grief,  
great breath of millions, in unknown crowds or alone,  
rooms of dreamers above the cement abyss, —and I,  
who all night restive in the sleeping rain,  
awoke and saw the windows covered with tears.*

*I heard, like the noise of melting rivers, the concourse of the living  
all hours mingled, violent, murmuring, or bright.*<sup>49</sup>

Whitman echoes from the formal technique of poetic address ("O secret of the earth and sky! Of you O waters of the sea! O winding creeks and rivers!"<sup>50</sup>), to the discovery of tears in inanimate environment ("From under that yellow half-moon late-risen and swollen as if with tears."<sup>51</sup>), but most importantly, "The City" opens with the narrator's sudden awareness of multitudes, like Whitman's poem of New York, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry":

*Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!  
Clouds of the west -- sun there half an hour high -- I see you also face to face.*

*Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!  
On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more  
curious to me than you suppose,  
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more  
in my meditations, than you might suppose.  
The impalpable sustenance of me from all things at all hours of the day,  
The simple, compact, well-join'd scheme, myself disintegrated, every one  
disintegrated yet part of the scheme,*<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Niven, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Maddow, p. 33.

<sup>50</sup> Whitman, "Passage to India," *Leaves* 1891, p. 539

<sup>51</sup> Whitman, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," *Leaves*, 1891 p. 388.

<sup>52</sup> Whitman, *Leaves* 1891, p. 307-8.

Maddow addresses the “melting river” just as Whitman addresses the “flood-tide,” and both poets follow the flow of humanity to a conclusion about the *scheme*. Whitman uses that term repeatedly and particularly throughout his works to refer to *the one formed of many*. He sometimes associates the scheme with democracy, sometimes with a unity superior to political democracy because it also embraces religion, literature, and education.<sup>53</sup> In “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” Whitman celebrates “the simple, compact well-joined scheme” — the collective humanity of the city. Fifty years later Maddow revises Whitman’s poem in much the way that Algren revises Sandburg. Viewing the industrialized New York of 1940, Maddow’s poem equates the scheme with capitalism and the division of labor:

*All I see are innocent; not walls, nor men  
brutal, remote, stunned, querulous, weak, or cold  
do crimes so massive, but the hideous scheme  
stands guilty: the usurpation of man over man.*<sup>54</sup>

When Algren uses Maddow’s themes to revise Sandburg’s Chicago, he uses not just Maddow’s New York, but Maddow’s revision of Whitman’s New York. Unlike Whitman, Maddow indicts the city — the *scheme* — but, remaining Whitmanian in his ethics, Maddow indicts no one within it:

*Yet who is it crawls on the subway's iron floor to sing  
where all must give or listen, since the door is shut?  
O in the proud mirrors of the brain, the ugly clerk  
I see is myself! and the murderer trapped on the fire-escape;  
and the desperate salesman; the thief; and the pale girl bought  
to open herself again to the stranger's thrust.*<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> See especially *Democratic Vistas*, *Notebooks*, and “Song of the Universal” for Whitman’s uses of “scheme.”

<sup>54</sup> Maddow, p. 37.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, Whitman is triple inscribed and multiplied in *City on the Make*. A democratic sentiment derived from Whitman converges through all these poets, and it requires more than sympathy for the poor: it requires sympathy for the rich. As Algren notes and quotes in *The Neon Wilderness*, “No man is an island.” American literature must love not only geeks and gargoyles and old blown winos, but capitalists and squares and “the people stuffed with kapok” on the North Side. Even the Biblical influence on *City on the Make* urges it toward an inclusive telos. As an author, Algren had signed onto this commitment:

*The big Milwaukee Avenue moon of home casts an equal light on neon wilderness and payola jungle. Upon men and women forced to choices too hard to bear. From the penthouse twenty-five glass-windowed stories up, to the night-blue bar below, in a time that is neither one of peace nor of war, where new wars start before old ones are done. Where all, all are survivors. Where not one should be slighted. Blows on the head or blows on the ear, not one should be turned away. Under any old moon at all.*<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, in Algren's essay as in Whitman's poetry, the have-nots win the text's love more easily than the haves. Algren locates the city's very heart in “The nameless, useless nobodies who sleep behind the taverns, who sleep beneath the El. Who sleep in burnt-out busses with the windows freshly curtained; in winterized chicken coops or patched-up truck bodies. The useless, helpless nobodies nobody knows: that go as the snow goes, where the wind blows, there and there and there... there, there beats Chicago's heart.” (67-68)

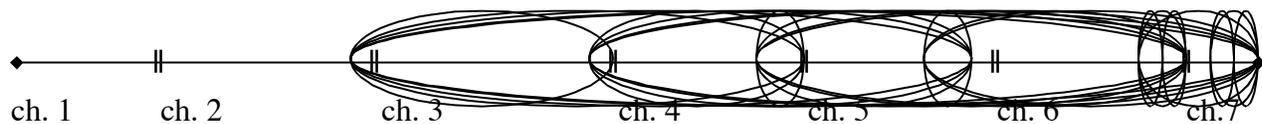
This beating heart forms another system of reference in the text, one associated importantly with endings. Beginning with Chapter Two, references to the city's heart emerge at the end of every chapter and accumulate intensity until they permeate the final chapter (**Figure 5**). These heart references associate with the poor and forlorn until the final page, when the final

---

<sup>56</sup> Algren, *Neon*, 14.

reference engulfs everyone: “While we shall leave, for remembrance, one rusty iron heart. The city’s rusty heart, that holds both the hustler and the square. Takes them both and holds them there. For keeps and a single day” (77). Critics who submit to the temptation to divide Algren’s people fail to grasp this ultimate unity. Hurt pits derelicts against hustlers, though Algren uses those terms interchangeably. Rotella bizarrely aligns Algren’s heroic leftists and his meddling Christians against the industrialists.<sup>57</sup> *City on the Make* blurs these camps rather than divides them; its heroes are slightly tainted, its villains have hearts of gold, it turns away not a single person. All dichotomies close in the rusty iron heart, entombed together beyond time in perpetual October. This difficult, reluctant, final act of love, this grand ethical reference to Whitman, gives the essay its *telos* — its ending as well as its end.

**Figure 5. The Cardiac System:** References to the city’s heart in *Chicago: City on the Make*



Unity arrives at the end in an image of apocalypse through no accident of fate. When apocalypse — *revelation* — occurs, the text reveals all it has concealed. *City on the Make* conceals a message of unity by emphasizing division: dichotomies and dualities, beauties and brutalities. In *Writing the Apocalypse*, Lois Zamora explains that apocalyptic narratives conceal to sanctify the truth they ultimately reveal, empowering their endings with hard-won thematic impact: “While any narrative text may be said to disclose its full meaning only at its point of closure, apocalyptic narrative makes the conjunction of meaning and ending its theme, both in its

<sup>57</sup> Rotella, 36.

expressed understanding of history and in its own narrative procedures. Apocalyptic narrative moves toward an ending that contains a particular attitude toward the goals of the narration, and toward an end that implies an ideology.”<sup>58</sup> Algren’s ideology, Sandburg’s ideology, Maddow’s ideology, Whitman’s ideology: *there shall be no difference between them and the rest*. The text’s definition and achievement of its goal depends upon a reference inscribed on the text through all these intertexts: Whitman’s literature of inclusion. But Whitman’s ethic runs deep and ancient in human culture, where it connects with another intertext that echoes from *City on the Make*. Beginning with creation, ending with apocalypse, *City on the Make* conveys a Biblical message of ultimate unity in love. Characters who symbolize Chicago — from the punch-drunk bar fighter to the kapok-stuffed shirt — blend in a universal finality peculiar to Chicago — a love made of rusty iron. Readers hear the resonance of an ancient story modernized and particularized for Chicago. The essay endures because it revises, for Chicago, an ancient story that endures.

Echoing Barthes, the purpose of this paper is not to announce the single canonical system of *City on the Make*, but to reveal some portion of the plurality of systems that emerge within it.<sup>59</sup> Much more waits to be discovered: more poets, more systems, more understanding of their action and interaction. The systems revealed here prove sufficient nonetheless to explain how the text seems to capture Chicago and why it endures as Chicago changes. Using Barthes’ method of excavation, we unravel the text’s weave of codes, its intertextual richness, its symbolic, referential, and narrative cooperation (**Appendix I**). Using emergence theory, we see how individual references partake in systems that draw overtly upon the poetry of Chicago —

---

<sup>58</sup> Zamora, p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> “To interpret a text is not to give it meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it.” Barthes, *S/Z*, p.5.

suspending a prior literary mythos of Chicago — and then draw covertly upon the poetry of New York to revise that mythos for modern times. Algren gives color to Sandburg's generic personifications of Chicago, and in doing so, he gives complexion to the city. Algren replaces Sandburg's gas lamps with a modern street lighting system, and in doing so, he illuminates the modern wickedness of the city. Algren develops the rudimentary duality of Sandburg's Chicago using Ben Maddow's New York, and in doing so he depicts the commercial city in janus-faced falsity. Like the poetry it draws upon, *City on the Make* finds a lasting place on the bookshelf by settling upon the lasting view of humanity championed by Whitman, an ethic woven into culture long before Whitman joined its cause. Winners and losers, hustlers and squares unite ultimately in one love, one grave. The essay seems contentious and critical until it reaches an end that reveals an overarching message given flight from the beginning: *Chicago is a city on the make*, this essay tells us, *but you can love it just the same*.

## SOURCES

### *Algren and His Influences*

- Algren, Nelson. *Chicago: City on the Make*. Fiftieth Anniversary Edition, annotated by David Schmittgens and Bill Savage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Home and Goodnight," in *Poetry*, November 1939, vol. 55, p. 74-76.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "How Long Blues," in *Poetry*, September 1941, vol. 58 p. 309.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Laughter in Jars — Not as Sandburg Wrote of It," in *The Chicago Sun Book Week*, July 20, 1947, p. 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Local South," in *Poetry*, September 1941, vol. 58 p. 308-309.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Makers of Music," in *The New Anvil*, April-May 1939, vol. 1 p. 23.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Neon Wilderness*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960).
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Second... Not Third!," a review of *Chicago: The Second City* by A.J. Liebling, in *The Saturday Review*, June 21, 1952, p. 37.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "This Table On Time Only," in *Esquire*, March, 1940, vol. 13 p. 78-79.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Travelog," in *Poetry*, November 1939, vol. 55, p. 76-77..
- Baudelaire, Charles. *The Complete Verse of Baudelaire. Vol. 1*. Ed. and trans. by Francis Scarfe. (London: Anvil Press Poetry: 1986).
- Beuttler, Bill, "Chicago in Their Sights," in *Chicago Magazine online*.  
<http://www.chicagomag.com/people/0301algren.htm>
- Campbell, Russell. *Cinema Strikes Back: Radical Filmmaking in the United States 1930-1942*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982). (for information on Ben Maddow's career.)
- Corrington, John William, "Nelson Algren Talks with NOR's Editor-at-Large," *New Orleans Review* 1 (Winter 1969): 130-32.
- Cox, Martha Heasley and Wayne Chatterton. *Nelson Algren*. (Boston: GK Hall, 1975).
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*. Ed. by Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir. (New York: The New Press, 1997)

- Donohue, H.E.F. and Nelson Algren. *Conversations with Nelson Algren*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
- Drew, Bettina. *Nelson Algren: A Life on the Wild Side*. (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1989).
- Durnell, Hazel. *The America of Carl Sandburg*. (Washington, D.C.: The University Press, 1965).
- Giles, James R. *Confronting the Horror: The Novels of Nelson Algren*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989).
- Hurt, James. *Writing Illinois: The Prairie, Lincoln, and Chicago*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
- Maddow, Ben. *A False Autobiography: Poems 1940-1990*. (Carmel: Other Shore Press, 1991).  
See Wolff, David, below.
- Nelson Algren: A Descriptive Bibliography*. Ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985).
- Niven, Penelope. *Carl Sandburg: A Biography*. (New York: Scribners, 1991).
- Pillin, William. *Poems*. (Prairie City, Ill.: The Press of James A. Decker, 1939).
- Rotella, Carlo. *October Cities: The Redevelopment of Urban Literature*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
- Royko, Mike, "Nelson Algren's Golden Pen," in *One More Time: The Best of Mike Royko*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) p. 147.
- Sandburg, Carl. *Chicago Poems*. (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1994)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Chicago Race Riots, July 1919*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Howe, 1919).
- Savage Jr., William, "Nelson Algren: Vernacular Poet and Social Conscience," at <http://www.lookingglasstheatre.org/ALGREN/algren/algren.htm> (Chicago: 2001).
- \_\_\_\_\_ and students, "Rebuilding the City of Words: Postwar/Postindustrial Chicago Writers" course at Northwestern University, Chicago: May 1,2002.
- Shulberg, Budd, "Heartbeat of a City," in *The New York Times Book Review*, Oct. 21, 1951, p. 3.
- Terkel, Studs. *Chicago*. (New York: Pantheon, 1986).

Wentworth, Harold and Stuart Berg Flexner. *Dictionary of American Slang*. (New York: Crowell, 1960).

Whitman, Walt. *Complete Works*. In the Whitman Archive, Electronic Text Center. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/whitman/> (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Library, 1995).

Wolff, David (pseudonym for Ben Maddow), "The City," in *Poetry*, January 1940, vol. LV, no. IV, p. 169-171.

### SOURCES:

#### *Critical Theory*

Anderson, P.W., "More is Different," in *Science*, vol. 117, no. 4047, August 4, 1972, p. 393-396.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed by Michael Holquist. Trans by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. Trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1974).

\_\_\_\_\_, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986).

\_\_\_\_\_, "On the Structural Analysis of Narrative," in *The Semiotic Challenge*. Trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988) pp. 95-135.

\_\_\_\_\_, "On S/Z and Empire of Signs," in *The Grain of the Voice*. Interview by Raymond Bellour. Trans. by Linda Coverdale (New York: Hill and Wang, 1985).

Bloom, Harold. *The Anxiety of Influence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Map of Misreading*. (New York: Oxford University Press: 1975).

De Man, Paul, "Roland Barthes and the Limits of Structuralism," in *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes*, ed. by Diana Knight, (New York: GK Hall & Co., 2000).

Derrida, Jacques, "Of Grammatology," reprinted in *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Ed. by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: FSU Press, 1986).

de Saussure, Ferdinand, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign," reprinted in *Critical Theory Since 1965*. Ed. by Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Tallahassee: FSU Press, 1986).

Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

- Iser, Wolfgang. *The Range of Interpretation*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Repertoire," in *The Act of Reading*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 1979).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Models of Emergence and Local Narratives," unpublished paper presented at *Narrative Systems/Narratology of Systems* workshop, University of Chicago, March 16, 2002.
- Johnson, Barbara, "The Critical Difference," in *Critical Essays on Roland Barthes*, ed. by Diana Knight, (New York: GK Hall & Co., 2000).
- Levi-Strauss, Claude. "La Geste de Asdiwal," in C. L.-S., *Structural Anthropology II* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) pp. 146-198.
- Lotman, Yuri. "The Semiosphere and the Problem of Plot," in Y.L. *Universe of Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990) pp. 151-170.
- Mayr, Ernst. *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).
- Olsen, Mark V., "Signs, Symbols and Discourses: A New Direction for Computer-aided Literature Studies," *Computers and the Humanities* vol. 27 nos. 5-6 (1993).
- Signs in Culture: Roland Barthes Today*. Ed. by Steven Ungar and Betty R. McGraw (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989).
- Teubner, Gunther, "The Many-Headed Hydra: Networks as Higher-Order Collective Actors," in *Corporate Control and Accountability*. Ed. by J. McCahery, S. Picciotto and C. Scott. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993): 41-60.
- Wellbery, David E. Lecture material presented in *Narrative Systems* course, University of Chicago, Winter 2002.
- Wolff, Mark, "Post-Structuralism and the ARTFL Database: Some Theoretical Considerations" in *Information Technology and Libraries* (March 1994).
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson. *Writing the Apocalypse*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

## Appendix I. The Starred Text

A Barthesian Analysis of the Opening Lines of *Chicago: City on the Make*

### Key to Barthes' Five Codes:

HERMENEUTIC (HER) – Articulates in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events that can either formulate or delay its answer. Constitutes an enigma and leads to its solution. The narrative appears as a drama of unveiling, culminating in apocalypse, the unveiling at the end.

SEMIC (SEM) — A signifier par excellence because of its connotation. A shifting element which can combine with other similar elements to create characters, ambiances, shapes, and symbols.

SYMBOLIC (SYM) — An immense province, a symbolic structure underlying the work. Antithesis organizes meanings in terms of oppositions.

PROAIRETIC (ACT) — Actions that imply a logic in human behavior. Categories of verbs. The main armature of the readerly text.

CULTURAL (REF) — Cultural codes originating in traditional human experience. Proverbs, truisms, cultural references, literary allusions, what we know about the era, deployed clichés.

*To the east were the moving waters as far as eye could follow.*

*To the west a sea of grass as far as wind might reach.*

(1) *To the east... to the west* \*(SYM. Antithesis: negation.) This lexia defines the space the text will fill, defines it not positively, but negatively and differentially, by describing everything *other*. As Ferdinand de Saussure wrote of signifiers: "It is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content, but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system." This allows signifiers to change meaning. Thus, Chicago emerges in the negative space between lake and prairie. Wolfgang Iser: "Negation makes something emerge, revealing the duality of its character."<sup>60</sup> Barthes' first lexia in *S/Z* was also a unit of symbolic code: "This lexia lays the groundwork, in introductory form, for a vast symbolic structure, since it can lend itself to many substitutions, variations.... On the symbolic level, an immense province appears, the province of antithesis, of which this forms the first unit, linking at the start its two adversative terms."<sup>61</sup>

(2) *moving waters* \*(HER. enigma 1 — A question arises: Moving from where to where?) The question is answered in (6) below. \*(ACT. to move)

---

<sup>60</sup> Iser, *Models*.

<sup>61</sup> Barthes, *S/Z*. p. 17

(3) *as far as eye could follow* \*(HER. enigma 2 — A question arises: Whose eye is following the moving waters?) The question is answered partially in (15) below. \*\* (ACT. to follow)

(4) *sea of grass* \*(SYM. Antithesis: negation) The opposites are shown to be the same. To the east are *waters*, to the west is a *sea*. What lies between waters and sea remains featureless, undescribed, negated.

(5) *as far as wind might reach* \*(ACT. might reach: to touch)

(6) \* (REF. the literary code) Whitman: "By the old lighthouse, nothing but sea-tossings in sight in every direction as far as eye could reach."<sup>62</sup>

***Waters restlessly, with every motion, moving out of used colors for new.***

(7) *Waters restlessly, with every motion, moving out of used colors for new.* \* (HER. Enigma 1: A question is answered.) Where is the water moving? The water is moving from color to color, from itself to itself, from nowhere to nowhere — a lake.

(8) *used... new* \*(SEM. connoting commerce)

***So that each fresh wind off the lake washed the prairie grasses with used sea-colors: the prairie moved in the light like a secondhand sea.***

(9) \* (REF. the literary code) "And the earth was without form, and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light."<sup>63</sup>

(10) *wind off the lake washed the prairie grasses*\* (SYM. Antithesis: mediation) *wind* moves from *lake* to *prairie*, mediating opposites.

(11) *the prairie moved in the light like a secondhand sea.* (SYM. Antithesis: negation) Again, to the east are waters, and to the west, a sea; to the east are the depths, and to the west, a void.

(12) *used... secondhand* (SEM: connoting commerce)

(13) \*(ACT: to wash) \*\*(ACT: to move)

---

<sup>62</sup> Whitman, *Specimen Days*.

<sup>63</sup> Genesis 1:2

***Till between the waters and the wind came the marked-down derelicts with the dollar signs for eyes.***

(14) *between the waters and the wind came* \*(SYM: Antithesis: negation) Negation makes something emerge from between water and wind, i.e., from nowhere.

(15) *the marked down derelicts with the dollar signs for eyes.* \*(HER: Enigma 2 answered in part— whose eyes? *Derelicts' eyes*. The answer is partial; the enigma continues in the term *derelict*. Who are the derelicts? In what ways are they derelict? What will they do? The substance of the essay addresses these questions.)

(14) *marked down... dollar signs...* \*(SEM: commerce)

(15) *dollar signs for eyes* \*(REF: the cultural code) Cartoon portrayals of greed.<sup>64</sup>

***Looking for any prairie portage at all that hadn't yet built a jail.  
Beside any old secondhand sea.***

(12) *prairie portage* \*(SYM. Antithesis: mediation) What emerges (a portage) from negation mediates between opposites, between east and west, between moving waters and sea of grass. Roland Barthes: "The development of an antithesis normally involves the exposition of each of its parts (moving waters/sea of grass). A third term is possible: a joint presentation. This term can be... literal, if we are concerned to denote the physical conjunction of antithetical sites."<sup>65</sup>

(13) *jail* \*(SEM: connoting crime, lawlessness)

(14) *secondhand* \*(SEM: connoting commerce) The emergence of portage between prairie and sea immediately alters both opposites to human terms: the prairie is distinguished by the absence of a jail, the sea becomes *secondhand*.

(15) *Looking for any prairie portage at all that hadn't yet built a jail.* \*(ACT to look, to build). The story of the founding of Chicago is told in the verbs used so far: *moving, following, reaching, came, looking, and built*.

---

<sup>64</sup> In *Talking to Myself*, Studs Terkel tells the story of a meeting between Algren and Billie Holiday in 1956: "You're all right," she said to him. "How do you know?" he asked. "You're wearin' glasses." He laughed softly. "I know some people who wear glasses who got dollar signs for eyes."

<sup>65</sup> Barthes, S/Z, p. 21.

**Appendix II**  
"Chicago" by Carl Sandburg

HOG Butcher for the World,  
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,  
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;  
Stormy, husky, brawling,  
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I  
    have seen your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm  
    boys.  
And they tell me you are crooked and I answer: Yes, it is true I have  
    seen the gunman kill and go free to kill again.  
And they tell me you are brutal and my reply is: On the faces of women  
    and children I have seen the marks of wanton hunger.  
And having answered so I turn once more to those who sneer at this my  
    city, and I give them back the sneer and say to them:  
Come and show me another city with lifted head singing so proud to be  
    alive and coarse and strong and cunning.  
Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job on job, here is a tall  
    bold slugger set vivid against the little soft cities;  
Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action, cunning as a savage  
    pitted against the wilderness,  
    Bareheaded,  
    Shoveling,  
    Wrecking,  
    Planning,  
    Building, breaking, rebuilding,  
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing with white teeth,  
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,  
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who has  
    never lost a battle,  
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse.  
    and under his ribs the heart of the people,  
    Laughing!  
Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of  
    Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog  
    Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with  
    Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

**Appendix III**  
 “The City” by Ben Maddow (David Wolff)

Children of the cold sun and the broken horizon,  
 O secret faces, multitudes, eyes of inscrutable grief,  
 great breath of millions, in unknown crowds or alone,  
 rooms of dreamers above the cement abyss, — and I,  
 who all night restive in the unsleeping rain,  
 awoke and saw the windows covered with tears.

I heard, like the noise of melting rivers, the concourse of  
 the living  
 all hours mingled, violent, murmuring, or bright:  
 the cheers; the radio; the metal shriek of the accident;  
 the whisper of hired affection, hit of the week,  
 applause; gunfire on the screen; and at night the tragic  
 houses  
 issuing like voluble flame the outcries of the city.

Yet none pronounced the truth, no hand disclosed  
 the heartbreak behind the muted door, denying all.  
 I longed to read letters therefore which were never sent,  
 to pierce walls, covers, silences, part the sad lips,  
 to stand by warm bed and witness the instantaneous dream,  
 put my hand in men's foreheads and clasp the beating  
 spring.

The girl in the park cried *Juan! Juan!* but it was not I.  
 None answered, but I felt the breath of unknowable love.  
 Dawn silent: an old woman climbed with dry hands  
 the iron stoop where her daughter feared to give birth.  
 None spoke, but waited to watch the discolored twins  
 drawn forth,  
 wrapped on the bed together, born to neglect.

Light on the painful eyelids, agony of beginnings;  
 the assault naked against the edges of the world;  
 then the long childhood inexplicably kind or cruel;  
 the boy fingering himself, the flush of the blind pulse,  
 the maiden touching the first blood of sex;  
 still ignorant of desire, the double wilderness.

Life smiles with heavy breast: her children run  
 forward with shouts, hunger, the impulse of free affection;  
 but each gets punished for his open face, each falls  
 twisted, twisted returns, gets dreaded blow, and turns  
 back screaming into that room at last, into himself  
 obscure, restful with lonely forces, like the sea.

The young return, —but cold, with skin-tight mask,  
 seeing this city honors most the most false:  
 the lady behind glass, untouched by human hand,  
 with plaster pubis, thigh, and docile belly lifting

the admired fabric up for sale, —  
 while the living long to wear her enameled eyes.

Within is dearer merchandise: men and numbered words  
 cold, vehement, or admiring, as the price demands;  
 where the painter hangs for sale beside his work,  
 the critic, the peddler, and the smiling acrobat;  
 toady and plagiarist for the price of one;  
 and a masked surgeon offering jars of happiness.

The sheen, the glamour, and the marvelous fanfare,  
 the alluring neon and the porcelain smile,  
 the arranged caress of furs, the forearm blazing with  
 dollars,  
 the headlines bought in advance for the subnormal beauty;  
 and all life long the shoppers with laboring hearts  
 desire and possess at last: the corpse in cellophane.

Black halloween! I walked with the crooked nun;  
 heard the cruel father sob in the empty room,  
 and households dining together in daily hatred;  
 the posed hysteria, and the idiot calm; and those  
 whose love was poisoned with delay, I saw still smile,  
 — and felt in myself forever the anguish of understanding.

O lost people! O vendors of desperate myths!  
 Who prints the cold path of stars that promise voyages?  
 Who markets the daydream to the tubercular,  
 puts obscene clothing on the frigid wife,  
 makes woman its soft automaton, and man its bed,  
 and brands the false face on the living flesh of the child?

I read the smooth journals, but they gave no news of this.  
 Who rents the cells of this city? Whom shall I learn to kill?  
 The mysterious pencil? The dealer in abstract food?  
 Or past the chrome-steel and the politeness of corridors,  
 with row of buttons summoning tears or flattery,  
 at his old powerful desk, the immaculate imbecile?

As I walked on the glossy avenue, and with morose fire  
 thought the immense proud fraudulence to vivisect,  
 I heard the derision and the girls' duet of laughter  
 of two who stopped before me with flaunting hair,  
 insulting the photo of the noted man,  
 who, finger in his printed cheek, could not reply.

All three we drank together, mentioning love,  
 delights, friends, quick passion, and the fine pale sky.  
 So rapid cognac glittered in our heads,  
 while I to each gave sumptuous years; to one

her house with windows full of the green sea light;  
and foretold one to have love wherever she goes.

And late, after the headlong passage of first desire,  
now two alone, we lay awake in murmuring ease,  
and spoke again of happiness, and of the elan of flight,  
and as outdoors the high branch yielding to invisible air,  
so she to her wish to learn the touch of that wand,  
hold motor, and ride on the immeasurable gestures of  
space.

Night dwindling, from how many tranquil hands, white  
morning extends the beautiful directions of the word;  
luminous chasms, city of vertical south, north,  
upward, dark march of windows, inlaid each by that star  
softening with precious light in streams of dawn  
toward the close court, the black leap, and the suicide's  
open eye.

Like a fall forward into time too fast, is death,  
springing in each the coil of irreversible years:  
the lymph and architecture of the self,  
unique delirium, lust, and dreams of lightning,  
the body remembered in luscious movement or at ease,  
names lost forever, and childhood of wonderful snow.

Knees broken backward, refugees from life,  
leaving behind the houses they have lived in,  
the sweat on the walls, the toilet, the hateful embrace,  
the colored mottoes and the step of the insane son;  
or failure driving like point of dynamite into the heart  
lifelong, till they enter the impossible wall.

O space that lifts the monoplane strong did suck them  
down,  
this act upon this stone; and shadows on it of living people,  
noon, and dark twilight, and night with argon peaks,  
matchless city, terrible, and I cried aloft  
What monster, O what monstrous foot  
here trod, leaving in blood the measure of its corruption?

Rages in this packed town, in this wilderness of hands,  
beast over mankind, ruling with cruel mark;  
on the delicate mind, on the beautiful mouth like syphilis,  
sometime on everyone, on myself horrible I have seen it:  
the perversion by money, wasting, mad, and universal,  
measure of humanity, and its heavy assassin.

Here the strict labor of the many must support  
the monotony of the useless; and luxury is got  
with smiles, false kindness, marriage, or embezzlement;

he who can feign desire, praise poison, or hang by his  
teeth,  
lives well, accumulates the powerful bond,  
receives inhuman honor, —but the kind man is strangled.

Vaulting metropolis, under whose diagrams of eloquent  
light  
wrestle decay and energy, both blind —  
I went in your purest hours, and met with friends,  
some with familiar calm, or gay, or drunk in the bright  
rooms,  
but I heard the terrifying pulse of other selves:  
on the face of each I touched unknown the invisible tear.

In the membranes of the skull there lie in millionfold  
powers and memories, and I find them forth often:  
the deep smile, and the simple day at the zoo,  
the voices over the bay, the avowal, and the window with  
leaves,  
the joint of the thigh of the beloved person,  
and the wish to live calmly on the highest level.

Yet who is it crawls on the subway's iron floor to sing  
where all must give or listen, since the door is shut?  
O in the proud mirrors of the brain, the ugly clerk  
I see is myself! and the murderer trapped on the fire-  
escape;  
and the desperate salesman; the thief; and the pale girl  
bought  
to open herself again to the stranger's thrust.

I see a boy's hand move as pale as glass,  
and women sleeping with infinite eyes, and all, all  
I see are innocent; not walls, nor men  
brutal, remote, stunned, querulous, weak, or cold  
do crimes so massive, but the hideous scheme  
stands guilty: the usurpation of man over man.

Thus in the grating rack and torsion of society  
the inmost being cracks; gulfs there with groaning cliffs  
disfigure hope; and secret fires grow; and chasms  
unknown hold paralyzed the maelstroms of love; despair  
with frigid pinnacles, hatred, silent catastrophes;  
crevasses of self the self dares not discover, —

Between the inner and the outer face,  
between the cold palm and the incestuous mind,  
between the thought, the pleasure, and the indifference,  
between the bright talk and the solitude,  
between the oratory and the massacre,  
between the music and the soundless scream.

Appendix IV  
Chicago Sun Book Week, July 20, 1947

# Laughter in Jars—Not as Sandburg Wrote of It

## Two Poems Show How Chicago Has Changed

By NELSON ALGREN

(Author of "Never Come Morning" and "The Neon Wilderness.")

IT IS now 33 years since Poetry magazine published Carl Sandburg's famed appraisal of Chicago:

*Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a young man laughs,*

*Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who never lost a battle.*

The quality of that laughter has altered since 1914; it has been replaced by something that sounds more like a juke box running down in a deserted bar. Instead of an unbeaten fighter, its profile is rather that of a prematurely aged adolescent with a gin-fizz hangover lugging Saturday night empties toward that same abandoned bar—offering only a morning-after snicker, in the hope of a refund on the bottles, and conscious of no larger a destiny than that of getting the price of an eye opener. Chicago's laughter has grown metallic and its smile has deteriorated into a complacent smirk.

The ravaged cities of Southern Europe are better described today by the poet's lines. One sees how such a city as Marseilles—where the poor seem always to be poor together—draws now on the sort of vitality Chicago once possessed. Here the poor man, to laugh, feels he must go to a fourth-rate cabaret or listen to Bob Hope, to be wheedled and prodded into laughter. We no longer laugh well out of our own spiritual good health. Whole audiences wait tensely for the placard bearing the sponsored command: "Laughter. Applause. More Laughter."

Even when a man dies on the streets of such a city as Marseilles he does not seem to die alone: his death, like his life, is shared. He dies among men, in his own place. But when he dies on W. Madison or N. Clark he dies lost and disgraced.

For the city has lost its value along with its laughter. It asks only of its dead: "Was your in-

come tax listed and did you own a Nash?" And if the dear departed owned the very latest model then his children are set to emulate his success. Albeit he was, possibly, the sorriest phony who ever walked in shoelather and lived as emptily as he died.

"The cult of money which one encounters here does not spring from avarice or meanness," the distinguished French playwright and novelist, Simone de Beauvoir, observed on a recent tour of Chicago: "Making money is the only aim one can set one's self in a world in which all aims have

been reduced to this common denominator."

Or, in the words of another contributor to Poetry:

*The young return—but cold, with skin-tight mask,  
Seeing the city honors the most false:*

*Where the painter hangs for sale beside his work;*

*The critic, the peddler, and the smiling acrobat;*

*Toady and plagiarist for the price of one;*

*And a masked surgeon offering jars of happiness.*

THE CHICAGO SUN

## BOOK WEEK

JOHN WILLIAM ROGERS, EDITOR

George Dillon, Marion Strobel and John Frederick Nims, editors of Poetry magazine, have collaborated in bringing out this special report on verse.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS SPECIAL POETRY ISSUE:

Article	Author	Page
The Outlaw Kingdom of Modern Poetry	George Dillon	1
Poetry Magazine: The Past 10 Years	S. I. Hayakawa	2
What Do the Poets Mean?	Harvey Curtis Webster	3
Laughter in Jars	Nelson Algren	3
"The Fat Man in the Mirror" A Poem	Robert Lowell	3
Poetry in the Perthes	William Foster	3
How Poets Read	Karl Shapiro	3
"Attentions of Hyman" A Poem	Karl Shapiro	3
Postwar Books of Verse: A List		3
The Survival Press	John Clardi	4
Poetry in New England	Winfield Townley Scott	6
Poetry in California	J. V. Cunningham	6
University of Chicago as Poetry Center	Henry Rago	6
The Infernal Poetry Group	Amos N. Wilder	6
Too Many Poets?	David Dalcho	8

REVIEWS:

Author	Book	Reviewer	Page
Noyes	RESIDENCE ON EARTH	Kenneth Rockwell	4
Breath	THE WELL BROUGHT URB	Harvey Curtis Webster	8
Kate	SEEDTIME	Alfred Warner	9
Otto	I HAVE TWO COUNTRIES	Bucklin Moon	9
White	REPORT ON THE GERMANS	Robert Leach	10
Sheridan	PARADISE ALLEY	James O. Supple	10
Mason	THE WIND CANNOT READ	Dorothy Sparks	10
Baltava	THE FUR MASTERS	Chaim Toker	11
King	THE BALKANS	L. S. Savranos	11
Hoff	FULL CIRCLE	Robert Ralston	11

FEATURES AND DEPARTMENTS

Page	Page
R Takes All Kinds	8
I've Been Reading	9
(Russell Dukeman's column, "Worth Noting," will be resumed when he returns from vacation.)	
In New York	10
Supper	11

Classified Advertising ..... 28

Published Sunday at 400 W. Madison st., Chicago 6, ILL.  
Eastern Advertising Office, 250 Park st., New York 17, N.Y.

**Appendix V**  
Style in *Chicago City on the Make*

In his 1961 introduction to *City on the Make*, Nelson Algren refers to his text as an “essay,” but once as a “prose poem.” In practical terms, the text adopts many forms that work in concert or interruption: a creation myth, an apocalyptic narrative, a historical documentary, an argument, and as William Savage has said, an exhortation to Chicago to be its better self. Often praised, rarely panned,<sup>66</sup> the essay’s flexible style allows it to follow all these paths to their common end. Algren writes prose so poetic, that some passages can be relined in poetic form:

*When chairs are stacked and glasses are turned  
and arc-lamps all are dimmed,  
By days when the wind bangs alley gates ajar  
and the sun goes by on the wind,  
By nights when the moon is an only child  
above the measured thunder of the cars,  
You may know Chicago’s heart at last: (73)*

The style produces atmosphere, controls pace, and highlights content. When Algren describes the pristine prairie before the development of the city, he uses simple parallelisms that mimic, in appearance and grammar, their prairie subject just as Frank Lloyd Wright’s Prairie Style of architecture mimics its prairie setting:

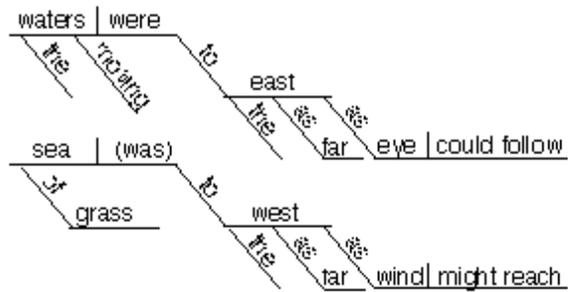
*To the east were the moving waters as far as eye could follow.  
To the west a sea of grass as far as wind might reach. (10)*

*Where once the marshland came to flower.  
Where once the deer came down to water. (25)*

Parallelisms recur throughout *City on the Make*, creating the essay’s central stylistic system.

---

<sup>66</sup> Hurt borrows another reviewer’s words to describe Algren’s style as “overblown, elegiac, tremulous, quivering, cadenced, or wistful celebratory nostalgia that used to be called ‘prose poetry.’” Sal Maloff describes Algren’s *The Last Carousel* in these terms in a 1974 New York Times review (Hurt, 103).



**Style:** Simple parallelisms that mimic, in appearance and grammar, their prairie subject just as Frank Lloyd Wright's Prairie Style of architecture mimics its prairie setting.

The text's overt use of poetic device constitutes another sort of referential system, one that refers ostentatiously to itself: "Style selects a schema in order to demonstrate the selection of a schema," according to University of Chicago narrative theorist David Wellbery. "It is a self-referential system...the emergent system of the text's self-advertisement."

Style in "One Man's Chicago" appears close to the final form it achieves in *City on the Make*. However, some stylistic emergence does continue in revision. For the sake of brevity, one example: Algren often uses front-end parallelisms to build momentum before a crescendo. In "One Man's Chicago," the effect is muddled in this sentence:

*By its padlocked poolrooms and its nightshade neon, by the nuns studying ads on the Englewood local you shall know Chicago. (119)*

In the final draft, the iambic trimeter that had emerged in the first clause repeats in a new second clause. The text now has two lines of identical meter leading to a third clause with four extra syllables. The syllabic structure becomes 12 – 12 – 16. A reader expecting resolution of the meter is held aloft in that third clause, gratification delayed, until the sentence closes in a final rush of iambs: *you shall know Chicago:*

*By its padlocked poolrooms and its nightshade neon, by its carbarn Christs punching transfers all night long, by its nuns studying gin-fizz ads in the Englewood local, you shall know Chicago. (72)*

By its padlocked poolrooms and its nightshade neon,  
 By its carbarn Christs punching transfers all night long,  
 By its nuns studying gin-fizz ads in the Englewood local, } you shall know Chicago. (72)

**Structural Balance:** The structure of this triple parallel reveals growing complexity. A

structural change hinges on the word *Christs*, its position underlined below:

*Preposition – adjective – adjective – noun – conjunction – adjective – adjective – noun*  
*Preposition – adjective – adjective – noun – participle – noun – prepositional phrase...*  
*Preposition – adjective – noun – participle – adjective – noun – prepositional phrase....*

Algren establishes a simple repetition in the first line, repeats it in the first half of the second line, then switches, on the body of Christ, to a new structure — a participle modified by a prepositional phrase — that he complicates with an adjective in the third line. The prepositional phrase in the third line is also longer. The beginning of the third line still evokes the pattern established in the first line, but weakly. Algren doesn't write *nervous nuns*, he just writes *nuns*. This may be partly in service to meter, but it also shows the dominance of the new structure.

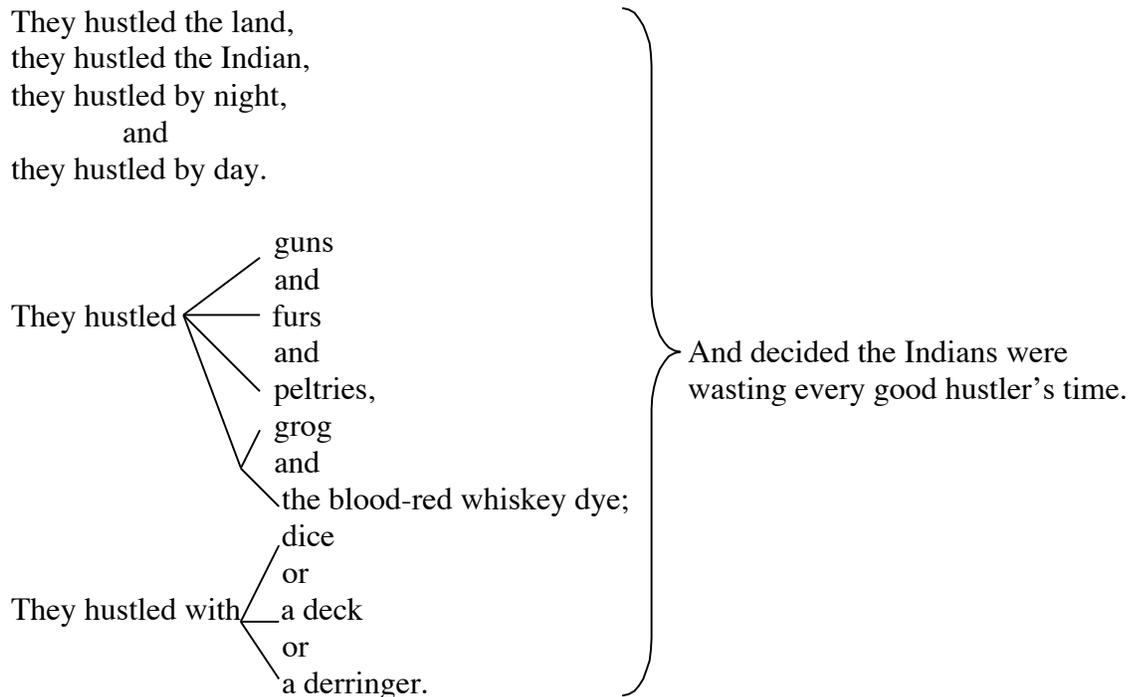
**Dictional Balance:** Algren uses alliteration to carry us from Chicago's darkest corners, *padlocked poolrooms*, through its poisonous urbanity, *nightshade neon*, via the working stiff to the son of the Christian God Himself: *carbarn Christs*. *Carbarn Christs* occupies the same position in the second sentence as *padlocked poolrooms* in the first. Then, at the structural hinge identified above — *Christs* — Algren abandons the alliteration and establishes parallel diction through the present participle and prepositional phrase: *carbarn Christs punching transfers all night long* parallels *nuns studying gin-fizz ads in the Englewood local*. *Nuns* echoes *Christs*, and *the Englewood local* echoes the *transfer punching* in the second line. Even after moving into the more complicated structure of the second and third lines, Algren reminds us of the simpler first:

*Nuns* in the third line sounds a lot like *neon* in the first. *All night long* at the end of the second line echoes *nightshade neon* at the end of the first.

The police may have padlocked the poolrooms, or the poolrooms, presumably open quite late, may be closed for the lateness of the hour. *Locals* in the third line sounds like *long* in the same position in the second, and *locals* imply long journeys — they stop at every station. The train conductors are Christs, no doubt, by virtue of the sacrifices required by their overnight labor. We can only wonder why the nuns are on the train at this hour studying gin-fizz ads — even the godliest seduced by Chicago's forbidden knowledge: You shall *know* Chicago.

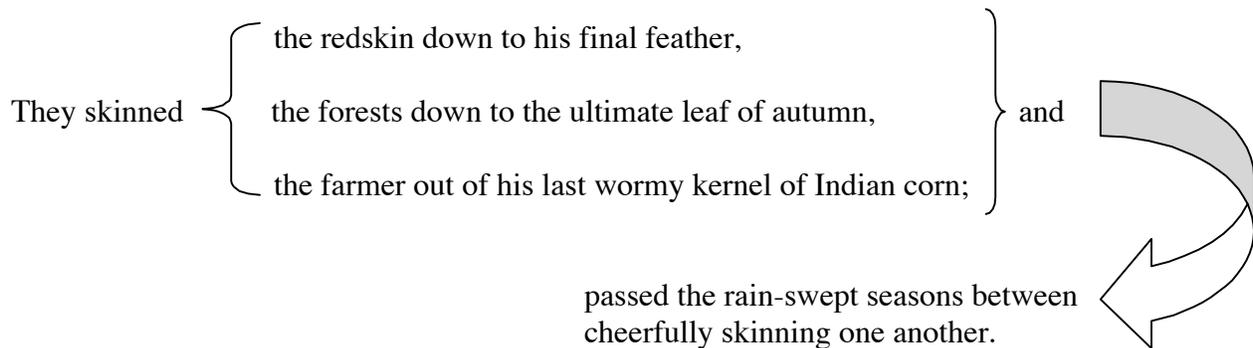
Algren often uses front-end parallels to lend force to a climactic clause:

*They hustled the land, they hustled the Indian, they hustled by night and they hustled by day. They hustled guns and furs and peltries, grog and the blood-red whiskey-dye; they hustled with dice or a deck or a derringer. And decided the Indians were wasting every good hustler's time. (11)*



Notice the increasing length of the branches in the next example. Algren initiates the reader into the grammar with a simple branch, then elaborates in the subsequent:

*They skinned the redskin down to his final feather, the forests down to the ultimate leaf of autumn, the farmer out of his last wormy kernel of Indian corn; and passed the rain-swept seasons between cheerfully skinning one another. (12)*



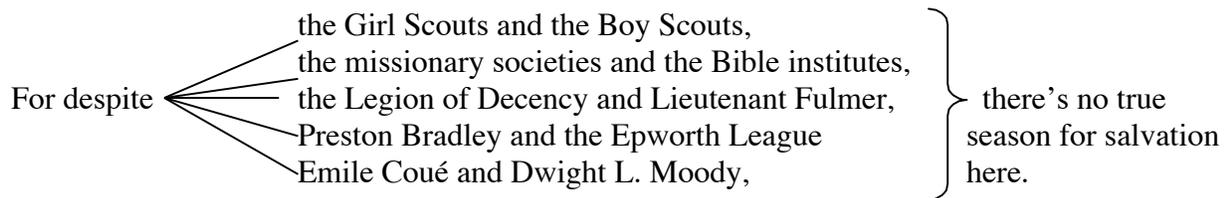
**Structural Balance:** Algren adds a second prepositional phrase in the second and third branch: *of autumn*, and *of Indian corn*; and adds adjectives to the third branch — *wormy* and *Indian* — that make it longer than the second.

**Dictional Balance:** All three branches begin with the same article. The three nouns that follow, all in the same position, represent the commercial culture's three successive conquests of the Midwest: first the Indians, then the forests. The forests fell to farms, but the third line shows that farmers who helped to motivate the conquest of Indians and forests themselves fell victim, a commentary on the ruthlessness of Chicago commerce. The adverbs that open the prepositional phrases together form a popular expression for the downtrodden: *down and out*. The first adjective in each branch is a synonym for the first adjectives in the other two: *final*, *ultimate*, *last*. *Feathers*, *leaves*, and *kernels* occupy the same position in the sentence and are all basic elements of nature in the Midwest. Feathers and leaves bear particular resemblance to each other.

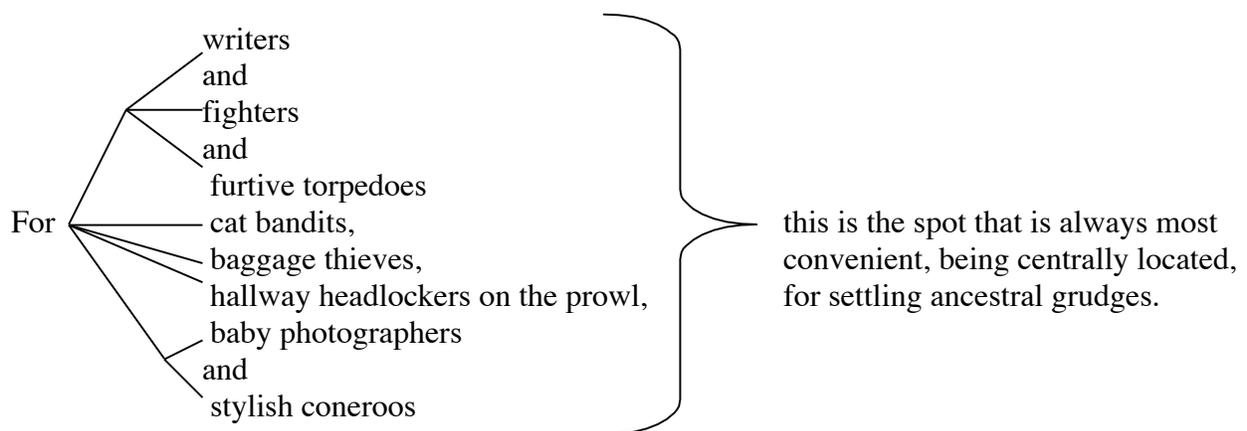
The worminess of the kernels inflates the cynicism of the sentence, to show, again, the ruthlessness of the hustlers who will plunder commodities of the most meager value. The Indian corn is ironic corn. The farmer stole it from the Indian only to have it stolen from himself by Chicago hustlers. Indian corn is an icon of *autumn*, which appears in the second line; it evokes *redskins*, which appears in the first.

In many instances Algren compresses the parallels, squeezing out every luxurious word, until only nouns and the thinnest adjective cladding remain exposed:

*“For despite the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts, the missionary societies and the Bible institutes, the Legion of Decency and Lieutenant Fulmer, Preston Bradley and the Epworth League, Emile Coué and Dwight L. Moody, there’s no true season for salvation here.”* (16)



*“For writers and fighters and furtive torpedoes, cat-bandits, baggage thieves, hallway headlockers on the prowl, baby photographers and stylish coneroos, this is the spot that is always most convenient, being centrally located, for settling ancestral grudges.”* (62)



When Algren wants to go long, he crafts a kind of macro-sentence made of fragmented clauses and phrases. Algren uses these subordinations as abundantly as parallelism and with no less trickery. Fragmented subordinations appear next to both of the perfect prairie parallels we examined at the beginning of this appendix. The first begins with a resumptive modifier (the modifier and its antecedent are underlined) that links the subordination to the parallel:

*To the east were the moving waters as far as eye could follow. To the west a sea of grass as far as wind might reach.*

*Waters restlessly, with every motion, slipping out of used colors for new. So that each fresh wind off the lake washed the prairie grasses with used sea-colors: the prairie moved in the light like a second-hand sea.*

*Till between the waters and the wind came the marked-down derelicts with dollar-signs for eyes.*

*Looking for any prairie portage at all that hadn't yet built a jail.*

*Beside any old second-hand sea. (10)*

Algren uses punctuation to chop what could have been a single sentence into four paragraphs. But he takes pains to be sure the reader also processes it as a single sentence. He bridges periods and indentations by starting his fragments with connecting words like “so” and “till.” Another starting word, “looking,” reaches into the previous paragraph to find its antecedent, “derelicts.” “Beside” reaches a paragraph backward to “portage.” The last two paragraphs in this example are prepositional phrases that should not, by the standards of any indefatigable schoolmarm, stand alone. In the one place where this chain of fragments would most easily break, Algren binds it with a colon. Rewritten as a single sentence, the passage looks like this:

*Waters restlessly, with every motion, slipping out of used colors for new, so that each fresh wind off the lake washed the prairie grasses with used sea-colors: the prairie moved in the light like a secondhand sea, till between the waters and the wind came the marked-down derelicts with the dollar signs for eyes, looking for any prairie portage at all that hadn't yet built a jail, beside any old secondhand sea.*

Algren juxtaposes parallels and subordinations to combine and contrast their effects. In the example above, Algren creates a feeling of serenity and stasis with the prairie parallel, then uses that resumptive modifier (still underlined) like a banana peel to send the reader sliding down a cascading subordination that shatters serenity. The styles conform to content: the prairie is serene, as captured in the parallelism; its serenity is upset by the arrival of European settlers, as captured in the subordination. The effect is reversed in the example below: the breathless momentum of the subordination and the awkward incompleteness of the fragments leave the reader pent up, unsatisfied. She's in this state as she enters the turbines of the front-end triple parallel. By the time she gets to *you shall know Chicago* she'll be pleased to find some grammatical resolution:

*An October sort of city even in Spring. With somebody's washing always  
whipping, in smoky October colors off the third-floor rear by that same wind that  
drives the yellowing comic books down all the gutters that lead away from home.  
A hoarse-voiced extry-hawking newsie of a city.*

*By its padlocked poolrooms and its nightshade neon, by its carbarn  
Christs punching transfers all night long, by its nuns studying gin-fizz ads in the  
Englewood local, you shall know Chicago. (72)*

Parallelism is vital to the style of *City on the Make*; subordination operates vitally in contrast to it. We can see this clearly in a parallelism that blossoms on page 23 and continues for two pages. It begins like this:

*Jane Adams, too, knew that Chicago's blood was hustler's blood. Knowing that Chicago, →*



The next paragraph picks up these “one for” parallels and they continue for the next 47 lines, occasionally building new parallels as they go, so that those beginning with “one” refer back to “two faces,” while those beginning with “for” refer back to some “one” dropped along the way. The beginning of this series of parallels appears on the next page to show how length and complexity vary and parallels occur within parallels:

One for the open-eyed children of the thousand-windowed office buildings.  
And  
one for the shuttered hours.

One for the sunlit traffic's noontime bustle.  
And  
one for midnight subway watches when stations swing past like ferris wheels of light, yet  
leave the moving window wet with rain or tears.

One face for go getters  
and  
one for Go-Get-It-Yerselfers.

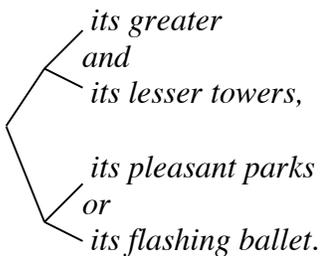
One for poets  
and  
one for promoters.

One for the good boy  
and  
one for the bad.

One —  
for — white collars  
as well as  
blue,  
for — our museums like cathedrals  
and  
our cathedrals like museums,  
for — the windy white and blue miles of our beaches,  
the Saturday night moonlight excursions to Michigan City,  
the afternoons at the zoo... sudden warm, still rain;  
and  
for — that night-shaded honkytonk where Sherry Our Shivering Sheba  
shook the long night's last weary shake to twenty empty tables and  
one middle-aged pimp wheedling a deaf bartender for a final  
double shot.

One for early risers,  
one for evening hiders.

After this series of parallels ends on page 25 with, “*For all the collarless wanderers of the horse-and-wagon alleys of home,*” a new parallelism begins:

*It isn't hard to love a town for*  *its greater  
and  
its lesser towers,  
its pleasant parks  
or  
its flashing ballet.*

The next line leads the reader to expect this parallelism to continue, but it transitions, instead, into a fragmented subordination:

*Or for its broad and bending boulevards, where the continuous headlights follow, one dark driver after the next, one swift car after another, all night, all night and all night. But you never truly love it till you can love its alleys, too. Where the bright and morning faces of old familiar friends now wear the anxious midnight eyes of strangers a long way from home.  
A midnight bounded by the bright carnival of the boulevards and the dark girders of the El.*

Which leads to that perfect prairie parallel:

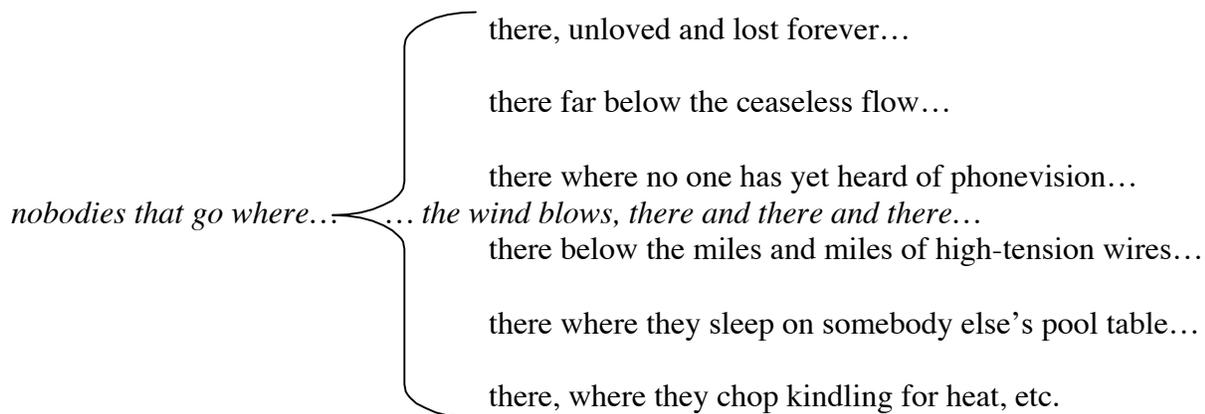
*Where once the marshland came to flower.  
Where once the deer came down to water.*

The final parallel is made striking by the subordination that separates it from the parallels of the preceding pages. After a sustained two-page exploration of the city, Algren finishes by reminding us, with a prairie-style parallel, of the prairie it replaced.

Modified variations of these styles occur throughout *City on the Make*, including one curious species of combined parallelism and subordination that demands to be explored. Algren repeats a resumptive modifier, *there*, to transition from one subject to another:

*The useless, helpless nobodies nobody knows: that go as the snow goes, where the wind blows, there and there and there, down any old cat and ashcan alley at all. There, unloved and lost forever, lost and unloved for keeps and a day, there far below the ceaseless flow of TV waves and FM waves, way way down there where no one has yet heard of phonevision nor considered the wonders of technicolor video — there, there below the miles and miles of high-tension wires servicing the miles and miles of low-pressure cookers, there, there where they sleep on someone else's pool table, in someone else's hall or someone else's jail, there where they chop kindling for heat, cook over coal stoves, still burn kerosene for light, there where they sleep the all-night movies through and wait for rain or peace or snow: there, there beats Chicago's heart. (68)*

Algren often uses fragments and modifiers to reach across stops, like the period, that in other writers seem impenetrable. So when the reader first encounters clauses like, “*there, unloved and lost forever*,” it is natural to assume they modify the nobodies in the prior sentence, the *there* linking back to *where the wind blows*. Algren reinforces this impression by describing, in these clauses, the locations and activities of those nobodies: *there where they sleep on somebody else's pool table*. We seem to have entered a rear-loaded parallelism:



But when the reader reaches the end of the sentence she encounters a new main clause and discovers that all those *theres* also point to it: *there, there beats Chicago's heart*. We can then reconsider the sentence as a front-loaded subordination. Chicago's heart becomes unloved and lost, Chicago's heart sleeps on somebody else's pool table. Ingenious grammar serves an ingenious purpose — to redefine the nobodies as Chicago's heart.