

Chicago

Carl Sandburg

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

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 wanton¹ 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:

10 Come and show me another city with lifted head singing
so proud to be alive and coarse and strong and cunning. **B**

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,

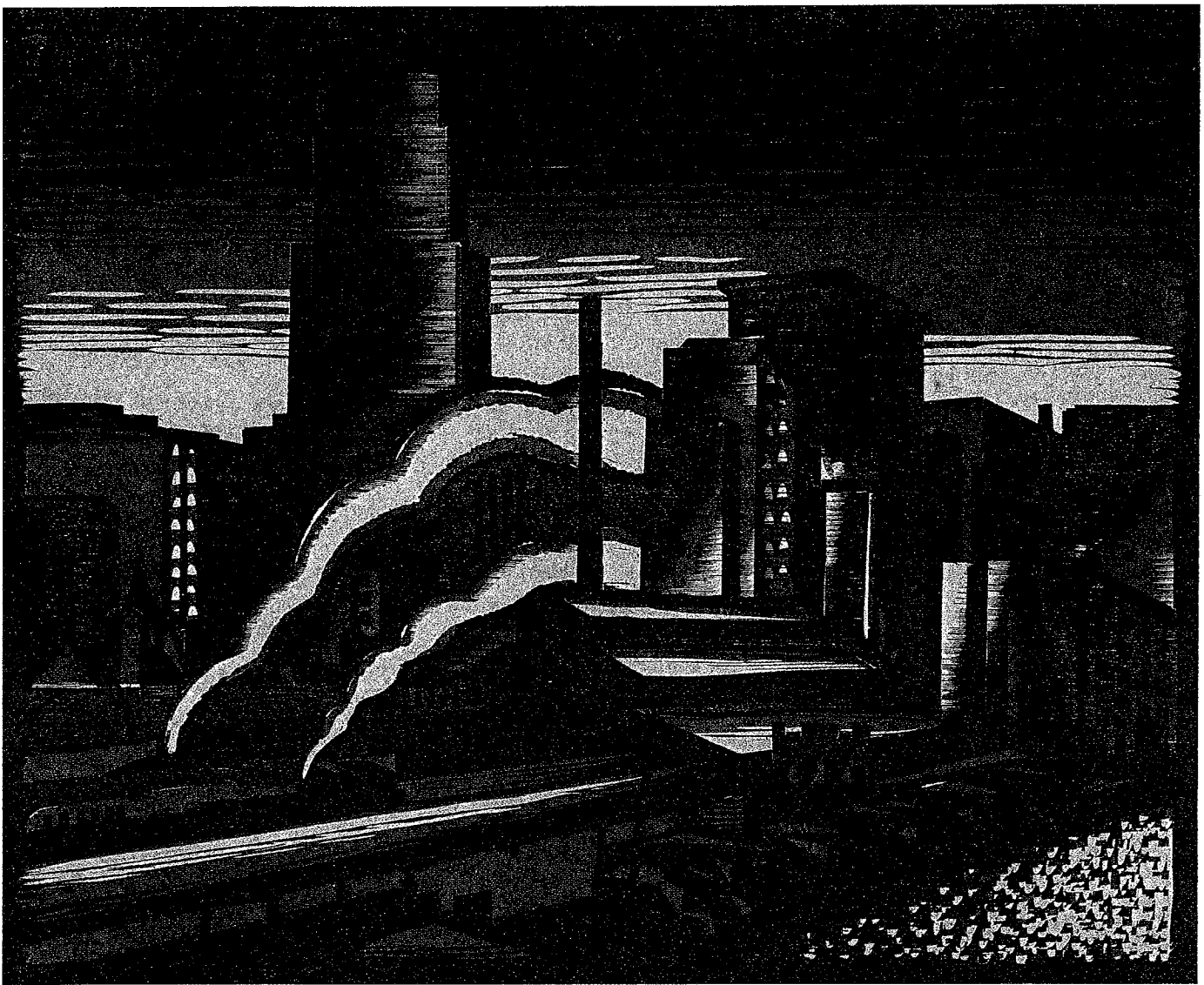
A SYNTHESIZE DETAILS

The brief descriptive phrases in lines 1–5, also known as **epithets**, are almost like nicknames; in fact, some of them have come into common use. What do they tell you about the city's economy and industry?

B TONE AND DICTION

Lines 6–8 contain harsh words such as *wicked* and *brutal*. Identify the language in lines 9–10 that counters this harshness. What does it reveal about Sandburg's feelings toward the city as well as its critics?

1. wanton: without limitation.



South of the Loop (1936), Charles Turzak. Color woodcut, Image 10²/₃" × 11³/₄", sheet 11¹/₄" × 15". Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, 1992.73 © Joan Turzak Van Hees.

15 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,
 20 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.

ANALYZE VISUALS
 What qualities of the city are emphasized by both the horizontal and the vertical lines in this woodcut? Refer to specific areas of the print when giving your answer.

Grass

Carl Sandburg

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo.¹
Shovel them under and let me work—

I am the grass; I cover all. **C**

And pile them high at Gettysburg
5 And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.²
Shovel them under and let me work.

Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the conductor:

What place is this?

Where are we now?

10

I am the grass.

Let me work. **D**

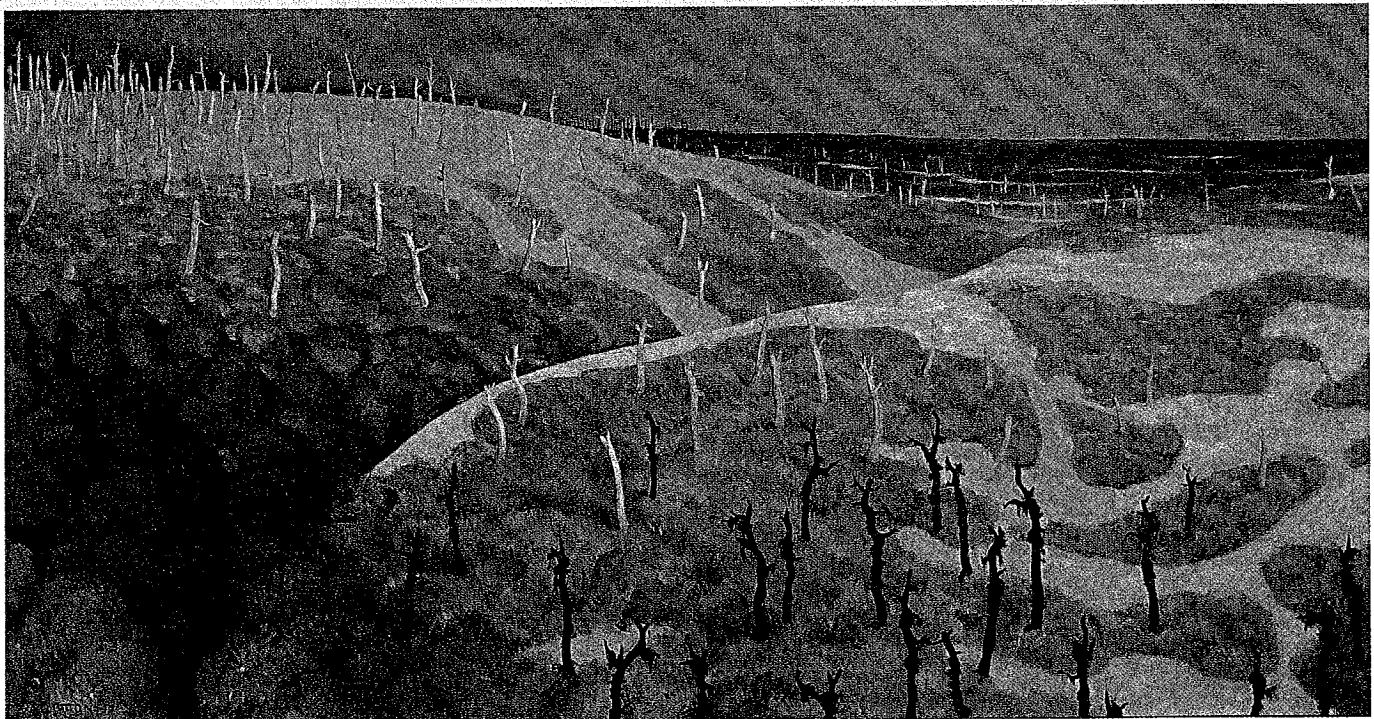
C PERSONIFICATION

Reread lines 1–3. Sandburg uses personification in establishing the speaker for this poem. Who is the speaker and what is its role in these scenes?

D TONE AND DICTION

Identify several examples of **repetition** in this poem. What **tone** is established by the repetition of these words and/or phrases?

1. **Austerlitz** (ô'stêr-lîts') and **Waterloo**: sites of significant battles during the Napoleonic Wars (1800–1815).
2. **Ypres** (ē'prê) and **Verdun** (vêr-dŭn'): sites of significant battles during World War I.



Le Plateau de Bolante (1917), Félix Vallotton. Oil on canvas. Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine, Paris. © Musée d'Histoire Contemporaine-BDIC.