

Carl Sandburg, Idols in the Sand, and Galesburg Shacks

By Michael Lee Johnson

Idols are what idols appear to be.
Idols are men that idols are.
They're the sleep walkers,
the self-styled hobo's,
saints in small villages
people living alone.
Birthright of saviors, railroad men, famous poets.
Birthright of little places, big hearts,
speakers of cold skillets and dainty bedrooms.
Folk songs fall, black and white,
divided cracks celebrated brick streets.
They form modest communities,
quiet spaces, momentous churches
named my denominations and breed
rail tracks divide their ideologies, brands
of beer, run down shacks divide their lives.
Property vultures, ex Maytag mongrels'
Maytag treason, traders of trade, traitors to Mexico,
walk simple steps away.
Jobbers walk and jobs move away.
Streets quiet lights, slate deserted
house shacks of many races abandoned, colors
form rows PMS color charts leading to his birth place;
folk songs, Swedish heritage, Remembrance Rock,
savior of a poetic dream born in a slum.
Just a roadside museum,
mile and a half walk from downtown,
summer sweat, drenching summer heat,
Galesburg railroad days June 2010, ending
beginning humidity, snippets of beer bottles
tossed around, Saturday night drunks
lie in flush untailed grass.
A three room shack, half pint bedroom,
curtains merge the window with sun rays,
more summer heat.
Idols grow as children, their ambitions
toss them away.
Idols are what idols appear to be.
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Anecdote: this poem is based on a real travel experience to Galesburg, IL in June 2010. The poem was developed from the vivid pictures and images taken by Carol Marcus, a devoted friend of many years.

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