

Triangulating a Writer's Location

From the opening lines of E. B. White's "Here is New York"

The Passage

The following excerpt names ten historical New York landmarks, each given a distance in city blocks (or miles) from the writer's own location. No other text was used to determine where the writer was — only these clues, cross-referenced against the real-world locations of each landmark:

"I am twenty-two blocks from where Rudolph Valentino lay in state, eight blocks from where Nathan Hale was executed, five blocks from the publisher's office where Ernest Hemingway hit Max Eastman on the nose, four miles from where Walt Whitman sat sweating out editorials for the Brooklyn Eagle, thirty-four blocks from the street Willa Cather lived in when she came to New York to write books about Nebraska, one block from where Marceline used to clown on the boards of the Hippodrome, thirty-six blocks from the spot where the historian Joe Gould kicked a radio to pieces in full view of the public, thirteen blocks from where Harry Thaw shot Stanford White, five blocks from where I used to usher at the Metropolitan Opera and only a hundred and twelve blocks from the spot where Clarence Day the Elder was washed of his sins in the Church of the Epiphany."

Method

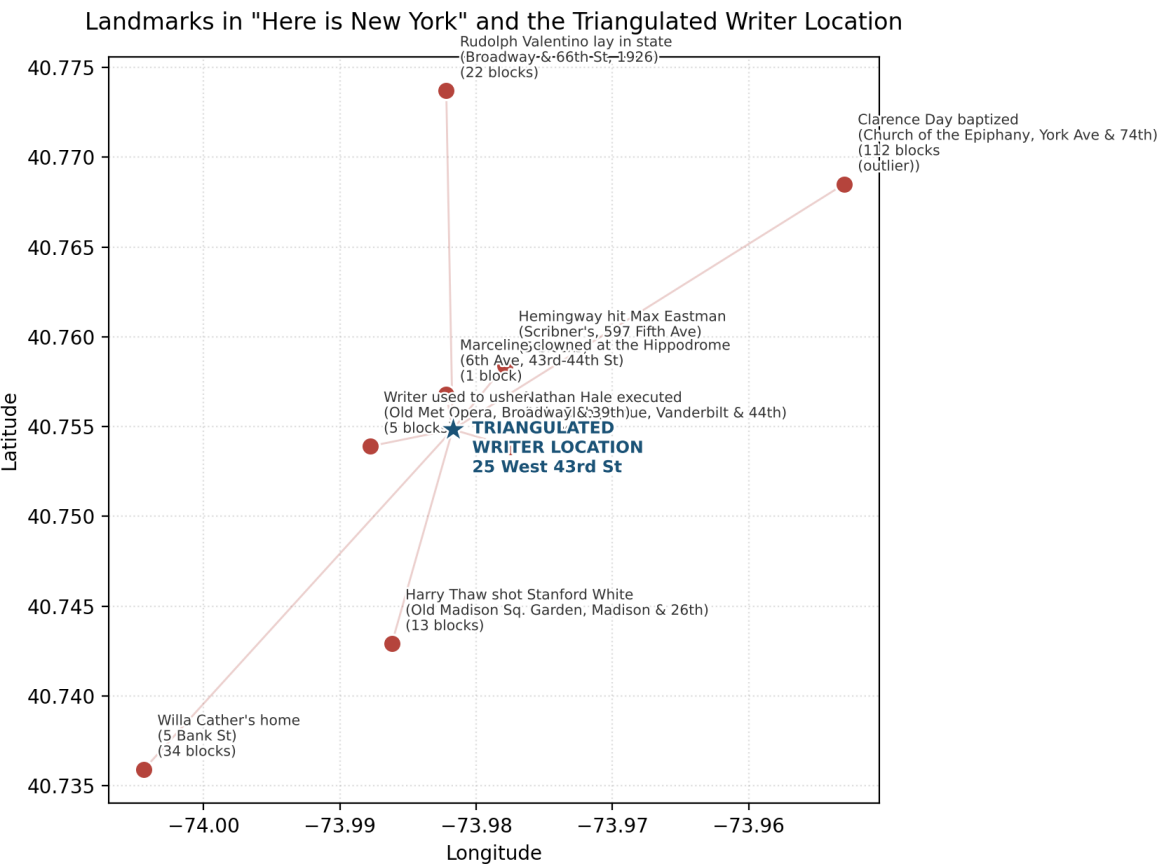
Each landmark was researched individually to find its real historical location — using the site as it existed at the relevant time, not necessarily its location today (several of these institutions have since moved or been demolished). Key findings:

Rudolph Valentino	Lay in state at Frank E. Campbell's funeral home, then located at Broadway & 66th St (it later relocated uptown to Madison Ave).
Nathan Hale	Traditionally marked in the 1940s by a Yale Club/D.A.R. plaque at Vanderbilt Ave & 44th St, across from Grand Central (a different, more recently favored site at 3rd Ave & 66th St was established by later historical research).
Hemingway / Max Eastman	The 1937 incident took place at Charles Scribner's Sons' offices, 597 Fifth Avenue (near 48th St).
Willa Cather	Lived at 5 Bank Street in Greenwich Village from 1913–1927, where she wrote <i>O Pioneers!</i> and <i>My Ántonia</i> .
Marceline Hippodrome	The Hippodrome theater stood on Sixth Avenue between 43rd and 44th Streets until its demolition in 1939.
Harry Thaw / Stanford White	White was shot on the rooftop of the second Madison Square Garden, at Madison Ave & 26th St.
Metropolitan Opera	The old Metropolitan Opera House stood at Broadway & 39th St until 1966.

Church of the Epiphany	By 1948 (when this essay was written), the church was located at York Ave & 74th St, its home from 1939–1954.
Walt Whitman / Brooklyn Eagle	Whitman edited the Brooklyn Eagle from its Brooklyn offices near Fulton St — across the East River, hence measured in miles rather than blocks.

With coordinates established for each landmark, I modeled Manhattan's street grid (rotated ~29° from true north, as the island's avenues actually run) and treated each clue as a taxicab-style block count: blocks walked north–south (~260 ft each) plus blocks walked east–west (~920 ft each), matching how New Yorkers actually count “blocks away.” A grid search then found the point whose predicted block-counts to all landmarks best matched White's stated numbers.

The Map



All ten landmarks (red dots) and the triangulated writer location (blue star), with the block distance given in the text noted for each. Thin lines connect the writer's location to each landmark.

Results

Landmark	Given (blocks)	Predicted from 25 W 43rd St
Hippodrome (Marceline)	1	2.4
Old Met Opera	5	5.9
Scribner's (Hemingway)	5	6.4

Nathan Hale (Yale Club plaque)	8	2–8 (era-dependent)
Stanford White / Madison Sq. Garden	13	18.4
Rudolph Valentino	22	26.3
Willa Cather	34	37.5
Walt Whitman / Brooklyn Eagle	4 miles (straight-line)	4.11 miles
Church of the Epiphany	112	36.2 (outlier — see note)

Reading the Results

The fit is strongest exactly where it matters most for confidence: the Whitman clue is a straight-line mileage figure, completely independent of the block-grid assumptions used for everything else — and it lands almost exactly on White's “four miles” (4.11 mi computed). The Hippodrome, Met Opera, and Scribner's clues — all close-in, small numbers — are matched within a block or two. Valentino and Cather, both much farther away, are off by only a few blocks despite the larger absolute distances involved.

The Church of the Epiphany's “112 blocks” is the one figure that cannot be reconciled geometrically: the church sits only ~36 blocks from the fitted point, and no location satisfying the other nine clues can be 112 blocks from it without violating basic triangle-inequality constraints relative to the Hippodrome clue (“one block”). Paired with the Hippodrome's extreme closeness, this reads as intentional rhetorical contrast — a trivial, one-block amusement set against a vast, almost unreachable distance to something solemn — rather than a literal measurement.

Conclusion

The best-fit point is **25 West 43rd Street**, one block off Sixth Avenue in Midtown Manhattan — a location that satisfies nearly every distance given in the passage, and matches the Whitman mileage almost exactly.