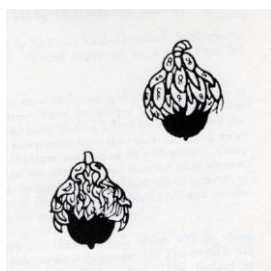


**THE ANNOTATED LETTERS**  
**OF**  
**NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY**  
**TO**  
**SARA TREVOR TEASDALE**



**Ed. Dennis Camp**  
**Professor Emeritus**  
**University of Illinois-Springfield**

**These letters are collected among the Vachel Lindsay Papers. Yale Collection of  
American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library**

## INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most meaningful way to begin reading the annotated letters of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (“VL”) to Sara Trevor Teasdale (“ST”) is to turn to the end, and read the final letter in the collection. ST has written Elizabeth Conner Lindsay, VL’s widow, to request permission to publish these letters. Elizabeth is in total agreement:

Indeed you are most welcome to the permission I gave in respect to the publication of Vachel’s letters to you. The time is absolutely for you to decide; so far as I am concerned, this may be anytime. I view the placing of his work before the public in an absolutely impersonal way and am glad for any words of his which have characteristic beauty to see the light of day. (Letter 264, dated April 6, 1932)

Unfortunately, however, ST’s own life collapsed; and, in less than a year (January 29, 1933), she, like VL before her, committed suicide, ST by overdosing on sleeping pills.

The key word in Elizabeth’s response is the word “characteristic.” These letters allow readers to see the complex nature of VL, from his boyish humor to his senescent despair, from his imaginative whimsies to his dedication to discipline and revision. The letters cover the creation of the majority of his best work, in poetry and in prose. Readers will learn the details of VL’s first performance of “The Congo” in Springfield, Illinois; they will learn his theories on film and film stars; they will learn his reliance on other people, especially in regard to his poems. The letters also expose the American publishing scene in the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Between the two of them, ST and VL knew anybody and everybody who was involved in literary publishing—authors, editors, publishers—not only in Chicago and New York but in England as well. What may be most impressive of all, though, is the breadth of VL’s knowledge. He was, of course, trying to impress an intelligent fellow poet; but the sheer depth of his reading and his memory may be what these letters best reveal.

In preparing this edition, I have tried to preserve the character of VL’s work. He was never a champion speller, but many of his “misspellings” are really manifestations of intentional playfulness. I have used the mark ^ as a substitute for [sic]; thus, when a word is printed “intiamate^,” readers will know that it is not a typo. And because so many names, like Harriet Monroe or Jessie Rittenhouse, recur in letter after letter, the first appearance of such a name in each letter will read: “Harriet \*Monroe.” The asterisk indicates that the name is explained in the “Glossary,” which is attached as an appendix to this edition. Some researchers may want to print the “Glossary” and keep it on hand as the letters are read. Nevertheless, VL’s broad knowledge makes footnotes inevitable and relevant notes are published at the close of each letter. The notations assume that few people will attempt to read these letters end to end. Most will be interested in a particular era of Lindsay’s life, and thus will turn to specific months or years. To this end, the footnotes offer guidance to related materials in other letters. Also, to preserve space, several books have abbreviated titles. The full bibliographical data appears in the “Partial Bibliography” below.

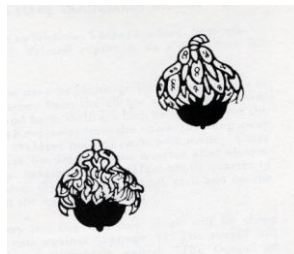
Finally, these 264 letters, nearly all by VL but several by Elizabeth, his wife, are collected at Yale University. The credit line reads: Vachel Lindsay Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. My heart-felt thanks to the university library staff for their guidance and help.

Dennis Camp

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(These are works abbreviated in the notes.)

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"Great oaks from little acorns grow,"  
Each acorn is a magazine.....

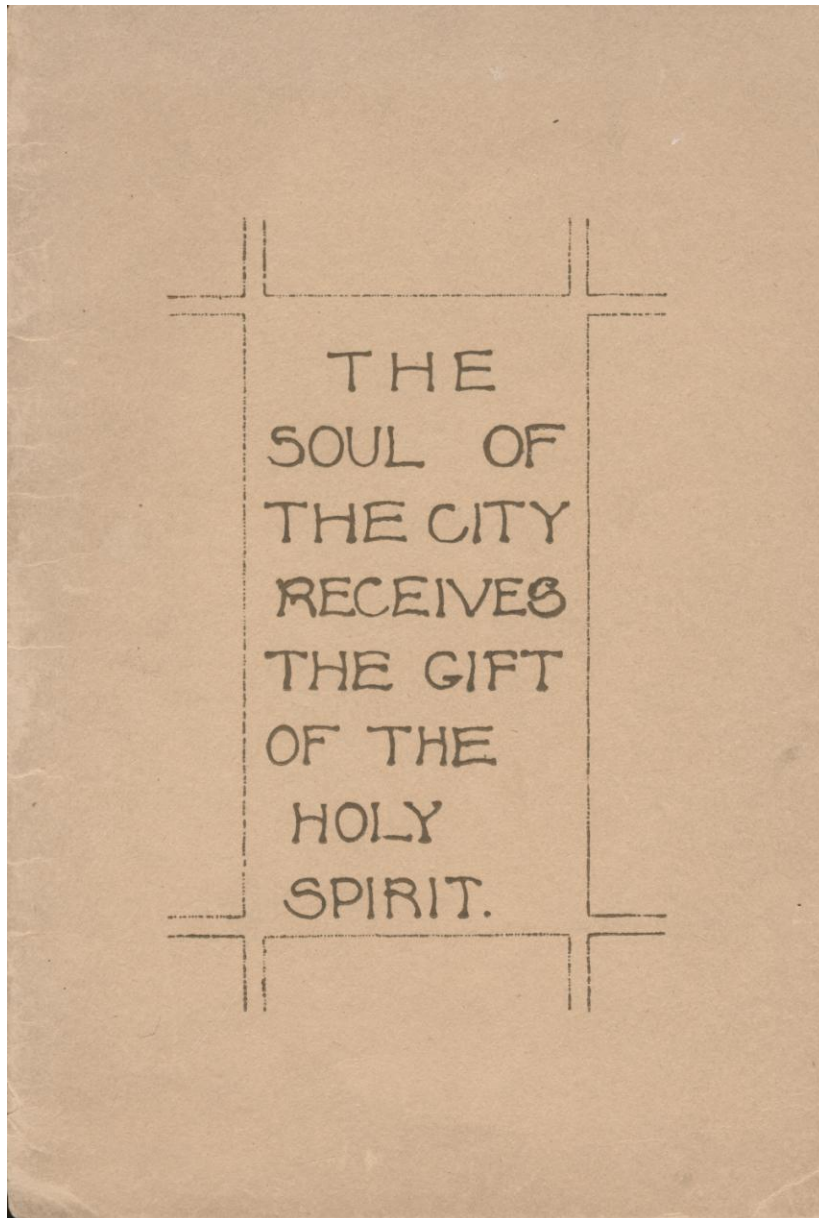
Vachel Lindsay



NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY at about the time his first book was published. circa 1913

**The Annotated Letters of  
Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
to Sara Trevor Teasdale**

**Chapter 1 (Letters 1-21)**



**The Soul of the City (1913): see Letter 13**

1) “Miss Monroe told me you were a very lovely young poet-lady . . .”

Springfield Ill.

August 2, 1913.

My Dear Sara Teasdale:

You can't guess what I have been doing? Writing a mash note. To an utter stranger. Or at least the preliminary to a mash note.<sup>1</sup>

I wrote her my delighted congratulations on the downright literary and historical style in which she acted Mary Queen of Scots in the Edison Photoplay last month.<sup>2</sup> She acknowledged very demurely, sending nothing but a folder with pictures of the company—the page with her picture turned down at the corner. Its^ a regular Julia-Marlowe-curls arrangement and for a day and a half I have been dippy about it—and finally slashed over into a letter—to Mary Fuller.<sup>3</sup>

I'll just bet the Edison company answer her mash notes for her just to keep us village yokels jollied along and going to the show. I think “What Happened to Mary” is pert, shoddy, flip stuff. But in Mary Queen of Scots she showed—and all the company showed themselves to be simply great; they are big people when they stop to think out their parts and deliberate and practice up. Most films are about as deliberate and considered as a Hearst newspaper—Sunday Edition. But even then—there is far more in them than in the Sunday Paper.<sup>4</sup>

Miss \*Monroe—since you ask in your letter—Miss Monroe told me you were a very lovely young poet-lady—and that it would be much worth my while to stay over in Chicago till the end of the week when you arrived—just to meet you, and if I could have seen the shadow of an excuse for a weeks^ loaf!...but alas—I had already had more picnic than I in any way deserved.

What you say about our dear Miss Monroe helps me a bit to make my picture of her clearer. But it doesnt^ take a minute to understand she is a thoroughbred. I think she was born twenty years before America was ripe for her, or to put it another way—America is going to be a far better sounding-board and echo-place the next twenty years than ever in its history.

The Revolution is on—not the Socialist Revolution either.<sup>5</sup> But just such another set of infinite tiny momentary changes as we have seen in dancing and in Dress and in songs are going to take place in all the ways of life. Not that I like rank songs. Or good little healthy bouncing ladies dressed like sloppy Rahabs<sup>6</sup>—but the same coolness and courage that goes into this matter is going into many more worth while things. I am not so sure we are moving on toward^ immediate Social Justice but I am sure that a new nation is rather quickly yet rather deliberately arriving. By the time the women have voted at two Presidential Elections<sup>7</sup> we will be doing things as different as the Tokugawa Shogunate differed from modern Japan.<sup>8</sup> And I do mean that—just that. We are going backward into magnificence. We are going backward into Asia as it were—to ripen and

blossom and bloom, instead of being a nation of barren saplings. The American people have been stimulated beyond all human precedent as a social body—by the mere mechanical action of flying machines upon the mind, moving pictures—Cataracts of moving Pictures upon the eye and [~~the very~~] Armogeddons^ of Automobile Horns in the ear.<sup>9</sup> And every corner of the country has been searched out—there is no inert mass to recruit the conservative forces. It is as though you should every day be dosed by your doctor with a magic drug which he told you was beef iron and wine—and it accumulated and accumulated in your system till you wake up one morning transformed from a butterfly into a bird of Paradise or something like that. Gerald Stanley Lee makes the tremendous point that men have tried to fly for 4000 years—and only learned yesterday.<sup>10</sup> [AH] Eternal Precedents are broken. And a generation cannot live through many such breakings even in mechanics without itself being made over. Speaking esthetically—and entirely aside from the ugly industrial question—I feel that the most settled quiet American community is changing forever from a daisy-field; to a poppy-field perhaps and from a poppy-field tomorrow to something like a field of Tiger-lillies and Red and White Roses—or some such strange and rich combination.

We have left Longfellow and gone past Whitman and are in for something more splendid and luxurious and pompous and Venetian—well—I am writing a perfectly assanine^ letter. What—t’ ell do I know about it?<sup>11</sup> I have been drawing pictures alone in this house for two weeks—and am now having measles in words—as it were—the suppressed ink is breaking out. The dawn of unuttered language [~~words~~] is breaking.

My folks have gone west to camp and I keep just as cool as you please in a big empty darkened house—though it is 104 out doors sometimes.<sup>12</sup>

I sit at this desk<sup>13</sup> and draw and draw with more and more concentration—and I have not drawn anything much since the \*Village Magazine three years ago. Drawing is my lame leg, I hobble on it. It takes twice the effort and preperation^ to concentrate, and twice the will when concentrated and when I am done—only about 1/2 as good as my writing, as I know. Or twice as poor—since you insist I put it that way.

But once in a while it seems just the right salt and pepper to flavor some little stunt of mine, something that comes to me in pictures and will not be satisfied to be put down in writing.

Do you know William Marion \*Reedy? He is getting quite cordial and boasting me a bit, publicly and privately. If I ever go to St. Louis I would like to look you both up. Are you friends? Or just acquaintances?

I read your verses with great interest and have a family-fraternal feeling whenever I see your name in print.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5<sup>th</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A “mash note” is a flirtatious fan letter.

<sup>2</sup>The Edison stock company, along with the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company and the American Vitagraph Company, was one of the first motion picture companies, moving into new quarters in the Bronx in 1906, the year after the rise of motion picture theaters in America. One of Edison's first stars, Mary Fuller actually began her career with Vitagraph in 1907. *What Happened to Mary?* (1912) was a series of pictures, each installment independent and complete, with a prize of \$100 for the best answer to the question-title. VL recounts his experience of viewing Fuller's first historical picture: "Once I saw Mary Fuller in a classic. It was the life and death of Mary Queen of Scots. Not only was the tense, fidgety, over-American Mary Fuller transformed into a being who was a poppy and a tiger-lily and a snow-queen and a rose, but she and her company . . . radiated the old Scotch patriotism. They made the picture a memorial" (*The \*Art of the Moving Picture*, 1915, p. 167; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 284). Fuller's picture may be seen in Terry Ramsaye, *A Million and One Nights* (1926), after p. 658.

<sup>3</sup>Julia Marlowe was the pseudonym of English actress Sarah Frances Frost (1866-1950), famous actress of the American stage. She began her career performing child parts but gained lasting fame as a Shakespearean actress. Teasdale's poem "To Julia Marlowe" was published in *\*Current Literature* (September 1911, p. 333). VL is unaware that ST's St. Louis social group, the "Potters," considered Marlowe as one of their favorite contemporary women (see Carpenter, p. 71).

<sup>4</sup>Beginning with his father's San Francisco *Examiner* in 1887, William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) established an extensive chain of newspapers throughout the United States.

<sup>5</sup>VL considered socialist politics during his stay in Springfield after returning from New York (1908-12). See "Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 64).

<sup>6</sup>That is, harlots—see Joshua 2:1.

<sup>7</sup>VL would soon write a poem on women's suffrage: "The Woman-Voter Comes" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 741-742), first published in the *Chicago \*Herald*, August 30, 1914, the same day the *Herald* announced ST's engagement to Ernst \*Filsinger. On August 7, 1913, VL advises Harriet Monroe: "I get so eager for the national woman-vote to happen at once that I could squeal with the impatience of a pig half under a gate. Now that it is inevitable, I want it to hurry up" (Chénetier, *Letters of VL*, p. 76). For more on this issue, see Letters 18 and 51.

<sup>8</sup>"Shogun" was an early title for supreme military commanders asked to campaign against the Ainu of northern Japan, although after pacification of the north in the 9th century the term lost its literal meaning and the shoguns became de facto rulers of Japan. In 1603, the Tokugawa house became the third line of succession, making Edo the capital city. In 1867, the Tokugawa shogun (called "tycoon") resigned his powers and returned civil and military authority to the emperor (mikado), laying the groundwork for modern Japan.

<sup>9</sup>See VL's "*\*Santa-Fé Trail, The.*"

<sup>10</sup>Gerald Stanley Lee (1862-1944) was a Massachusetts clergyman and author of *Crowds: A Moving-Picture of Democracy* (1913), among other books. The passage VL refers to (he omitted one zero) is on p. 88: "The big and really revolutionary thing about Wilbur Wright's flying was that he changed the minds of the whole human race in a few minutes about one thing. There was one particular thing that for forty thousand years they knew



they could not do. And now they knew they could.” VL’s “The Picture of Crowd Splendor,” the fifth chapter of *The \*Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), reflects Lee’s influence. The chapter closes with a discussion of the importance of *Crowds*, pp. 49-50; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 234. For other references to Lee, see Letters 23 and 139.

<sup>11</sup>VL enjoyed “hell” and “damn” but normally did not spell them out.

<sup>12</sup>The Lindsay family spent summer vacations at “Camp \*Olive” (actually the “Guanella Ranch”) on the slopes of Mount Clinton, one mile west of Empire, Colorado. VL gives a detailed description of the camp site and the surrounding area in Letter 186. For more information on the summer camping experience, see Letters 14 and 106. VL’s poem “Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan” was written at the Guanella Ranch in August 1919: see *Poetry of VL*, p. 349.

<sup>13</sup>The Lindsay home at 603 South 5th Street in Springfield is just south of the Illinois Governor’s Mansion; its ten-foot ceilings and its near floor-to-ceiling windows help to keep the downstairs cool in summer. But the high temperature in Springfield for three days from July 29 to 31, 1913, was 100 to 103°. VL’s room was on the second floor, top of the stairs right, and was not cool. In addition to his bed and a table, the room contained a bookcase VL made as an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade student. Jessie B. \*Rittenhouse, two-time visitor to VL’s home, observes: “No passion more enduring than that which Vachel felt for this home of his boyhood could be conceived. His room on the second floor overlooked, by two windows, the Governor’s Mansion and Yard, and as the house stood upon a slope he had the more effective vantage-point. The room was large enough for all practical uses, considerably larger, as I recall it, than the average bedroom, as it contained a spacious table in the center literally piled with manuscripts and drawings, bookshelves heaped with books and magazines; in short, it was a workroom in every sense of the word. I doubt if any maid dared invade it, as it was innocent of the ravages of a dusting-cloth,” *My House of Life*, p. 296. As I write (2010), VL’s room has been restored and boasts the original pieces of furniture. For more on VL’s room, see the next letter.

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2) “But I just imagine the Poetry Society—flutter . . .”

Springfield Illinois  
Sept. 3, 1913.

My Dear Sarah Teasdale:<sup>1</sup>

Why do I write so often? Because you are a neighbor. I could almost imagine myself going to St. Louis to see you and W. M. R. [William Marion \*Reedy] sometime when I am too poor to go to Chicago—or New York.

Oh—I thank you so much for proposing to propose my name to the \*Poetry Society of America. (Be sure you do it. Miss \*Rittenhouse said she would and didnt^.) Delighted. Flattered. All puffed up over it.<sup>2</sup> After it happens I wish you would send the news to the Illinois State Register so I can get the benefit out of it.<sup>3</sup> I would like to have them find it out in some sideways inadvertent kind of a modest way. Then they would print it right next to the Mexican situation.<sup>4</sup>

This will be a good part of the fun for me—for I do not see how I can afford to go to New York. But I just imagine the Poetry Society—flutter—it would be great. I would be perfectly delighted to see about a dozen people I have written to for years—Anna Hempstead \*Branch and Witter \*Bynner and then there is my star-dream-goddess Mrs. \*Peabody Marks—who honored me with a letter once but who never never would write again. I suppose my reply was so fluttery she dassnt^. Gosh. And I suppose \*Ficke will be there—and Edward J. \*Wheeler—sure—[who] he asked me to come and speak ten minutes on the \*Gospel of Beauty<sup>5</sup>—but I felt obliged to reply that my dress-suit was full of moth holes, and had so been for seven years. But I think it will be just great to belong. I am just wondering how I can get it into the Register. I didn't get that invitation of Wheeler's in either. I'm just that modest sometimes I actually embarrass^ my neighbors. Well—some day it will leak out. I will get it in my mortuary maybe.

I am afraid I am writing like an ass. Oh yes—that mash note you were asking me about. Mary Fuller is a frost.<sup>6</sup> She is a tightwad. Not one line of reply. I send you her beautiful picture she sent me. I don't want to see it any more.

These actresses are all vain. No ordinary eloquence appeals to their vanity. Its^ a kind of a satisfaction to know John \*Phillips has taken my poem to Mary Pickford. Maybe Mary Fuller will see it—and repent and write. But I will be cold. I will say—go away, treacherous curls.

Still—I continue to write like an ass. Its^ the hot weather. This autumn you eloquate about so solmniferous hasn't hit us.<sup>7</sup> The last leaf is decidedly still on the tree. I have to write with my head soaked in cold water. The folks are back from the West and have driven me from my exquis[i]tely cool comfort of the once-lonely down stairs to this room under the roof.<sup>8</sup> So I have my first hot weather of the year.

When I come down to St. Louis I want to meet Zoe \*Akins and Orric \*Johns if you like them and Reedy if you like him.

Send me your book. By your apology I assume it is a swizzler<sup>9</sup>—calculated to break up families. Well—I will put on gloves and read it to mother. You can't break up her family and I havn't^ any of my own. My sweetheart is the truth beyond the moon.<sup>10</sup> Please send me your book.

I understand that your soul is like a river that has gone to sea and gotten salty, or so I understand \*Scribner's magazine.<sup>11</sup> I liked that poem immense. Heres^ to you Sarah. Dam good poem. Heres^ the end of this page.

Good morning.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—  
603 South 5th.

[Enclosure: Picture of Mary Fuller, with a handwritten note: "Dear Exhibitors: Though my voice to you is silent, my heart is with you. Mary Fuller." VL adds: "A villianous^ prevarication. Woman—avaunt. N.V. Lindsay."]

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>ST was born “Sarah Trevor Teasdale” but dropped the “h” when she began publishing her poems. The opening question here suggests that several early letters have been lost.

<sup>2</sup>VL is already a member, as we learn in Letter 28.

<sup>3</sup>Springfield’s *Illinois State Register*, the daily afternoon paper, was unabashedly pro Democratic. Springfield’s morning paper, the *Illinois State Journal*, was just as brazenly pro Republican.

<sup>4</sup>Newspapers everywhere in America were publishing accounts of the Mexican revolution. In February 1913, General Victoriano Huerta joined forces with the rebels and ousted Liberal President Madero, who was shot to death four days later. Although the new regime was recognized by European states, President Woodrow Wilson would not bow to business pressures and refused to recognize Huerta’s government. In March 1913, Wilson ended “dollar diplomacy,” asserting that special business interests would no longer be supported in foreign countries. Huerta’s rule proved inefficient and repressive and led to further revolution, some of which was backed by the United States. At the time of this letter, Mexico was in a feverish state of patriotism, preparing to celebrate Mexican Independence Day (September 16) with a show of military strength.

<sup>5</sup>VL’s “The \*Gospel of Beauty” is summarized in a brochure described by the author as “a little one-page formula for making America lovelier” (see *\*Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*, p. 11; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 156).

<sup>6</sup>For Mary Fuller, see Letter 1.

<sup>7</sup>The neologisms “eloquate” and “solmniferous” are characteristic of VL’s linguistic playfulness.

<sup>8</sup>For the location of VL’s room, see Letter 1.

<sup>9</sup>VL writes “swizzler” but means “sizzler”: see his note at the end of the next letter.

<sup>10</sup>VL quotes his poem “Beyond the Moon” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 9-10).

<sup>11</sup>ST’s poem “The River” (in *\*Rivers to the Sea*, p. 105) was first published in *\*Scribner’s Magazine* (August 1913, p. 222). The final stanza reads:

But the thirsty tide ran inland,  
And the salt waves drank of me,  
And I who was fresh as the rainfall  
Am bitter as the sea.

\*\*\*\*\*

3) “I have had a good time with Helen of Troy . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Sept. 23, 1913.

Miss Sara Teasdale—

Charlevoix<sup>1</sup>

Michigan:

My Dear Friend Sara:

If you were in New York for a week you are back by now.

Well—I have had a good time with Helen of Troy and read the book several times over—with little sister once and Mary \*Johnson once and Susan \*Wilcox once.<sup>2</sup> They all liked it—and were especially charmed with the way your verse endured the reading-aloud test—it brings out your exquisite technique. Some, smooth-looking poets are jolty out loud.

The Title Poem seems to me on the whole most impressive—and next to that Anadyomene.<sup>3</sup> But many others follow close after. You are certainly a grown up artist despite your tender years and henceforth I shall write you letters with respect to your artistry with due state, and forget you are a precocious child.

I am sending you some moon worms under separate cover.<sup>4</sup> Put one of them on a long line and let it down over the edge of the Universe and fish for a Dolphin in the Styx.

Going through your book I have noted that your Helen is Marlowe's Helen.<sup>5</sup> The lines I have marked are

“They shall be quiet when the day is done.”

“Leda—my mother—etc.”

“And left their spirits.....

The little songs.... soul.

Then—In all the Islands set in all the Seas

to ... Longing after me.” 5 lines

Then—He shall not have the power to .....shall fall.<sup>6</sup>

Page Ten—Ah—love.....perfect feet.<sup>7</sup>

Page eleven—“But when...away from me.

Page 13—Love—to.....blue.<sup>8</sup>

Well—I marked the book all through I find—so I'm not going to catalogue any more lines.

Franz \*Rickaby—caddie master and poet and all at the Chicago Club Charlevoix last summer—has marked many. “The Song Maker. Dew. The Wanderer. Less than the cloud to the Wind. Song. A Winter Night. City Vignettes. The Two Knights. The Prayer. Galahad.

I have marked a lot beside: The Christmas Carol with a little heart—and By the Sea—and To Cleis and Guenevere with little hearts.

Well—the day rolls by. I am up to my neck in letters and want to get to my Ballad on Billy Sunday.<sup>9</sup> Just watch what I do to Bill. He converted me once. I got religion and

I am going to write a tribute. No one can view him without mixed emotions and that is the kind of a Ballad it is going to be.

Who is Lyle Solomon Baer?<sup>10</sup> Tell my^.

With proper thoughts I remain yours—fascinated

603 South 5th (over) Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

[P.S.] Notes on your letter,

I said SIZZLE, not swizzle.<sup>11</sup> If you ever fried bacon you would know. You evidently avoid the hot kitchen.

Here—you say you wrote a book at 20. Dear me—I thought you were a child^.

I send you my picture. I sent the same one to Mary Fuller the other day.<sup>12</sup> That rascal keeps sending me pictures but wont^ write. When she sees my poem on Mary \*Pickford in the \*American she will be sorry.

If you have a Chautauqua poster—cut out your picture and forward to meh^.

N.V.L.

[Enclosure: Profile picture of VL].

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>“Altasand,” the Teasdale summer home, was in Charlevoix, Michigan. For a history and description, see Carpenter, pp. 14-15. The home sat well above Lake Michigan, on the dunes, hence the name: “high sand.” Also see Letter 192.

<sup>2</sup>*Helen of Troy* (1911) is ST’s second volume of poetry. VL’s personal copy, inscribed “For Nicholas Vachel Lindsay from Sara Teasdale—September, 1913,” is in the Barrett Library, University of Virginia. In his copy, VL pasted several ST manuscripts and two small photographs: the “laughing picture” and the “baby-picture.” See Letters 66, 67, 73, 81, 124, and 153. VL’s “little sister” is Joy Lindsay \*Blair. VL also pasted a copy of Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem “The Wife” in his copy of *Helen*, likely when he had thoughts of marrying ST. See Letters 78, 79, and 81. *Helen of Troy* is online at Google Books.

<sup>3</sup>“Anadyomene” is a sonnet on p. 82 of *Helen of Troy* but is not included in ST’s *Collected Poems* (1937). Anadyomene (“emerging”) alludes to the birth of Venus/Aphrodite.

<sup>4</sup>The “moon worms” refers to VL’s rhyme sheet with drawing and poem, “What the Hyena Said” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 40-41). VL often called the rhyme sheet his “golden skulls” work: see, for example, the next letter.

<sup>5</sup>See Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), *Doctor Faustus*, V, i.

<sup>6</sup>All lines that VL refers to are, indeed, marked in his copy. This and the lines preceding are from the title poem, “Helen of Troy” (pp. 3-5).

<sup>7</sup>Lines from “\*Sappho,” the early version of the poem (pp. 9-10).

<sup>8</sup>This and the line above are from “Marianna Alcoforando” (pp. 11-13).

<sup>9</sup>VL apparently abandoned his effort to celebrate evangelist Sunday: there is no indication of a Billy Sunday poem in the manuscript collection of the Barrett Library, at the University of Virginia.

<sup>10</sup>Lyle Solomon Baer remains an unknown. VL asks the same question of George \*Sterling, in a letter of September 23, 1913, adding “what has he to do with the \*Poetry Society?” (Chénetier, *Letters of VL*, p. 79). Baer is not mentioned in the extensive list of names in the *New York Times* article describing the origins of the Poetry Society: “The Poets’ Circle and Syndicate Open” (January 2, 1911).

<sup>11</sup>For the “sizzle” or “swizzle” story, see Letter 2.

<sup>12</sup>For Mary Fuller, see Letter 1.

\*\*\*\*\*

4) “Take that, beautiful temptress—right between the eyes . . .”

Springfield Ill.

Oct. 27, 1913

My Dear Sara Teasdale:

Yes yes. Of course I like the top of a bus to ride on in N.Y. Your ardent invitation reminds me of a song what I heard in my previous incarnation just before I was ducked and drowned^ in the Rhine by the Loreli^ maiden. Also the song in that other incarnation when as a Greek Sailor I smashed my boat on the rocks of the Siren. Otherwise I would come to the great and sinful and beautiful New York. I shall here write you a suppressed poem of mine—written long ago:

Where, after all, is the soul of the nation?  
 Why should we turn to the East with yearning  
 When our fathers came to the West with yearning  
 Generation on Generation?  
 Live in the West! There is no returning  
 From the soil where buried breasts are burning.  
 Maybe buried after Lincoln  
 They lived through freedom's second dawn  
 Or smitten with untimely arrows  
 By cabins rude as the nests of sparrows  
 Or wagons wandering to the sunset  
 On strange new plains in the days long gone  
 Or swept [with] by prairie-fires or floods  
 They died with their toiling all undone  
 By the grey Ohio, or black Missouri  
 Or wan and haunted Sangamon.

Say not that wild land is no more

Whose voice was in the voice of Lincoln  
 Yea—Lincoln—how he haunteth us!  
 And unseen fires from buried breasts  
 Rise into the living hearts of us  
 Rise into these barren days for us.  
 No other soil is haunted thus.  
 What has the East—for us?<sup>1</sup>

Take that, beautiful temptress—right between the eyes. Paste it in your hat and come home. I have positively resolved after a week of spouting and reciting in Indianapolis—<sup>2</sup> not to leave this town again till March—anyway—and then to go in my walking shoes—if I go at all. There are just two possible exceptions. They want me to talk to the farmer-boys about Prairie poetry at Champaign.<sup>3</sup> And then I suspect that by proper teasing I can get Sara Teasdale to ask me down to St. Louis for one day to meet Zoe \*Akins, Orrick \*Johns and William Marion \*Reedy—if she happens to mix with and like those people. I havn't^ the least desire to meet more than two of them anyway—whichever two you like best. The rest of the time I would like to spend investigating your intellect and the artistic discrimination of your eyes in the St. Louis Art gallery. I know La Farge's Wolf-charmer is there.<sup>4</sup> Thats^ all I know.

And be careful what you do—for I am rumored to be engaged.

I send you a bundle of golden skulls.<sup>5</sup> Please distribute to those New Yorkers who need a warning as to the seriousness of life.

“I positively refuse to write another line, Vachel Lindsay. You know there are twenty letters here waiting.” Thus speaks

Yours truly

His hand and pen.  
 He will be good  
 But God knows when.

[P.S.] A mutual friend<sup>6</sup> tells me you are a very dangerous young woman for a poet to meet. It makes my bottle smoke with indignation, just to think of it. [Drawing of a smoking ink bottle.]<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Late revision of VL's "Sons of the Middle West" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 794).

<sup>2</sup>VL had been in Indianapolis during the third week of October 1913, staying at the home (2011 North Alabama Street) of his mother's younger sister, Frances ("Aunt Fannie") Frazee Hamilton (born 1866). The *Indianapolis Star* (October 18, 1913) reported: "Tramp Poet Will Address Club Women Here Today." Vachel Lindsay will speak to the "art and literary section of the Woman's Department Club this afternoon . . . his subject here is to be 'The \*Gospel of Beauty.'" ST may have enjoyed the *Star's* observation that "Mr. Lindsay's home is in Springfield, Ill., but he spends much of his time in New

York.” The article is pasted in one of two scrapbooks that “Aunt Fannie” assembled in order to chronicle her famous nephew’s accomplishments. This editor was allowed to use these scrapbooks, as well as VL’s many unpublished letters to “Aunt Fannie” and to his sister Joy Lindsay \*Blair, courtesy of VL’s niece, Catharine Blair, Joy’s daughter. See also Letter 61. Fannie’s scrapbooks are now housed in the “Sangamon Valley Collection” at Springfield’s Lincoln Library, while VL’s letters to Fannie are collected in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Hamilton was the family historian, especially on VL’s maternal side. Her book-length genealogy is entitled *Ancestral Lines of the Doniphan, Frazee and Hamilton Families* (Greenfield, IN: W.M. Mitchell Printing Co., 1928). For additional information on “Doniphan,” see Letter 223.

<sup>3</sup>The “farmer-boys” are the students of the University of Illinois, where VL spoke on several occasions at the invitation of Professor Wilhelm Miller and, beginning late 1915, Professor Stuart P. Sherman.

<sup>4</sup>John La Farge (1835-1910) was a painter, writer, and worker in stained glass, in fact the discoverer of “opalescent glass.” His “Watson Memorial” stained-glass window at the Paris Exposition (1889) was awarded the insignia of the Legion of Honor. “The Wolf Charmer” is an early illustration. La Farge’s books include: *An Artist’s Letters from Japan* (1897), *The Higher Life in Art* (1908), and *The Gospel Story in Art* (1913).

<sup>5</sup>For the “golden skulls,” see Letter 3.

<sup>6</sup>The “mutual friend” was likely Harriet \*Monroe.

<sup>7</sup>Compare “An Apology for the Bottle Volcanic” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 96-97).

\*\*\*\*\*

5) “And as for New York—get away from there . . .”

Springfield Illinois<sup>1</sup>  
Nov. 8, 1913.

Excellent Rascal—Sara Teasdale:

I hope you get better soon. I wish you well in all things. Try Peruna.<sup>2</sup>

Yes—I am rumored to be engaged. But my first love is the Good God—the second the Devil—the third my Ink Bottle—the fourth mine own people (Papa, Mama and little sister,) and the fifth the road. Yes—Woman—is number six.<sup>3</sup> I can’t help it. That’s just the way it is. Nobody ever believes it, often I do not believe it, but in my inner soul I know it.

And as for New York—get away from there. Go back home and write poems about St. Louis. If all the prodigal sons and daughters who were gathered there would return to their native heaths, America would be remade in a generation. Temperament set a-tremble in that exotic air has nothing to do with cornfed America.<sup>4</sup>

Come back through Springfield and visit Mama and Papa and little sister. Can’t you scrape up a girl friend in Springfield to visit? We will go out and write Poetry in red



chalk on the State House walk, where he who runs may read. That will be a conjunction of planets, and a fine thing for the populace.

Well—I wrote you a long silly letter and tore it up. You shouldn't—you shouldn't—well you know what you shouldn't.

All that I have to say about you is that you are either a very *young*, or a very *frivolous*^ young woman. Take *that*.

Very distantly yours  
Sara Teasdale's correspondent

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5<sup>th</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Most of this letter is quoted in Carpenter, p. 170.

<sup>2</sup>Peruna is the commercial name for one of the popular “bracer” medicines of this era, most of which featured “cologne spirits,” that is, 190-proof alcohol, with a negligible addition of other “medicines.” See “Peruna and the Bracers,” *Collier's Weekly* (October 28, 1905); also see Letter 40. Peruna was obviously intoxicating, and the Springfield *Illinois State Register* (November 1, 1915) reports that VL is “partial” to his poem “The \*Chinese Nightingale” because “it is one of his best literary efforts and has in it none of the ‘Sarsaparilla’ or ‘Peruna’ of some of his other verses.” See also VL’s “Twenty Years Ago,” ll. 81-84 (*Poetry of VL*, p. 726). Elizabeth Lindsay was taking a similar “bracer” in February 1932, when she was attempting to cope with the death of her husband: see Letter 263.

<sup>3</sup>Compare VL’s poem “The Beggar’s Valentine” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 8-9).

<sup>4</sup>The thought expressed here is part of VL’s “The \*Gospel of Beauty.” Also see VL’s “An Editorial for the Art Student Who Has Returned to the Village” (*\*Village Magazine*, all editions, *Prose of VL*, pp. 149-151).

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6) “A little hot air goes a long way with me . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Nov. [13] 14, 1913.

My Dear Sara Rowena Trevanion Tremain^ Trevor Teasdale:<sup>1</sup>

Of course, you should, and of course I ought to, now that that's^ settled we both feel better I know.<sup>2</sup>

If my friend Charles \*Ridgely of Springfield Illinois calls on you, please make him welcome as you would my deputy. Introduce him to all these people you think want to meet me. He is twice as presentable and has three times my command of the English language in conversation. He adores your work and will no doubt pass the sentiment on

to you in a reasonable and respe[c]tful measure. Here in Springfield he and I are always rumored to be engaged to the same girls etc.

Seriously—he has all kinds of talent. He has a sister who decorated MacBeth's Art Galleries<sup>3</sup>—I believe—a most brilliant person whom I have never met.

I will be delighted to know you have made friends.

I humbly ask permission to call upon you when you return to St. Louis.

As to New York—do not try to tell me anything about that most pleasant town. I owe it no grudge whatever. But I was a king in Babylon—when you were a Christian Slave.<sup>4</sup>

Tell these people that want to see me to come to Springfield, and then they can meet Papa and Mama too.

As to coming to New York to preach the \*Gospel of Beauty<sup>5</sup>—if you and your friend \*Wheeler will secure me a circuit^ of twenty churches where I can preach twenty long sermons on the issue—why—I will consider it.

What is the use of being passed around as a curio in a town that will not listen seriously, a minute? I have just had a week of that in Indianapolis—all very pleasant—and I met my kin folks besides—and had chicken-dinner with all the connection.<sup>6</sup> But I have no relatives in New York but a man who runs a soap-factory and he wont^ own me, the stick-in-the-mud.<sup>7</sup>

No my dear—I can meet you alone in St. Louis without the wear and tear of chinning people. A little hot air goes a long way with me. I humbly ask your permission to call when you return to St. Louis.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—

603 South 5th.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>VL refers to “the fair-haired and blue-eyed Lady Rowena Trevanion, of Tremaine” in Edgar Allan Poe’s *Ligeia*. The difficulty in deciphering VL’s handwriting is apparent when one considers Drake’s reading of the opening of this letter: “My Dear Sara Ravena Trevenian Tremain Trevor Teasdale” (p. 118).

<sup>2</sup>Translation: Of course you should come home to St. Louis and of course I ought to come to New York.

<sup>3</sup>The reference is to Robert Walker Macbeth (1849-1910), English painter, etcher, and writer. The Macbeth gallery was in New York City.

<sup>4</sup>VL is quoting from memory: “Or ever the Knightly years were gone / With the old world to the grave, / I was a King in Babylon / And you were a Christian Slave,” ll. 1-4 from William Ernest Henley (1849-1903), “To W.A.” in *A Book of Verses* (1888). See especially Letters 210 and 211 (in which VL explains exactly what he means, because, apparently, ST was a little miffed by the comparison).

<sup>5</sup>For VL's Indianapolis trip, see Letter 4.

<sup>6</sup>VL encloses a copy of "On the Soap-Box," one of his essays published in the short-lived periodical *Vision* (Spring, 1911-Spring, 1912), edited by Walter Storey and dedicated to the "Aesthetic Appreciation of Life." The spring, 1912, issue is made up almost entirely of VL poems and essays devoted to the "The \*Gospel of Beauty," under the general title: "The New Localism: An Illustrated Essay for Village Statesmen." The message from the "soap-box" is that artists must engage in "an epic struggle for the abolition of the slavery of ugliness, and the giving of eyes to a nation of ninety million blind, and the putting of creative power into ninety million hands" (p. 18). Moreover, "the village is the best place to begin political action" (p. 17). For Walter Storey, see Letter 161. For the relationship between "the Soap-Box" and VL's poem "This, My Song, Is Made for Kerensky," see Letter 177.

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7) "This will introduce Mr. Charles Ridgely . . ."

Springfield Ill.<sup>1</sup>  
Nov. 14, 1913.

Miss Sara Teasdale:

My Dear Friend: This will introduce Mr. Charles \*Ridgely. He is my deputy, my alternate, my social representative, my friend and fellow citizen. Introduce him to all those people you threatened to introduce to me—Zoe \*Akins, Orric \*Johns, Edward J. \*Wheeler, Floyd \*Dell and all of them. I am quite sure he will rise to the occasion more aptly than I could ever expect to do. I have a great ambition for Ridgeley in a literary way, as I have written you, and anything you can do to lead him onward upward and skyward is a favor to me.

But he speaks for himself. Enter Ridgely.

Very Sincerely  
Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th.  
Springfield Ill.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>This note is enclosed with Letter 6 above.

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8) "I know by the way she hangs her head she is a poetine . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Nov. 19, 1913.

Miss Sara Trevor Teasdale:

Dear Sara: Miss \*Monroe writes me that you are a “prize package”—in strict confidence—and I tell you in strict confidence. Don’t you tell a soul.

I begin to imagine myself coming to see you in St. Louis. I walk up to the door of the little vine-clad cottage on the out skirts—on a cliff—where the Lordly Mississippi rolls by, and I knock at a door as white as ivory and a demure miss in a blue gingham apron and a dust cloth in her hand comes to the door—and I know by the way she hangs her head she is a poetine—that is—a female poetess.

Good afternoon.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

603 South 5th.

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9) “What the Sam Hill are you doing in New York . . .”

Springfield Ill.<sup>1</sup>

Nov. 20, 1913.

My Dear Sara:

Your letter came this morning and I answer it at once. Thank you for letting me come to St. Louis. That is nice of you. I anticipate a real conversation.

And if you have truly thought me horrid, I humbly beg your pardon, child. I have not been sufficiently respectful to your eminence and glory. Really—this little song you send about night in the park<sup>2</sup> sounds to me [~~like~~] as I fancy the girl \*Sappho must have sounded to those who were stirred by her. It reads aloud so beautifully, your sounds are decorative if I may say so. And [~~But~~] the beautiful tremble in the whole thing is so much what all young hearts feel and what so few young hearts can say! You have indeed a singing voice. That’s^ it—precisely, and therefore you are a rare bird, and as a rare bird, I solemnly salute you. Rare bird, rare bird, rare bird!

I venture to send you my reply. This is to appear in the December \*Forum—so don’t let it out. I only wish I could take you harvesting. It would give you a rest from this \*nightengale business. The women are not emancipated. They never can be emancipated till they can be disguised in the flesh and bones of men and go out and have the dogs bark at them six months at a time, and sweat like troopers and eat like threshing machines and work like blazes.

I wish you would give this passionate little heart of yours to the Middle West—instead of always to particular persons—or your own moods. I wish you would turn clover-fields into throbbing song—the corn-field in the hottest day of August sizzling up to the sky. We accept the proposition that you are an individual, you have abundantly proved it—now show us that you are a voter and a citizen. I think you ought to be cook in a farm house one whole season and then write it all in poems from the dishwashing to weeding the radishes. Give the sunflowers your golden tongue for they as yet, are dumb.

Yes—when my Mama used to say these things to me—or things like them—I was roaring mad. Spiritually speaking—I was ready to chase her all around the block. But after all she has won out in a fashion.

The Middle West needs to be glorified and gilded. It needs to sing—it needs to be made to sing—it needs to be pounded to a pulp by us resolute poets. You quiver in the wind when you should be going out against the enemy with a baseball bat, as it were. Now you object to my writing silly letters—when the trouble is that if I write serious ones—I am so dead in earnest I am more “horrid” than ever.

It is my conviction that you should write up your special social history. You are not a heart on a gold platter—though one receives that dazzling impression from your very beautiful verses. Once in a while, in rare moments you are a heart on a gold platter. The rest of the time you are Sara Teasdale—descendant of godly Baptists—I think you said. Well—write a poem on a boys^ baptism—the boy taking the thing as fervently and ideally as possible. In the last two lines if you so desire—let the reader feel your personal attitude. You are Sara Teasdale—living by the Mississippi. Write a poem about that river that shall bring tears to the eyes of Huckelberry^ Finn himself. You are Sara Teasdale—living in the state of Missouri. I walked through that state—and it is full of poems. I was rained and thundered on one day in a way I shall never forget.<sup>3</sup> It was great. Write a poem on Missouri thunder and rain. You are Sara Teasdale—graduate of the St. Louis High School. Write a poem about the Public School in the Middle West. St. Louis is a steamboat landing. Write a poem about a steamboat. Well—here I am laying down the law. (Its^ for me to bully and for you to sass back. This is destiny.) Burn yourself to ashes—scatter yourself over a field in the spring and come up the Worlds^ most wonderful corn-song in the autumn. What the Sam Hill are you doing in New York—anyway?

With all good wishes

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A substantial part of this letter is published in Drake, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>VL refers to ST's “Spring Night,” the initial poem in *\*Rivers to the Sea*. The poem was first published in the *North American Review* (April 1914, p. 599): see Letters 106 and 146.

<sup>3</sup>See *\*Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*: the stormy day was Friday, June 7, 1912. VL found refuge with an elderly black man who told him the sweet singing bird he described was the “\*Rachel-Jane,” pp. 41-44; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, pp. 166-167.

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10) “A nice girl to write to is a grand thing . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Nov. 24, 1913.

My Dear Sara Teasdale:

Well—I am delighted to find a fellow craftsman—and a leddy in the bargain—who gets as much fun out of letters as I do. It really amounts to a mania with me—getting letters—and writing them—if I have a minute—and just the right person—is equally a pleasure.

I am most glorified and exalted by your \*Sappho poem—something like this she must have been. Your words are so glowing and Greek and full orb'd and Golden—and it may be my personal interest in the writer—but this seems to me the nearest to white perpetually burning fire of anything you have written.

I shall read it and wonder at it many times. I cannot advise or admonish you as a poet of passion—I have had mighty little experience in writing verses of Love—even the thin variety. But as a lover and worshipper of Beauty I think I can talk to you like a dutch uncle. I was just exactly in your frame of mind toward Beauty. I was as steeped in the Greek mood—in certain moments—five years ago—as you are today. I feel at least five years older. Certain of my rather feeble poems are to me the dim record of it—(my book—now out, by the way—contains only one that stands for what I find in transcendent power in your work. It is a piece called “The Fairy Bridal Hymn.”)<sup>1</sup>

But all this—by the way. I just mean to say I have been through this mood. I have lectured from end to end of the Metropolitan Museum—for three winters<sup>2</sup>—pretty largely in the aesthetic state in which you wrote Sappho (tho not the heart state—which we will not argue about.)

Now—speaking as a Dutch Uncle—I feel vastly older than you in aesthetics. The Greek standards are in you for all time—and I know it is possible—still keeping those standards in the core of your heart—[and] to look the West straight in the face and admire it. I can remember when a corn-field seemed the most horrible slashing thing in the world to me—and a small town newspaper a masterpiece of bad-grammar and stupidity. But now I look on both with the same joy with which one observes squirming bouncing ruddy children. And I have all sorts of pleasures in them.<sup>3</sup>

I know it is possible for you to move on—in this way though the transition cannot come in a day. I love your verses as I love the Medecian^ Venus<sup>4</sup> in the niche just inside the door of the Metropolitan Museum—as the Macmonnies Bacchante<sup>5</sup>—or George Gray Barnard's Maidenhood or Two Natures<sup>6</sup>—or the Pediments of the Greek temples—where I used to have convulsion fits and roar around for the benefit of my little class. And now that you have become tractable—I confess that some day I will just love to take you through these halls and shout in your ear. In two or three years, if we are still bachelors. But I do really, most seriously covet a fellow warrior in this Middle Western fight—or many for that matter. \*Ridgeley and Floyd \*Dell both going east at once—are all too typical of the time. Theoretically—I will grant Ridgeley has a right to stay in the East till he becomes a Greek in the best sense. But there should be a graduation point sometime, when his hide is hardy enough and his heart is bold enough to come West and sing a loud song by himself—that sounds like Huck Finn in a storm.<sup>7</sup>

Dell is a very loyal friend—but he hasn't the least idea how seriously I take this issue. Maybe I can bully a leddy—if I can't bully a gent.

I understand and deeply enjoy the mood in which Sappho is written—and it brings back a thousand memories in my personal aesthetic life—if I may put it so. But now—excellent lady and noble muse—let us write to each other—and enjoy it all we possibly can. Lets^ not spend any more time pulling and hauling—lets^ just make merry and be acquainted. When I see you here in the west—I shall lecture you unmercifully—but—till we meet—lets^ make merry. A nice girl to write to is a grand thing. My girls^ out of town—but the rascal won't write.<sup>8</sup>

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th Springfield Illinois.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See *Poetry of VL*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup>VL lectured at New York's Metropolitan Museum during the three winters from 1905-06 to 1907-08.

<sup>3</sup>VL includes three pages of "clippings" from village newspapers in his *\*Village Magazine* (all editions), most of them from April 1910. In an accompanying essay, "An Editorial for the Wise Man in the Metropolis Concerning the Humble Agricultural Village in Central, Illinois," he explains: "There could be found few better introductions to the outer court of the village, than the village paper" (*Prose of VL*, pp. 128-144).

<sup>4</sup>The "Venus de' Medici" was familiar to VL from his New York Metropolitan lectures and also from Poe's allusion to the work in his description of Ligeia. See Letter 6.

<sup>5</sup>Frederick William MacMonnies (1863-1937), American sculptor and painter, known early in life for his famous "Fountain" at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition (1893), and later for works such as "Nathan Hale" in New York's City Hall park, "The Horse Tamers" in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, and the battle monument in Princeton, New Jersey. The controversial "Bacchante" was commissioned for the Boston Public Library but was deemed too sexually explicit and was finally accepted by New York's Metropolitan Museum (see note 2 above). VL's description of "The Bacchante" is in *The \*Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), p. 87; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 250.

<sup>6</sup>George Grey Barnard (1863-1938), Chicago sculptor, studied in France, where he earned fame for his "The Struggle of the Two Natures in Man" (1894—now at New York's Metropolitan Museum), a depiction of a dual personality. He is also known for his two pediment groups for the New York Public Library; the colossal "Hewer" in Cairo, Illinois; two massive groups of figures for the State Capitol at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania ("The Burden of Life" and "Brotherly Love and Work"); and the Lincoln statue at Lytle Park, Cincinnati. For VL's personal acquaintance with Barnard, see *The \*Art of the Moving Picture* (1915), p. 84; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 249.

<sup>7</sup>For VL's belief that artists should turn or return to the west, see Letter 5.

<sup>8</sup>VL likely refers to Mary \*Johnson.

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11) “Why I would walk to St. Louis, if necessary . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Nov. 29, 1913.

My Dear Sara Teasdale:

This is just to say I hope for a letter from you soon. I have greatly enjoyed your poem in the \*Century<sup>1</sup> and am proud for you. Never have I attained to the dizzy heights of the embalmed and imperial four—\*Scribners \*Harpers—The Century or the \*Atlantic. I have an awesome and envious respect for anyone who does.

Write me if Charles is behaving himself.<sup>2</sup> If he says anything mean about me—sass him.

I have all sorts of curiosities^ and fellow-feelings about you. Miss \*Monroe is about the only poetes^ I have ever known face to face that was a real profesh. And we have seen little of each other. I have known exquisite artist-girls and musicians, and two lovely dancers live here—solo-society dancers—but never a poet-leddy.<sup>3</sup> My dear Miss \*Roberts is a story-writer—but not a poet-lady. I suppose Charles has bragged about her now—being her cousin.

Don’t get too awfully well acquainted with that young man—or he may tell you tales, out of school. I’ll bet he has already told you I am old Mr. Fog Horn himself.<sup>4</sup>

Do you know “The Carpenter’s Son” poem is a sort of second cousin of one of mine, set to the tune of “The Holy City” which I have just started on its begging rounds? It is called “I Heard Immanuel Singing.”<sup>5</sup> You can probably guess the rest from the title.

Well—not another word till you write—or send for me to come to St. Louis with at least half the zeal you spoke of New York. Why I would walk to St. Louis, if necessary. We can go swimming in the Mississippi.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—  
603 South 5th—  
Springfield Illinois

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>ST’s poem in the \*Century Magazine (December 1913, pp. 161-163) is “The Carpenter’s Son” (collected in \*Rivers to the Sea, pp. 72-76). Also see Letter 13 below.

<sup>2</sup>Charles \*Ridgely.

<sup>3</sup>The two dancers were likely Mary \*Johnson and Lucy \*Bates.

<sup>4</sup>Compare ST’s account after her first meeting with VL: “His voice is good, but too loud much of the time and very Middle West. When he reads his own poetry (recites it, rather)



in this tiny study of mine, it is like being compelled to listen to a pipe-organ in an hermetically sealed safe-deposit vault. Your ears ache, and so do your nerves” (as quoted by Louis \*Untermeyer, *From Another World*, p. 175). For some of VL’s self-humor concerning his loud voice, as well as another first-hand description of listening to VL, see Letter 26.

<sup>5</sup>See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 66-68. \*Reedy published “Immanuel” in the *Mirror* (December 19, 1913), after it was rejected by the *\*Yale Review*. For VL’s account of the poem’s origin and importance, see Letter 13.

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12) “What evening shall I call . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
Dec. 6, 1913.

My Dear Sara:

Please answer my letters the day they come. Now I am answering your letter the very morning it comes—and I had just torn up one urging you to write, three days ago. And I tore up the first one I wrote this morning, because it had a mean sentence about a neighbor. Oh yes—I will tell you after we are acquainted when we meet in St. Louis. Now there is an incentive that ought to move any real lady—gossip. I know you will be just daft to come home now for I’ll tell you something on somebody—the story of Washington and Lincoln. Now just remember. Washington and Lincoln.

Now leddy, I will not be satisfied till you name the precise evening I am to call in St. Louis—I will be there—Johnny on the spot. We must have one long evening’s conversation—and then when we write we can tell all sorts of mean things on the neighbors with perfect propriety. I will take the midnight train home with a new friend in my fancy. I am acquiring new curiosity every day about you. I will talk you to death, and watch your demise by inches.

I have just been correcting the proof for the January \*Forum. It is not as unified a section as the December number. That is the prize installment of the bunch—I think. It closes with the Kansas poem. The prose is the same thing—in prose. Travel-letters are so choppy. But December is one long letter. Its^ the best handy sample of my prose.

I will send you my book the minute I have one. But my friend \*Kennerley has forwarded only one—which I have [~~given~~] sent to my sister and brother-in-law, missionaries in China.<sup>1</sup>

One of the things that stirred me with pleasure in your beautiful letter was that you loved the Good God. I have been keeping company with two grand ladies<sup>2</sup> the last few years who delight my eyes and my mind but neither of them love God and occasionally call him names and it makes me so lonesome sometimes, that I have to say my praye[r]s [øf] alone. The Lord is a friend of mine—though he slay me yet will I trust in him<sup>3</sup> and I cannot bear to charge him with foolishness—though lots of nobler people than I am have done so.

I like your poetry more every day—especially your full page poems. I have several editors now who turn down all but my full page poems, and it is flattering—but exhausting. One full page poem like The \*Congo does me up in a writing way for quite a spell. I either have to write little ones or quit. So I took a whacking big walk yesterday to steam up and came home and wrote the first stanza of my next buster—The \*Fireman’s Ball. It is on the plane and in the mood of Alexander’s Ragtime Band—by William Shakespear<sup>^</sup>. I shall follow the conventions of vaudeville for that type of musical incident—as closely as I can—and still keep my grammar on, as it were.

Please read the December \*Forum. There you have what I have been so little—but what I would like to be always, a sun blasted harvest hand. It was great, that harvesting. It almost killed me—but not quite.

If Papa and Mama go to China in the spring I will have to wait and stay in the house till they get back. But some day—God willing—I will go out and bite the dirt again.

George \*Sterling has written me sad news.

I am not lonesome a bit in Springfield—except to know a poet-lady. I think that would be perfectly grand, and enormously congenial. What evening shall I call, dragging my battered life behind me? With expectation<sup>^</sup> written on my forehead? With all good wishes

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See \*Wakefield, Paul.

<sup>2</sup>Octavia \*Roberts and Mary \*Johnson.

<sup>3</sup>Compare Job 13:15.

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13) “Sara—I am telling you so many tales out of school . . .”

Springfield Illinois—  
Thursday, December 18, 1913.

[Headnote: “Did you get \*General Booth—I sent—and The Soul of the City?”]<sup>1</sup>

My Dear Sara:

Your most noble letter came to hand and I thank you kindly, and your counter-confidences shall be put in the safe. I will tear up your letter in a minute. Thus to all our enemies.

But now for real business. Please express to Miss \*Rittenhouse and Mr. \*Wheeler my continued pleasure and earnest gratitude for their interest in me. If I had them for fairly steady correspondents I would count it one of the real blessings of life. They are smothered with letters I know—for even humble little me has a plenty—still I wish they would write once in awhile. I get so much pleasure out of letters.

I wish you would come home Christmas.

I am one of those poor men—dead broke. And I owe 75 dollars for my last pamphlet (did it arrive?) The Soul of the City. I had rather get in debt for tracts than for travel—and I am just busting to print my next tract as soon as this one is paid for—. The new tract will probably be called “The Golden Book of the Cross-Roads”<sup>2</sup> and I will probably start out on a walking-trip with it as soon as it is done. Not that the private persons to whom I give it on my trip will be much moved by it—it will serve to amuse them and give spice to my call and the episode of my splitting kindling—serve as a sort of quiz and mystification at least—but the copies which remain behind in the hands of my Springfield friends will be really read just because they see themselves in imagination receiving them as strangers. And The Golden Book of the Cross Roads will preach just another phase and form of “The \*Gospel of Beauty.”

You see—I get them going and coming. Either [~~the man~~] my host on the road reads my gospel from curiosity or the Citizen at home reads it with speculation—the main point is—it gets read. And woe is me—if I preach not the gospel.<sup>3</sup> (And in spite of the \*Gospel—if I had been born without it—I would still have played tramp. That is its own reward.)

Your invitation to New York is most enticing—. If I come—it would be to see (1.) George M. \*Richards. (2.) Sara Teasdale. (3.) My old Landlady. I can’t endure to be gabby and make friends with people unless it be for life. If the good Mr. Wheeler and Miss Rittenhouse want to make a lifetime surrender—they shall be (5) and (6).<sup>4</sup> George M. \*Richards was my hearts^ best brother for my four years of up and down in New York and I would most weep to see him. He is in \*Everybody’s Art department—Art Editor I think. I wish you three would dig him out as my proxy. Now do.

Now comes a more shocking confession than last time. It means nothing to me to meet the \*Poetry Society unless I can know them all like I know you. My attitude toward^ them is exactly that I have toward^ the City of Springfield—I want them to join my gang. I want Rome to come to Camelot. Camelot does not want to go to Rome.<sup>5</sup>

Now you dear darling poet lady—do not be shocked or vexed. I kiss the sleeve of your gown and proceed.

There never was a person, not even Mohammed with so much uncrushed arrogance in him—or faith that he had the true religion to reveal, as I have.

And I know well enough New York even Poetry New York—is in no state of mind to receive it from me. And in the present state of my prestige—I am in no position to lay down the law. Mohammed has no sword in his hand—only a reed. It will take ten years of producing “the most important book of the year”—the most important in its own right artistically—aside from its argument—before I can thunder the way I want to

thunder in person. Meanwhile it is far more fun to play beggar and bide my time. I would rather beg than not have my way.

You know nothing of the Love of God Child, if you think it less than the love of Woman. It has come between me and every woman I ever knew.

Of course I may fail. I may fall to pieces tomorrow. This first little book may be my last. Well then—I have had a merry time—thank God for all the Roses—and good night. But the only kind of success for which I give a hang is a spiritual dominion and since I see no one else on earth who is attempting one at present—the kingdom is mine by default.

Now you beautiful poet-lady—I know you are beginning to think me young mister Brass-man. I admit full and free that in private I am a disgusting egotist, a ruination to any parlor. I admit that the true Christian would mend his manners. But crossing the line of the twilight zone I become a public person—and there it seems to be the law that arrogance is legitimate and the most arrogant wins. And I have every faith in my cause. I have every justification in my \*Gospel. And if it is a false \*Gospel—the rival religion that will rise provoked by reaction, will have the truth in it—so in the end there will be a spiritual dominion hovering above the material [~~dominion~~] world of America, instead of smoke and stifle.

And it all sounds so premature even to good confidential Sara—. If we ever do meet—I may say no such word. But it will be way inside.

I can't stand it to make speeches and be listened to—just politely. I want people to think and think after I am through, and take counsel and mend their souls and love God, and all. I want the Poetry Society to be divided between my friends and my enemies and at present I am not man enough. That's^ the trouble, I am not man enough yet—and I don't want to be a flash in the pan. To be passed around a day or two among pleasant people is nothing. Why can't the Poetry Society visit Lincoln's monument—Lincoln's Home,<sup>6</sup> and let me beat them with my stick and scold the hide off of them like I do you?

Two or three of you might feed me on Lamb Chops at the new Astor but all I would say would be “To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of Rams.”<sup>7</sup>

I know some of this talk sounds rather mysterious to you dear—I can only say it comes out of me from deeps beyond the deeps of passion.

There has been in one branch of my people a peculiar tradition. My great Grandfather used to have peculiar and very confidential interviews with my mother when she was only six years old and of course—later—as the only one of his grandchildren who showed symptoms of “Carrying on the light.”<sup>8</sup> He laid his hands on her head and blessed her and enjoined her—endowed her as it were with her office. She has been a passionate religious leader all her life—meaning nothing to those living next door—who do not live in that world. But she has a circuit^ of little country churches where she is sent for infallibly once a year—she is a leader in the counsels of her denomination, and has been a sort of Pope of the devout women of this city for twenty-five years. All this has gone on under the shell of orthodoxy. I am an utter heretic—but she began on me when I was six years old—with this tale of the Light, and of grandfather Austen. Till I was

seventeen I was under the complete domination of her most powerful mind. Then for years I had to fight for myself and my personality—it was a bloody heart-breaking struggle—but having conquered that noble lady and won her loyalty—I am not afraid of anything in heaven or on Earth and can say “boo” to—New York, for instance. I spent years and years going into the mysteries of comparative religion and comparative art—and the simple propositions “The Love of Beauty” and “the Love of God” represent the wreck of empires and the doom of worlds, sacrificed to achieve them. If what I say sounds noisy, remember it is my muffled great Grandfather—beating me till I talk.

If I can in the end, be to the people who listen to me with loyalty, what my mother is to her friends, who listen to her loyally—I will have achieved my life. My audience is just humans, like hers—only speaking another lingo.

Sara—I am telling you so many tales out of school and showing you my naked bones till I ought to be ashamed. And all of this is better said—in War-Bulletin No. 3—which you have read.<sup>9</sup>

One thing more—and then I will come to my practical conclusion.

After years of struggle between the Hebrew and the Greek in my soul when I was almost torn to shreds with it—I found peace and sudden solution—and permanent rest in this vision of Christ—in the Song enclosed: Immanuel.<sup>10</sup> Your little poem in the Christmas \*Century<sup>11</sup> is an infinitely better one—full of love and sweetness. But it bears a sort of resemblance to this one—therefore you can understand this one better and I am so glad, for I can get few people to care for it, and it is a blazing milestone in the history of my innermost heart. Though the record is so poor, and the verse so defective—it represents everything to me, and I would be much obliged to you if you will sing it very softly to yourself till you understand the real heart of my religion—the vision of the Christ-Apollo. It was on the boat coming home from Europe—and about two o’clock in the morning—and this vision woke me with terrible power—it shook me from head to foot—and I was in a daze for two or three days—and with the feeling of the completest triumph I have ever known. It was the turning point of my life. “The \*Building of Springfield” and all of my Art Sermons in Rhyme grew out of it.

Now the setting of it to the Tune of the Holy City occurred to me only a few days ago—that is only for the laity—I think you will find a subtler tune with a little different set of accents. But by suggesting “The Holy City” the [“]Poetry-Hater” who is abroad in the land, may be seduced into experimenting with it, and in the end to grasping the outside meaning.

That Holy City tune implies something devout, it implies The New Jerusalem, it implies Triumph, it implies The Presence of Christ, and is utterly familiar to the very hand-organ man. Therefore it should be an aid to the hasty reader. And if softly sung it does not too much distort the cadences.

Still—I say—there is a different whisper there for you.

This poem is the most precious lame child of all my lame children, so be good to it, dear beautiful Sara.

I want you to come home Christmas and give me a smile for a Christmas Gift. I swear if you will let me I will visit you on the 27th in St. Louis.<sup>12</sup> Concoct the most

elaborate reason you can for my being there on that particular day and I will go—proclaiming my reason to my set here. When is that Poetry Society dinner?<sup>13</sup> What is the date? Will you start home the next morning?

I have not seen the \*Transcript—and have not sent it to you. I am very much surprised at your announcement. \*O’Brien wrote me of a series of publicities that were to appear, beginning today—toots of various kinds via himself and \*Braithwaite. I am so dead broke I can’t even buy a wedding present. And to take two or three days to paint a picture would sure jar up my system at present.

I have read your gentle letter many times, and now tear it up as an act of good faith. Thus to all our enemies.

If I ever come to New York—unless I am an old grey-headed man—I will not talk like this letter. I will be nice and meek. But remember—I am only biding my time—a suppressed Moses in the bulrushes!

You are just about the poeticallest poet I know—an honor to the profesh. I make my bow of allegiance—I kneel on one knee—I kiss your wrist and the hem of your hobble<sup>14</sup>—but you just wait. Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain—but the woman that feareth the Lord—she shall be praised.<sup>15</sup> When you write a prarie^ hymn—then I shall praise you.

With love

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.  
603 South 5th  
Springfield Illinois.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>VL refers to his privately printed pamphlet, “The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit” (1913)—see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 197-212. VL often called this work his “Censers” poem: see, for example, Letter 16 and Letter 25. Also see Letters 64, 73, and 261.

<sup>2</sup>This “new tract” would evolve, finally, into *The \*Golden Book of Springfield* (1920).

<sup>3</sup>Compare I Corinthians 9:16.

<sup>4</sup>VL misses number 4—or is intentionally having fun.

<sup>5</sup>An introductory page of VL’s *\*Village Magazine* (2nd, 3rd, 4th eds.) announces: “In the end I want you to join my gang. I do not want to join yours”: see *Poetry of VL*, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup>Both the Lincoln home and the Lincoln tomb are located in VL’s “Camelot,” that is, Springfield, Illinois.

<sup>7</sup>Compare I Samuel 15:22. The annual \*Poetry Society dinners were held at New York’s Hotel Astor (see note 14 below).

<sup>8</sup>VL’s family were Campbellites, officially known as “Disciples of Christ.” This passage reveals the intensity and eclecticism of the family religion: see Drake, p. 117. The

Lindsay family believed that “Grandfather Austen” (VL’s maternal great-grandfather) was a descendant of Jane Austen: see the close of Letters 37 and 209.

<sup>9</sup>VL’s *War Bulletin Number Three* (August 30, 1909) was privately printed and given away in Springfield. All of the *Bulletins* are included in the *Village Magazine* (3rd, 4th eds., and reprinted in *Prose of VL*, pp. 83-122). *Number Three* begins with “The Creed of a Beggar” and includes statements such as “I believe in Christ the Socialist, the Beautiful, the personal savior from sin, the Singing Immanuel.” Also see Letter 18.

<sup>10</sup>The poem is “I Heard Immanuel Singing,” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 66-68). See Letter 11.

<sup>11</sup>ST’s poem is “The Carpenter’s Son.” See Letter 11.

<sup>12</sup>Octavia \*Roberts was married on December 27, 1913.

<sup>13</sup>This particular Poetry Society dinner was Wednesday, January 28, 1914, at the Hotel Astor. See Letters 23 and 31.

<sup>14</sup>That is, a hobble skirt, a skirt very constricted at the hemline.

<sup>15</sup>Compare Proverbs 31:30.

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14) “Springfield is a novel . . .”

Springfield Ill.  
December 21, 1913.

My Dear Sara:

I feel that in my last letter I wrote something like a Brass Monkey, like a close relative of old mister fresh—so I hope this letter will be different. I feel different I am sure.

Lots of things keep happening—and here I don’t tell you just because you do not belong to that delicious little wasps nest and honey-jar Springfield Illinois. For instance I might tell you the catty thing one of my real intimate friends said to another pretty intimate friend without a turn of the eyelash. And I might tell you what another did that was bad and bold, and most dramatic to contemplate. I know the children of the principal robbers of the town—the barons from of old—and of the raw skinned radicals as well—and the second generation in the play house is delightful when you understand it. The way our most substantial editor our most democratic editor looks when off duty—and the particular things I wouldn’t be surprised if he does—well why should I go on?

Springfield is a novel—and never loses its flavor for those who have the true instinct for observing those cats and kittens called women and those bears and bear cubs called men.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the paradoxes that these sleek and plotting and negotiating creatures should be tortured with souls and sometimes jerked out of the natural orbit of their passions by the fear or love of an invisible creature called Almighty God—whom few of them have ever seen in his glory.

Well—I say I would tell you the news—but every time I would have to begin twenty years back and tell you just how these kids behaved when I went to public School with them—or their fathers and mothers—or you wouldn't get the point. That's^ one reason, I don't discuss C. \*Ridgely with you as much as I could do.

I think it is true Romance—that you and I should write to each other. We are both in the midst of our adventures in this life—and every day brings me new tides of gossip good or bad—and every mail news—always good news by mail—and I suppose its^ just the same with you. Neither of us are at the stand still period: I hope we often sit side by side in the same anthologies. I would deem it indeed an honor. And if I ever get into \*Scribners and the \*Century side by side with you—won't that be wonderful! But that's^ a great deal like being received at the Court of the Great Grand Chair. Which reminds me of \*Benet. Hooray for the Merchants of Cathay.

The \*Metropolitan and one or two others keep yelling for my best stuff—and will not take my second best—and they are perfectly right. But to do my best requires a full head of physical steam that I do not believe I can regain till I wheel bricks at the water-works or something. I wrote my roast on Lorimer<sup>2</sup> a little while after wheeling Bricks for a week or ten days out there. If you notice any brickbat flavor in that poem—its^ owing to the circumstances. That for you, Mr. Lorimer. One Brick, with my compliments.

Since that time Lorimer poor creature has become the fashionable villain—the scapegoat in the wilderness, and I don't feel so much like roasting him.

Well—I was just starting to say I don't believe I will write worth a cent till I do some real hod-carrier bone-breaking work—. Suppose I carry hods in St. Louis a few weeks, and call on you once in a while? A job, incog, as it were. I am an awkward workman but fairly satisfactory when the work takes not too much muscle. I can pitch hay and shock wheat better than I can wheel bricks. I want to break my back again, little Sara—so think it out for me. My bottle is running dry—though I have scads of poems outlined. The \*Fireman's ball just crawls along.

Please explain to me how I can chloroform myself in such a way that I can paint a picture for a wedding present and keep forgetting that it is a wedding present.<sup>3</sup>

My very best sentiments to Miss \*Rittenhouse.

Well—I might as well write another page. I want to. Why shouldn't I?

If you will be in St. Louis for Christmas—I will come to see you and not go to the Wedding. Mark up a real devil of an excuse for me to be there on the 27th that my pleasant little friends can pass on to my other little friends without turning a hair. Oh—I tell you there are humors in these matters. And we will let that wedding present go hang. Its^ too late to send for anything—and the town holds nothing—its^ all been picked over.

Send me another beautiful poem at once—like that one on The Poets Mother.<sup>4</sup> It might very well apply to any mother in general—and very beautifully. But not mine b-gosh. But I told you about her the last letter. She is Roman, Spartan, and a Delphic Sibyl. A driver, a big hous[e]keeper—a rousing cook of the old fashioned farm style, a cool judicial executive, and a straight forward diplomat. Also she goes to all the Springfield parties. Also for two years she lectured the literary Society of which she is a humble



member here—on Moulton’s Modern Readers Bible,<sup>5</sup> from the Purely Literary standpoint, suppressing her religion entirely. She did it so well they kept her at it two years—one for the old the other the new Testament. And they are one half of them pagans of the deepest dye.

With all deference to Edwin \*Markham’s mother—or whatever mother your very lovely and most sweet poem had in mind—my mother does not lean back in big blue eyed wonder at the things sonny is doing. Sonny does very well to keep the cherries on her bonnet in sight as she keeps ahead of him a quarter of a mile on the dusty road. I think she is absolutely right on every question in the world except in matters where I disagree with her. There it pains me very much to correct her, and since it is a rather elaborate process, I have ceased doing it of late. And since I agree with her on most matters from the infallibility of the ten commandments to the worth-whileness of the Anti-Saloon league<sup>6</sup>—little differences on the Higher Criticism seldom affect us any more. She still drives the orthodox tandem to Sunday school hitched to her chariot—viz: Baalam’s Conversational Jackass and Jonah’s whale—but she can get more spiritual profit out of them than some folks can out of Tennysons^ Poems.

Where did I begin? Well I might as well stay on this subject—now I am on it. Papa<sup>7</sup>—I shall tell you of some other time—in his prime he was a whirlwind of Rooseveltian energy—a paralyzing marvel to normal folks and he and Mama go out west every summer and camp to beat the band,<sup>8</sup> and he is temporarily himself again. You ought to see ’em at it. If there are rocks to lift, he lifts ’em, and she goes ahead and cooks on the camp stove with that big free arm-movement she used when a girl in cooking for twenty harvest hands, when the harvest hands ate with the family—way back in Indiana, just after the war.

Well—they camp all over the place. They have been at it sixteen years. Camp is as elaborately regulated as home—though most informal and non-tailor made in its contraptions. The Camp takes for granted two very energetic old people, one of them a wood chopper—a tent builder—a bridge maker, a water-carrier—a mountain climber a trunk mover—thats^ Papa—and the other one a whirlwind cook and general atmosphere:—thats^ Mama. Between Breakfast and Supper they climb the highest mountain they can find—carrying lunch and eating it on the peak. Then they come home real chipper and refreshed.

Write me a letter.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—  
603 South 5th.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Rudyard Kipling’s “The Truce of the Bear” was a favorite VL story. On October 1, 1909, he quotes Kipling to former girlfriend Nellie Tracy \*Vieira: “It is written in my soul ‘Make you no truce with Adam-Zad, the Bear that Walks Like a Man’” (Fowler, *Annotated Letters*, p. 105).

<sup>2</sup>In 1909, with the help of bribes and adroit political maneuvering, William Lorimer (1861-1934) devised to have himself elected United States Senator from Illinois. About a year later, the *Chicago Tribune* broke a story on the bribes, and Lorimer faced expulsion from the Senate. However, the first vote (March 1, 1911), found Lorimer's election valid. On that same evening VL expressed his disgust in his poem "To the United States Senate" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 135-136). A second investigation and vote then led to Lorimer's expulsion (July 13, 1911). See Letter 140.

In early 1911, with the assistance of his friend, city Commissioner Willis Spaulding (see Letter 26), VL worked two weeks as a day laborer at the city waterworks, hauling bricks and mortar for a new boiler. William Lorimer should not be confused with George Horace Lorimer (1867-1937), editor of the *Saturday Evening Post* (see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 48). The "scapegoat in the wilderness" is an allusion to Leviticus 16:7-10.

<sup>3</sup>See \*Roberts, Octavia. Just below this passage, VL is begging ST to return to St. Louis for Christmas, so he will have an excuse not to attend Octavia's wedding, which was held December 27, 1913. ST stayed in New York City, and VL attended the wedding.

<sup>4</sup>ST's "The Mother of a Poet" is in \**Rivers to the Sea*, pp. 77-81. The poem was written for the mother of John Hall \*Wheelock, not for the mother of Edwin \*Markham. See Letter 141 and Carpenter, p. 164.

[Esther] Catharine ("Kate") Frazee Lindsay (1848-1922), VL's mother, was from Rush County, Indiana (near Rushville), daughter of Ephraim Samuel Frazee, "the proud farmer" (see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 166-167). Among other Springfield groups, she founded the Missionary Social Union, an organization for ecumenically minded women from area Protestant churches. She served as Union President for the last thirty years of her life. For more on "Mama," see Letter 162.

<sup>5</sup>Catharine Lindsay participated in at least two Springfield literary societies: Anti-Rust and Sunnyside. Richard Green Moulton (1849-1924) was a professor, critic, and biblical scholar. While teaching at the University of Chicago, Moulton edited *The Modern Readers' Bible* (20 vols., 1896-1906), in which verse was printed as verse and prose was arranged in paragraphs. Moulton is credited with enhancing the sense of the Bible as literature. When ST graduated from Hosmer Hall in May 1903, Richard G. Moulton was the commencement speaker (see Carpenter, pp. 21-22).

<sup>6</sup>VL lectured for the Illinois Anti-Saloon League during 1909-10. See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 88-89; Fowler, *Annotated Letters*, passim; and Letter 18.

<sup>7</sup>Dr. Vachel Thomas Lindsay ["V.T.L."] (1843-1918), VL's father, was from Franklin County, Kentucky (near Frankfort). He finished one term at Cincinnati's Miami Medical College and, in 1866, began practice at a crossroads in Cotton Hill Township, ten miles southeast of Springfield, Illinois, returning to Miami to earn his degree (1868-69). After the tragic death of his first wife, childhood sweetheart \*Olive Crouch, he married Esther Catharine Frazee (November 30, 1876) and moved to Springfield, where VL was born in 1879. Until his death in 1918, Dr. Lindsay harnessed his horse to his rattly buggy and brought medicine and moral recommendations to the citizens of Sangamon County, especially to the minorities and the poor and especially to his original clientele near Cotton Hill. For more biographical accounts of "Papa," see Letters 42 and 162.

<sup>8</sup>For information on the Lindsay family's summer Colorado camping trips, see Letter 1.

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15) "Mama urges you to come to see us on the road home . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
December 22, 1913.

My Dear Sara:

I had already accepted this invitation via Christopher when your letter came.<sup>1</sup>

Now good lady—I will make you this promise—and you may tell the one or two people who really care. This time next year—if all is well—I will meet you in New York and gad around the town with you—and go wherever you want to.<sup>2</sup>

I assure you my dear I am not accustomed to taking such expensive pleasures right off the bat. Going to New York is a whole lot of an undertaking for a pore^ man. And I wouldn't ask dady^ for the cash right now for the world.

But now—I give you my word—that if possible—this time next year—I will be with you. I am sure if I consulted my own idea of a picnic—nothing could give me more pleasure than seeing things with your kind eyes. We would just jabber and peek at everything.

Today Florence Wilkinsons<sup>3</sup> poems arrived. I think "A Roman Garden" is the rarest sort of poetry. It is all I ever read of hers—and the reason I bought the book. It stands in my memory with your \*Sapho—(the last one) and \*Benet's Mad Merchants—and Miss Cathers "In the Palatine"<sup>4</sup>—and other few great things.

I am writing against time while little sister \*Joy is getting on her dress to go calling with me. Mama urges you to come to see us on the road home. She and Joy will be perfectly delighted I am sure. Work up some fake business commission from some New York Publisher to talk to me about—as a special messenger. Make me some proposition for encyclopaedia articles I will have to decline. After what I have written you of Mama you oughtnt^ to be scart to come. She urges you to come.

And I have several lovely lady friends that will be peachy to you. M. J. and M. H.<sup>5</sup> will do their damdest. Now come on. Get a commission to write up the Lincoln Home. I think it will be the greatest sport on earth. Or interview Lincoln's old neighbors. The old rascals like an excuse to embroider their recollections.

Well—you must thank little Joy \*Blair's vanity at her toilet for the length of this letter. She will be Joy Blair in May.<sup>6</sup>

My dear—if you knew what real whirlwind temptations I have been saying boo to of late, you would not try it at such long range. Why child—I have been facing the music lately—all kinds. But you are a most dear friend, remember and I am delighted you care so much.

Good evening—

N. V. Lindsay.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>VL encloses an invitation to recite his poems for the “Springfield Author’s club banquet, to be held at the Y. W. C. A. rooms on the evening of Monday, January 5 [1914].” He is to advise “Mr. C. J. Christopher” as to whether or not he accepts: “We shall have toasts dealing with the history of the club, its members in the past, its honorary members and its officers and we have assigned to you the place of honor on the program.” He has 30 minutes. (The letter is signed by “E. R. Branson, Attorney at Law”).

<sup>2</sup>VL and ST were together in New York during July 1914.

<sup>3</sup>Florence Wilkinson (Mrs. Wilfrid Muir Evans) was a minor poet and an acquaintance of Harriet \*Monroe. The book referred to is *The Ride Home: Poems. With the Marriage of Guineith, A Play in One Act* (1913) by Florence Wilkinson Evans; “A Roman Garden” is on pp. 189-191. Witter \*Bynner published many Wilkinson poems during his tenure as editor of \**McClure’s Magazine*.

<sup>4</sup>Willa [Sibert] Cather (1873-1947) was a poet and short story writer before she was a novelist. “The Palatine,” subtitled “(In the ‘Dark Ages’),” was published first in \**McClure’s Magazine* (June 1909, pp. 158-159) and then collected in Cather’s revised *April Twilights and Other Poems* (1923). VL may have read the first three stanzas in Albert Bigelow \*Paine’s biography, *Mark Twain* (vol. 3, pp. 1501-02). Cather served on the staff of *McClure’s* from 1906 to 1912.

<sup>5</sup>Mary \*Johnson and Mary \*Humphrey.

<sup>6</sup>The wedding was April 11, 1914, and seems to have occurred as planned. See Letters 76 and 79.

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16) “More and more I try to think out what is fundamental . . .”

Springfield Illinois.

Dec. 22, 1913.

Now like a silly man—I write at midnight—having mailed a letter at eight o’clock. It began to snow while \*Joy and I were making our call—and we walked home in it about a mile and a quarter—the snow as big as goose feathers. Joy is full of spirit, slender, and athletic from much mountain climbing,<sup>1</sup> and a walk in the snow just gets her blood up. She is always game in the presence of a proposition like that and a pleasure to walk with. I do not believe she ever refused^ a walk in her life. She has quite a swing and spring to her when she gets started.

Well—now that I have time for breath I must just pause to say I am ever so grateful to be wanted. I shall remember that with many thanks.

“My religion<sup>^</sup>” as I have talked about it, has grown like a coral reef a little at a time—and yet I let it so severely alone or leave it so quiescent for such long periods it seems a little queer to some folks that I should be dragging it into the lime light—after I have apparently forgotten it.

Its<sup>^</sup> like Mama’s “Art Treasures of America” 100 elegant India Proofs—representing the high water mark of exquisite respectability for the year 1886. They havn’t<sup>^</sup> been opened for fifteen years—not even for the cousin from Indiana.<sup>2</sup> Now supposing our nigger hired girl swiped them like she does the soap. Wouldn’t there be a howl? She would possibly entertain all her friends with them.

Is there any virtue in just having a thing? There must be. Not a very large virtue—still the rudiments of a virtue.

Well—my Religion<sup>^</sup> is like those parlor books in a way—kept jealously—but more or less on the shelf. And it is unlike them—in that it grows. Another steele<sup>^</sup> engraving every year as it were. But what to do with it all—besides holler about it? I understand with what a grim brute beast satisfaction Tolstoi took to the plough or Buddha to the road.<sup>3</sup> Its<sup>^</sup> great to really get your teeth into something, after endless gabble.

If I wasn’t a regular barrel of ink—I would have fought it out before now. I can’t be horribly serious now—but some day I want to take my religion with bloody battle seriousness and see it through even if it smashes me.

I am languid and loafy and poky and sleepy—and writing or doing nothing—so much of the time—just loafing till I write again and getting more and more dog eared—and then comes the reaction and I must leave the ink and eat something alive. Your little word about really understanding and caring for my religion is a rash word. I may trouble you with it to the bitter end, some day, when everybody else merely affects to care.

I will probably get out a few more Springfield pamphlets like the Censer Pamphlet<sup>4</sup>—but after while I must really do something—that will leaven the town—that will make a chemical change in it, like adding nickel to steele<sup>^</sup> to change its fibre in the making—or leaven to bread dough.

Some little tap on the crazy-bone of Democracy—to make it jump as it were—some jolt that goes a long way for the little investment of one man’s force.

More and more I try to think out what is fundamental. I am too dog lazy for anything but something that seems to have to do with the jewells<sup>^</sup> of the mainspring.

This wasn’t what I was going to say at all. (I intended to answer your letter.) But so many external things have been happening to me Sara—and I am so surrounded by sweet and heart-breaking and ensnaring play actors! I have been stung and flattered and all—and I do want to get back to the heart of life and duty.

And I am a silly frivolous<sup>^</sup> selfish vain spoiled child—and all sorts of accidental and temporal things are whirring round me. I want to get back to the red heart of God and hold to him.

I wish there was some great big-boned man like Tolstoy around here I could hang on to. Every time I begin to depend on anyone I am too pig-headed or something and pretty soon have to go it alone.

Well—this is enough. Goodnight. I am so glad that you care to have me fight this thing out. The best friends I have at best can only give a qualified sympathy when I try to live the smallest part of my creed—and most of them only think the statement of it a stimulating kind of rhetoric. But I really must break my bones for some of it, sometime: and I'll bet you object, at the crisis—if you care at all. And I for one will be glad you care enough to object, and be thankful for a dear disagreeing but gentle friend.

Merry Christmas—good and gentle lady.

Good night—

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay  
603 South 5th.

[P.S.] I am beginning to imagine you look just like Martha Washington, as I said before.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>For the Lindsay family summer camping trips, see Letter 1.

<sup>2</sup>Frances Frazee (born June 6, 1893), daughter of John Paul Frazee (1860-1926), brother of VL's mother. See Letters 14 and 74.

<sup>3</sup>See VL's later poem: "Tolstoi Is Plowing Yet" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 285) and "With a Bouquet of Twelve Roses" (p. 157), this latter from *\*General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems* (1913).

<sup>4</sup>That is, "The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit": see Letter 13.

<sup>5</sup>ST stayed at the Martha Washington Hotel while visiting New York City, and she obviously wrote VL on hotel stationery: see Letter 26. According to Louis \*Untermeyer, the hotel "advertised itself primly as 'The Only Hotel in the World Exclusively for Women'" (*From Another World*, p. 162).

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17) "I want to get under the world . . ."

Springfield Illinois.  
Dec. 29, 1913.

My Dear Sara:

The picture came and I was so glad to get it, and we served it up in the bosom of the family along with a belated box of Christmas Candy. I can get you a whole lot better now and I have something with which to cover up Martha.<sup>1</sup> She was beginning to positively mesmerize me.

Yes—I have endless things to chat about—and it is eleven o'clock, and I s'pose I'd better quit. I think its^ grand to be along in the same anthologies with you—. You have a nice curly face.

Poet Lady—I am just busting to tell you all about that wedding<sup>2</sup> but I aint a-going to do it. You don't know all the parties and I am not going to write a three-volume novel this hour of the night.

(There is a great deal of curiosity and kindness in your mouth.)

(You have very wise eyes!)

Please keep writing all about your interesting self—to keep me in countenance for I keep writing about myself all the time.

(You have the face of a dear elfin lady!)

Why should I be so tragically disappointed in that lost lady of mine for being an arrogant queen of local Special Privilege at last, without one radical at her wedding, after years of parlor-talk and ardent championship of the radical issues in America?

For I myself am a fake. I have never really gotten under the world and stayed under—over four months at a time.<sup>3</sup> Yet some men stay under the surface of Society for years, and become strong rich characters—rich in blood and vigor and experience and mind. I truly wish I could stay under four years—just like a college education. Instead I will be thankful if something does not drive me to the surface in a week. The dentist—for instance. Or some silly temporary weakening of the will. Or temporary horror at monsters that never touch me—whatever they do to each other.

I want to get under the world. Not to put it on record. Not to preach there. Not to gab or write about it afterwards, though human vanity may ensnare me into doing all these things. But just because I seem to hear the good God calling me there—just because I belong there as a merman belongs in the ocean. And once there, the Good God talks to me.

And the women are always perpetually fishing me out and dragging me back to the parlors—and I am so fond of kissing their lilly-white hands it is hard for me to break away. But I just must plunge. It is more important to my soul somehow—than love or life or song or even literary vanity. And that last is a good deal.

If I plunge next week—and it kills me in a day—I will die on a field of battle which scarcely anyone will understand—unless you choose to do so, and maybe one or two others. It is more joy to feel myself under the world even temporarily—than to be the bridegroom of Cleopatra or Mary Queen of Scots<sup>4</sup> or any other jewel-like women—. But to make the choice is sometimes hel^ (or have it made for me!)

Being still in the parlor I kiss your hand.

Good night—honorable elf.

Very much your friend

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

603 South 5th.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>When visiting New York City, ST stayed at the Martha Washington Hotel. See Letter 16.

<sup>2</sup>See \*Roberts, Octavia.

<sup>3</sup>Compare VL's poem "The Would-Be Merman" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 269), published in *A Handy Guide for Beggars* (1916) but written much earlier. Also see next letter.

<sup>4</sup>For the relevance of Mary Queen of Scots, see Letter 1.

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18) "Sister Joy has invented a name for you, Sara FIMM . . ."

Section I.

Springfield Ill.

Jan. 3, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Your delightful letter came this afternoon and I could write an answer to every line of it.

I have just a grain more of self-respect today having labored on The \*Fireman's Ball some more. It has dragged on for weeks—all because I havn't^ shovelled enough coal or something. I am interested all right and it is a fine scheme—but comes out punk. It is now in a stage where I can lay it aside at least, with the reasonable assurance that it is started. I went to the Fireman's Ball early last fall. A friend very kindly gave me tickets to the bricklayers ball for New Year's night and I loved those folks so well I came home and took some of the Buddhism out of the Fireman's ball and made it more human. The plot is now done.

Well whats^ the use of gabbing about that. It may never see the light.

Well—as to being a Franciscan. I was an acetic^ at 20 and at 25 by preference and religious passion. Now it is pretty largely habit—and the instinct of self preservation, artistically speaking. My work crowds out the world. But the "world" looks mighty good to me at times. Still my dancing friends, and gay little cupids like \*Ridgely think I am a regular frozen quail—as it were. Life has about as much lure for me as for most healthy mortals—but mighty few people have fate gripping the back of their necks and dragging them like kittens the way they should go as I have. I used to fight for my destiny but now it clears the path for me and drags me squealing and kicking after it, no matter how my poor frame aches for devilry and freedom.

For instance I talked to my very dearest consoler<sup>1</sup> till 12 oclock^ last night—and I offered to learn one new dance for every proposition in the Creed of a Beggar she would accept. But she don't want me to learn! She wants me to stay like a parson on the shelf while she goes to the Governor's ball and dances her little feet off. And she looks just like those long-limbed statues by the divine \*Lyssipas who carved just before Alexander the Great conquered the world. She wants to dance all week and then read Sara Teasdale's poetry and George \*Sterling's poetry on Saturday night with me, peaceful and sated herself. And as for the Creed of a Beggar—it is fine for me but not a line of it will she accept seriously for herself.



I am always getting all snarled up with complete pagans and then preaching myself hoarse at them and getting all tangled up in their hair and leaving in the end with my sermons fallen to the ground. The real serious kind of people are apt to be so lacking in dimples. This present pagan has a wonderful brain—a cynic of the gentler sort with a genius for the TRUTH and an absolutely worldly disposition. A Greek body—a Greek brain—a fashion-worshipping soul. Why the Sam Hill I don't hunt up a devout and decent Baptist I don't know, except that she is a friend of mine, this pagan.

Well—maybe you and I can tramp off together sometime. I am so glad you love the good Lord at times. It is such a relief. I will not have to be converting you. I get so preachy with the naughty girls.

You poets do all seem to be there together in one nest. \*Wheelock and \*Untermeyer in one letter! Now make all these people love me if you can—Sara. I want them for dear friends or nothing—those that are really your friends, that you can really command in soul.

By the way—Sterling says he may come to see me in the Spring. Leaving wifey—or wifey leaving him. I'm glad I don't know anything about it. Id^ probably give him helupthewabash. I lost my most intimate and delightful man friend in town this time last year for that. I gave him such a three hours grilling as he never had before—the spoiled child. I don't ever want to scold anybody any more. So I am glad I am not in a position to know. Sterling seems to sort of hang to me a little bit, and I am very glad. It is fine to really be of value to people.

Why I am certainly going to wait to see you in St. Louis before I “plunge.”<sup>2</sup> That ought to be a real conversational evening. And of course when I plunge I am bound to come up again and hunt up everybody. My stay under the surface will be all too brief. It makes me sad to think of it. I would like to be a real dream-statesman, the whole of the United States gets on my heart—I want to teach them all to dream. [~~and~~] I want to know [“Section II.”]<sup>3</sup> the soul of the 90 million and be seasoned by them, and then speak to them in hearable words, their own thoughts made golden and gleaming.

You little dear poet-lady individually you are a rare work of art and a rare art-worker—but the United States is not enough on your heart. You ought to make yourself the little mother of the whole United States and especially the Middle West.

That new dress of yours sounds as good as Stuarts Confectionery<sup>4</sup> at 10 P.M. Which same is my favorite tavern. You ought to see how awkwardly not-at-home Charles \*Ridgely looks there! A bar-room—a grill room of course should be the place for a grown up man! But Stuart's Confectionery for meh^, and my old friend Court Stuart to bring me the Tomato Bouillion^, or the Chocolate Sundae.

And so—I hope you can wear your cake-and ice-cream dress there some day. Or is it too grand for the street?

Sister \*Joy has invented a name for you, Sara FIMM. She is quite tender on the subject of names lately. She has a dear one who has recently auspiciously addressed her as Joy-heart.

These are indeed confidences, scandalous in those that have not met.

You know—you give me the fraternity feeling—a thing I have scarcely [enjoyed] experienced for some time. I get the meaning—vaguely—of the College Fraternity at last. There are just about 100 of US that get into the anthologies and the magazines, and I have heard from so many poets in such a friendly family way of late. It is all so unexpected. I never dreamed of joining a clan<sup>5</sup>—and had scarcely read one contemporary poem when these folks began to get friendly. Now of course I read—for they are my friends. It is a whole new world to me, this \*Rittenhouse and \*Braithwaite universe. And most unexpected. It seems to me they are quite knit together—in one way or another simply because of the limited numbers. I am confident there are 10000 people that could write or are sometimes writing as good verse as the bunch of 100. But they do not make the long continued sacrifices necessary to get placed. They either give their main energy to prose or business, or use it all up writing, without the everlasting hammering it takes to get the stuff printed—or they are so pressed by grim necessity they cannot take the time to write their best often. It takes lots of vanity and self confidence and willingness to renounce the dollar to be part of this fraternity of 100. And you look to me like a romantic object because you have really belonged for quite awhile.

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Joy and I have just been down town for the evening. We saw Blanche Sweet—the only real moving-picture actress now on the boards.<sup>6</sup> Look for her in the Biograph. I hope to write a rhyme about her some day. The \*American has one of mine on Mary Pickford. I wish \*Phillips would hurry up and print it. Mary is no longer in the movies. It is an appeal to her to return.

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\*Ridgely in a recent letter puts in an amusing sentence. “James Collier Marshall in reply to a question from your defamer and your servant as to whether you ever did anything human in New York, said that if you did no one ever caught you at it!” The idea of those two worldly minded youths with their heads together playing unsuccessful detective is great. They are both rather mundane. Let them meditate on the great fact—that after all—if I had not introduced them—they would never have met. The situation has a humor forty fathoms deep, which I cannot here dwell upon. But I can just hear them cackel^ over their beer and dam my abstinence.

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### Section III.

My dear Sara—I know it is foolish to write so much—but it is such a pleasure to write to you—partly because I get real answers, and I reread your letters so much I feel in them your spirit breathing back to me.

The business of singing is such a peculiar one—it tempts one so soon into over-expression—too many words—feelings drawn too thin that I long ago made up my mind to try to avoid those sins. Certainly I mean to keep being friends since I have begun—and real friends, not mere avalanches of words. You are the one woman-writer I sit down to be daily comrades with—and the first writer of verse a member of the 100 as it were. My lost lady<sup>7</sup> married Dec. 27—was a short story writer of the magazine brand. But I never settled down to what might be called a professional comradeship in the \*Nightingale business. She had a notion she would some day be my little monitor in the short story business I suspect. Now I am trying to tell you how to write verse. I know I get different things from your verses than a layman gets—even a novelist would get—and I sort of put myself in your place pen in hand—and feel the electricity running thick or running thin

according to the quality of the words, and get at second hand, the joys of composition and triumph.

I would like so much to have a professional influence in your life—you are bound to grow—I would like to have something to do with the direction in which you grow. Your letters tell me of this friendship and that—but nothing of your dreams as a priestess and citizen—a near-neighbor of Abraham Lincoln, a child that lives under the Star-Spangled banner. Why, by the time three years have past—by the next presidential election—probably two thirds of the women of the United States will vote for president.<sup>8</sup> Everything looks like a stampede that way when the next legislatures get in session, the next two winters. And the woman heart of America must needs sing itself. You are a beautiful and exquisite private citizen—you have done it so well it has made you a public citizen—now you must have your public message. You sing most nobly of girlhood, motherhood, wifehood—but there is the further degree of citizenship. In forty years you will be a Grandmother in the Nation (if not as a private fact!—) you must sing toward that goal—The American Sibyl sometime—. You should write such verse at sixty as Aspasia might have written for Pericles on his Athenian policy.<sup>9</sup> Nay, nay—I am not telling you what you shall do. If this change occurs in your work—it will be after many slow changes in the details of your life—that will afterwards come out in song.

I think it the grandest and most romantic thing on earth that you should be a young singer with such a full and noble note at its fullest—and all your life before you. If I could actually leave my mark on your art-life I would be the vainest mortal on earth. [It] Such fundamental revolutions can only come after long talks. Letters are nothing in such issues. It seems to me these 100 singers ought to sing in chorus—so loudly that they would drown out the editors of the twenty magazines. They ought to be scattered about two apiece in every state and make those states real stars in the flag. For the next fifty years they could make America a place of dreams and glory.

Dear lady—I am impatient to see you. It will be a professional adventure in the Nightingale business—I am sure—and it may mean a lot for our music. I dearly hope so. What it means to us just as humans is not so important. We both belong to the Good God—and are here to sing.

With love of a proper sort

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

Section IV.

Sunday morning—Jan. 4.

The Journal to Stella.<sup>10</sup> Yes. The cataract of mere language? Yes. The Niagra of ink? Yes. The continued conversation? Yes. The bleating lamb? Yes.

All us men are bleating lambs,<sup>11</sup> when we should be back tending to business. I should be writing poetry. Since starting The Firemans ball I have made the first sketch of ten poems just as good, and the table is jam full of similar notes. And on the shelf tied up with nice clean shoestrings are two big bundles of other notes shot out like sparks from the pin-wheel these two years. And I will never write up any of them—for new things keep happening to me to write about that seem more important.

Yet the words are so apt to assert themselves, and exaggerate the experience. Its<sup>^</sup> time I began to shovell<sup>^</sup> coal and quit talking awhile. I walked hundreds of miles in the desert before I wrote \*General Booth. Western Kansas—then in Colorado west to the mountains and north beyond Denver—then back—and weeded onions for a truck-gardener near Denver—then begging my way through the deserts to Trinidad—and it is some desert north of Trinidad—believe me—then down into New Mexico when the stopping points became eighteen miles apart—and I lost my nerve and quit.<sup>12</sup> Then I telegraphed for money—took the train and wrote General Booth in Los Angeles—so ashamed of myself for being a silly quitter I wished I was dead. I think I was about the silliest baby that ever drew breath, when I wrote that piece—and so humiliated over my lack of sand I could hardly look anyone in the face. And that money I had telegraphed for! It was awful.

Well—the physical force I had accumulated in the desert went into the poem and I wont<sup>^</sup> really get a punch again till I beg [~~some~~] again, or something like it. Even little Joy says so—which is extraordinary talk for such a respectable young woman. And I am so afraid of dogs. They bark and bark. Yet it is bracing.

Well I shouldn't write such long letters to you. It is perfectly scandalous. Its<sup>^</sup> a sure sign I am not writing poetry—when I produce so much prose. Wait till the poems get to going—and you shall have one-page letters—Miss—and be a thankful Sara FIMM!

You know—I really believe your life lacks a general direction. You zig zag from one Romance to the next.

You have no business taking any men seriously but real statesmen—. If it wouldn't wreck the capitol I would advise you to find a mutual spirit in Wilson's cabinet—or somebody like that—or Wilson himself—at a safe distance. Read Bryce's American Commonwealth and put some of the best chapters of the second volume into verse.<sup>13</sup>

The trouble with our poets who have Americanitis as it were—is that they say WHITMAN and then look as important as stuffed owls. Well—with all due deference to brother Whitman as an Individual genius—Emerson or Mark Twain are safer guides in real Americanism. In some matters our fat friend Whitman retrograded two thousand years back to Alcibiades<sup>14</sup> not forward to Lincoln. Woodrow Wilson and Bryan and \*Altgeld and such are good enough for me.<sup>15</sup>

And Ill<sup>^</sup> bet you dont<sup>^</sup> really swear by Whitman. I just get it by your general tone. Thats<sup>^</sup> a good start. Now read the first volume of Albert Bigelow \*Paines life of Mark Twain and see how much more of a real American experience and American soul that describes. Or read Wilson's History of the American People<sup>16</sup>—and then make yourself into the American Sibyl, the American literary statesman, straight from Mizzouri. I havn'<sup>^</sup>t read Wilson myself, but think you'd better. Such men—and Emerson gives the main directions of Americanism—so does Mark Twain—Whitman does not. Be a sweet little Mark Twain in rhyme.

Now are you lectured enough?

Really—Sara—I would give most anything to make you over into a boy and take you harvesting. I just wish I was a Wizard. If I write you everything that happens to me

when I am next on the road will you listen hard—and say it happened to you? And write it into verse? Now that piece on Kansas<sup>17</sup> is the only scrap I have in verse of my wonderful trip. And every day was just as rich and different and strange. It would take your golden voice to say it.

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One reason I have been so late realizing there was a circle of American \*Nightingales is that in my student days (when one is alert on such matters) I thought I was going to be an artist, and had a sort of touch with the art battles of New York-Chicago and the world. I read Richard Muther's history of Modern Painting straight through<sup>18</sup>—and followed all those wars. That was the real world then. I am real gabby and talk the lingo, in studios! With a proper tenderness

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Mary \*Johnson. For “The Creed of a Beggar,” see Letter 13. On January 18, 1910, when VL's relationship with Nellie \*Vieira was rapidly deteriorating (from VL's perspective), he advises Nellie: “I tell you child, to be truly serious now, loneliness eats me like a disease, and you have forgot womans^ chief glory is that she is a Consoler” (Fowler, *Annotated Letters*, p. 326). For more on VL's idea of woman's role, see Letter 47.

<sup>2</sup>For VL's idea of taking a “plunge,” see Letter 17.

<sup>3</sup>For clarity, VL divides this long letter into four sections, with section two beginning in mid-sentence.

<sup>4</sup>Stuart's Confectionery was at 109 North 5th Street, at the site of Abraham Lincoln's first Springfield law office. Proprietors Cortland B. “Cort” Stuart and Earl K. Stuart frequently advertised “Candies, Ice Cream and Luncheon” in the Springfield papers. For more on VL and sweets, see Letter 174. We learn in Letter 64 that VL owes money to Stuart's.

<sup>5</sup>For information on VL's contempt for “clans,” see Letter 13.

<sup>6</sup>One of the great Biograph Company stars, Blanche Sweet appeared in such D.W. Griffith films as *The Avenging Conscience*, *The Battle*, *The Clew*, *Judith of Bethulia*, and *Oil and Water*, all of which are discussed in VL's *\*Art of the Moving Picture*. VL's poem “Blanche Sweet, Moving Picture Actress (After seeing the reel called ‘Oil and Water’)” was first published in Margaret \*Anderson's *Little Review* (June 1914) as the lead poem of “A \*Kaleidoscope.” In *The Art of the Moving Picture* (1922), VL notes: “I am the one poet who has a right to claim for his muses Blanche Sweet, Mary \*Pickford, and Mae Marsh. I am the one poet who wrote them songs when they were Biograph heroines, before their names were put on the screen, or the name of their director” (pp. 3-4). For Mae Marsh, see Letters 175 and 177.

<sup>7</sup>See \*Roberts, Octavia.

<sup>8</sup>For VL and women's suffrage, see \*Nightingale, Florence, and Letters 1 and 51.

<sup>9</sup>Aspasia was the witty and intellectual mistress of Pericles (c.490-429 B.C.). Lampooned mercilessly by the Greek comedy writers, Aspasia was nevertheless admired by Socrates and an important inspiration for Pericles.

<sup>10</sup>Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* (1710-13) is a series of intimate letters from Swift to Esther Johnson, daughter of a companion of Sir William Temple's sister. Among other things, the letters detail Swift's daily life and, in this respect, are not unlike VL's letters to ST.

<sup>11</sup>The "bleating" lamb image was one of VL's favorites. Compare Letter 32.

<sup>12</sup>VL's quitting place was Wagon Mound, New Mexico: see "I Went Down into the Desert" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 213), included in "A \*Kaleidoscope." Also see *\*Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*, and Letters 20, 28, and 38.

<sup>13</sup>James Bryce (1838-1922) was an English statesman considered an expert on American government and character. His *The American Commonwealth* (2 vols., 1888, rev. ed., 1910) was read more by Americans than by the English. Bryce served as the English ambassador to the United States (1907-1913). In his preface to *\*Going-to-the-Sun* (1923), VL writes that he remembers well his conversations with Stephen \*Graham, his hiking companion: "I kept trying to deliver him from memory Bryce's *American Commonwealth*, unabridged, two volumes, one thousand pages each. I remember those volumes well. I read every page in lonely country hotels and on slow local trains while a Sunday field-worker for the Anti-Saloon League [1909-10]," p. 2. Also see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 270, and Letter 14.

<sup>14</sup>Athenian statesman (c.450-404 B.C.), kinsman of Pericles, known for his opportunism and dissipation, traitor to both Athens and Sparta.

<sup>15</sup>For VL's admiration of William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), see "Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan" and "When Bryan Speaks" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 343-349, 284).

<sup>16</sup>[Thomas] Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), 27<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, authored many books, including *A History of the American People* (5 vols., 1902).

<sup>17</sup>For VL's "Kansas," see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>18</sup>The reference is to Richard Muther (1860-1909), *The History of Modern Painting* (4 vols., 1907).

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19) "Springfield is a fair cross section . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan 5, 1913<sup>^</sup>. [1914]

{My Dearest Poet and  
My Esteemed friend}

I do not suppose any mortal ever had a wilder scheme than mine. I want by sheer will-power, by sheer bullying force of the imagination—to change the temperament of this village—and thereby make a little leaven for the whole lump.<sup>1</sup> Springfield is a fair

cross section, a representative individual cell of the United States. I want it to contract from me the dreaming-disease. I want to be Mrs. Eddy<sup>2</sup> and give them a poetic and artistic Christian Science that will heal half their diseases, and give them the plague of a new imagination.

Darling poet (and respected friend) I have returned from the Author's Club<sup>3</sup> banquet full of coffee and irresponsibility. Lest I say something—I will close. Lest I break loose—I cease.

Very Sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay 603 South 5th.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Compare I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9.

<sup>2</sup>Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), author of *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (1st ed., 1875, frequently revised), was the founder of the Christian Science Movement. The Church of Christ, Scientist, originated in Boston in 1879, the year of VL's birth.

<sup>3</sup>For the invitation to address the Author's Club, see Letter 15.

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20) "Have you ever slept in vermin Sir? . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan 7, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Tonight I brag. Let me tell you:—I had five High School senior boys as I have once a week in the winter around the parlor fire—. Then there are two Juniors. Next year the two juniors will be seniors and pick another bunch for me. By the time Christmas has passed they are all limbered up and good friends. We had warm debates tonight. Every man named the local and national reforms for which he would be willing to shed his blood, if that were the way to help. One wanted more efficient high Schools, a stronger Chief of police—and a nationalized educational system. Another wanted a dry state and nation. Another wanted Professional legally educated salaried Jurymen—. And the debate was warm. I try to get the High School leaders—and these are live ones I'll tell you. They are the joy of my life. Then, after they go to college—they come back and take walks with me Christmastime. They get to be men mighty quick. Thus I have new friends coming on all the time, and keep in touch with the young blood of the town. Every so often we have a ladies' night and the girls come then as guests—dressed to kill and bashful as violets and minding their manners you bet. And the boys are all stewed up and nearly yelp the roof off in their sweet young excitement. Its^ great. There is nothing so flattering on earth as having these creatures for friends. And argue! They can beat the United States Senate. God bless them, every one.

To save splutter—on the nights when there are no ladies—we just meet around the parlor fire—and I pass around a two pound box of chocolates. On ladies night we all assemble around the dining room table with the cut glass etc. and argue three quarters of an hour—the table serving to unify and discipline and concentrate the company. Then little sister (or the daughter of \*Lyssipus) pours the chocolate or grape juice and all is merry as the star-spangled banner. The sweet darling things—just like chickens one day old—all fluffy and funny and fine. And these boys learn my ways and get at home with me—and I don't have to explain myself for a minute—. They take me for granted—just like the paper on the wall. Its^ fine—and I am happy all over about it tonight, and glad I am alive.

They are just crazy for ladies night to come—to see who can bring the grandest girl. I told them I was going to steal the best one.<sup>1</sup>

I have read “Adventures in Contentment” today.<sup>2</sup> “The \*Chicago Evening Post” wants a long review of it. I view it with mixed emotions— but I hope to keep them out of the review—since I can place the book very nicely without being unpleasant. I shall compare it to Ik Marvel's Dream Life<sup>3</sup>—which we have all enjoyed in youth—I presume. And since the book advocates some of my views—I must back up its propaganda. Whosoever is not against us, is for us.<sup>4</sup> But how I could rake the volume if I tried! I could address him thus:—Have you ever slept in vermin Sir? How many nights? When you were rained on—how many days were you rained on—and how long was it before you were dry? Did the mad dogs ever chase you? Were you ever trapped in an infamous hole of tuberculosis and vice? Have you ever slept with barbed wire and Russian thistles? Did you ever drink alkali water till you turned to a baloon^? Did you ever sit up all night on account of microscopic red ants on your cot?

The trouble is—that I too have idealized my narrative somewhat and left out many of these things myself. Neither Grayson nor your servant has dared to write the heights or the depths of the road. And he is so cautious of his magazine audience. He sees himself pleasantly exhilarating^ and shocking the rather prettyfied element of the Middle Classes. I am out jolting the jolters. (Brag!) Brace up man—I silently say to [~~myself~~] Grayson. Beg! Sleep in the old horse-blanket. Get yourself to smelling bad. Sleep with the Greeks. I dare you! Oh Grayson, to spend a night beneath the roof of a hospitable Greek truck-farmer. Oh lord! I am the man who invented the proverb “Beware of the Greeks bearing gifts.”<sup>5</sup> And did you ever put up in an adobe house where there had been no women for three years? Only wild men?

It just gets me all stirred up. I will have to write some of these stories myself. And there is the story—never yet told of the 25 cent Hannibal Hotel—and the Black upper room. Grayson—you are a sissy. I dare him to go on a begging tour. I dare him.

Was he ever followed three days on the road by a chattering tramp-idiot as hard to shake as the old man of the sea?

These things be the mere salt and pepper of the road.

Then there was the bath I took in a storm in alkali water—and the two old people I found absolutely reeking with disease running a hotel in a Kansas village as frightful as ten lepers I fled in haste!—and there was



Oh well—whats^ the use of bragging? There was exhilaration^ every hour to make one forget all these things. The first sight of the Spanish Peaks<sup>6</sup> was worth it all. The walk from Colorado Springs to Denver! The interview with the paroled convict working alone on the road—! The episode of the automobilist with the muddy legs! Lots and lots of things—I havn't^ ever told. Really put them out of my head for one bitter reason—that I suddenly find removed from my heart for an hour tonight. Wagon-Mound made me hate it all—but tonight bragging to Sara—makes me forget Wagon Mound. I must remember it. Back to Wagon Mound for mine, and goodnight.<sup>7</sup>

Do I write too often? Its^ lots of fun—just before I go to sleep—a kind of an opiate.

With esteem and respect

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—

[P.S.] The Mirror is going to have an essay on my philosophy! Gosh. Just why— for what profound reason—I am a poorer hand at doing the chores around home than I used to be. Its^ fun for the family—that article.<sup>8</sup>

(over)

Friday morning:

Your long fine letter just came. I will answer tonight, at length and with pleasure indeed—with even a sober delight. Meanwhile let me say—thanks for the party invite—but no—not till next year—if you and the honorable \*Jesse Belle can hold over for a year, and be so indulgent as to ask me then.

I was a king in Babylon when you were a Christian slave.<sup>9</sup>

Since my last real argumentative letter to Edward J. \*Wheeler—and his reply—I feel the ice is pretty well broken and we are real friends. I am so glad—for he has done a great deal for me—off and on.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>VL names some of his “boys” in an article published in Springfield’s *Illinois State Register* (August 4, 1929): “Franz [\*Rickaby] was the leader of my gang and the real shepherd. A group of boys and girls who gathered at my home in Springfield . . . including John Gehlmann, George Nelch, Donald Shumway Rockwell, and David Shand were there every two weeks for two years. And often, after the manner of other manly clubs, they had a ladies’ evening, when they brought their favorites among the fair. We read everything from Shaw to Pshaw, and shouted until midnight, being some of us still high school sophomores and very smart-alecky, all but the . . . musician, Franz, who dominated the scene” (see Daniel W. Greene, “‘Fiddle and I’: The Story of Franz Rickaby,” *Journal of American Folklore* 81 (October-December, 1968), pp. 318-319. VL names several other “boys” and relates additional information on his meetings: see Letters 25, 28, 33, 38, 50, 72, 146.

<sup>2</sup>David Grayson was the pseudonym of Ray Stannard Baker (1870-1946), a leading contributor to *McClure's Magazine*. Baker published seven volumes of familiar essays under the name Grayson, including *Adventures in Contentment* (1907). However, VL actually reviewed Baker-Grayson's *The Friendly Road* (1913): he enclosed a copy of the review in Letter 30. Entitled "Ik Marvel Afoot," the review was published in the *Chicago Evening Post Friday Literary Review* (January 23, 1914). VL apparently is reading *Adventures* for background material or he simply confuses the then-famous *Adventures* with his present assignment.

<sup>3</sup>Ik or Ike Marvel, pseudonym of Donald Grant Mitchell (1822-1908), is a name that resulted from a misprinting of J.K. Marvel in 1846. Mitchell himself preferred his writings on rural pleasures, such as *Rural Studies* (1867), but his fame rests with fanciful works such as *Reveries of a Bachelor* (1850) and *Dream Life* (1851), works that combine fiction with essay.

<sup>4</sup>Compare Matthew 12:30. VL views Grayson as a kindred soul and commences to recount his own experiences on his three tramps through the South (1906), the East (1908), and the West (1912). Many of the events here are in his diaries but, as he himself states, are omitted from his literary accounts: *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty* and *A Handy Guide for Beggars*. For a non-idealistic account of the Morristown, New Jersey YMCA, see "An Adventurer Gets Religion" in *War Bulletin Number Two* (August 4, 1909), reprinted in the *Village Magazine* (3rd, 4th eds.).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book ii.

<sup>6</sup>That is, the Sangre De Cristo Mountains, where the Lindsay family spent their summers at Camp "Olive": see Letter 1.

<sup>7</sup>For Wagon Mound, see "The *Gospel of Beauty*," and Letter 18.

<sup>8</sup>The "article" is VL's poem "The Flute of the Lonely" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 252), published in *Reedy's Mirror* (February 27, 1914). The poem tells of a "ne'er-do-well" who sits on the porch and plays his flute while other people are working, a situation not unlike the family's view of VL.

<sup>9</sup>The reference is to William Ernest Henley: see Letter 6.

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21) "I feel most cosy with you all ready . . ."

Springfield Ill.  
Jan 7, 1914.

{My most beloved and adored song maker  
My esteemed and properly respected correspondent}

I do now take my pen in hand to say that it is eleven o'clock and it is entirely too late to be sitting up writing letters to strangers I have never met. So as far as the respected correspondent is concerned—I make her as frigid a bow as I can in my grey silk socks and bid her good evening. Don't hurry. Must you go? I begin again.

{My admired and confidential \*nightengale  
 (Nothing here but the vacant place) }

I will now settle down to an eye-to-eye conversation with you, now that that strange person has gone. Sister of yours you say? Well—I hope to be thoroughly introduced sometime soon. Is she on the way to St. Louis now you say? I will certainly go to see her the first train she will let me take.

But {noble-harping lady  
 \_\_\_\_\_} as for you I feel most cosy with you all ready.

First—let me tell you all the news. It is this—I have been working on the \*Fireman's Ball some more. Also the girl I go to see at present looks like a sister of the statues of \*Lyssipus and Scopas.<sup>1</sup> They did mostly men—I think. She is a feminized version.

Now that all the news has been told we can settle down to thoughts.

Thought I. I wish to the devil I wasn't so sleepy so I could put down some of the things I have been thinking with your spiritual help this last two hours.

Thought II. I must remember to get my watch tomorrow. The Jeweller has had it a month—and this little one-dollar substitute ticks so loud I can hardly hear myself write to you.

Thought III. Write me an essay on your opinion of Florence Wilkinson.<sup>2</sup>

Thought IV. And of my new Book.<sup>3</sup>

Thought V. I bid you Goodnight—lady nightengale—soul of beauty—Olympian singer. The Old Gods be good to you till you have learned to serve the new ones. The ambrosia—the nectar the rich meats of Mars and Mercury be yours. The Muses be your guardian angels—and Apollo your St. Valentine and so Goodnight—Swan of Ionia, sister of Pericles—white handed daughter of Athens the violet-crowned.

(With reverence for your song and your dreams—)

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

[P.S.]Tell that Sara-Girl person I want her to come home. And I send her some profitable press clippings.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Skopas (Scopas) (c.370-c.330 B.C.), Greek sculptor: with Praxiteles, he founded the later Attic school. E. A. Gardner's *Six Greek Sculptors*, with chapters on Skopas and \*Lysippos, was published in 1910.

<sup>2</sup>For Florence Wilkinson, see Letter 15.

<sup>3</sup>\**General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems*. New York: Kennerley, 1913.

<sup>4</sup>VL encloses two clippings, the first a humorous squib on a western melodrama, the second a serious editorial from a Litchfield (Illinois) newspaper on a Canton, Ohio, Congressman, one Mr. J.T. Whitacre, who refuses to run for reelection because “there is no place in that body for an intellectually honest man.” Compare VL on Lorimer—Letter 14.

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