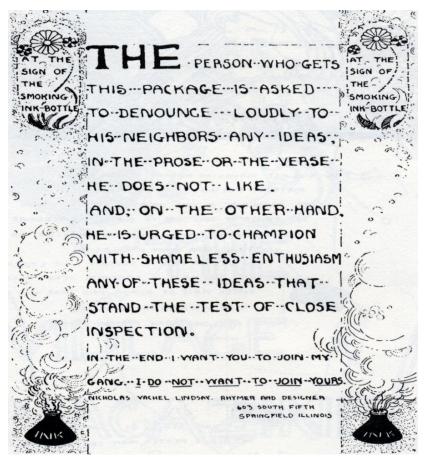
Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Sixteen



[Vachel's insert introducing his self-published Village Magazine (1910)]

by

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[This ongoing biography may be read online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Choose "Biography" and then "Uncle Boy: A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay." The biography and the website are sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association.]



16. New York: Dreaming and Working [May-December 1905]

"I am my father's curse."

1

During the winter, 1904-05, Vachel experienced firsthand the truth expressed in Samuel Johnson's Rambler 168: "Few have Abilities so much needed by the rest of the World as to be caressed on their own Terms, and he that will not condescend to recommend himself by external Embellishments, must submit to the Fate of just Sentiments meanly expressed, and be ridiculed and forgotten before he is understood." By May 1905, still convinced that he carried a vital message for an artless and materialminded world, Vachel decided to change direction and "recommend himself by external Embellishments." His essential message would remain the same, but he would seek a new means of delivery, one designed to make him, at least temporarily, a contributing member of the financial community. His interest was not a profession as such: that already had been determined. His God-given profession was to create art and poetry that would bring spiritual health to his fellow human beings. After months, though, of fruitless struggle to find a publisher for Aladdin's Lamp, he realized that under present circumstances his father's generosity could not continue much longer. Somehow he needed to support himself and still not relinquish God's and his own essential purposes. He slowly realized that independence required compromise.

Characteristically, when Uncle Boy determined that significant change was necessary, he punctuated his decision with lofty declarations. At 3:00 a.m., on May 17 (the entry is dated "May 16"), he sanctioned his new resolve in a notebook entry more than a little reminiscent of Dr. Lindsay's tract, "One Unwavering Aim":

I am absolutely demoralized unless I can concentrate. And I can't concentrate on but one thing at a time.

Let me consider one good possibility, and hammer away till something happens. Newspaper work seems the thing tonight. Let me write for the newspapers, and do only such drawings in connection as absolutely compell^ themselves to be made. Let me construct the most artistic writing possible, be a specialist if possible, on the street, and write away, say three articles a week. God Help us all to be brave, Amen.

("gathered information on Art")

Training for business, however, would take time, as well as effort. Time meant money, and money meant continuing support from home. Thus, on the evening of May 17, Dr. Lindsay's boy addressed a letter to "Dear Papa":

I laid awake till three o'clock last night, thinking over the past months peddling. Little Jobs seem just as hard to get as big ones, there are about twenty men after every little one and ten after every big one. I certainly have tried everything this month. Hence I must try one thing and keep pounding away.

I feel very much encouraged to go on today and I have a definite plan, which I wish you to consider. I am by no means going to abandon all hope of drawing. But I am going to give my main efforts to writing for the newspapers, following Willard's [Wheeler] footsteps as a freelance. It will probably take some time for me to learn to dish up the stuff in true journalistic style, but it is my plan to keep at it till I can. And illustrate my articles in newspaper style, when illustration really helps, trying to make the drawing the servant of the news. Now in order to do this I must concentrate on it as hard as I did on my book [Aladdin's Lamp] last fall. I must go in deep into journalism, and I want to feel that you are standing by me, and in hearty sympathy with the idea. It is a terrible thing to me to be dependent, it almost drives me crazy; its^ so demoralizing that I dash around from pillar to post trying to get work whether or no—and get nothing done. I keenly feel in obligation to you, and the neccessity^ of being self supporting. I deeply appreciate your long loyalty to me, and your standing by through thick and thin. All I can say is that I want you to stand by me a little longer till I try this plan.

Newspapers hire reporters in September and October, Vachel continued: "They are cutting down the forces now, and it is almost impossible for one to try at present, for a permanent position. The only chance is to free-lance, like Willard; and that is the best way to begin anyway. You have to say you have had experience. By September I will have had enough work accepted I hope, to have some editor take me in."

To encourage his long-suffering father, and perhaps to transfer some of his own enthusiasm, the would-be journalist established his first deadline and then announced his plan of attack: "Now if nothing happens by October, I will feel I have given New York a fair trial, and it will be time to make new plans. If I get one article accepted a week, from now on, I will make a living. Willard has had two and three accepted right along. It may take me some time to learn the tricks. I want you to stand by me till I do, if it is possible. If I go at this thing I have to go at it with intense concentration for a definite period of time, not thinking of anything else till October first. My plan is simple—to bombard the papers with timely news articles about the street and town—what are called 'Human Interest stories' technically—till I get them accepted, write three a week, and when one a week is accepted, consider the first stage passed. When I have been given a position I will consider the second stage passed. Then it will be time to look around and plan again. Once in the newspaper office, I can get most anything accepted, and I will consider slowly developing some special line of my own."

Predictably, the chronic starter was excited about his new direction and went on to repeat himself and even to apologize for repeating himself: "If you feel that my letters are too full of the subject and too little concerned with anything else, I must ask your forgiveness beforehand. This is the first plan I have been able to take hold of with all my might, because it is the first that has depended wholly on myself." As for the plan of storming New York City with *Aladdin's Lamp*, he could only confess the error of his anticipation. Besides, he observed, peddling was incompatible with his artistic strengths:

"Here I have been puttering around New York asking this man and that man and the other to consider me, and getting nothing. I can't concentrate with any enthusiasm on a trade that amounts to peddling. All the illustrators of New York are peddlers. Your^ are absolutely helpless till you have a pull and then another and another. I could work my old head off, if I only had a man who would sell the stuff. But though I may conscientiously make my tours, I don't know the arts of blandishment well enough to be a successful drummer. At best I am only a conscientious but enthusiastic agent." Along with asking forgiveness, of course, he asked for: "more money, when it is convenient to send it" (May 17). [Note 1]

Without waiting for a reply to his letter of inquiry, Vachel turned to the task of preparing himself to write "human interest stories" about "the street and town." He intended to focus on the common people, and thus include his democratic ideals as part of his job training. He also decided to begin with a sympathetic audience; and, on May 20, he sent a 14-page manuscript/letter to "Dear Aunt Fannie" (Blair). (Unfortunately, this seems to be the first surviving letter to Frances Hamilton after Vachel's Hiram days, although several others were written.) In his letter, Vachel describes (in what he thought to be journalistic style) the events of May 19, "an exceedingly interesting day." Then, when the letter to Fannie was finished, Vachel copied selected passages verbatim into his "gathered information on Art" notebook, along with a brief entry to explain his frame of mind: "A man must serve a long apprenticeship to Life, before he knows how to Live. If we are to prepare for things worth while, we must have a ripening apprenticeship in many harsh experiences, and many resolute conquests."

For Vachel-the-aspiring-journalist, May 19, 1905, began with a visit to the annual student show at the New York School of Art: "The exhibition at the Chase School, was better than last year at this time. It is a summary of the years\(^\) work, better selected, better arranged than before, and there is pleasure to be found in noting the progress of my friends in the school, since last year. There was one room of decorative designs, one room of drawings from life in charcoal, in which one of the laziest men last year had the best work this. There was one room of portraits and figures in oil, involving some brilliant and promising painting. The next room abounded in compositions in oil and in charcoal, some of them promising, and all of them electrified by the point of view of Mr. Robert Henri. He believes in life, life, nothing but life and the inner soul of things, no matter how ugly or unusual or crude the expression. He never gets tame work from a student, and is by far the most stimulating teacher I ever knew, though I agree with few of his theories. He has done wonders with some of the sleepiest students. He binds every student to himself that passes through the school, and in a few years artistic New York will be made up of Henri's friends and foes. . . . There will be a sharp dividing line," Vachel observed, and he echoed the same opinion on conflict that he had expressed as a student in Chicago: "it will be a great thing for Art. Both armies will have to work hard for the faith that is in them. There is nothing like two balanced parties to keep things lively." There is also no other observation, we should note, that more clearly expresses Uncle Boy's democratic principles.

After additional commentary on the exhibition, Vachel singled out the pen-andink work of his friend, George Richards: "It was the most striking work in the room, and we were very proud of it. He received honorable mention. That is doing remarkably well for a man who graduated valedictorian of Williams College last year. To win a mention in an art school like ours, in one year, in the annual exhibition" (Blair). In his notebook, Vachel added: "Richard's^ work well placed, and plain to be seen, and leading the Illustrations. But every other department had good work, well arranged" ("gathered information on Art").

Following the visit to the show, Vachel had lunch at the exclusive Aldine Club upon the "special Invitation" of G.W. Reynolds, the friend, as we have noted, of Edward Scribner Ames. To Aunt Fannie, Vachel explained: "It has been by Ame's^ urgent insistence that I made the acquaintance of Mr. Reynolds, and tackeled^ him for any old position, from office boy up. But while our aquaintaince^ has grown more intiamate^, Mr. Reynolds has never been able to place me in his firm." Reynolds, it seems, urged his friend's friend to use his executive office when it was available, and also allowed the use of his name as a reference. Over lunch, according to Vachel, "He told me something of the Calendar business, and I told him the story of the boats of the Prophets. That story clinched him. That opened his heart to be sure. He had me in his understanding after that" (May 20, Blair).

2

After lunch, Vachel took the subway to the neighborhood of the Brooklyn Bridge. "I crossed the Bridge and back," he reported to Fannie: "I had been on it in street cars^, but never afoot. It made a tremendous impression on my infant mind. I have no memories of Colorado Mountains to stir me so much. The great harbour^ of New York to the South, with Liberty looking like a Child in the distance. To the East; the City of Brooklyn, and though the bridge is high, one cannot see over it. Way underneath; the little tug boats^ and flat boats look like water bugs." Indeed, Vachel's organizational motif becomes increasingly more clear as he continues to contrast the great and the small. "About the smallest thing on the New York side of the Panorama, is the Times tower [at the time, Manhattan's tallest building], way to the North West, barely peeping above the mass of stone blocks between, the miles of chimneys and roofs. It is about as big as a period at the end of a sentence. Yet when one stands on the Times Building, the Brooklyn Bridge looks like a broken fishnet."

The Times building was to the south. Turning to the north, the would-be journalist observed the Williamsburg Bridge in the distance, "and resolved to try the view from there." On the long walk north, he was alert for any human interest story that might attract the editors of a New York newspaper; and, in keeping with his avuncular side, he centered his attention on the plight of slum children. The theme develops as another contrast, one that we may anticipate. The innate artistry of the children, especially the little girls, is juxtaposed to the social tumult that surrounds them. The following excerpt is from the letter to Aunt Fannie, but Vachel also summarized his experience in his "gathered information on Art" notebook (indicating that he thought his observations might provide material for publication):

There were no women to be seen, but occasionally little girls dragging gunny sacks full of kindling, swiped somewhere. The kindling hunter is an ordinary sight in New York. Wherever a box has been broken, whereever a Bill board has been repaired, wherever a carpenter has left two chips and a splinter and three shavings, the kindling

hunter appears with a bit of rope and a gunny sack. One little girl had a sack so big she could hardly drag it.

There were little girls still smaller, left free from the stern duties of life, who danced to the Hurdy Gurdy, that is, the street piano on wheels. A Dago and his wife generally run these things, and it is the accepted thing that the children of New York, of the slums, shall dance to the Hurdy Gurdy day and evening. It is one of the prettiest and most refreshing sights of the day to see the unconscious matter of fact directness with which the babies begin to dance. There is an alliance between the baby and the Dago. Yet it is always a girl, two girls, that dance. I have never seen the smallest boy dancing to the hurdy gurdy[^]. It is a feminine accomplishment. Once down in front of the Fourteenth Street theatre I saw two girls at least ten years old dance for a passing hurdy gurdy for an hour, while the crowd stayed to watch and the Elevated Railroad roared by. The dance was pensive and slow, stately as a minuet. Those kids were taking their pleasures where they could get them. The streets of New York are the only possible playground for nine tenths of the children. The streets that run lengthwise are given up to traffic. In the older more crowded sections of the city, the famous and infamous East Side, the streets are so narrow, that children, booths, trucks, peddlers are all jammed together.

Vachel followed the shoreline to the Williamsburg Bridge, where he found, in his words to Aunt Fannie, "the bridge way above me, and the foot of it about a quarter of a mile away into the heart of New York. . . . The space under it is given for a few blocks to the children for a playground. First it is dirt. Then there are several blocks of plaster floor. Then it is given over to business. There is a fish market, that smells like blazes, though each cart is heaped with chopped ice and the cement pavement is slushy with it. Then there is a fruit market, and finally the bridge comes down to the ground, and one can climb on." After crossing and recrossing the bridge, noting more of the contrasting ups and downs of the New York City skyline, Vachel walked home along "Avenue A, First Avenue, and on to 56th street." His way took him through "the thickest part of the Ghetto. . . . And," he observed, "what a mess of a place the whole Ghetto was":

Not that it was so very dirty. It was about as clean as could be expected, as clean as a County fair—but supposing one lived ate and slept in a perpetual county[^] fair, where they sold all the neccessities[^] of life from stands smaller than a decent pop corn[^] stand? There were men who evidently lived and sold in the streets all the time, and I don't know what they do when it rains, except squat under their wagons, for the houses are jam full. Trucks of cheap finery, ribbons and laces, Jammed[^] up against little ice wagons, and onion emporiums. These trucks on each side of the streets, in the gutters, and hardly enough room left for wagons to pass. And the sidewalks are narrow, and not only do the people in the stores crowd out into the sidewalks with their potatoes and their apple pies, but there is a system of booths piled against the blank walls wherever there are any. And in between the children play, and two great streams of people pass. The only thing that prevents a massacre of the innocents is that the people are a slow moving sort, everlastingly at it, but in no rush. They are at a sort of perpetual family picnic, and everybody knows everybody else, and everybody has such an ugly face and such an ugly shape, there is no danger of love, jealousy or other inconvenient emotions. Once in a while there is a wonderfully beautiful child. I could tell you all afternoon how hansome[^] one little girl and boy were that I saw.

Their beauty was a spiritual comeliness, they were the descendants of the prophets, not the traders. (Blair)

In all, Fannie's nephew ambled more than ten miles. His experience as a high school walking star was paying dividends (and would continue to pay even greater dividends).

This May 19, though, was not finished. At 8:00 that evening, thanks to the professional connections of a friend named "Parker" (who was an advertising agent for *McClure's Magazine*), the budding feature writer witnessed the newspaper business, literally, from top to bottom. Accompanied by George Richards, Willard Wheeler, and Jack Jones, Vachel followed Parker to the top of the Times building, where, in Vachel's journalistic words, "we looked right down on Broadway":

It was great. The theatres were just out, and how the streets shone. For miles on every side was a wilderness of lights. To the West was the gleaming Hudson, that seemed higher than the house roofs, by some illusion of the night lights. It was a dizzy thing to look down on the creeping streetcars, and the cabs like lightning bugs. The William's Burg^ and Brooklyn bridges were way to the South East, just little nec[k]laces of light in the mist. I never knew there were so many lights in the world as were all over New York, and Brooklyn and Jersey City and Hoboken.

Then we went through the upper rooms in the tower. We saw the library, bigger than that in Hiram College, and all reference books for the office. It included all the bound copies of the Times, way back to the beginning in 1840 something. We examined the first number with some interest. . . .

We went to the Basement and saw the giant presses. They use a long tubular mercury light to work by, which is made by mercury vapor in a vacuum. It gives no red rays and is said to rest the eye. Men who use spectacles all day, take them off to work by this light. I have seen it before, but never observed it closely. It will never be used for ball rooms, for it turns complexions to a seeming yellow, and lips to purple. We looked like a walking morgue beneath it. (Blair)

On May 29, Vachel returned to the Brooklyn Bridge, this time at night (10:30 to 11:30), and he added another observation in his notebook. As before, his interest focused on contrasting extremes, although this time he borrowed an insight from Wordsworth's sonnet, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802": "It was a beautiful night. The bridge was almost deserted of foot passengers. Under the foot passenger walk, were the four railway tracks. The cars went by with tremendous roars. In the intervals of silence, such silence as New York has, I heard my own heart beat—I saw the great City asleep under a scattering of Lights. The East Side, between the two Bridges was a beautiful Brown. The rest of the lands^ was a cold dark blue, the waters were sweet black purple" ("gathered information on Art"). Earlier this same evening, Vachel had finished another letter to "Dear Papa," a letter in which he boasted that he had paid his board with money earned from designing "two menus last week." Also, he thanked his father for supporting the "Newspaper idea." Apparently, then, the return visit to the Brooklyn Bridge reflected Dr. Lindsay's son's excitement over his recent success, as well as his chronic enthusiasm for any new endeavor.

This particular newspaper career, however, ended almost as soon as it began. On the night of May 30-31, Vachel experienced a stunning vision, perhaps caused by his peculiar visual imagination, perhaps caused by the onset of one of his "spells." In any event, his inner parent, his sense of ultimate duty and responsibility, seemingly rebelled against his decision to sell a God-given talent to the world of business. To sacrifice the redeeming message of beauty simply to earn money, the conscience seemed to declare, was to serve Mammon and to deny God:

At half past one this morning my heart is hungry with desire to lay hold of, and live and die with the vision that posesses^ me. I see God in the greatness of his cold high beauty. I understand why the monks have counted their beads, why Michaelangelo^ carved the Night and Morning, and painted the Sibyls. I have seen Beauty that is cold as death, eternal as the voice of God, more to be desired than any earthly fire. There is peace in the shadow of these wings—Oh my God let us attain to them for refreshment and strength, again and again—give me this thing to hold to—let my Rock of Ages be granted to me—if I can only have this vision for a moment every day I can do all things that I have been sent to do. The Beauty that no man can name, deep as the Ocean, high and cold as the stars. For a moment I felt my hands upon the fringes of the robe. I felt the eternal strength of the shadow of the Wings—yet I know it may never never return to me. When I prayed my prayer in the Jungles of heaven—I learned how to repent, how to pray, how to kneel. Yet that vision has been gone for many a day. It may never return. Likewise this one may never return, these words will read cold and dead to me.

But—the coldest part of Keats—of which Arnold speaks—the principle of "Eternal Beauty in All things," the part in Keats that stands higher than the bloom and the ripeness—to serve this thing day and night, to feel the secret understanding with the spirit that will enable me to go for strength, and cool many foolish passions, this is my prayer.

I have seen my God face to face—how can I blaspheme Him ever?

Why am I made to forget what I love, to lose the dream I worship, to be stupid, to be shameful, to be hot with fool fire, to be paralyzed by the struggle for life, to be daunted by the stupidity of men?

God make me strong—help me to look you always in the face and see your stern eyes on my soul. Then if I am weak, I can wait for strength, then if I am wounded, I can be healed, then if I am still selfish, I can at least be worth something to men—serving my God, I can serve them. ("gathered information on Art")

After such an astonishing vision, further blasphemy was impossible. Temporarily, at least, the artistic soul could not compromise, could not debase itself with journalism. (By mid-summer, though, Vachel was again considering compromise, as he speculated on a career as a newspaper art critic. Indeed, in Uncle Boy's early life, visions were truly spectacular but not absolute, not infallible.)

Only days after his face-to-face encounter with God, in what seemed to be nothing less than a profound miracle, God seemingly answered His suppliant's prayers. The venerable Eli Vaughn Zollars, former Hiram College President and the Lindsay family's longtime pastor and friend, had accepted the presidency of Texas Christian University (Waco). Prexy Zollars needed an art lecturer, and he was willing to consider Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay's son, even though the son lacked a college degree. Thus, Vachel no longer felt obligated to train himself as a journalist. With parental encouragement, he

spent the summer, 1905, filling notebooks with observations on art, on artists, and on what John Keats refers to as the history of "Eternal Beauty in All things." Uncle boy hoped he was preparing to lecture young students on art history at Texas Christian University. He would indeed lecture; but his venue would be New York City, not Waco, Texas.

3

Although summer, 1905, began with cause for concern, overall it turned out to be one of the happiest times in Uncle Boy's life. With five younger men, all members of the "Rutgers Club," he rented a house at 134 West 86th Street. Using the initials of their first names, the six friends called their establishment the "NAHEGO CLUB" and purchased stationery that boasted the new title. Their names are listed at the top of each page: Orville G. Bennet, Jr., Arthur G. Blaisdell, Nicholas V. Lindsay, and George M. Nicholls, (members of the "Board of Directors"); Eugene Beal Peirsel, "Managing Director"; and Harold Mills Salisbury, "Assistant Managing Director." To Aunt Fannie, Vachel explained: "We are spending the summer in the house here, hiring a nigger cook, and doing it so far at less expense than a boarding house, with lots more room and facilities impossible at the price with any other arrangement. The fellows are younger than I am, kids in everything but business. This paper is part of their youthfulness. The name of the club is made up of the first initials of the members. These things are none of my doing. I suppose if I write home on this paper Papa will again infer I am wildly extravagant." In spite of appearances, though, Vachel claimed: "I never got so much for my money before in New York or Chicago" (June 29, Blair). Part of what he got for his money, we may suspect, was the pleasure of sharing living quarters with "kids." [Note 2]

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ORVILLE G. BENNET, JR.
ARTHUR G. BLAISBELL
NICHOLAS V. LINDSAY
GEORGE M. NICHOLLS

NAHEGO CLUB

134 WEST 88TH STREET

AMANGING DIRECTOR

Wanging Director

Assistant Managing Director

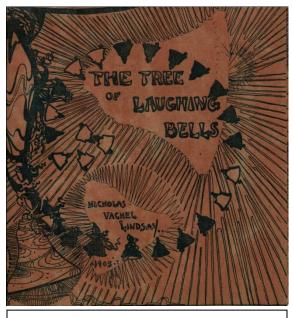
Assistant Managing Director

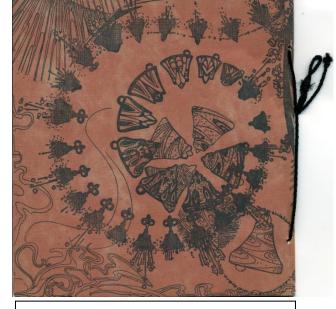
WANGE OF CLUB

134 WEST 88TH STREET

In addition to his club friends, Vachel's social life was enhanced by one of his favorite Springfield confidantes, Mary Humphrey, who had chosen to spend part of her summer in New York City. He also had occasion to exchange ideas with fellow artists Ethel Mars and Maude Hunt Squire. "I am going to eat with Miss Mars and Miss Squire tomorrow night," Vachel wrote to Mary Humphrey: "I am so glad they are here. I need them awfully" (June 8, Lindsay Home). Characteristically, he craved female inspiration, especially since breaking his engagement with Ruth Wheeler. Humphrey, Mars, and Squire provided some relief: "I hardly had time to discover I was lonely till late this summer," Vachel confessed to another favorite confidante, Susan Wilcox (Chénetier 14). [Note 3]

In Ethel Mars, Vachel found not only inspiration but an answering voice, especially on the subject of private publication. Mars encouraged Vachel's intent to issue his own art books: "the body of the book shall be pictures printed by Wood blocks^, by a process Ethel Mars has taught me. The entire volume will be a hand product, except maybe a page containing one poem, that shall string the pictures together, and the cost will merely be that of the raw material which will be not more than fifty cents" (August 24). In fact, Mars was likely involved in another ambitious effort. Without informing his parents, Vachel wrote to Frances Elizabeth Austen Frazee, his Indiana grandmother, and asked, not for fifty cents but for fifty dollars, to pay for five hundred professionally printed booklets of *The Tree of Laughing Bells*. The publisher's name does not appear on the booklet, but it was likely Louis Goerck, who earlier in the year had printed "We Who Are Playing" and "The Cup of Paint." Several of the hand-tied "Tree" booklets survive. The text of the poem is enclosed in red-paper wrappers, and Vachel's pen-and-ink illustration, printed by Mars's wood-block method, appears on the front cover. Each copy has (or had) its own mailing envelope.





Front Cover

Rear Cover, with String Tie

In a "July 5, 1905," entry in his notebook, Vachel summarized his enterprise and recorded his intent: "Up to this date—500 copies of the Tree of Laughing Bells have been printed. Grandma has paid the bill of the printer—\$43.63 and incidentals—string for tying, envelopes etc. bringing the total of fifty dollars. This payment she made a gift but I consider a loan. . . . Scribners^ have consented to display five copies, through the courtesy of Mr. Kingsley. Brentano twenty five^, through the courtesy of Mr. Volney Streames, Dodd Mead through the courtesy of Mr. Avery" ("January 19, 1903"). On another page of this same notebook, Vachel reported that Dodd Mead had accepted ten copies. Brentano's apparently promised the author twenty-five cents for each copy sold; the other two bookstores promised fifteen cents per copy. There is no record, though, as to the selling price and no record that anyone realized any profit. On the other hand, there is ample evidence, as we shall see, that the author owned hundreds of copies of his

booklet a year or more after it was printed. Faithful Aunt Fannie was her nephew's best customer: she bought twenty copies (June 29, Blair).

Studying art, however, not selling art, was Vachel's primary concern this 1905 summer. July 30 (on "NAHEGO CLUB" stationery), he wrote to advise "Papa and Mama" that "Last week and week before were about the happiest I have had for some time. I wrote the first draft of seven lectures on the History of American Art—about 135 pages in all, and the next two weeks I want to revise them." The work was accomplished at the Lenox Library and, more frequently, at Columbia University's Avery (Art) Library: "These places are perfect mines of gold for my purposes. If I cannot give these talks in Texas, they may help me to a position in New York. With a little more work I will have something useful in a variety of ways." Initially, the study focused on Lorado Taft's seminal book, *The History of American Sculpture* (1903): "Taft was writing it while I was in Chicago," Vachel explained. In the meantime, his study methods were also reminiscent of Chicago and, earlier, Hiram. He recorded detailed summaries, interspersed with personal comments, in small dime-store notebooks, all of which survive (Virginia). Certain themes in letters to Springfield also remained unchanged: "Seventeen dollars is soon due here, for household expenses, for which I will be very grateful" (July 30).

Throughout the summer, Vachel complained to his parents that Prexy Zollars did not offer "much encouragement," though, as of July 30, he remained hopeful. As an alternative plan, he suggested: "I may try for a job as a secondary art Critic on one of the papers as art Reporter, if the President cannot work the president of the board." Five days later (August 4), he added: "Thank you very much for the check. I also want to thank you for trying so hard with President Zollars for me. Your letter has given me more hope than I have had for some time, of making the thing go. My attitude tward^ it is entirely practical—it is an actual opportunity, and my living, if it comes. Bill [Wheeler] has some very generous dreams of making me famous here this fall, and some rather elaborate plans, not neccessarily^ dreams, and there is no doubt every year in New York counts. . . . As I have said it must be some sure thing that takes me away from here. It will bust things up for Bill a good deal if I go, for in a peculiar way our fortunes are tied together."

To his parents, Vachel did not elaborate on what "peculiar way" his fortunes were tied to those of Willard Wheeler. To Aunt Fannie, however, he was explicit: "Now I will tell you a dead secret. Bill Wheeler, my chum, during his present holiday in Springfield, has written a novel, of which your humble servant is the hero. I really do not know how heroic I appear in it, it may make a monkey of me, for all I know. I know Bill well enough to know the book will be spirited and amusing. He fondly hopes it will usher us both into fame. In that case the 'Tree of Laughing Bells' will be sold out to a hungry public. I will be carried into prosperity by the rising tide of enthusiasm for Bill and all that concerns him. Sometimes I think it will be as well, in any event, that I am in Texas. Bill and I might break each others^ hearts quarreling over the glory. I have a mild curiosity to see that book, and I wish it all success, I think I can live down any reflections it may cast upon me. I stipulated that Bill should not give my name and address, that he should change the color of my eyes and hair. Now do not let these facts outside Rush and Fayette Counties [Indiana]" (August 16, Blair). Unfortunately, Vachel's "dead secret" does indeed seem dead: the fate of the Wheeler manuscript remains unknown. [Note 4]

Meanwhile, all summer, even with the uncertainty concerning Waco, Vachel's messages to his parents continued to be serious and self-confident: "I have the certain conviction of success here, if I have time enough. As to the newspaper business, I would undertake it not as a life work, but as a means of getting on. If I worked into the field of art Criticism as I would hope to do if I went into it, I think there are prospects at the end. You and the other people do not see that Texas or newspapers are to me temporary outlets—my main purpose remains unchangable. However I may veer as to my outward plans—within I have only one purpose—to create in Art and Letters, to draw and write works that have been planned for many a day. That is my one duty to myself and my Maker, Texas or New York. And I want to do it independently. I must earn the money." If his fate were Texas, he mused, "I shall probably be more creative"; but he vowed that he would return to New York "with more and better work with which to storm the town, in few years or many. I am not through with New York" (August 4). [Note 5]

On August 16, the ambitious art history lecturer reported to Springfield that he had sent a typewritten copy of his first lecture to Texas: "American Art 1776-1876." Prexy Zollars' board was to decide on the lectureship on September 4, and Vachel was working at a feverish pace: "I have now completely polished and finished three lectures, one hundred pages, and I have five unpolished ones I will put through as fast as I can, and if I get no favorable answer by September 4, or a little later, I will be prepared to hunt in some other direction. The lectures are constructed with sufficient care to have staying qualities, they can be used somewhere beside Texas, sometime. The field is very interesting, and I am happy every moment I write. I write with more facility and directness than this time last year. As a matter of fact I have never felt happier in my life than in the midst of this work. I wake up eager for it every morning. I am in excellent health, and as long as I do this, I feel that I am justifying my existence, at least the money nightmare does not haunt me, for I feel I have a right to ask you to be patient with me, I am doing my best." Olive, he noted, "wrote me urging me to stay in New York, which is such a pleasure to hear that I hate to write to her about Texas." Anyway, he expressed amusement at the fact that "if I go or stay, somebody will be pleased" (August 16).

Meanwhile, life at the NAHEGO house remained peaceful and interesting. "Our house life is very harmonious and homelike, we have pleasant quarters, and the various members of the Rutgers club that pass through the city stop to get acquainted, and spend the night." One of these friends, a man named Whiteside, took the club (in Vachel's words) "on an all day cruise on his steam yacht, from the Columbia Yacht Club, of which he is a member, which has its house near here, on the Hudson, to some place on Long Island where we saw the Yacht races." More concisely (but predictably), the Lindsay son's letter ends: "I need seventeen dollars, at your convenience" (August 16).

4

In spare moments this summer, Vachel was rethinking the creative work in *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?* He felt that his cosmogony was perhaps unduly cheerless, and he sought ways to temper the harsh themes of crucifixion, rejection, and isolation. In a reflective letter to Susan Wilcox (August 16), he declared his continuing need for her support: "You help me so much to sustain a mood that I myself desire to keep. What I am with you, is what I consider it my business to be all the time." He wished that they could

talk for an evening, as letters were "no satisfaction." But circumstances forced him to write, since, in his words, "I know you want to know my plans":

I suppose most people would not call them plans at all. Aside from the question of fussing around for some money, which nearly drives me crazy sometimes, and for which I have no really sensible plans, I have a rather clear cut notion of how I intend to develop.

I feel I was on the right track for ultimate results in Aladdin's lamp, it indicates several things I will ripen and carry further. In poetry, the system of the Universe set down in it, after ripening, (the Jungles of Heaven and all that), shall some day see their^ place in rhyme. It is quite an undertaking, but I have already ripened the system of things, the cosmogony there laid down. The meaning changes with experience, but the elements of the spectacle remain the same. I may some day be able to state those elements with power, and with simplicity, and they can serve other men as they have served me. In short, in poetry I anticipate carrying farther the promise of the Tree of Laughing Bells and Lucifer. My note books are full of the plot, I really see myself much readier to put these vast things into rhyme than last year, and by a proper pruning and simplicity, make the pictures plain. I have arrived at a point where the overwhelming gloom of the conception is mended, without impairing the pictorial value. With leisure and a free conscience, I feel I could embark on the enterprise. With money on my conscience, I cannot steal time to write poetry.

In fact, he asserted, he had not written a poem or drawn a picture for "six months," although he had decided his personal preference for "Art or letters. . . . For a time at least I see the thing now settled, and I frankly conceive that I have more to say in poetry than art." And he was eager to begin: "I am certainly hungry for another period of creation. I would make most any sacrifice to obtain it. I am not anxious for anything so much as the leisure and the free conscience to work out these plans for books and poetry. I am fairly bursting with six months of pent up energy in these matters" (Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 10-12).

Some of Vachel's revised thinking, what he referred to as the "ripening" of his cosmogony, survives, as he filled the end pages of his "January 19, 1903" notebook with his speculations. In a piece entitled "The Lamp Found," for example, the "overwhelming gloom of the conception" is at least partially "mended" by the author's imaginative realization of a democratic art-millennium, the realization of one of his dearest dreams:

Conceive of a land where the Poets are the Politicians, the actors are the Preachers, the Musicians are the only warriors, and the only battels^ questions of technique and beauty, a land where the most private citizen is an artist, and life and Art are one.

The Counsellor finds the lamp burning beneath the amaranth, and round it ranged all the artists of the Universe. He brings them back to America, the tree of Laughing bells is set up, the bells distributed, then the artists set about to reform the government.

A few pages later the dreamer suggests the means of putting his hopeful insights into rhyme: "Poem—The finding of the sons of art in the midst of the Jungles who have still another method for bringing the Millenium^. It will not be a city built by genii, but by the sons of Art who are only waiting for their plans to mature."

Although he understood the nature of his millennial goal, Vachel was forced to confess to himself, after months of trying to find a publisher for Aladdin's Lamp, that he did not know how to induce business-oriented Americans to accept his life's dream: "We must have leisure that is not restless nor disapaited, nor careless, nor empty, nor thoughtful. The leisure of the subjective sensuous dreamer, who feeds his art soul on soft colors and plastic mysteries. How can the nervous American be taught to do this? How can we create a clean, earnest class of men sufficient to do this, sufficient to form a really deep art?" A PERSONAL art-millennium, on the other hand, could be imagined. In Vachel's words, it would be: "a place prepared for me-a mansion not made with hands—endless halls—every wall new pictures—I hand the verses and pictures out the window and in return I am brought bread and meat. But I am absolutely unmolested." The expectation of actualizing a DEMOCRATIC art-millennium, however, proved to be frustrating. How could one persuade nervous Americans to visit the "mansion not made with hands"? How could one coax nervous Americans to support someone who lived in such a mansion? How could one convince nervous Americans that they themselves should seek to live in such a mansion?

A few months after this notebook dream, as we shall see, Vachel adopted a different but logical approach. He abandoned all thought of residing in a mansion not made with hands, and instead he tramped to places where nervous Americans chose to live. He brought with him multiple copies of creative works, such as *The Tree of Laughing Bells*, works which he sought to trade for "bread and meat." Rather than waiting futilely for nervous Americans to come to him, so that he could hand his work through the windows of a mansion not made with hands, he set out to confront nervous Americans, distributing his work to people living in mansions made with hands. The principle remained the same: trading food for the soul in order to earn food for the body. Seven years later, in 1912, he would set out on a third such tramping expedition, still attempting to trade rhymes for bread. After all, when the mountain refuses to visit the prophet, the prophet senses what he needs must do, but now we are ahead of the story.

In summer, 1905, the potential realization of a democratic art-millennium is the primary "ripening" aspect of Vachel's rethinking. And, in accord with what he related to Susan Wilcox, his revised ideas were generally positive. One note of melancholy remained, though; and it was a significant note, especially if we recall the author's identification with Lucifer. At the end of time, Vachel mused in his notebook, hell and its inhabitants would be redeemed: "all Hell rises made strong and healed of sin—its dark palaces crumble and there fly rejoicing with new hearts the soldiers of Satan—the demons within the demons cast out." However, when "Hell is wiped away and the great deep beneath Hell is rolled back— . . . there is revealed the white corpse of Lucifer, the one unarisen, because of the irrevocable curse that followed his intolerable song. And Satan His king mourns above him—the last to remember and regret, and sets his own dim crown upon the head of the dead, as being one more worthy—and nought is left in the deep but the mourner whom no wine can comfort and the dead whom no blood can raise." In his innermost thoughts, anyway, Vachel continued to wallow in the comforts of Romantic melancholy. Indeed, not one of this summer's reconsiderations appears in later published work. The aspiring missionary angel seems to have returned, finally, to the "overwhelming gloom" of his original vision.

At the time of their conception, Vachel was unable to pursue his new thoughts artistically because, he advised Susan Wilcox, he was struggling to take care of "business." With wry irony, he commented: "It is pleasanter to be bold with the Universe than with men. It seems I am doomed to go out snatching money from men who do not want me to have it. I have got to make faces, and stand on my head, then pass the hat. . . . Business is with me, like Latin and anatomy were. I have the sand to *let my own plans alone* for the sake of business, but never the nerve to attack business with a whole heart." He repeated that he had "not written a poem or made a picture for six months, I have conscientiously abstained from doing what I have been hungering and thirsting to do. I have been up and down the city begging, begging and peddling for work, I have tried every possible line, yet lots of the time with the same indifference and paralysis of the mind with which I used to look my old Latin books in the face, hour after hour. I have done a little drawing and writing, but not with my whole soul, merely as an opiate when the world became a jangle."

He insisted that his ultimate purpose remained unchanged: "There is only one plan I have, however I may seem to twist and turn to superficial observers. I want to earn leisure and solitude, that I may do the highest honor possible to the dreams that beset me. I have only one duty—to give them form and setting, putting my whole strength into them." Of course, he speculated to Wilcox, he could always go home to perform his life's work. But the thought of returning to Springfield, at least in 1905, was more than a little distasteful: "that is a terrible imposition. It is sordid to take shelter and money from those that will consider your success failure, and your failure success. I hate myself for that. I am my father's curse."

The possibility of the Texas Christian art lectureship provided some hope, and Vachel advised Wilcox that "the sharp shame has been gone for the little while I am preparing these lectures. I feel I am doing my best, and I have a right to ask the old folks to be patient. My mother seems to think Zollars will give me the place. I am not too hopeful, but till it is decided, I can at least have a respite at entirely congenial work. And I am getting in some good licks. I am happy and busy as a bumble bee. It is curious how easily we are pleased sometimes" (August 16, Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 11-13).

The "old folks" also were pleased, and Kate suggested to her son that his lectures focus on art in the home. He answered with enthusiasm: "As to the preaching the gospel of the simple artistic home, my lectures shall abound with the theme, all I can discover on the subject I hope to set forth. We can come to common ground here, and for that very reason a family campaign in the matter is the more desirable. It is pleasant when we all speak the same thing. There is a great body of literature on the subject, the followers of Ruskin and Morris in England have threshed the question over for these two generations, they have gone to the bottom of it, and all I would need would be a lectureship, to make it worth my while to go to the bottom of them. I do not want to spin it out of my inner consciousness. I want to become expert in what has been already done." He even claimed that under the proper circumstances he would deliver his lectures in Springfield, "after I have made a start of a success somewhere else. . . . Springfield is waiting for assurance that we boys in the big towns are coming home with the stamp of success. Otherwise Springfield is not smitten. The tyranny of the majority rules, the small town desires to vote with the great city." Ironically, the Lindsay son would discover the truth of his

words in a little less than three years, when he returned to Springfield in the summer, 1908, most decidedly without "the stamp of success."

In his 1905 letter, meanwhile, Vachel altered his mother's suggestions to serve his own purposes: "The greatest preaching an artist can do is to do his work with his hands, and all I desire is a chance to begin. It is folly for me to preach craftsmanship unless I am willing, like Morris, to be a craftsman. I have some very definite plans for making high class hand made books, at a most moderate price, as a matter of fact I have made two already, and all I desire is the opportunity to go into the matter deeply, and study out all the problems till I evolve the real work of art. . . . With the whole family agitating for craftsmanship, and I devoting myself to illustrating the process, the books ought to have a demand after while." As for the content of the books, Vachel's plan naturally reflected his avuncular side. He proposed that the family press begin with "fairy tales for children, or something like that, fairy tales in pictures": [Note 6]

That certainly would be a wholesome adjunct to your perfectly artistic home. Other books, as I get a little income, could contain my selected verses, privately printed, and bound by my hand and decorated with a hand wrought cover. I am in no hurry to rush my poems before the public. I am^ merely the desire to print enough to keep them from being lost. I have the egotism to consider them valuable, and I have perfect faith they will take their rank in time. I will be perfectly content to print them thus and move on to graver issues. And if the books shall ultiamately^ contain deep world stirring ideas inspired by my mother, or even her exhortations, written by herself and carefully supervised as to the proper artistic printing by her son, the world will be the better for them.

Typically, Vachel warmed to his subject. He pointed out that Mama and Papa, Olive, Paul, Professor Wakefield, President Zollars—all the family and their best friends wrote memorable prose. Each had something original to say and each could be privately published in the manner of the Pre-Raphaelites. Modestly, Vachel reduced his own role to that of illustrator: "All I would ask would be the department of decorative design, book covers etc." Finally, in spite of his ebullience, Kate's son admitted: "These are merely vistas in the dim future." He was absorbed with his "vistas," however; and, predictably, he wrote several more pages on the "chief charm" of an artistic plan that might provide "a chance for family cooperation." He went so far as to solicit the opinion of the business mind in the family, dear Papa: "I hope this letter will put hope into him. I think it has elements of wisdom, and would be very glad to hear just what he thinks about it." Tactfully, though, Papa's son assured his parents that he was dedicated to finishing the business of the hour: "I have at present five lectures finished—173 pages. I may write one more, but shall give up most of my time to studying architecture" (August 24). [Note 7]

In the back of his notebook ("January 19, 1903"), Vachel recorded other dreams, especially his changing ideas concerning the cosmogony of the "Map of the Universe." He wrote at length of walking in the Jungles of Heaven; speaking to the "wild men" who lived there, men who ate "locust and wild honey"; journeying to the empty Thrones of the Trinity, led by "John the Baptist and Isaiah"; encountering "all the prophets" assembled at the Amaranth vine, eating its buds and drinking honey from "the little river" that flows behind the Thrones; listening as Isaiah commands the prophets to collect the blood of the

crucified angels; watching as the blood is poured "on the roof of Hell" and the Demons "are sent to the stars redeemed, to be crucified after the manner of the Angels, and nought is left but the under-Hell, and the cold everlastingly dead Lucifer with Satan mourning over Him." When "the Blood of Angels and Crucified Demons" is mingled "completely, then Isaiah rises to prophecy\(^\), and cries out—This is the throne of Christ, this mingled blood of Hell and Heaven." The blood/wine is poured down from Heaven, and God's messenger concludes: "That is the Coming of Christ to the Earth."

A few days later Vachel added notes for another dream creation: "A doctrinal Poem—'God is a creeping fire'—Let that be the first line of each stanza." The proposed last line of each stanza, though, is more revealing than the first line: it reflects the fact that the author was not entirely self-confident. The last line of each stanza would be a continuing prayer: "God help us all to be brave." [Note 8]

5

In a notebook entry dated "August 29," Vachel pondered the importance of dreams themselves, echoing the philosophy of Henry Adams and the imagery of Charles Algernon Swinburne: "As for the discussion of the wings of the morning, let it be a clear exposition of the cold uncanny wonders of late science, and a tolerable detailed review of their action. Set against this, briefly, the wonders of dreaming since the world began. Show how the wonderland of Science is colder than the garden of Proserpina after all. And it is worth while if one cannot have imaginative experiences of their\[^\lambda\] own, to lay hold on those of other men" ("January 19, 1903"). The dream of a family Pre-Raphaelite press, though, was not shared by Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay. Both wrote to tell their son exactly what they thought of his idea. The dreamer was hurt, and he made little attempt to hide his resentment: "My last letter was merely an answer to Mama's from camp. She has evidently lost the mood in which she wrote then, so she had better burn the letter, and not worry over it" (August 31).

Actually, this response is from the second letter that Vachel mailed to "Dear Papa and Mama" on August 31, 1905. His parents not only rejected the printing-press dream but Mama also suggested that he was wasting money that he ought to use to buy clothes. Papa added a comment on the extravagance of a "retinue" of servants at the NAHEGO Club boarding house. Vachel's first letter was an attempt to justify his situation: "I don't feel the need of clothes, especially. I have spent most of the sixteen extra dollars a month on books, that I need more than the clothes. I have not bought books for some time, I have read Richard's^ all the year, but he is in Bayport [Long Island] now. . . . The house is very economically managed. One woman here cooks and washes and does everything else for from six to ten people. We get the house very reasonably or we would not be able to do it. We have no 'retinue' The gist of the matter is, you are about as impatient for me to be off your hands, as I am to get off. I assure you I will breathe a great sigh of relief and self respect when that time comes."

All the same, the parental remarks continued to chafe. Later the same day, the Lindsay son mailed his second letter, parts of which are missing, likely destroyed by Mama. The surviving pages amount to part explanation, part fulmination: "Please allow me to explain. Papa sneers at an imaginary 'retinue' of servants in this place. I wrote my

letter in confusion this morning. I suppose I rewrote that a dozen times to no advantage. . . . We have a small boy for the chores, but it is none of my doing, it was an idea of the management, and they undertook to have him only because the cook threatened to leave without help. They agreed not to raise the rate, and have not, so I could not object, being in no way responsibile. I assure you the boy helps the cook, and I have nothing to do with him. I assure you also the only way to get cheaper living, is to be absolutely alone, in a very low quarter of the city. I have set the date, October the first, and intend to abide by it. As a matter of— " [the next page is missing].

Apparently, Papa had made other critical comments, including one about Vachel's friend, pastor Charles Clayton Morrison. What is left of this second letter, anyway, ends with bitter sarcasm: "I am so glad to hear that Morrison is a failure, and that all my ancestors were impractical, visonary\(^\) and egotistical. Please give me more on these themes. I am sure my ancestors ought to be ashamed of themselves. Its\(^\) a pity they cannot see the dreadful results of all their bad habits in me and my parents. I am sure I would change my ancestors if I could. If I could only have been descended from the humble, rather than the proud, the businesslike rather than the visonary\(^\). I am ashamed of myself, heartily!" The rest of the letter is missing, and the proud son seems not to have written his parents again until October 16, when, as we shall see, he was intent on reconciliation.

Notwithstanding Mama and Papa's comments about the "impractical, visonary" and egotistical," Vachel did little to curb his imagination (although he became increasingly more cautious about sharing his dreams with the "old folks" at home). On September 4, in the privacy of his "January 19, 1903" notebook, he recorded an insight that would soon play an important role in his decision as to what he wanted to do with his life:

I begin to discover a new thing—that when a poem has worn itself out upon you, because you read it in solitude, if you read it to your sympathetic neighbor, most of the old pleasure returns and some new treasures are won because of subtleties of interpretation rising within you, as his soul enters into yours. The soul of the listener seems to enter your body, you have his fresh eyes and ears, and so with a series of really sympathetic friends, the enthusiasm can be almost perpetually renewed. This must have been the joy of the trubadors, who sang the same love songs all over Europe, yet each new lady gave the old song new blood. And likewise it must have been and is the joy of a great actor, he never repeats himself because an audience never repeats itself.

To an altruist or the pious and orthodox, accustomed to glittering generalities about sympathy, and brotherly love, and the beatitudes of unselfishness, all this may be very plain. But to the selfish artist, egotistical and working from within, this thing comes only as the result of experience, and is by no means to be taken for granted. There are noble frauds in the world, but this axiom is not a noble fraud, but a true saying—it is worth while to read poetry to friends who can understand, and only by reading to others can poetry be made always new.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the importance of this notebook entry in regard to Vachel's life for the next fifteen or more years. His letters are filled with accounts of

reciting poems aloud for friends and acquaintances, eagerly seeking reactions and then, more often than not, "correcting" works in the light of those reactions.

The same day as the above notebook entry, September 4, the Texas Christian governing board met to decide the fate of the university's art-history lectureship. Also on this day, Vachel paid the rent for his final two weeks at the NAHEGO boarding house. As of September 20, he and his friends were forced to move. October 1, the date that Dr. Lindsay's boy agreed to end his financial assistance from home, loomed less than four weeks away. If he found no work by October 1, he likely would have to return to Springfield. His one prospect seemed to be Prexy Zollars; but, as of September 15, Zollars had not communicated his board's decision. Still, Vachel was hopeful. "I have a course of lectures accepted by the Y.M.C.A. here, in case Zollars fails me in Texas," he related to Aunt Fannie, "and I have prospects of having the course accepted by others. . . . I have high hopes that I am on the right track in this lecture business. If I once get well started on something that will bring an income I can develop my other work on the side, for the love of it, with no commercial considerations. As a matter of fact, these lectures once well started, will be merely the giving out of studying I must do anyway, to progress" (September 15, 1905, Blair).

With Aunt Fannie, Vachel also shared his pride in the fact that Robert Henri, according to George Richards, gave his New York School of Art class "quite a talk on my work [The Tree of Laughing Bells], ten minutes or so, and I feel now I can make a judicious use of his name, in hunting work, though I hope not to overdo it." In later years, Hamilton included her nephew's good news in Ancestral Lines, with understandable exaggeration. Henri, she claimed, "devoted an entire class hour in expounding this poem as an inspiration to his class. He saw the beauty, the poetry, and the wonderful imagination it portrayed, and was pleased for an opportunity to show honor to one of his pupils, a courtesy Mr. Lindsay highly appreciated" (452-453). [Note 9]

Despite his good news and "high hopes," Vachel grew increasingly desperate as the summer, 1905, came to a close. The following December 3, he confessed as much to Susan Wilcox: "My life has certainly been rich in experience this fall. This summer I swore softly to myself I would either get some kind of work by October first, or go into the river. And I most decidedly meant it. I was near crazy. . . . And Nicholls one of those with whom I had been rooming all summer, had been running a gas tubing factory. I had no special notions of what that might be, and it was not till about September 20 that I tackeled^ him on the subject. Up to that time President Zollars of Texas Christian University had more or less promised me a place lecturing. But not hearing from the President by the Twentieth, I tackeled^ Nicholls, and when he found me willing to do simple stupid manual labor, in fact, preferring it, he took me up at once, and for October and most of November I worked in his factory ten hours a day and never enjoyed anything more in my life" (Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 15-16). Although we have no record, the Texas Christian lectureship had been decided, and obviously Prexy Zollars and his friend's son had not carried the day. [Note 10]

On October 16, about the time Vachel received his first paycheck from the Nicholls Gas Tubing Company, he was ready to seek reconciliation with his parents. It was his first letter home since August 31, and he clearly relished his new independence: "Physically, owing to the absolutely favorable conditions, I am way above par. I was

never so vigorous in my life, my general nervous condition is splendid, and for many reasons I cannot help but be happy. My old problems, so far as New York goes, are past. I have entered upon an absolutely new and surprising experience, day and night." The occasion for this letter, though, was not entirely happy. Vachel had learned that, after months of negotiations, "the executive committee of the Foreign Christian Missionary Society" finally had agreed to appoint Olive and Paul Wakefield as medical missionaries to China (Lindsay-Wakefield 88). The missionaries themselves were enthused, but the decision initially distressed both Papa and Mama. After all, they had already buried three children, and now their elder daughter was intent on living in a semi-barbarous country halfway around the world. To make matters more disheartening, Olive was three months' pregnant with her first child. Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay visualized only tragedy, and they were not reluctant to share their fears. For his part, their son wrote to offer what comfort he could:

I would liked to have had a good talk with the Paul and Olive before they started, but it seemed to me impossible to make the trip. It has taken so long and cost so much patience and sweat and heartache on all our parts, for me to get even the little hold I have here that I ought not to let go, even to say goodby to those people. I think I am working along lines much nearer to your ideals than you expected, and I am mighty glad to realize it.

I do not want there to be only an emptiness when these people go. I want to turn over a new leaf, and be more of a son than I have been and carry part of the burden and be a comforter as much as I can. I cannot come home right away but I want you to be expecting me within a year. I am planning to visit as soon as I feel I leave a well established work behind me, that will be a credit to all of us.

I want to be a steady comfort and a help. I want to live a life you can enjoy hearing about and I want to tell you all about it. . . . Now lets^ be good to each other. Don't leave me out, I am not leaving you out. I want to be as much to you in your troubles as I possibly can. I want to be a loving a faithful and a creditable child to you, and if we cannot think alike, we must agree to disagree, and love each other anyhow. I want to be true to all of you, Olive and Paul and Papa and Mama, and this in spite of the fact I cannot think the way any of you do. It must just be trusting and loving all the way round. Nothing would make me happier than to feel my work here is a comfort to you. (October 16)

Writing to a trusted confidante like Aunt Fannie on the same subject, Vachel was more candid: "The good news from Olive and Paul puts new ginger into me. I also have my work, and I want to do mine as earnestly and thoroughly as they will theirs. I feel their chivalry and their romantic courage. Missions may be a forlorn hope, but they are all the more magnificent. I only hope I will be able to help them here, and hold a rope as it were. It is a great pleasure to live up to ones^ convictions, and I respect those of my sister and brother-in-law, however I differ from them. There is no luxury like fanatacism^, if it is in a high cause" (September 15, 1905, Blair). To the missionaries themselves, he sent congratulations in his own inimitable manner. He wired a simple but cryptic message: "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (Lindsay-Wakefield 88). Olive and Paul had finally won a long battle, and their efforts were reminiscent of the Browning poem that Vachel saw as an emblem of his own struggles. [Note 11]

Two weeks after the conciliatory letter to his parents, on Sunday, October 29, Vachel was as good as his word. He wrote a detailed account, chronicling the everyday events of his life of labor, beginning with his new address, "One, West Eighty Second," in a boarding house called "The Rutledge": "One more week has ended propitiously so far as the New York battle is concerned. I really feel that if all my life I had nothing harder to undertake, I would live the happiest kind of a life. I never was so strong since I grew up. The whole regime[^] seemes[^] just the right sort to exercise the whole man, strengthen and recuperate him. My alarm clock goes off at six thirty, and I get up in my little room where I sleep alone. That is because the Scotchman [MacClain] I slept across the hall with was almost kicked out of bed by your well meaning son, and the fellows have literally given me a wide birth though sleeping-room is at a premium in our establishment Well, I rise as six thirty, take a nice big bath, because the water in all these apartments is always red-hot from a common boiler, and I do enjoy a hot bath and a hard rub. Then I go down to breakfast, which is in the white little dining room in the floor below, which the fellows say looks like a ship's cabin. We have a floor and a half in our apartments. Well, I eat breakfast-food or oatmeal, biscuits, a bit of meat and coco[^], and put my two sandwiches in my pocket which Madaline[^] the cook puts by my plate, tied up in white paper. Then I walk two blocks to the ninth avenue Elevated, and ride on to thirty fourth street, and walk three blocks more to the Nicholls' tubing works, arriving at 7:30."

He changed into "some overalls" loaned by Nicholls, and "a soft shirt, dressing in the back room, where I keep a piece of soap also, and a towel and my lunch. . . . Nicholls, the boss arrives about half an hour later. He is son of the owner, who lives in Cleveland. Nicholls is a member of the club [NAHEGO], and gave me the situation. I have a good deal the sort of work I had at Marshall Fields[^], but stand it a lot better; I carry gas tubing, rubber tubing that is, tied up in bunches of twenty five. They vary in length from two to twenty feet, and I handle about four kinds of tubing, single dip black special, single dip black diamond, double dip three eighths and double dip half inch. I put them away on shelves, and take them out again to fill orders, using my arms a great deal. Its^ healthy mild exercise all day, and I am not tired at night. Frank, the man who packs up the goods after I put it out on the counter, is a very good fellow. He has been with the company seventeen years. I never thought much more of anybody." Vachel went on to describe how he helped Gus, the driver, load his truck twice a day: "I have got so I can put a barrel of tubing in a wagon by myself without winking. It does not take a bit of trouble. About once a week Gus and I go over to a cellar about two blocks off and roll up a bale of cotton. Its^ easy when you know how."

He also claimed to enjoy his fellow workmen, Italians "who toil for six dollars a week, and seem happy over it. . . . They will all go back to Italy inside of ten years, rich. They are good fellows, happy go lucky, willing to be driven, and Nicholls drives them all right. The upstairs foreman is an Italian named Ben, who is a good fellow. The whole thing is a social experience full of unexpected pleasures and no pains at at^ all." For a half hour at noon, all work stopped for lunch: "I eat there among the boxes, and then snooze for about fifteen minutes till I hear the machinery start up stairs. I tried going to the lunch counter across the street at noon, but a clam chowder is too filling and makes me loggy in the afternoon. I find Madaline's lunches are just the right size."

He then returned to his day: "The morning goes by like a flash. The afternoon is divided in half. The middle is marked by Gus taking down another load. We pile up some big orders on that counter, sometimes four thousand dollars worth a week. The bigger the order, the easier it is to handle. I have to recount every bunch of twenty five that comes down stairs, and supply everything that has been taken out by those that tested for leaks, just before the bunch came down stairs. . . . By the end of the day I have gotten so full of the working habit that I hate to stop. At six o clock, I quit, redress after scrubbing, and get home, read all letters and am ready to eat with the rest of the fellows at quarter of seven. . . . The fellows are determined to make that evening [meal] the reward of the day, and we do all our real living till eight o clock^. We have grace before meals, and generally many graceful remarks during meals. . . . I think that, and the bath in the morning and the very sound sleep at night, serve to balance the exercise. I never woke up so refresed[^] before in the morning, never felt so much strength and ginger in me, and I am in better nervous condition in every way than I have been for years. This isnt^ mere exhileration[^] and novelty. I have settled into the routine and past the first flush from unusual exercise and new experience." His wages, moreover, covered his club dues "and leave just enough for laundry and carfare. It is worth it all to me, because of the recuperative effect of the good cheer in the few moments I snatch, and because I can ask any man here I hope to interest, to eat."

Vachel continued to be solicitous, and then ended his Sunday letter with another attempt to comfort "the old folks" at home: "Now I have written you my life as it is, the best I can. I do not think I have exaggerated anything or placed it in any false light. I want you to set yourselves to get all the hope and cheer and comfort out of it you can. I want to feel that my effort is worth while, that I am not wasting my enthusiasm. If I do my best to please you, do your best to be pleased. Olive and Paul will arrive safely in China and do a useful work there. I have great faith in that till I hear absolutely to the contrary. But if your minds are set on making the worst of their case, please take comfort out of mine. Give youselves^ a rest. Is everything I do to please you to be as well as not done at all? Can't you be cheerful for my sake anyway? There is nothing that would please me so much as to feel that something I have done here in New York has been a real source of uplift and a cause for brighter outlook in Springfield. Unless you are determined to worry over me anyhow, there is not one single thing to worry about here. Think about New York and give yourselves a mental change of air, a little rest. With love . . . Nicholas Vachel Lindsay" (October 29)

6

Even before accepting the job at Nicholls, as we have seen, Vachel reported to Aunt Fannie that one of the New York YMCAs had agreed to allow him to deliver the art lectures he thought he was preparing for Prexy Zollars' university. Fannie's nephew may not have realized it at that time, but he soon learned he would be lecturing at the second largest Y in America: New York's West Side YMCA, located at 318 West 57th Street, almost 30 blocks south of "The Rutledge," where the lecturer currently lived. Vachel's class began in mid-October, meeting on Tuesday nights at 8:30. For his parents, he described the students as "a bunch of about twenty fellows around a table with their elbows on it, talking informally, asking me all the questions they please. It lasts till ten, when the Association closes. I am fascinated by the interest the men take, several of my

Art Student friends from Chase's join the circle, and are quite loyal and interested" (October 29). The loyalty of his friends, especially the fellows of his eating club, was one of Vachel's unexpected joys: "I have never before experienced such loyalty from boys of my age" (November 27).

On Friday nights, the teacher led the same students on a guided lecture tour at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, focusing on the paintings and artists he had discussed the preceding Tuesday night. "We have had a very good crowd each time. And several of the fellows go from this club here, we have merely to walk across the park [Central], about four blocks. They are full of loyalty and hope for me. We get back by ten thirty. There is no pay from these classes yet, but they are all the more interesting to me on that account" (October 29).

If the classes were "interesting" for Vachel, the same seems to have been true for his students, according to one friend who made the walk across Central Park: "One of the interesting things that Vachel did during his stay in New York was to conduct an evening class in art for the West Side Y.M.C.A. Every Friday evening during the winters, he would take his brood up to the Metropolitan Museum and spend two hours in going from picture to picture, telling what he thought about the work itself and what he knew about the artist—his life-struggle and ambitions. His handful of students grew often into a crowd of hundreds, for many were attracted by Vachel's interesting talk and joined the throng or else came week after week on Friday nights as uninvited students, so interested were they in his personality and methods" (as cited by Trombly 33).

Although the YMCA classes began with "no pay," Vachel soon had encouraging news for his concerned parents. New York's Twenty-Third Street YMCA also accepted his lectures, but Twenty-Third Street promised remuneration—"five lectures, ten dollars apiece . . . beginning at the fifth week before Christmas, and lasting five weeks, with a possibility of a second course after Christmas. I am on the up grade^, in the very midst of things, and it is going to take a lot of steam to make good, but I feel I have the steam" (October 29). (We learn from later letters that these arrangements changed. The first lecture was on Thursday night, November 30; subsequent lectures were then offered every other Thursday night, through January 25, 1906.)

By mid-November, 1905, on Wednesday nights, Vachel added a poetry class at the West Side YMCA. He also convinced Charles F. Powlison, the religious director and his primary sponsor, that the classes would improve if the lecturer could devote his days to study. Powlison agreed to a two-week trial. Vachel was paid \$12.50 per week, in part for his classes, in part for designing brochures and for distributing invitational tickets to the Y's Sunday meetings. The designer-distributor pasted examples of this advertising in a scrapbook that he prepared for feature writer, Peter Clark Macfarlane (see "Works Cited"). One brochure reads: "Classes in Art and Poetry: Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Leader. Open to all Men at the West Side Y. M. C. A. 318 West 57th Street, Room 502." Other brochures announce Vachel's topics. On Tuesday, November 21, he spoke on "Grandeur in Art: Angelo and Milton." The next lecture night, his subject was "Tennyson and the Hearthstone." On Friday, November 24, he led "A Tour of the Renaissance Sculpture Gallery" at the Metropolitan Museum. Women as well as men were welcome on the museum tour, but the Y classes, in accord with Association policy, were advertised "for men only."

Vachel's YMCA wages allowed him to persuade friend Nicholls to grant what both thought would be a temporary leave from the gas-tubing factory. Starting Monday, November 20, Dr. Lindsay's son was again free to pursue his studies as he wished. He likely breathed a sigh of relief because, in spite of his sanguine words to his parents, he quickly grew disenchanted with mere physical labor. In a confidential letter to Susan Wilcox, written just two weeks after quitting Nicholls, Vachel expressed fear that his factory job would have been "the old Marshall Field episode over again. . . . And I feared it would end the same way. I would get tired or indifferent and go back to be dependent on my people again. Therefore I lectured at night, and fought every inch of the way and the Y.M.C.A. allowed me to do it as a favor, seeing so few came. Finally by a desperate wrestle I succeeded in persuading the religous^ department that I could do better and get better lectures if I had the daytime to study in. Therefore I was offered twenty five dollars for two weeks of lectures, at the end of that time I was to be dropped, if I did not make good. I increased the attendance in each of the classes from eight and ten to fifteen and twenty. The two weeks are ended, and its^{\(\)} up to them. They may put me permanently on the force, or they may not. I feel serene in either event" (December 3, Lindsay Home cf. Chénetier 16). He was not placed "permanently on the force," but in early December Powlison did extend the \$12.50-per-week salary through January 1906—and offered some hope for continuation after that. Vachel's factory career thus ended. [Note 12]

"The ticket distribution, which occurrs^ on Friday and Saturday," Vachel advised Susan Wilcox, "is in itself well on the way to making a Y.M.C.A. man of me . . . it is so interesting in itself. Powlinson^ has decided to broaden his policy, and by his direction I took the tickets into every Saloon on the route, and after asking the bartenders^ permission, placed a little pile on^ them by the cigar lighter, where men might pick them [out] up as they went out. My route is over the very most interesting part of New York, and the theatre section of Broadway runs across it, and the experience is rich, absolutely great. I am going to endeavor to carry out all the tickets I can, and dodge the sign-painting, which wears out my soul. They want it in a hurry, and they want it inartistic and mechanical, this sign painting" (December 3, Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 15).

Indeed, the experience of delivering YMCA tickets to saloons proved to be even richer than the solicitor realized at the time—if we believe a newspaper feature story written in 1922. After interviewing his subject at length, *New York Morning Telegraph* reporter, Roy L. McCardell, published a capsule newspaper biography, part of which reads: "During this time [winter, 1905-06] Vachel supported himself by distributing tickets of invitation to the Y.M.C.A. Sunday meetings, on a small salary. He tried to place these tickets to those he thought would be most benefited, and he haunted Hell's Kitchen. . . . There was no Volstead act in those days, and when Vachel saw the bad, red liquor—but not as bad as what we get now by bootleg—served directly from the barrel to the negro roustabouts and stevedores of that locality, his imagination carried him back to the African ancestors of these, and his poem, 'The Congo,' took shape in his mind." [Note 13]

As we may suspect, Vachel's concerns for his fellow human beings shaped the subject matter of his YMCA classes. He was hardly an ordinary academic lecturer. His goal, in fact, was to preach the virtues of his envisioned, democratic art-millennium. The YMCA classroom, he informed his parents, included two long tables, "set end to end, and

there is served up a spiritual repast. I sit at the head and slice it off in chunks. It is a great experience. I am truly thankful for it. I may kindle a fire yet, within that little room" (November 27). And for Susan Wilcox, Vachel had a frank confession: "I find I have some rather unexpected resources as a leader of men. I am nearer my mother than I knew, when it comes to playing the oracle, and bullying the minds of those who listen, and I have more of her powers as a speaker, in my best lectures, than I ever bargained for."

In fact, the lectures were delivered under the auspices of the West Side's "Religion Department," and Vachel professed to be amused that Powlison, "the religous^ director," was "a very broad man, but it keeps him pretty busy explaining how Art and Poetry are part of his Evangelism, especially since they are uttered by a person not markedly religous^ Hence the neccessity^ that I make myself busy carrying tickets and printing oceans of signs. He has to put on the check he gives me 'Bible Study' which is a fine point in conscience. He explains that is merely a technicality, but it looks to me like tainted money" (December 3, Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 15). Powlison, though, knew exactly what he was doing. Vachel's art and poetry lectures were nothing less than thinly disguised sermons. And his claim that he was "not markedly religious^" refers to religion only in the denominational sense. By this time in his life, Vachel's extensive reading and his imagination had taken hold. The creator of "The Map of the Universe" was markedly religious but not sectarian, a little detail that does not surface in letters to Springfield, at least not in letters to Papa and Mama.

Congregationalist Susan Wilcox, on the other hand, was not judgmental on sectarian issues and thus gained Vachel's confidence. "But when you hear reports on these matters," her former pupil continued in his candid December letter, "be not deceived. I do not mistake my calling. With the help of the good Jehova I shall some day begin the search of Aladdin's lamp again, and set those dreams in order. I know they are my best self, and everything else is preperation[^]." All of his work, he maintained, was "merely a chunk of raw experience, which is valuable only as it refines my fibre as an artist. . . . Its\(^\) delightful in itself, but not in the main path, unless it be considered experience, as we do air and sunshine, an essential element in every life, in every real personality. I much doubt whether any of the things I am now doing will be even indirectly worked over into my writing or drawing. The only hope is that as a result souls will be born beneath the raiment of my dreams, that there will be more blood in the veins of my prophets, more witchcraft in the fingers of Balrubador, more order, and reason and serene health and simple massiveness in the Jungles of Heaven and the three empty thrones" (December 3, Lindsay Home-cf. Chénetier 16). The democratic artmillennium, in other words, must come from art, not from lecturing about art.

Vachel's parents, meanwhile, had a proposal for their son. They planned to take their younger daughter, Joy, on a tour of Europe's art museums during the summer, 1906. They asked their son to come along and appealed to his big-brotherly instincts. They suggested further that he return home for Christmas and look for work in Springfield. Vachel responded with somewhat clumsy caution. He generally preferred candor, but he did not wish to rekindle the anger of the preceding August: "Now I would like to come home, and if you could find me some sort of a position, or suggest one I might take it, some day. That is an indefinite statement. I will try again. I have not much hope of being a comfort to you if I come home, my ideas are so different and so positive, that it is better

for us all that I be here, and succeed my own way. Nevertheless as far as willingness goes, I am willing to transfer my life to Springfield and do my best; if the thing can be done. It cannot be now, but after next April, maybe. Say I plan to spend the summer with you, or something like that. I do not see where I can get the money, or how I can afford to quit work, or anything like that. But You^ speak of a trip to Europe. It is the logical thing for me now, if this lecture course is ever on its feet. Many of the fellows who attend the lectures have been on the 'other side.'"

It was time, he thought, to remind his parents of his one, unwavering aim: "All these lecture plans are merely the question of earning my salt, and I will not consider my life begun till I have reached the point where I have a set period at set intervals where I can write or draw without interruption. That is the real business of my life. I am open to any plans you can suggest along this line. I don't want any more money than just enough to keep me going while I do this" (November 23). Indeed, in his "January 19, 1903" notebook (from which the following quotations are excerpted), Vachel continued to record his artistic plans and dreams, even while working at Nicholls. On October 25, for example, he imagined a poem entitled "The priests of Art": "I dream that a group of men vow themselves secretly to celibacy and religon\(^\), openly to poverty and Art, and how they accomplish much, and scatter beauty abroad. The priesthood of beauty." The next day he added: "Yesterday night as I knelt by the bedside, I felt the hand of the almighty upon my head. Yet he was not an omnipotent God, only a kindly Father who said to me in his touch—Peace, Peace. There was no necessity for forgiveness, for he was not angry, and had never been angry, only watching, watching."

Vachel also pondered new meanings for his "Map of the Universe," especially for his particular understanding of Lucifer: "Let Lucifer stand for all those who consider death as an adequate solution of life. Let him stand for the Songs of Death of Whitman, the Garden of Proserpina of Swinburne. Let Death and Satan crown him in the beauty of eternal stillness." The death of Lucifer was a theme he returned to time and time again. The day after Christmas, 1905, for example, he mused: "Consider Lucifer as the sole great representative figure of fair restful death. Let him realize that deep cold sleep we all long for. There is another death—the death of the stones of Jacob's ladder. Both equally cold, but Lucifer's death beautiful, while the other ugly."

Then, in early November, a new theme begins to emerge in this notebook, a theme that would prove to be consequential through much of the following year: "Let me be a maker of Gods, and let the iconoclasts come after me. Let Moses come after and grind the calf to Powder and make the people drink it. . . ." The idea that he was nothing less than "a maker of Gods" impressed Vachel, and a few days after this initial entry, he added a salient afterthought: "Christ in his second coming" would be "the new god." On November 5, Vachel tied the theme to his "Map": "Let the new god appear as a consolation for the empty thrones. Let a voice go throughout heaven. Let the word be passed from one to another—The new God has come! Let him appear on the pinnacle of the three thrones that are broken and heaped." Indeed, father Vachel's "new God" would be Jesus, but not, as we shall see, the traditional Jesus. He would be the dream Jesus, the aesthetic Jesus who would rule the democratic art-millennium. This Jesus would be Lucifer redivivus, Lucifer reborn; he would be Jesus the consummate artist, Jesus the singing Immanuel, Jesus the God made by Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.

The Lindsay son was politic enough not to share his millennial dreams with his conservative parents. However, he did suggest another fanciful idea that gained their immediate attention: "As to Europe—I must see my way to paying for it myself before I go, and three hundred dollars looks pretty big at present. It will be an excellent investment in my line, as soon as I can make it. And I am even more anxious to know my own country. I plan to take a walking tour of the United States whenever it can be worked in. I may do that instead of Europe, taking you people in at the beginning or end of the trip. I may not do the whole U.S. one summer—but part of it, anyway" (December 4). Papa fired back a long letter, and the lack of argument in his boy's brief response demonstrates the doctor's power of persuasion: "It will be a great pleasure to do the galleries and the architecture of London and Paris with Joy. I shall do my best to get ready" (December 18).

Four days later, a dutiful son affirmed his change of heart: "I have for the present dropped the idea of a pedestrian tour, though it has occurred to my mind for so many years off and on. It will find satisfaction sometime, be sure. Your opposition, the difficulty of breaking away from the club, and the desire to prepare for Europe in a financial way, have somewhat changed my outlook" (December 22). [Note 14]

7

As the end pages of his Chicago notebooks began to fill, Vachel purchased new books. One he dedicated to "Evidences of magic in our daily life, when we are caught up into the unseen not so much that we may be saints of Heaven, but rather Kings of Chaos; that we may create new worlds that will praise us, rather than praise the Power that has made us. Giving all reverence to the Father, our chief joy in this book is that we also are posessed^ of Children." The notebook was to contain "spiritual adventures" encountered while delivering YMCA tickets, although what seemed to be visions were, the author freely acknowledged, "only my souls^ fancy, and not one of those things where one can say 'The Spirit Speaketh expressly." In brief, these YMCA "spiritual adventures" amounted to the now-familiar "pictures in the air," similar to those Vachel experienced during the summer, 1904. "They were metaphors of the day, consolations of the hour"; and he would "make them the servants, not the masters" of his "religious life" (see *Poetry* 928).

The first "spiritual adventure" recorded in "Evidences of magic" is one of Vachel's distinctive apocalyptic visions. In July 1905, he had proclaimed: "The City of marble and arrogance must fall" ("January 19, 1903" notebook); and we have already noted the vision of the ghosts of the buffaloes trampling Chicago. The materialistic American Babylon must be destroyed as a first step toward realizing the dreamed-of, democratic art-millennium. Dated "Saturday Night, December 23, 1905," the "Evidences of magic" entry begins: "This is the beginning of Christmas. MacClain, the Scotchman, and I saw three processions down Broadway tonight, as we walked, from eight to ten." The subsequent story, however, depicts only one of the "processions":

The first was led by that king with the purple blood whose name is a grief and a wonder to the ages. Yet we almost knelt from the delight of looking upon his unveiled soul, burning forth from his all-comprehending face; carved with august experience.

He was in a chariot that was all purple wings. He was driving foaming dragons bound to the chariot by bands unseen, he hissed over their heads a whip of snarling fire.

Behind him in smoking armour[^] came his legions, with that reverence in their eyes that the tough vetrans[^] of Caesar must have had, as they saw him undisputed master of Rome. The clank of their tarnished trappings made the roar of the elevated like a still small voice; and their shields of tempered flame made the lights of Broadway like dusty Sunflowers at noon.

Though they marched ahead in steady lines behind their master, by unseen power they pushed down the skyscrapers, and the walls screamed like beasts suddenly wounded and slain, and the legions shouted till the city was a heap, and still marched on. And they began to smile, their even teeth glittering behind their golden beards.

"Suddenly" the legions sink "into the ground like mists before a wind," and Vachel and MacClain find themselves standing "on a starlit, desert rock, in the edge of the sea, with only the stone curbing to remind us of a city." A troop of fairies comes and goes; "then the stars come nearer, and the thing happens which must happen always, with those who wait and open their hearts. The stars came down, the boats of the prophets came down, the purple mists were poured from their wine-jars." The city rises again, "in outer form what it had been, but all the walls were baptized by the glory of their anointing; they gleamed like the hands and the arms and the breasts of the fairies, the demons, the prophets, the mingled flood was in the veins of the walls, a light shone through them as though the city were built of crystal, and beneath the crystal walls, the souls of the buildings indeed, and the people that walked the streets were merely human again, except there was a fire behind their eyes, made up of all the mingled fires we had seen."

The stage is set for the imagined Millennium, but Vachel's effort to create a new world, his avowed purpose in this notebook, comes to an abrupt end. Had he continued the story, we may well have the seeds for a *Golden Book of New York City*. Indeed, the notebook story may end, but what we have witnessed is another expression of an archetypal theme in Vachel's life, a theme that begins with his 1893 visit to Chicago's great white city (see Chapter 5). Before white cities can emerge, however, Flat Iron buildings must be toppled.

The second spiritual adventure in the new notebook is also representative of the author's disposition. Since breaking with Ruth Wheeler, he admitted to Susan Wilcox, "I am dissatisfied with myself in the matter of woman. Everything else is beautiful. . . . What I ask of my women friends you have supplied in the past, when we could see each other. If the Y.M.C.A. fails me, I have my mind serenely ready to go back to gas tubing, where a job is waiting for me. But with woman it is not so, I can find no rest. I want a woman near me where I could talk out a thousand phases of this present experience while it is hot within me. Letters are no satisfaction. There seems to be no interchange without the personal presence. . . . Now I am human enough to often desire the thing for which woman stands in the best romance, and I know the lack of romance adds to the discontent. But it is a thing I have forgone^, and can for the most part forego, if I had this other" (December 3, Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 16-17).

Uncle Boy yearned, as we have seen, for an Eve in his garden; he was dependent on his "inspiration girls." This need is all the more evident when we read the second entry in the "Evidences of magic" notebook. When a flesh-and-blood Eve was missing from his life, he generally turned to dreams:

December 24, 11:30.

Last night that woman I call Eve in my wan thoughts; came to me in a dream. We slept far apart on this earth, but together we rose to the uttermost heights of the sky, we were in the Jungles of Heaven together, the Land of today—with none to make us afraid. The twilight of the place made her seem like a dream too gracious to be real. But her hands were soon in mine firm and strong, her voice was steadfast and warm with womanly kindness. It was a real woman who walked with me through the dim half faded trees, whose ragged moss was half-real, and half like mist as we pressed it back from our faces and passed through. The ground did not give way beneath our feet, yet we felt it was because we were upheld by forces we did not understand. When this wife, this dream-alive of mine, slept in the fork of an oak bough thrown down by some old tempest, I watched, lonely, lonely, wondering. The shadows ten paces away seemed to be holding their breath lest she should hear them as they crept nearer and nearer, they crouched low like lions and loomed at me with blank manes.

When Eve awakens, they begin to build "a small hut, feeling it was worth while to abide. And," Vachel promises, "the story of the house we built and the life we lived shall be told in order." Indeed, during the following few years, the story was told, but in poetry, not in prose. It may be read in "Genesis" and "Eden in Winter" (*Poetry* 92-93, 114-115).

Vachel's thirst for romance is also manifest in a second notebook purchased at this time. Dedicated to "all other things but magic," the book was intended as counterpoint to the "Evidences of magic." One entry recounts Vachel's reaction to meeting a pretty, eighteen-year-old manicurist in a Sixth Avenue lunchroom, where he and a fellow worker stopped to leave their YMCA tickets. The companion whispered that the girl was pure, but in the privacy of his notebook Vachel imagined he had met Cleopatra: "Only eighteen—her eyes were thirty years old, her manners ten thousand years old. I will keep far from you, but Oh, Queen of Egypt, I give thanks to Isis and Osiris that I have seen you! Shame upon the city that will not throne you! If I were Antony, with a kingdom to waste, I would spill it into the ocean for you grandly, grandly. Let the Y.M.C.A. pray for your soul. But you pray always for Antony, and in vain. Good night."

Meanwhile, Vachel's primal inspiration girl celebrated a modest creative success of her own this December. Kate Lindsay's essay, "The City Beautiful" (surviving in the Ward papers), won second place in a contest sponsored by one of Springfield's several newspapers, the *Springfield News*. On December 18, Vachel acknowledged the victory in a short letter addressed to "Dear Mama": "I write to congratulate you on your speech for the beautifying of Springfield and all that. I am certainly heartily in favor of that sort of a thing, and your interest in the matter gives me gladness of heart." In only a few years, Mama's essay would also give her boy another of his important artistic themes: the dream of transforming Springfield into the democratic art capital of the world, a millennial Springfield, a Springfield that could inspire a golden book. [Note 15]

In his congratulatory note to Mama, Vachel commented that he had also mailed "a long letter to Nankin^," where Olive and Paul had finally arrived. He knew that his parents were anxiously awaiting the birth of their first grandchild. For the Lindsay son, though, the prospect of marriage and children looked even more distant than China. There was no Eve in his garden, and Cleopatra lived only in his dreams and his notebooks. "Poems and pictures are as near to Grandchildren as you can expect from my quarter for some time," he confessed to his parents: "I have problems enough on hand, without taking to myself a wife though she be an angel from the skies" (November 27). He did not know, but "some time" proved to be almost 20 years. [Note 16]

Notes for Chapter Sixteen

[Note 1] Actually, Vachel made at least one more attempt at "peddling," as he admitted in this letter to his father. He sent *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?* to Boston publisher, Richard G. Badger, but received another rejection slip. After this failure, though, Vachel determined to adjust his tactics: "Hereafter for a while, I shall not push Aladdin's Lamp, but the poems by themselves, using Aladdin's Lamp in asking for work, etc. I am going to send the poems to the Macmillan Company next. They published Stephen Phillip's^ latest book" (May 17—for Phillips, see chapter 15, note 4). In his short letter concerning the 30-or-so manuscript poems offered to Macmillan, Vachel offered to illustrate the poems, claiming: "Pen and ink designing is my specialty" (Chénetier 9). Badger assumed publication of the periodical *Poet-Lore* in 1892.

[Note 2] The "Rutgers Club," as we saw in the last chapter, was Vachel's Sunday school class at New York's Rutgers Presbyterian Church. Vachel assured his conservative parents that the "Club" teacher, "Mr. [Frank] Ferris, . . . is nothing if not orthodox. But he is a splendid old man, and the boys love him like Santa Claus. We all count ourselves fortunate to stumble upon such a Sunday School class; I think [Harold Mills] Salisbury is responsible however if the truth be told. If he were taken out of that class, it would be dead. He is the social leaven" (October 29, 1905).

In November 1909, Vachel described the NAHEGO "Assistant Managing Director" for Nellie Vieira's edification: "Salisbury was one of my dearest friends in New York, few indeed have been the mortals I have held dearer. He is a boy full of Chivalry and Religon\(^\), with something of a game Wall-Street finish. He is romantic as D'Artagan\(^\) [D'Artagnan is one of Dumas's "three musketeers"] out of business hours, but works in the Bank of America, 44 Wall Street all day these seven years, and somehow keeps his job. Every woman loves him. I wish he were in Chicago to break your heart with his curls, his half-bald head, his elegant ways and his Romantic Eyes" (Fowler 292-293). An October 1909 letter from Salisbury to Vachel (Virginia) reveals that, although the "N" in NAHEGO was derived from "Nicholas," the "Rutgers Club" boys regularly referred to Vachel as "Vach." Vachel's letter congratulating Salisbury's bride, "Miss Van Derveer," is published in Chénetier, pp. 47-48.

[Note 3] Who Was Who in Art (1987) lists the birthplace of Ethel Mars (1876-1959) and Maude Hunt Squire (1873-1954) as "Vence, France." Although Mars and Squire spent most of their adult years in France, Ethel Mars was born in Springfield, Illinois, the daughter of A.B. Mars, a railroad employee. (Maud Hunt Squire was born in Cincinnati,

Ohio.) Mars returned to her birth city with her friend Squire several times in early adulthood, when both women were on vacation from art study in Chicago, New York, and, later, Paris. Mars and Squire were made life members of Springfield's Amateur Art Club on November 4, 1909, when Vachel was accepted as an honorary member (Fowler 61). On November 27, 1905, Vachel informed Susan Wilcox "that two exceedingly congenial spirits are returning to Springfield: Miss Mars and Miss Squire. It will be a real favor to me if you people can get together. . . . The girls have succeeded here. I think they have done as well as they could ask so far, with good prospects. They were the heroes of the hour at the great New York Water Color Club. Miss Mars sold all her wood-block prints twice over" (Lindsay Home). Writing to his parents the same day, Vachel related much the same story but added: "They [Mars and Squire] have been in the closest touch with me of any people in the city, this summer, and can tell you most anything you want to know, and are anxious to be friends with you." Chénetier (14, 18) wrongly refers to Mars as "Moss," an error that is easy to understand when one considers Vachel's handwriting. For more on Mars and Squire, see Grace Glueck, "Art in Review: 'Tres Complementaires," The New York Times (November 3, 2000). For Mars and Squire and Gertrude Stein, see http://www.glbtq.com/arts/squire mh.html at web site "glbtq, an encyclopedia of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender & queer culture."

[Note 4] Typically, Vachel's pride concerning Willard Wheeler's novel led him to expand on, in his words, "that bit of gossip. . . . Bill is vexed because I plan to go to Texas. I suppose he wants to exhibit me as the only live cave man in captivity. If he gets up a picture of me in his paragraphs, that I think should be presented to the gaze of my relatives, I will let them know.

"It is flattering to know he thinks me worthy of even an unflattering novel. It is something to be a pronounced personality, even though not a winning one. Yet I am of two minds about being crowded into the limelight. For my own sake, I hope the book will not go, for Bill's sake I wish it all the success in the world. My hope is that he has sufficiently disguised me to make the book succeed, sufficiently disguised me so that all my friends will deny I am the original" (August 16, 1905, Blair).

[Note 5] In a postscript to this letter (August 4, 1905), Vachel writes: "I received a wedding announcement from Adaline Mugrage, who is now Mrs. Francis William Bosco—living at 41 Byers Street, Denver. Hunt her up if you have time. She is delightful."

[Note 6] The first of the hand-made books was *Aladdin's Lamp*, the second a mock-up copy for the publisher of *The Tree of Laughing Bells*. In years to come, Vachel often collected his poems and drawings in hand-made books to give to friends and family for a birthday or a wedding gift. On August 16, 1905, he shared his new interest with Susan Wilcox: "I have some rather definite plans of some little picture books I shall make, possibly by hand, with wood-blocks, using little bits of color, and printing in editions of ten or twenty. In my present state of finances it will save printers^ bills, it will sufficiently multiply my work to put it in the hands of my friends and keep it from loss, it will be a form of art expression, and above all, it will be a step along lines already taken. I will bind the books with hand made covers, after the manner of Aladdin's Lamp, only on leather rather than paste board. I have made two already, the only difficulty being there is no method of duplication, they are made by hand straight through. I am willing to

design separate covers, it is such a joy, but by the wood block method, I can make as many duplicates of the interiors as there is a demand for. I have made quite a study of Japanese work—which was done on this principle. . . . I am going to develop this sooner or later, my books shall not be half baked forever" (Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 11-12).

Vachel confirmed his study of Japanese prints in a 1920 letter to fellow poet Arthur Davison Ficke: "I have dabbled in [Japanese] prints and studied them about as much as any man who does not buy them or use them as a basis of suggestions for his paintings. And one whole winter in New York I spent with a group of a dozen friends poking through the collection once a week of what was then the Lenox Library" (February 6, Harvard).

[Note 7] In this same letter (August 24, 1905), Vachel reacted positively to his parents' suggestion that his sister Joy attend college in New York City and share living quarters with her brother. The idea appealed to his avuncular instincts: "As to Joy, I do most heartily enjoy the prospect of having her with me at any one of our colleges. We are thoroughly congenial, and I will take the same pride in her development that I had in that of Olive. She shall have all the wisdom that I can part with, duly adapting it to her tender years." He also approved the alternative plan of sending his sister to Smith College, although Joy, as her sister and brother before her, finally attended Hiram.

[Note 8] Variations on "God help us to be brave" echo throughout Vachel's "Litany of the Heroes" (*Poetry* 435-441). In *War Bulletin Number Three* (August 30, 1909), the first tenet in Vachel's "The Creed of a Beggar" reads: "I believe in God, the creeping fire, the august and whimsical Creator, maker of all religions, dweller in all clean shrines." In the subsequent essay, "It May Be, Brother," Vachel adds: "I believe in God, the Creeping Fire. I have met him. He has scorched the walls of my arteries" (*Prose* 103-105).

[Note 9] Vachel likely gave Robert Henri *The Tree of Laughing Bells*, in booklet form, in late August 1905. On August 31, Vachel related to his parents: "I had a splendid and most inspiring call on Mr. Henri the other day, and he put a lot of ginger into me. He is a man destined to lead before he dies, and is at present a prominent figure in Art Circles. He talked up the splendor of the Texas opportunity, and made me feel like a new man. If I go there I shall take some of his spirit with me, of renunciation for his pupils^ sake, of spending himself for the work, of absolute sincerity." Frances Hamilton, meanwhile, claimed to prefer Vachel's original title for his poem—"The Wings of the Morning"—but her nephew adopted the new title at the advice of "some friend" (453).

[Note 10] There are several errors in Chénetier's printing of Vachel's letter to Wilcox (December 3, 1905), and I quote from the original (Lindsay Home). This frank letter reflects Vachel's growing loneliness. More and more, since breaking his engagement with Ruth Wheeler, Vachel felt the need for a worthy confidante. On November 27, 1905, he promised Wilcox an open and frank letter: "I write to promise you a letter that I cannot write now . . . this is not the time to reveal my sentiments, long disguised. I may however, plunge in this much—that I have been intending to write those sentiments for some time" (Lindsay Home). One week after his December 3 letter, Vachel sent Wilcox, in his words, "just a little note, at midnight." In part, the "little note" reads: "I wish for you every ease of heart, and freedom from all sorrow. I think of how much you deserve from this old world, and hope you will find your reward within in an untroubled soul, in a mind that enjoys every hour it grows, and does not grow into darkness. I hope you will

laugh often every day over the glints of sunshine, no matter what real pain may be just against your heart. This is a Valentine in December. . ." (December 10, 1905, Lindsay Home). To his parents, Vachel declared: "I received a splendid letter from Miss Wilcox the other evening. She is one of the wisest people in the world, or seems so to me" (December 22, 1905).

[Note 11] Vachel also commented frankly on Olive and Paul to Susan Wilcox, referring ironically to his parents' reaction as "the tragedy of missions. . . . I have my moments of suspense and wonder and apprehension, but I must be a fatalist in the matter. To choose the absolute right—to say they were right or wrong, is impossible. Their lives are not in my world, we can only shout across the seas. I trust them, I hope for them, they have enlisted, they are part of the far flung battle line of missions. If they live their lives and think them out honestly, they have a chance to become very wise before they die. Living or dead they are essentially true to themselves, they stand pure before my eyes, however foolish, and I am in no place to set my wisdom over theirs, and they can trust me to think kindly, and do my best to sympathize. They are essentially romantic-religous, and I envy them the romance. If they are killed a week after landing, as the old folks seem to anticipate, I can only hope it is without torture. Mere death is no matter to be apprehensive about, so far as I can see. Of course I have never died, and may be mistaken. It often looks most seasonable. There is the martyr's crown for some, and for even the worst of us a sweet epitaph. I suppose after I have lost many, that are really dear, the question of immortality will seem more worth while" (December 3, Lindsay Home cf. Chénetier 17-18). Olive and Paul arrived safely in Shanghai on Thanksgiving Day, 1905 (not 1904, as in Hamilton 463). They went directly to their new home in Nanking.

[Note 12] Vachel's class roster is part of his "January 19, 1903" notebook; it includes some 27 names and addresses. Predictably, however, he was plagued by attrition, as he confessed to his former teacher, Susan Wilcox: "Half of them come and go like flies, all sorts of tanglefoot tactics are neccessary\(^\) to keep that fifteen or twenty, to justify the use of the room." Vachel added that, while he was lecturing at both New York YMCA's, his "total income" was "about \$30. for every two weeks" (December 3, Lindsay Home—cf. Chénetier 15).

[Note 13] Entitled "Vachel Lindsay—Wandering Minstrel" (New York Morning Telegraph, June 18, 1922), the illustrated article is pasted in the first of Frances Hamilton's scrapbooks (Blair).

[Note 14] There is a note of levity in Vachel's December 22 letter. He related that he attended "varnishing day today, at the Academy of Design exhibition, by invitation of an exhibitor. I had the pleasure of meeting about a dozen of the leading exhibitors. Varnishing day only the artists and their friends are there. . . . I was introduced as an 'Art Critic' to the prize winner, whose name I have forgotten, a very young chap. And he was extremely deferential. I begin to see this thing has possibilities."

[Note 15] A random note in Vachel's "January 19, 1903" notebook indicates the germ of another idea to follow: "There is a Poem which might be written, entitled—'the Spacious days of Rossevelt^!" In the "Litany of Heroes" poem, begun in 1907, the Roosevelt stanza opens with: "These were the spacious days of Roosevelt" (*Poetry* 440).

[Note 16] Olive Lindsay-Wakefield valued her brother's letters while she and her family served as missionaries in China. In Olive's own words, written long after the fact: "It was his letters which helped to keep us there and to take us back to China again after three years' discouraging conflict with problems of health. In all the days of my life Vachel's plans and counsels for me were the anchor to my wandering soul, and the inspiration and flying banner to lead me on to that which he wished his sister to be. Without him I was less than half a person; with him I could conquer the earth" (Lindsay-Wakefield 88).

Olive and Paul's first child was Vachel Lindsay Wakefield, born in China on April 17, 1906. In a few years, Vachel Lindsay Wakefield would have a pet name for Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. He would call him "Uncle Boy."

