

The Annotated Letters of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay to Sara Trevor Teasdale

Chapter 6 (Letters 139-176)



(Censers over the Immaculate Conception Church: see Letter 141.)

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

139) "I always have a pile half-done, stewing along . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 1, 1914.

Saturday afternoon:

I have been very lazy and inert today and have not earned the privilege^ of writing, but am going to steal it.

Then I shall write on my poem—the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes then finish this letter to you.

The Gerald Stanley Lee clipping came today and I am glad you cared enough to send it. Yes—that is—Ideally—what Sara will be in St. Louis—some day. Perhaps not quite that—something better, but akin to that—the singer of the city.¹

And its^ my notion of my place in Springfield, when I am old and ripe and civilized.

But even that has changed a bit. For awhile at least—owing to Sara—[H] (in ways I cannot expand on here) for awhile I am Vachel Lindsay of 5th and Edwards, the Middle West—5th & Edwards Illinois, 5th and Edwards—Sangamon County—rather than 5th & Edwards Springfield. I am at home under the same elm—and happy in the same study—but I realize I have strained too hard—at least for awhile at the exclusively Springfield Idea. That is—as you have said—the smallest things about me are some of my petty uncontrollable^ Springfield grudges—and untill^ I can get over them—I am [~~only going~~] resolved to look at Springfield only vaguely and gently—as the place you visited, perhaps, or the place where the Elm tree grows in the front yard. I cannot afford to cherish an enthusiasm that makes me little or spiteful. [~~So while~~] I shall still go through some of the motions, and shall write for the *Herald (if I write for the Herald) as a Sangamon County person—(see Letter). But I shall think of the farmers and the miners, and my Grandfather's farm in Indiana, and the farm-stories of my Father's and Mother's early life, and things like that—and let Springfield stand as the vague and general representative of that sort of a thing—till all pettiness has left my heart.

All this because I cannot bear to be narrow—or hold spite or feud in my heart—after laughing with you in the Sun at Dawsons.² That was a wonderful-noon to remember—Oh Golden-heart. Who would be little or silly after that? You have no idea how that sunny day haunts me dearly.

And another thing I remember and remember is little Queen Sara eating with me with sparkling eyes at the Martha Washington.³ Somehow or other you had more that delightful air of proprietorship there, more than anywhere else. You certainly played Queen and slave. I was the slave.

I want to see the West through your eyes—my lady—I want to wear your point of view like spectacles on the end of my nose—looking over them of course—if ever they get smoked or clouded, but expecting to see more of fairyland because of you.

Lady—through your fairy eyes

I would see the West—
 Fairy things about here
 Fields in glory dressed.

Lady through your fairy eyes
 I would watch the corn—
 Through your voice and spirit
 Sing the [~~sturdy flowers~~] crops new-born—

Look you at [~~Singing all~~] the new born west
 Glorious it lies—
 Veiled, yet waiting to be found
 Through your fairy eyes.

A poor poem—but a sentiment of which I am proud.⁴

Now—unless I am the worst loafer in Christendom—I will work on the Ghosts of the Buffaloes—and postpone the delights of your intoxicating company till I have in a sense earned them, through proper grooming of said ghosts.

Later.

What you have said about the “*Adventures While Preaching” shows me that I can in some way work out the point of view [~~there~~] expressed in that book, and still be true to you and your fairy eyes. I must keep my future and my past in some kind of organic connection.

And what the lady I love thinks or fails to think has a great effect upon me.

It is about eleven o'clock at night. I worked awhile on the Ghosts of the Buffaloes and nipped and polished a bit at half a dozen poems or more. I always have a pile half-done—stewing along. 1. Here is one on Chicago. 2. One on *Mark Twain—3-7 Five to you about taking the road, 8 A dedication of a possible book, 9-11 Three or four old moon poems, two of which have possibilities. A poem to the tune 12 “A Hot Time in the Old town tonight, [”] Requiring complete revision. 13 A mass of manuscripts—The *Chinese nightengale. 14 A poem on Edwin Booth. 15 A *Song for all Strikers. Quite socialistic. 16 The Broncho that Would not be Broken of Dancing— A poem entitled 17 “Mine own people.” 18 A Devil-Story about New Mexico. A Jingle called 19 “The Rag Time Lady. [”] 20 A poem about Lincoln. 21. A poem about my bracelet. 22. A Prayer in the Immaculate Conception Church. 23 A Poem about my Grandfather’s yard. And there are others on the table here—I have not looked at the last day or two. 24—“The Saloon Must Go—“ for instance. Just what you don’t expect.⁵

I nose them all over—over and over again—sometimes I push one a little further—sometimes another. I generally have one or two main projects to put through—at present The Ghosts of the Buffaloes and the Chinese Nightengale. The Ghosts of the Buffaloes is short—but if I have my way it will be a twister. And the Rag Time Lady begins to look up. As a matter of fact the baffling thing is I can see each one in fancy complete from end to end, with great exactness as to the effects and all—and the only

trouble is to whip myself into polishing them up. I ought to get some of them done—these two months.

Every time I think of that European War I get almost sick. [H] Blake asks of the *Tiger “Did he who made the Lamb—make thee?” And I would ask of God—did he who made war Possible make Sara also? You are such a wonderful gift from Heaven—the very ability to remember your sweet eyes is a gift from Heaven—“who has given to me this sweet—and given my brother dust to eat—and when does his wage come in?”⁶

And Jaures—the most brilliant orator in France—if not in Europe—shot for being a man of peace.⁷ Karl Marx had one great war-cry—“Working men of the world—unite. You have nothing to lose but your chains.”⁸ And if they had united—these war lords could not hurl them at one another to satisfy family pride and silly arrogance and criminal hate. Some day there will be no more war-lords. They should all be put in the front of the battle.⁹

Well I must not wear you out with this.

I love you dear—and I am remembering now our second evening at the *Wheelers, and your flying delicate hair on the Bridge over the trains—on the way home. Heart of my heart—that was a night.

I have been in Fairyland, and it makes Springfield a strange place—except my study—where I feel more at home with myself than ever. But there is just one question I ask about [the city] Springfield—how will she like this? How will she like that? Wouldn't that bore her to death? What friends have I that she with her special ways, would take delight in?

Goodnight. I ain't done, but I'm agoin' to quit. With a kiss—

Vachel

[Enclosures: (1) Letter (dated July 29, 1914) from James Keeley, publisher of the *Chicago *Herald*, confirming, in part, that VL may “homestead a quarter section on the editorial page—that is, if we can agree as to price.” VL has written two notes on the letter: “This looks pretty good for my purposes, but you never can tell, till a thing happens—and sometimes not then.” “I proposed to Keeley a poem once in a week or so—in a definite place, with a little Springfield Heading—always the same.” (2) Editorial from the *Herald*, entitled “The Tragedy,” deploring the European war. VL writes on the clipping: “Probably written by Keeley. From today's Herald, A Conservative paper. I havn't^ spoiled my letter with it, but this is just how I feel. *And Keeley is a conservative man.*” (3) Newspaper article by Countess Nastasia Tolstoi recounting a vision of her granduncle, “Count Leo Nicolaevitch Tolstoi,” who is claimed to have foreseen the present European conflagration as early as 1910.]¹⁰

Notes

¹For Gerald Stanley Lee, see Letter 1 (note 10).

²For the Dawsons, see Letters 106, 137, and 148.

³For the Martha Washington Hotel, see Letter 16 (note 5).

⁴See the completed unpublished poem “To Sara Darling,” Letter 141; and see note 5 below.

⁵Following VL’s numbering system, we can identify the following titles (with page numbers from *The Poetry of VL*): (1) not extant; (2) “The Raft” (308-310); (3-7) only one extant: “Oh Wisdom in the Winter” (749); (8) “To Sara Darling”—see Letter 141 and note 4 above; (9-11) possible candidates include poems on pages 228-235, 748-749; (12) “Saturday Night in the Park” (742-743); (13) “The *Chinese Nightingale” (277-282); (14) “Edwin Booth in California” (303-304); (15) “Here’s to the Mice” (283-284); (16) “The Broncho That Would Not Be Broken” (313-314); (17) “Written in a Year When Many of My People Died” (404); (18) “I Went Down into the Desert” (213)—see Letter 18; (19) “The Apple Blossom Snow Blues” (376-377); (20) “Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight”; (21) not extant—see Letter 137; (22) “In the Immaculate Conception Church” (273)—see Letters 44 and 141; (23) not extant—see previous letter (note 2); and (24) “The Drunkard’s Funeral” (307-308).

⁶VL slightly misquotes William Vaughn Moody’s (1869-1910) poem “Gloucester Moors” (ll. 70-72). The word “does” (l. 72) is “will” in the original.

⁷Jean Jaures (1859-1914), one of the early leaders of the French socialist party, was assassinated in Paris on July 31, 1914. A journalist and orator, Jaures was an outspoken opponent of war and persisted to the last in urging European governments to find a peaceful solution to the events that finally led to World War I.

⁸VL loosely paraphrases the closing words of the *Communist Manifesto* (1848).

⁹Compare the anti-war poems included at the close of VL’s *Congo volume, all of which were written at this time (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 239-244).

¹⁰Compare VL’s poem, “Tolstoi Is Plowing Yet,” *Poetry of VL*, p. 285.

140) “I was never so amused in my life at a political turn . . .”

Springfield Ill.

August 2, 1914.

[Newspaper clipping attached to the first page: Illinois Senator James Hamilton Lewis announces that Carl *Vrooman has been chosen as the new “assistant secretary of agriculture.”]¹

My Dear Sara:

If this is true—how amusing! The politics of it is fun enough. And—if it is true, the Vroomans go to Washington—it means yours truly will be there inside of a year I’ll bet, for a two days^ racket. I was never so amused in my life at a political turn.

You see Bryan hates Richard^ [Roger C.] Sullivan, corrupt boss. Vrooman runs against him for Senator in the Democratic primary campaign. We have direct primaries in

Illinois. Vrooman is a good spender on printed matter etc. and a good advertiser, raises an awful hullabaloo—gives Sullivan the Devil. A lot of other's^ do the same and divide the pious vote and give Sullivan a chance to win. “We must all agree on Vrooman”—the Vroomanites say. Then Gov. Dunne, Mayor Harrison of Chicago and Senator Lewis agree on Lawrence B. Stringer and the rest withdraw. Bryan Consents^ to Stringer—the colorless good-and-bad-nobody Stringer—sometimes Sullivan, sometimes Anti Sullivan. He is the “official”^ Anti-Sullivan candidate.² Then rumors are heard of Vrooman in conference with the progressives—taking a ride on the cars with Senator Beveridge—there is talk of his supporting the brilliant and wonderful progressive Raymond Robbins^ [Robins] who will be the real anti Sullivan force in the state of Illinois next fall—and who has practically accepted the Progressive nomination.³

And I hoped he would do it. They are men of the same type, who really love the 90 million, excellent citizens and deep students of affairs.

Mrs. Vrooman is a friend of Mrs. Bryan. Bryan has kept up the Anti Sullivan fight year after year. Bryan has consented to Stringer. But Vrooman must be cared for. So there comes about what I have seen over and over again in politics—the brilliant number three is given an appointive office—to save his face—tide him over till he can run again at a better time, and possibly—in this case—keep him in the party.

And right here come some things George Fitch and wife who are good friends of the Vroomans, but members of the Progressive Party—told me: (and that I observed for myself)—that much as Mrs. Vrooman loves the People, and she is a good sincere woman, and a real lover of the 90 million, her more sinful and carnal self dearly delights in Washington—(almost as much as one Sara loves New York.) And she was getting Karl to Washington partly to serve the people—but partly because she loved the spot. So you see—her main idea is gratified. She is in Washington, and once there, you bet she'll be the whole administration in two years.

I never saw a creature more adapted to that kind of a thing, and truly she has a good and noble heart and wants to serve the people. Her attitude is the exact reverse of that of our dear Mary *Humphrey for instance—her place depends upon the loyalty of the least—and she wins it, and wants to keep winning it and keep deserving it.

I can just see the Vroomans in Washington. The things I have heard of Karl are that he is a little too good a man, a little too fine and gentlemanly to make the Senatorship. But being fine-grained will not prevent him making a good appointive officer and administrator.

Well two days of Washington would be enough for me. It is a lifetime of it those people want I'll bet. And as long as the Democrats are in power—The Wilson and Bryan brand, you bet they'll be there or thereabouts.

Well—it may not be true—but I hope it is, just for the fun of the thing.

I will write you another letter tonight. This with a hundred stars—from

Vachel

[P.S.] As a matter of fact—the Vroomans have invited me to Washington—several times, but I took it so-so, since they wern't^ elected yit^.

Notes

¹Democrat James Hamilton Lewis (1863-1939) was elected U.S. Senator from Illinois first in 1912, serving from 1913 to 1919, and then again in 1930, serving until his death in 1939. Lewis moved to Chicago in 1903, after failing to be reelected Washington Territory's U.S. Democratic Representative and then failing to be elected Washington's U.S. Senator. In Chicago, Lewis practiced law and lost an election for Illinois Governor, before winning his initial Senatorial bid in the elections of 1912. Lewis was a powerful political figure, serving as Democratic whip during both his stints as Illinois's U.S. Senator.

²According to historian John Hoffman, "Illinois Democrats in the Progressive era [1900-1920] were divided into three Chicago-based factions, led by Carter [H.] Harrison II, Roger C. Sullivan, and Edward F. Dunne" (*A Guide to the History of Illinois*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991, p. 85). At the time of VL's letter, Harrison was serving his fifth and last term as Chicago Mayor, Sullivan was recognized as one of the most powerful Chicago political bosses, and Dunne was Illinois Governor. Democrat Lawrence B. Stringer (1866-1942) was elected U.S. Representative from Illinois (1913-1915), but lost his bid to unseat Republican Lawrence Yates Sherman (1858-1939) in the Senatorial elections of 1914. Sherman had been elected in 1913, due to the unseating of Republican Senator William Lorimer (1861-1934), on charges of corruption. See Letters 14 and 64. Also see VL's poem "To the United States Senate" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 135-136).

Sullivan's *New York Times* obituary (April 15, 1920) supports VL's assertion that Bryan hated Sullivan: "Roger C. Sullivan was the benevolent 'boss' of the Illinois Democracy [that is, the Democratic Party]. For a quarter of a century he was a dominant factor in the State party and for the last dozen years he was a national figure in politics, due largely to the advertising he got from the attacks of William Jennings Bryan, until recently his arch enemy."

³Pulitzer-Prize winning historian and politician Albert J[eremiah] Beveridge (1862-1927) had been Republican U.S. Senator from Indiana (1899-1911). During his first term, Beveridge was known as one of this country's great imperialists. In 1900, for example, he argued on the Senate floor that the U.S. should annex the Philippines. In his second term, he emphasized domestic social reform, championing, among other things, national child labor laws and the Federal Meat Inspection Act (1906). Beveridge lost his Senate seat in 1910; then, in 1912, he joined Theodore Roosevelt and the short-lived Progressive ("Bull Moose") Party. VL hints that Democrats feared losing *Vrooman to the Progressive Party, and so they found a political post for him in Washington.

Raymond Robins (1873-1954) was a Chicago lawyer, social worker, and politician, widely involved in Progressive Party politics. Robins gave the keynote address at the 1916 Progressive Party convention, held in Chicago, and the *New York Times* reports (June 7) that, at the mention of Roosevelt's name, the delegates erupted in a 93-minute ovation.

141) "I keep wondering how you would like Springfield . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 2, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I have been over five poems today—and two are ready for you. I feel considerably more industrious than yesterday. I feel I am getting under way. The Rag-Time Lady¹ looks promising and the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes.

I spent a happy hour reading your verses today. I am proud to know a lady with so majestic a soul, able to write Helen and Guinivere[^], and The Last *Sappho—and November Night and To The Mother of a Poet.² I have known so many women eaten up with ambition, there must be a blessed peace in the corner of your heart when you think of your work—in the place of the rat that gnaws them, for you have won your place and are keeping it with no uncertainty whatever. And your next book is going to give you the same place, only larger and ampler and richer.

I went to Church today and was asked to lead the Communion-services sometime this month. The new Pastor does not come till Sept. 1. When I lead, you just bet I'll send you the programme to send to your parents. I 'spose I don't dare go to a picture-show this sabbath eve—if I'm going to be church-member agin'.

All sorts of gossip today. Mary *Johnson—the daughter of Lyssippus is living in Chicago—as she threatened us all to do for the past year. She is there now, and will probably stay, and one of her favorite young men—from Springfield Charles Ryan—at one time said to be engaged to Charles *Ridgley's sister) is studying medecine[^] in the University—and living in the next flat. And she is either in his machine or Bettys just “speeding” round the town. Has been arrested therefor several times. And having the time of her life. So I am altogether bereft in Springfield, and am not even anybodys[^] calling-beau. I have had three evening walks with George Lee and one with George Nelch.³ I keep wondering how you would like Springfield. I have about given it up from your standpoint—. But then you might like it. It does seem like a hidebound tight little place, after all the noble places we have had our masques in—and that are burnt into our souls with kisses.⁴

We might live in St. Louis or Chicago and I could write about Springfield and the country round about as Ibsen wrote about his country while in Italy or France. I am not so anxious for the letter as the spirit of my past—and I certainly do not want to break your dear body on the wheel of my fanaticism.

[Drawings of seven stars down the left margin of this next page.]

You would enjoy my family and the neighbors immensely—on visits—but I cant[^] see it any other way. It looks to me like Chicago is the place you would be happiest—this side of New York. Well—it is not a really serious question. Your health is by far the most important thing—and when I think of that—I think of the West very seriously. Arizona.

Well—we wont[^] move just yet, Sara. Get well this time and take the guilt off of my heart. I will feel that I did it, every bit of it—till you are clear well of that cold.

I love you, I love you I love you, I love you. You are my darling darling Sara.

Vachel.

To Sara Darling.

("Darling" not to be included in
the printed edition.)

All the west is veiled today,
Veiled by custom's hand.
Men have deemed far Attica
More the poet's land.

Lady, through your fairy eyes
I would see the West.
Magic things abound there,
Fields in jewels dressed.

Lady, through your fairy eyes
I would watch the corn.
Through your kindling spirit
Sing the crops new-born.

Look you at the Poet's West.
Glorious it lies,
Veiled, yet waiting to be found
Through your fairy eyes.

last year.

In the Immaculate Conception Church.
Springfield Ill.

Hunted by friends, who think that life is play,
Shaken by holy loves, more feared than foes,
By [~~And~~] Beauty's amber cup that overflows,
And Pride of Place—that leads me more astray:

Here I renew my vows, and this chief vow—
To seek each year this shrine of deathless power,
Keeping my Springtime cornland thoughts in flower
While labor-gnarled grey Christians round me bow.

Arm me against great towns, strong spirits old!
St. Francis keep me road-worn, not o'er fed.
Help me to look upon the poor-house bed
As a most fitting death, more dear than gold.

Town-friends are feasting much. Their powers take wing.

whack
at
They have too much who but their own share take.
Only the choir that pleasure's house forsake
Can sing as well as I would die to sing.

Help me to seek the sunburned groups afield,
The Iron folk, the pioneers freeborn.
Make me to voice the tall men in the corn.
Let Boyhoods wild[wæod]flower days a bright fruit yield.

Yea—I would woo the rich and hearty earth
True to the deep black furrows while I live.
And voice to all that [stolid] earnest laboring give.
My life, without this work, is nothing worth.

Scourge me—a slave that brings unhallowed praise
To you, stern Virgin, in this church so sweet
If I desert the ways wherin^ my feet
Were set by Heaven in prenatal days.⁵

Notes

¹The poem was finally entitled: “The Apple Blossom Snow Blues” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 376-377. See Letter 139.

²VL is rereading ST’s *Helen of Troy* volume, as well as two later poems. “A November Night” is finally collected in ST’s *Love Songs* (1917) and likely manifests, ironically, ST’s love for John Hall *Wheelock (see Carpenter, pp. 291-292). For “A Poet’s Mother,” see Letter 14.

³Like Charles *Ridgely and Franz Lee *Rickaby, George Nelch was one of VL’s “boys”: see Letter 20. Charles Ryan and the Betty referred to here have not been identified.

⁴As we have already seen (Letter 130, note 4), Sara confided to Harriet *Monroe: “I could not live in the Lindsay family home It would kill me.”

⁵Another version of “In the Immaculate Conception Church” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 273). In the final version, the fourth and the sixth stanzas have been omitted, probably at the suggestion of ST, who, after all, is instructed to “whack.” “To Sara Darling” is one of VL’s many unpublished poems and represents another (futile) attempt to “westernize” ST. For VL’s drawing of the Immaculate Conception Church, see the title page of this chapter.

142) “This is my third letter today . . .”

Springfield Ill.
Sunday Night
August 2, 1914.

10:30 P.M.

Pardon me—dear—if I write again this very night.

This is my third letter today—but I am much alone, and talking to you all the time—in spirit. I feel a bit more workmanly tonight. I am getting up a head of steam and will do just a little more work tomorrow I hope.

I went to the Leland 8:30 to 9 P.M. and listened in the dining room to the music and had a cup of milk, and a piece of pie and cheese. You sat opposite—and had milk and and^—toast or something. A club sandwich maybe. I can imagine you taking a little evening nibble there with me some evening after Papa and Mama come back. The music is pretty good—a violin and piano duet.¹

We sat there nibbling and talking about nothing much, and looking into each others^ eyes.

Then we went home past the church and it was closed and we stood in the shadow of the door and kissed each other and then we faced the altar and prayed with all our hearts for the Brotherhood of man, all over the heart-broken world.

Whenever I think of the war in Europe I think my heart will break. I do not see how I can bear it.

It is the moral of the book of Job that he did not charge God with foolishness—and we must not reject that wisdom from so long ago. The only thing is to pray and hope for the brotherhood of all mankind. I am one half hungry for prayer—one half rebel against God. Well—if I keep this up I will spoil my welcome with Sara.

I love you, fine lady—come let us gather water lillies again—and you will row and I will gather the lillies, and then we will walk on the edge of the lake and look through the bushes and find our two Chaperones are afar off and I will carry you over the brook—and then we will sit in the auto and talk all the nonsense in the world, and I will observe all your beauties and wonders.

You are the noblest and finest of ladies—and I wish you long life and I kiss your mouth and goodnight.

Vachel—

Note

¹The Leland was one of Springfield's fine hotels: see Letter 104.

143) "I have what few living mortals have . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 3, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I am very proud of myself this evening having actually done a considerable work on the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes.

I enjoyed your first long letter so today. I read it over and over—I spent most of morning and part of the afternoon rereading it—(and the rest of the time on the Ghosts of the Buffaloes.) Not so much rereading the letter as living in it with you.

The blossom from the *spice tree I have put in an envelope and it shall lie between me and the pillow under my temple and the bracelet shall lie on my heart, as ever.¹

This will be a short letter. I have just one thing to say—I have been living with that rare personality Sara all day and hiding myself from all the world under the shadow of her Psyche-wings.² Your letter so reveals and suggests the whole of you. I can see your arch smile and gentleness behind it all, and all day I have just been surrounded by Sara—her wit, her wisdom and her tang and special quality.

I have made up my mind you and I are just a bit too impatient. (Let us remember) We both have Sara—and she is a love of a creature—and neither of us have lost her—and both of us like to be alone with her, and both of us love to listen to the songs in her heart. And besides both of us having Sara, both of us have each other—and there is no reason why we shouldn't, yet—and untill^ there is—Sara shall dwell with me, and bend over me with her Psyche-wings. I have what few living mortals have—why should I be so eager for more all at once when I have not half counted my blessings nor taken stock of the most beautiful memories the mind of man may hold. Let me remember her—and let her bend over me with her Psyche wings while I write songs—for this month and next month.

Goodnight, bright starry lady

Vachel

[Enclosures: (1) Small envelope with a lock of light brown hair. Two notes are written on either side of the envelope: “Nonsense. Perfect nonsense. Mine is not gold. Just lead.” “Nonsense. Perfect nonsense. No excuse for it whatever.” (2) Newspaper clipping confirming Carl *Vrooman’s appointment.³ (3) Newspaper clipping reporting that the Rothschild family is withholding money in an attempt to curb the European war. VL writes under the headline: “This is the only hopeful thing I have struck.”]

Notes

¹For the bracelet, see Letter 137 (note 3).

²See VL’s “Under the Blessing of Your Psyche Wings” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 244). An early version of the poem is included in Letter 152 below. Significantly, since ST had parted with VL before the volume was finally published, “Under the Blessing” serves as the concluding work in *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914).

³For the *Vrooman appointment, see Letter 140.

144) “I begin to see you in a far different light . . .”

Springfield Ill.
August 6, 1914.
Thursday Evening.

My Dear Lady:

This letter will be brief. Just to send love.

I wrote to *Harriet as you suggested.

I like the Dugald Walker picture and the Sara poem in *Colliers.¹

I have taken your corrections on the two poems [~~you~~] I sent you.

There is just one thing I have been thinking tonight. You must get well. If you stay sick I will feel as though I gave you this cold and the guilt will not get off me till you do get well. And you just bet you will never get a chance to get your feet wet again around me. And we will do all our courting in the parlor if we have to be chaperoned every minute.

I really will feel much relieved in a practical sort of a way, when your letters come from Charlevoix. I sort of feel your folks will take care of you and be sort of responsible and watchful, even if they watch too much. And I think Charlevoix will be a nice place to receive visitors from St. Louis. Such people of course, I want to see you at your best and well, and play the game through to a just conclusion.²

If you get well at once, I will in a way have learned a valuable lesson, and certainly I have achieved a far deeper and more certain knowledge of you—if that is any satisfaction. *Olive and Mama have neuresthenic ups and downs and zig zags—but under them all so much fundamental vitality that their changes in the weather I have grown hardened to. But I begin to see you in a far different light. I see that your personal safety is actually at stake—with them it was scarcely safety—but comfort for themselves (and the innocent bystander!)

Your whole social philosophy (or lack of it) is bound up with your struggle for life, and I wonder with your delicacy how you have flowered so perfectly—with such high spirits and compelling personality. I want your little spirit to stay in its white warm little human house, and flutter and be happy there—I want you to live fully, and be happy. That is the first thing.

Whatever you do—I will bless you and bless you with my last breath. Only get well.

With love and a little kiss

Vachel—

[P.S.] The way to draw kisses is first to put down five dots [drawing of five dots in a star pattern]. Then join them [drawing of a star].

Notes

¹VL refers to ST's ironic poem "Pierrot's Song," published in **Collier's Weekly* (July 25, 1914, p. 30). The poem is collected in **Rivers to the Sea* (p. 95), with the subtitle: "(For a picture by Dugald Walker)." Author and artist Dugald Stewart Walker (1883-1937) had attended the New York School of Art, although not at the same time as VL. By 1914, Walker had illustrated and published *Stories for Pictures* (1912) and *Fairy Tales from Hans Andersen* (1914). Walker would illustrate ST's *Rainbow Gold* (September 1922), a selection of 80 poems for children: see Drake, p. 212.

²VL knows that Ernst **Filsinger* will be with ST at her Charlevoix summer home, and that may partially account for the confusing syntax in this sentence. For more on the Charlevoix home, "Altasand," see Letter 3.

145) "Of course I will write the poem to you . . ."

Friday Morning—
August 7, 1914.

My Darling Lover:

If you do not get well, you will break my heart.

and

My Darling Lover:

Of course I will write the poem to you, a big serious long devout song.

Vachel.

[P.S.] (I will write a letter tonight.)

146) "Sara I am mad about your beauty . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Friday Night.
August 7, 1914.

My Darling Lover:

The evening rings with locust.

It is not quite seven o'clock. At eight a high school lad named Rhinboth who was one of my boys, comes to take a walk.¹

For three days now I have reached a consummation^ devoutly to be wished. I have really been at my desk—except two hours cutting grass etc in the morning and two hours nap in the afternoon. I am really concentrating, cleaning up many half-written poems—(there are fifty now on my desk half-written)]—brought from upstairs. I am putting new ginger and new colors into many pieces that limped a bit and were set aside to cool. I shall send **Keeley* a sheaf tomorrow. And I am working on three principal

poems one to Sara—one the *nightengale—and The Wild West Show—(or the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes.)

I am so glad to be concentrated. I havn't^ really been concentrated and writing steadily day after day since way last winter. And at least 25 of these poems have chances to be good—they are everything but polished up. Many of them I worked on several days, a long time back—a year or two years back. In these two months I can put the finishing touch on a good big bunch of them and send enough to Keely^ to almost make my next book—without straining myself or getting stale. I have worked so much on so many of them already. Then I can go east and have them coming out in the *Herald steadily. Part of the bargain is that Mr. Keeley is to establish me with his public with the same standing I have with the critical world, not introduce me as a “newspaper poet.” And I have enough friends in Chicago to make the thing a go I think once it is started.

Some of these pieces I want for interludes for that possible *Macmillan book.

Several old poems I gave up as hopeless, I have put new clothes on today and feel quite happy about. I will mail them to you soon for correction.

This writing for a newspaper, if I can do it my way—I will consider an ideal opportunity. It has begun to stir my fancy already. There is a certain PUBLIC point of view and atmosphere—like Broadway at 23rd st—with the wind blowing—that is not necessarily shabby. Kipling did it with English affairs. Nobody does it with American in poetry. For instance here is the old outline of a poem on the movies—I have just worked up.² The very thought of putting it [being] in the Herald showed me how. And here is one on The Band Playing in the Park Saturday Night—I wrote when I wrote General *Booth. I have just discovered how to give it the proper staging.³

Of course this Herald idea may not work out. But it is a step in the direction I want to take. Some day the right thing will come. *Harriet's Poetry Magazine is just my kind of a thing—only she can't give me room enough. I want to keep producing as fast as the dreams come—(without forcing them) and I want a definite official^ publicity medium.

Well this is quite enough on this score.

Well I hope you are having a happy time—and are almost well at least. If you do not get well, my darling lover, you will break my heart.

Last night the little envelope with the *spice blossom was on my pillow and I dreamed you were in the *Moody apartment with me in New York, and we laughed among the white roses. And I woke and wondered if we could ever be so near together—so care free in such a shelter— At least we have been there in fancy—and that is better than not going at all.

I do not want to bind you child. I want you to be happy, and first of all, to be well. If I could bargain with the angels—and they would promise to keep you well and happy—I could give you up forevermore—all but the memory of you. I do not want to be greedy or a devourer—and I do not want you ever to catch any more colds at masques to please me. I will say yet, they were worth it—if you will get well, my darling lover.

Did you catch cold in Arizona or Colorado? Havn't^ you friends there you could visit?

But lets^ talk about our blessings. I am all puffed up about The Mirror write up of you—and your being translated into French. If it hadn't been for this wicked war—who knows? Paris might be Teasdale-mad.⁴

*Reedys first letter from Europe—by the way, is a mighty good thing.⁵ He has outdone himself. If he stays there and keeps it up, the Mirror will be worth while. I hope he doesn't have to come home.

Sara I am mad about your beauty—more than I put into a letter—you burn before me like a white and golden flame. If we never meet under the golden shawl, it is a comfort and a sustainer of my manhood to know that you accepted the dream of it—that to you it was a golden hope. And so when you bend over me and breathe upon me while I write—I seem to touch the fringes of the golden shawl—and I tremble to all your exquisite slenderness. Oh your gift of beauty! You beauty loving Sara. Love yourself most of all—for you are the white torch of song and your Botticelli slenderness becomes a symbol of every womanly quality of your soul. And so I thank God for my garden. Your bracelet is on my heart.⁶

With love

Vachel—

Notes

¹For VL's "boys," see Letter 20.

²See "The Goodly, Strange Lanterns" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 740-741), and Letter 152.

³The poem is "Saturday Night in the Park" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 742-743). See Letter 139.

⁴**Reedy's Mirror* (August 7, 1914) announces: "Miss Teasdale in a French Gown." ST's "Spring Night" (see Letters 9 and 132) has been translated into French, as "Nuit de Printemps," and recently printed in *Les Refractaires*. The reporter, likely Reedy himself, asserts: "It is a great honor to be internationalized, especially in poetry, and more especially while the poet is quick and not dead" (p. 13).

⁵The lead essay in the *Mirror* for August 7, 1914, is Reedy's "The Editor en Voyage," beginning a series of essays on the war in Europe as seen firsthand. The first essay is from London, dated "July 19th, 1914," and expresses a point of view common to many Americans, including VL, at the beginning of the European conflict: ". . . the ocean is restful after New York. Which town is now Gloomville, proper. You don't hear anything in Gotham but hard-luck stories and denunciation of Wilson for the hard times, but after all you only quit New York's complainant atmosphere to run into desperate depression in London. Substitute Lloyd George for Wilson and you have the same old tale of woe. Each of these men is ruining his country—to hear the fellows who have been doing his country good, tell of it" (p. 1).

⁶For VL's bracelet, see Letters 137 and 148.

147) "I cannot shut my eyes without telling you goodnight . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Friday night.
[August 7, 1914]

11:30—

I cannot shut my eyes without telling you goodnight

Sara my lover.

[Drawings of four stars.]

Vachel.

148) "certainly you of all women have taught me what Love is . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 9, 1914.

My Darling Lover:

This letter is addressed to your mind, and your coolest thinking powers, and I have written it twice (some of it three times) to make sure I put the argument as clearly as I see it. It is your mind and your plans that put me out of your life at the next turn of the road—your heart is for me. So it is that mistaken little mind I want to struggle with today.

Your very uncertainty of health makes it seem more right for me to urge you to stay single for me. Certainly I will be your devoted and obedient Vachel. You will have comparatively good health and live in safety for your one task will be to keep well—which grows more and more paramount in my thoughts of Sara. Then too you will have the spaces of solitude you crave when you want them. Every morning there will be a new letter on your heart—and on mine. We will pray with each other and for each other though much of the time apart. You are in a sense my saint, even now.

Isn't a long careful lifetime of understanding and helping one another, you keeping well better than the reckless risk you dream of—smashing most everything for a possible little stranger? Isn't our life together worth keeping?

By my plan you will keep well—we will both be bringing music into the world. I for one, without the least uncertainty can lay my hand on this bracelet and swear myself your exclusive poet and knight forever if you will swear yourself my exclusive poet and lady forever. As it is I am afraid I am yours anyhow.

We can trust each other—the word once given. We shall keep our kisses and daily letters for each other—and our songs shall be most intimately married—and aren't our kisses even the memory of them today—certainties, and our letters and our verses certainties, and isn't marriage a terrible uncertainty at least in the present hour for the

snowflower Sara? I know I can be just as true to you as I am to Poetry itself—I have not wavered since first I kissed you and found the home of my Spirit. Why should you turn me out of your Spirit's nest? You yourself are Poetry, and I must be true to you as I can.

I can pledge myself to you as a monk does to his church, and you can pledge yourself as those nuns that sang the day you gave the bracelet. Is this too hard and stern a prospect?

This is not a marriage in the world's sense—but is infinitely to be preferred to giving you up to a reckless experiment, or what would be today a reckless experiment.

Poets are so few—life is not planned for them—they must make such plans as they can with honor. And they have to pay the price of being different. You are trying to avoid the price. If you had been a more full blooded and less sensitive woman you would not have sung at all. I see how even your physical beauty as well as your souls wonderfulness is all bound up in your fragility, and I want to keep it all intact, a singing harp on my heart.

At least for the present you have struggle enough—keeping well. I see it plainly. Keep yourself beautiful for our kisses—and sing songs to satisfy our pride. I believe in motherhood, but isn't being a helpmeet first? Your desire to be a mother is one of the noblest things about you—but if you must choose motherhood or spiritual wifedom—which will you choose? We are sure you are equipped for the spiritual wifedom. No matter how sick you are—you are the very flame of my life—though a thousand miles away. You are nearer my natural partner though the marriage is incomplete—than any other woman could be—married or single. We live the same life—we have the same friends, we read the same books—we have the same selfish ambitions for our own work, and the same unselfish ambitions each for the other's work. We cannot avoid each other if we live our lives out to their natural literary goals.

We must live for our minds and souls and songs and thoughts, we must live to build up our mutual religion^ and our mutual music. Isn't this enough for a poor man and a tired girl? And when each has done his full task for the month or the year—he shall send for the other for a day in the sunshine. Arn't^ such kisses as we took in the sun on the rocks at Dawsons after work well and thoroughly done—worth more in the sight of the Angels than all other kisses?¹

They will know we are Poets with Poets obstacles, and they will say that with their limitations—the good children have done their best by the duty of Song and the duty of Love. Now they are rejoicing as much as they may, these children—not to hurt the snow-flower Sara, I say—in the sun—for I shall never take you out into the dew again.

Sara—I will stake my life on this bargain with you—I will give you all my years—gladly, gladly, gladly. You will have no idea how happy I will be in the hope. And you can ask no more than all my years can you? What more can I the artist offer that I am sure I can give completely, if I offer you my faithfulness?

If it is your will to cross the Rubicon you are now contemplating—and perhaps shut me out forever in a little month, we are indeed parted forever—beginning then. Why? For the simple reason I cannot look you in the eye or write to you honestly, without calling you my darling—and I will never covet or appear to covet what is another

man's. It just isn't in me to endure the thought or the hope of taking what is not mine completely. We love each other too well—now—in the sight of God to ever play if it is past the play time. Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lords.

I claim you against the world—Child—to the last hour of your fragility, certainly you must not decide against me till you are strong. When you become a Valkyrie, fit for the mother's battle—then perhaps I should surrender you. But why before?

Later—

Sunday Night.

Still my dear—I am afraid my letter sounds a bit cruel and grim—I do not mean it so. I want what I can get for the asking—or the pleading—with honor—and I do not want to lose—just because I did not ask. But after all I cannot help saying after all—that the passion for motherhood is perhaps the biggest and noblest thing in you—I admire you for it. You do not know how heroic it looks to me Oh Snow-flower Sara—and who am I to stand in the way of your struggling soul—working it out as best you can? But certainly child—as long as you are just fighting for health—do not turn me away—every day is happiness to me or better than happiness, every day is ennobled Life, while you are a part of it. By being tired and worn you keep me well in a sense—. If our days of love have broken you so—they have given me Life—you have been in that sense a mother—certainly you of all women have taught me what Love is—why should the lesson end? Have you taught me all I am to learn, little learned one?

Yet Lady—walking home tonight thinking this letter over—I said in myself—“you must tell her to tear up the letter if there is anything in it that is not true and fine—or that makes her feel ignoble or that Vachel is too selfish.”

Of a faith I cannot reason Child—. We have built up a life fine as the works of a watch and trying [~~tonight~~] improve it with a monkey-wrench and a saw—tonight. For arguments—in the presence of ones^ darling—are like the monkey-wrench and the saw.²

I know three things surely. I want you well at once. That is unselfish. Secondly I want to absolutely bury myself in my work here for two months before I see you or any one else on earth and emerge (—exhausted) with at least 25 of these 50 poems on my desk in real form. That is my passion for fatherhood. And I want a perfect darling of a letter from you every day—so that every time I look up from my work—I see you shining, laughing in the golden shawl—or if you prefer in the reticent black dress with the white frills and the pearly Gates. Not saying Goodby—but “Love me forever.”

I am a very selfish artist you have served infinitely well. And I want more more more from you of self denial.

Well—Goodnight. Beautiful beautiful beautiful.

from your

Vachel.

[P.S.] Is this a dreadful letter? If it is—tell me so.

[Enclosures: Several cutout stars. In addition, drawings of stars are on the blank verso and the blank recto of the first two pages.]

Notes

¹For the Dawsons, see Letter 106.

²The confused syntax is VL's and likely reflects his distress.

149) "Do not turn from me, bright lady of my heart . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 11, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

After two days of every possible kind of joy and sorrow thinking of our love and its uncertainties—and projecting dozens of letters of every possible variety—sleeping and waking—absolutely surrounded by our baffled dream—now I begin to write. And I have very little to say—except that the one desire of my heart is—do not turn away from me. Just as we are and just as we stand is infinitely better than goodby.

And so—please roast and return enclosed verses—and if you want any more “*Rhymes To Be Traded” you may have them—*Kennerley has grown suddenly civil and has sent back a bunch.

I have filled this letter full of my affairs—and let my heart go by.¹ I cannot begin.

Sara do not get one inch farther from me in spirit till you absolutely must. Can't you wait till we meet again in November? Can't you see me just before I start East? Mary *Humphrey issues you a most urgent invitation to come by on the way home from Charlevoix.

Mary is a good sober friend—but when I tried to read her the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes it was no go. She doesn't belong when it comes to upholstering Ghosts and the like!

You shall have it soon. But you have enough in this envelope. And I want a day or two more on these Buffaloes.

I made you a copy last night—but rereading it saw the raw places so plainly.

God bless you. Do not turn from me, bright lady of my heart.

With love

Vachel.

[P.S.] I think last night I went over half the days we spent together in New York, when I really should have been asleep.

[Enclosures: (1) Handwritten copy of the second and third stanzas of Robert Burns's "A Red, Red Rose."² (2) Copy of *Kennerley's announcement for **Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*.]

Notes

¹Apparently a part of this letter has been lost.

²These same lines were sent in a separate envelope the next day, August 12, with the note: "Yes—I sent it before. But its^ all I have to say. To Sara from Vachel. August 12, 1914." The lines read:

As fair as thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luv am I;
And I will luv thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry:

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
I will luv thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run

150) "Plan some way I am to always be in touch with you . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 13, 1914.¹

My Dear Sara:

If dear lady, I cannot have more of you—I must not lose what I have.

I just live on your letters lady. When you take up your pen—remember you are a life-giver.

But I don't want to say a word more.

I will just write my little poem again. I am past the point of elaboration today.²

I not only know I will always love you—but I want to always love you finely. Please think of some honorable way to keep me always loving you and happy, for I know I will then be noble—at least my life will be keyed in the region of dignity and worth where I always want it to be. Plan some way I am to always be in touch with you, even if [I] we cannot nightly meet.

If you cannot send anything else, not even a word in time to come, mail me one blade of grass every day.

(over)

I keep re-opening this letter while I write the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes. If there is anything I have said that I shouldn't, or hurts your heart—please consider it unsaid. You give me far more happiness than anything else, this minute.

Notes

¹A substantial part of this letter is in Carpenter, p. 215.

²VL recopies two stanzas from Burns' "A Red, Red Rose": see Letter 149. The next paragraph of this letter is written as a free-verse poem.

151) "take me at least as your love-consecrated poet forever . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 13, 1914.¹

If you cannot take me as your husband—and if you make such a distinction between the life of the one and the life of the other—take me at least as your love-consecrated poet forever and ever—and never let the arms of your poet's spirit leave me—and never drive me from you, or turn me from the door of your house invisible, in fairyland, where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage.² Keep me so close that our songs shall be our children—I care not how—so it is done in honor. God give me the essence of your spirit forever—amen.

From Vachel.

Notes

¹This note is included in Carpenter, p. 215. It is likely, though, that part of this letter has been lost.

²Compare Matthew 22:30, Mark 12:25, and Luke 20:35.

152) "I know you are trying to turn away from me . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Saturday [August] 15, 1914.¹

Dear Sara:

I send you the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes—now called the *Red Gods. Please show a little star by the side of the one I have drawn at the top. Then go through the poem and overhaul it and send it back as soon as convenient. I shall send today carbon copies for corrections to Louis *Untermeyer—Edward J. *Wheeler, Percy *Mackaye^ and shall leave off the stars for their copies, and urge them to return them soon.

I do not generally submit a ms. so raw as this, but if I used the usual process of rereading to my Springfield friends for a month and taking their corrections slowly, it would not be done in time for the book. So I want suggestions from the bunch, and I hope they all go manfully to the slaughter and are quick about it. While I am waiting for returns—I hope to prepare a few poems on the War to make a last brief section for my book. I know just what I want to say, and I have prayed hard that I may say it in some fashion. And this Buffalo poem had me by the back of the neck, and each morning I found myself unable to get loose, and spending one more day on it—so I am sending it to my dear friends to write for me, while I forget it a minute if I can, and tend to this war. I want to write some brief but pointed discourses on War vs. Buddha, War vs. St. Francis, War vs. Tolstoi, and to develop two discourses on Bryan and Wilson as men of Peace—and then several other things if I can get to them.² The opening poem is one to darling Sara “When All the World is at War.” I think the Movie Poem I sent you about War is too crude, for anything but the *Herald.³

I have lived a hundred lives since we parted—every minute I was not writing the Red Gods I have been with you—happy or unhappy—[but] going over every possible argument, conversation, plan, hope, scheme to meet again soon, and I have been amid it all—for the most part happy—and I think it is because of your whiteness—for the whiteness of your truth speaking soul moves my desire as the whiteness of the rose-garden moves my desire—so how can I be angry or restless? I do not want to fret you—and if you will send me just the tiny notes—or just an envelope with a daily card with a star on it, on the days when you think of me—and are not forgetting me—that will be all I will beg for. Just a sign is enough. I was so glad of your card today—I have had nothing for a week—. Finally last night I took down all your letters since before I started to New York and read and read—and looked at the bracelet till I was as in love with the color of gold as a miser.—⁴ And the *spice-tree flower that is always in an envelope on or near my pillow—I took out and its perfume always brings me your whiteness and your glory, and then the golden hair you sent just before I went to New York⁵—if I shut my eyes and hold it against my cheek it is almost like you when there is a masque—and it has the same perfume, and then I look at the color of it in the lamplight and read all your last letters but one I tore up where you called me your fine friend. I am your lover. You quit being Saraphim somewhere in Chicago—you are my dear lover and I am your dear lover—and that is all there is to it. You were trying to get sober and polite.

I know you are trying to turn away from me—but I honor you dear—whatever you do—I shall not be angry. I shall thank the God that made you a thoroughbred, whatever you do. It is not easy for my heart to feel that some one is taking you away from me—an inch at a time—every day—aided and abetted by all around him, even your own judgement aiding and abetting him. But on the other hand I am at least glad you are with your folks for your health’s sake—even if they do fuss over you too much. I want you to be fussed over too much, and abundantly taken care of. Your cold is on my conscience and my heart. Yet in a sense it represents a [certainly] womanly gift and sacrifice, a risk that I did not understand, that I cannot help but accept with a kind of pride and happiness. I can say she caught cold for her lover’s sake. I know if I could give you as much happiness it would be cheap at any price to me. And yet I want you well so much—I cannot help but be very very glad you are with your Papa and Mama your natural guardians—and not off in a stuffy room by yourself.

I have so much to say. I want to tell you how I kept myself happy a long time last night. I am not done telling I looked into the air till I could see you—, see you as you say my poem must be—just as you are. The exact edges of your hair—the exact shape of your face. And I saw you in all circumstances—and your various ways of smiling, and the exact and precise color of your eyes and their expression. And I could restore the whole picture—a moving picture of many and many an hour together. And no one sits opposite me at the boarding-house—there is a blank wall—so this morning I put you in that chair and it was just like eating opposite one another at the Martha Washington.⁶ And you called me “Bachel,” you really did. You did everything but order a meal. I am amazed how I can visualize your darling face and hands and shoulders opposite me there at the table. And looking so dignified and bossy! And then came your so very welcome card. Well—as a mark of good faith—I shall close the letter here.

For the length of time you send me these little brief letters I do not want to break down your resolution, or wear you down—or create an unnecessary strain. I shall probably send you a deal of verse to correct—being very busy there—and I shall be as brief in my letters as I can, without actually nailing my soul up a box of silence.

With love

Vachel.

Please write all over the Red Gods. Correct it sternly.

[Marginal note on final page: “I would rather have the tiniest star of love from you than all the friendship that was ever brewed.”]

With All the World at War.

Though I have often held your girlish head
 Long on my shoulder, faint from little ill,
 Though I have found you like a snowdrop pale
 On sunny days have found you weak and still

Under the shelter of your Psyche wings
 I hide tonight like one small broken bird
 So soothed it half forgets its troubled flight,
 And dread new winds of war are now unheard.

My heaven-doubting pennons feel your hands
 With touch most delicate so circling round
 That for an hour they dream that God is good,
 For in your shadow mercy's ways abound.

I thought myself the guard of your frail state.
 I come to you tonight a helpless guest,
 And hide beneath your giant Psyche wings
 And flutter near your pallid wondrous breast.⁷

To my darling Sara—August 5, 1914.

From Vachel—

Notes

¹This particular letter is somewhat puzzling, since VL dates it “July 15, 1914,” when he and ST were together in New York City. Since the close of Letter 149 indicates that VL has yet to send “The *Ghosts of the Buffaloes,” it seems likely that this letter was written on Saturday, August 15, and VL writes “July” in error. Carpenter quotes part of the letter but simply dates it “early” August (pp. 212-213). Examples of VL’s carelessness with dates in his correspondence are legion. When he was a Hiram College student, he sent one letter home dated “May 32, 1899.” His amused mother’s response questioned the nature of the Hiram calendar, commenting that Springfield’s calendar did not include quite so many days in May.

²Some of these verses were included at the close of VL’s *The *Congo and Other Poems*: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 239-244. Others were published in later trade volumes: see the following poems in *Poetry of VL*: “When Bryan Speaks” (p. 284), “Tolstoi Is Plowing Yet” (p. 285), and “The Voice of St. Francis of Assisi” (p. 397). The verses on President Wilson are included in “Litany of the Heroes” (p. 441).

³The “Movie Poem” is “The Goodly, Strange Lanterns” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 740-741). See Letter 146.

⁴The bracelet was ST’s gift to VL: see Letter 137.

⁵See Letter 112 for the story of the “golden hair.”

⁶ST stayed at the Martha Washington hotel when visiting New York City: see Letter 16.

⁷An early version of “Under the Blessing of Your Psyche Wings” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 244): see Letter 143.

153) “I have been rereading your letters . . .”

Springfield Ill.
August 16, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I have been rereading your letters—this Sunday afternoon—and I fastened *The Answer and Dusk in June in the Book*.¹

Your letters—read in order—make a most beautiful story, and every one brings memory after memory, wave after wave of recollection^.

And the whole packet is perfumed from the *Spice-Tree.

And so—with a thousand stars for you

Vachel—

And I will luv thee still my dear
 While the sands o' life shall run.²
 (over)

Who is Sara Teasdale?
 Well—first of all,
 she is a thoroughbred.

Notes

¹For “The Answer” and “Dusk in June,” see Letters 13 and 3.

²Robert Burns’ “A Red, Red Rose”: see Letter 149.

154) “I can send my congratulations to the winner . . .”

Springfield Ill.
 August 19, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

This is my next to the last letter.

There is only one person in the world I want to see—and that is Paul *Wakefield in China.

Well—that sounds like my last letter—and I am not going to write it now.

I must hear from you in regard to all the poems—at your leisure. Then I will write my thank you and goodby.

But in this letter I can send my congratulations to the winner—my respect and friendship to the members of your family, and so I do.

I am doing my best not to be angry or owe any grudges. But it is not easy to be turned out of the home of my heart.

[~~But~~] I solemnly promise to try to be good—and I will write you goodby when you send me the verses or the criticism thereof.

Vachel—

155) “I do not want to see you again for a long long time . . .”

Springfield Ill.
 August 20, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

Your letter made me very angry and I wrote a long wicked reply and tore it up. And I sealed up your bracelet to send back—it hurt me so to keep it and

then I sent it to my sister in Cleveland and told her to keep it and wear it.¹ She don't know why. But I told her I might ask for it again in a long time. Certainly I would have kept it if I could. Then I burned up your letters—and they smelled of the *spice tree. And I have put your golden hair away and the spice blossom—I couldn't destroy them. Yesterday was a very hard day—I do not want to live through another such. But by midnight last night after I had mailed some business letters down town I walked back in the dark and I had found a sort of Peace and knew what I should do.

I hunted and finally I found your little-lady picture, that you sent me from New York before we ever met—and I shall be true to that, and I wrote on the back of it your most beautiful phrase now—and the one that it seemed to me, in that hour, was the real phrase you had taught me “Ladies and Gentlemen.”

Thats^ what we try to be, and I prayed hard and gave myself to the cold saints and woke up with all the anger out of my heart I hope for good.

I do not say I am always going to be a gentleman—but I am going to try to be—in a sense in your cause, because you are a thoroughbred and there is not a yellow streak in you. That was all that kept me behaving yesterday—was a certain dim memory that you were a gentle lady.

I said you had turned me out of your heart and I would turn you out of mine.

And yet I could not bear to leave you and yet I cannot bear a dishonorable or furtive passion. What I think must stand any daylight. And so I was all to pieces.

But now I am resolved. If it be possible—so far as human strength lies—you shall be my Beatrice. Why should I leave your fine ladyhood and exquisite sense of honor—all for one more inevitable turn on the breaking wheel of passion. If I drive you out of my life—another spirit will come in. Young faces move me more with desire every day—yet I know they are an illusion and a snare. God knows I want to be true to your fine and immortal part—and keep your new vow in letter and spirit as well as you will keep it. I may fail and have to forget you. My blood grows redder every year. But on the other hand I cannot give up my saints. If I was only as cold as at 25 I could live with them alone, but in these last few years my heart has turned red. St. Francis means all the world to me—if I could only serve him. God knows that was what I wanted yesterday—that old coldness of the saints. But I knew my own absurdities. I know that I would keep cold, three months and no longer. From plain dog-loneliness, from sheer heart-chill and shiver, I would make a sweetheart of the nearest. Yet I do not like this. I will even then in the midst of the new dream know of my fate—and my north star—and the passion for ink that kills all other hope in the end. And that new sweetheart will be but folly too.

And so—my lady—I shall be true to you—rather than to any other as long as strength lies in me to be resolute—and in my strange life—one Beatrice is worth a score of sweethearts—if I can achieve it. Certainly the attempt is better than the old eternal wheel. I [~~hope~~] have mounted your little-lady picture, so thoroughbred and decorous—and put it between my two pictures of Buddha which I have brought down stairs today with the Nuremburg^ Madonna.² If it hurts my heart too much—or if I cannot think of you in every way as becometh the saints—I shall burn up your picture and every last scrap I have of you.

But I shall try to live up to your young-lady self—at least a little while, your fine and proper parlor self, and shall remember your phrase “Ladies and Gentlemen.”

After you send me those last poems—we must not write. I do not want to see you again for a long long time. (And) The sight of letters brings back too much. And they are as likely to make me black-beast angry from dead hope—as anything else. I am too weak to endure them.

I do not think we ought to see each other, feeling as I do now—for a long long time. Not till after your first little-stranger flower gives its little cry on your heart. In that day I, in spirit, am with you in your enterprise—be it life or death. And We actually could meet after that I think—once—perhaps. But no more. No more I say.

So now there is nothing but the word of goodby. I will write that word—and little more—when you send me the verses.

Vachel.

[Enclosure: Two stanzas from Robert Burns’ “A Red, Red Rose,” dated “Thursday, August 20, 1914.” See Letter 149.]

Notes

¹The sister in Cleveland is Joy Lindsay *Blair.

²For Buddha and the Nuremberg Madonna, see Letter 31.

156) “I know I must get command of myself and turn away . . .”

Springfield Ill.
August 25, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

When I decided to write you tonight, and hurried home from the picture-show, I felt so much happier I know you will not be stern with me about it.

And now that I begin there is nothing to say except that I am happy to begin. I cannot bear to come down from that high plane where I moved with your spirit, and to begin a letter takes me back there again. I cannot bear to give you up—and to give you up,—that is to try to give you up in one way and to keep you in another is utterly beyond me. Sometimes, it seems to me I am turning away from my very best self in turning away from you, and in turning toward you I know I cannot be moderate. And then I know I ought to forget you and so it is all a terribly sad-humorous mix. And just because your picture brings happiness I would not be unhappy if it were not for this restlessness—this something that tells me I dare not give you up—for my souls good I dare not—that my life will go back to something shabby—half-fulfilled, satisfied with half-measures. I cannot bear to be anything but reaching toward my best self and keyed to my highest—and my spiritual best and highest is you. And I am not deceiving myself by the glories of remembered fire and youth’s adventure. Your little picture here that I cannot help but kiss

twenty times a day is the picture of a lady, an exquisite keen spirit, a sober, worthy, dignified, friend of the holy angels.— I cannot be deceived—that is what you are essentially—amid all the accidents and beauties and ups and downs of life as it is lived by Sara—her essential self is clear divinity, crystal clear and darling and flawless.

Sara you do not know how much happier it makes me to let this praise out of my heart—if I must keep it all it turns to lead.

I must not burden you with my praise—and I know I must get command of myself and turn away pretty soon—but please take this one letter as a good gift into your heart, without any reserve or refusal. I only wish we could be as the Angels of God—. Every day your most celestial self puts me into a whirlwind of most earthly love—and I do not deceive myself—Beatrice turns to Juliet in one moment—in the twinkling of an eye. And I want with all my heart to keep Beatrice—and I am honor bound to give up Juliet—. I only wish we were as the Angels of God and I could walk with you forever upon the winds and rainbows in the sky.

The very minute I can turn away I will—but you must not ask it tonight of
Vachel.

And so—all praise for the lady Sara—forever and ever.¹

And till Heaven's day—
And till Heaven's day.—²

Beatrice Beatrice Beatrice.
For your wrist a little cross. [Drawing of a cross.]

Notes

¹This line and the two couplets below are written on separate pages enclosed with this letter.

²Lines 23-24 of VL's poem "The *Spice-Tree": see Letter 133.

157) "If I am not doing right—to write to you—say so . . ."

Springfield Ill.
August 30, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I have been so long expecting the letter with your corrections for the verses in them—and it has not come. Its^ like trying to hold ones^ breath too long to wait for it. If you have not accumulated some kind of vexation against me—please write it. And please write me whatever is in your heart for I want the touch of your personality at least once again—and I have not reconciled myself to doing without that last letter. There was no hint that you would not write it. Mrs. *Vrooman asked me to Charlevoix—[and] the other day and I wanted to go up and have my case tried all over again—but I

did not and wrote her my prettiest excuse. This virtue deserves a reward. And then this morning is your picture in the Tribune and the decorous announcement of your engagement, all very proper and Saraesque—and it looked so final I just felt lightning-struck. I suppose I am a bad loser—but I just kept hoping you would turn to me again. This is wishing the other man ill—and I am sorry for that and do not like myself for that. I am sure I do not understand the heart-break game and cannot thank God for it any more than I can for war. I am a very bad loser—I confess it a hundred times. I loved you and desired you far more than I felt I had a right to urge you—. It seems to me now I left it all with you—just from [the] my pride that made me stay in the corner because you thought me a poor man. Never for an instant have I thought myself a poor man—but your thinking so kept me from laying the bold siege this other man has done—. I should have swallowed my pride and fought and not let this other man come near you. But I enjoyed you so I was in a daze and did not want to fight. And I let you have your way in everything. I should have fought if it cost us a black week or t[w]o, or a black year. You are worth a hard battle.

And so here I am talking war—after so many poems against war in Europe.

You are comforted. You have your plans and your dreams—but I have neither kith nor kin nor lover, nor chum in this city—of the kind I could truly confess to—many dear friends—but I cannot say to any of them what you know I feel, and I just walk around holding my breath like a diver.

If I am not doing right—to write to you—say so. Certainly I want to be good—and the more silent you are—the more I am afraid you are hurt by something I have said or done.

I have been a very poor wooer—I did not do my case justice—I loved and desired you far more than I said—I should not have allowed myself to be sent away from New York,—or allowed the other man to show his head.

Do you know the last poem that will be in the *Macmillan book “Under the Blessing of your Psyche Wings.” It comes as an epilogue after six poems on the war, sent in the last minute written in 24 hours. The old rough version of the Psyche came out in the *Herald Wednesday. I was afraid if you saw it you would think I had ignored your revision. You will find it properly revised in the Macmillan book.¹

I really would like to talk things over with *Harriet. It isn't a very dignified statement—but I feel just like crying all over her collar. She is the only one really on the inside. But I cannot leave my work—and I must just tread the winepress alone. It is all right in the day, but by night I just prowl. I use up a lot of energy just NOT writing.

Answer my letter any way you want to but do answer it, honored lady—if you have any mercy. I know your letter will be crystal clear—and all truth and goodness—whatever it says—it will be the good and fine Sara. You did not say that other letter would be your last. You left me in mid-air—holding my breath. I promise to try to be good, whatever you say.

I was just meant to be faithful Sara. Every bone in my body and the marrow of my bones is full of loyalty—I was not by nature intended to ever change my lover—and to be

so fated just wrenches me all to pieces—after all our talk of little children and our dreams.

Havn't I done what I should do, that you havn't written? Am I being punished? I tell you if you write me what to do, I will try my best. I will try my very best.

Vachel.

[P.S.] If you have any rules wherby we can write to each other—with a regular time for your letter—I will try my best to conform.

[Enclosure: Newspaper clipping entitled “Remember Men Are Men!” One paragraph reads: “In brief, no matter what the plan or proposition is, it should always be considered in the light of the fact that human perfection is far distant. We must always remember that the plan must be largely worked by men.” VL marks this paragraph and adds: “very true in my own silly case.”]

Note

¹That is, *The Congo and Other Poems* (1914). “Under the Blessing of Your Psyche Wings” is, indeed, the final poem in the book. Ironically, “Under the Blessing” was first published in VL’s *Chicago Herald* column on August 26, 1914, just a few days after the *Herald* announced ST’s engagement to Ernst Filsinger.

158) “no word more for a month from me . . .”

Springfield Ill.
August 31, 1914.
Monday Morning.

The letter I cried for came this morning. So I thank and thank you dearly—and no word more for a month from me. It is perfectly reasonable that I should send you my two books then, and perfectly sensible that I should.

Vachel.

159) “When will you be married? . . .”

Springfield Ill.
Sept. 29, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

How is your health? How is your father?

When will you be married?

How does your book progress?¹

I send you the two new Lindsay books by mail today to Charlevoix.²

The *Chinese Nightengale is almost done. It is twice as long as the *Congo.

With all the love in the world
Vachel.

Notes

¹**Rivers to the Sea.*

²**Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty and The *Congo and Other Poems.*

160) "I only know I must not look back too much . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Monday Evening.
Oct. 5, 1914.

Dearest Sara:

I am going to allow myself the luxury of a letter to you tonight. Do not be alarmed. It is not the beginning of a series. But it is going to make me happy, and so here goes for a happy hour that I know will not disturb you.

In the first place dear lady, I must say that the memory of you the last few weeks has become a gentle and dependable happiness, and the sight of your letter made me very glad indeed.

You are really the lady, in The *Chinese Nightengale, though much covered up with costume—I admit. When you read that poem—find yourself.

Well—I see now I must not write more.

I am a very very restless creature. I am perfectly willing to admit I am spending a heap of time with the ladies of Springfield. And I suppose—without really thinking about it—I am groping around for my *Filsinger, so to speak, but while I honor and deeply respect my friends the hunting is largely to keep from looking back—and it will be a long hunt I fear. I only know I must not look back too much. I have so many vague inexpressible thoughts about it all—but the substance of it all is—that you still have the highest place among all the powers of the earth or sky—and to think of your gentleness and kindness gives me peace and happiness—happiness and peace. It is such a good gift—to look back upon—this memory of you—when I know from bitter experience the memory of a lost love may be a perfect nightmare. It is a kind of a precious legacy you have left me—and truly child—there is more peace in it—than I ever thought there could be. I think I shall send to *Joy for my bracelet after while.

As soon as I know it can mean perfect invulnerable peace and dignity of spirit I shall put it on.

It is a wonderful world—sometimes.

Well—I must not go on. I only want to say your name is Happiness, and honor and glory and peace, especially if I write no more tonight.

With dearest love

Vachel—

161) “I think I will do prose till Christmas anyway . . .”

Springfield Ill.

Oct. 13, 1914.

Dear Sara:

Enclosed find the answer to your very welcome telegram and your very welcome letter. Thank you, indeed and indeed.

Yesterday Walter Storey¹ came to boss the Springfield Survey for a month²—yes—I shall take to prose now. At the conclusion of my tour—which begins in Chicago next Thursday, and ends in Kansas in a month—and includes New York—at the conclusion I think I will do prose till Christmas anyway. The higher criticism of the *movies. Essays for the *Herald, with a book in mind.

And so—lady Psyche³

I remain, till your criticism
of the poem arrives—

N.V.L.

[After the]

Write here and your letter will be forwarded.

Notes

¹Walter Rendell Storey (1881-1953) was an editor and decorative art critic: see Letter 6 (note 6). From 1909 to 1942, he served as Executive Secretary for the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures.

²For information on the Russell Sage Foundation’s “Springfield Survey,” see Letter 80.

³For Sara as “Psyche,” see Letter 152.

162) “the memory of you is nothing but happiness . . .”

Springfield Ill.

Nov. 17, 1914.

My Dear Sara:

I have heard from you—, perhaps several times, since I have written. Twice—maybe. My mail is Chaos and whirlwind.

My life—since starting for Chicago on the grand tour has been an alternation of rock-like sleep—day or night—as I could get it, (day and night—when possible) and loud recitations—including the *Ghosts of the Buffaloes and the *Chinese Nightengale. And both have been much polished as I went along. They are about done now. Both much shorter.

When I was settled to the letter point to you—I waited—till I could say it right [?].

Mama and Papa are back from China and looking mighty well—and I am so glad. We are very happy together. Papa seems to have completely recovered from his morbid gloom and be more like he was ten years or more ago. He had so many things the matter with him when he started, and has temporarily recovered from about 2/3 of them—so his spiritual machinery does not creak as it did! Not to speak of his mortal tenement.

Mama is lively as a cricket and with a full head of steam on. I am so pleased. I did not know that they were heavy on my heart till I arrived here from Peoria several days ago—just before starting for Kansas.¹ Then the news came by telegraph that they had landed safely in the U.S. and then I realized I had worried about those German ships.— I was so much happier, and felt very dancy in Kansas. They were in a Japanese Boat—and one night two day's journey from Seattle they had to darken everything for fear of [~~the German~~] some German raider—since dismantled. They received warning by wireless. But all was well to the end.

Well—they have been done so much honor in China—receiving all the natural homage of the Chinese for old folks—and travelling where few foreigners of any kind go—it is no wonder they are made over in spirit. They were overwhelmed with wonder and amaze at the perpetual open-house hospitality—and the Chinese were overwhelmed that two such old folks should concern themselves about the welfare of China. (At least so they professed!) And they had the place of honor in the ship—going and coming! The picture of V.T.L. [Vachel Thomas Lindsay, VL's father] drinking hospitable tea for six months is an amazement! Him as independent as they make 'em! An Ishmaelite!²

Well—dear lady—truly I did not intend to write you a bit of this. I was only going to write you a tiny note to tell you one thing—that I resolved to write you—in the Hotel Brevort^—where I stayed in New York—and then I postponed it.³ It is merely that the memory of you is nothing but happiness—and a serene blessing. But really—I must not see you—(if I act worthily in accord with my best judgement) or do anything equivalent to seeing you. I didn't go to the *Wheeler's or the Dawsons this time—just for fear I might—in a sense—remember you more than your picture makes me remember you.⁴

As it is you are a blessing to me—a source of serenity and dignity and peace. And for that very reason a marvel, and amaze, and for that reason—a happiness. Some one is waiting for me—I suppose—around the bend in the road—but I am in no hurry. There it is—in as plain hard prose as it can be stated. The peace of memory is beautiful—and peace is a rare thing—these days, anywhere, and should not be quickly given up.

I speak for the Drama League in Chicago—Thursday—the *Hendersons being my hosts. Then I come home as soon as I have the resolution—(seeing I have so many dear

friends in Chicago.) I hope immediately. Then I hope not to budge all winter—but sit here and write a book on the *movies—the Higher Criticism thereof^—with the intent of printing the various chapters in the *Herald—and the book by *Macmillans—in the end—perhaps. This book has just gripped me till I am possessed with it.⁵

Sara—I have been completely overwhelmed by friends. The most dramatic thing was that the English Department at Princeton telegraphed for me four days before I left New York—and gave me a turn-out of 300 students on a days^ notice. They roared their heads off—they were like the waves of the sea—like the harp of a Cyclops—being played by a pygmy. (Recited 8:30 to 9:30) And then the professors gave me a smoker (!) afterward. I made the English Language smoke—while they smoked cigars! Recited 10:30 to 12! That night—and the Welcome I received in Kansas—both at Topeka and the State University—are the two brightest spots in the tour—though there were many others.—

Blessings on you—Queen Sara.

With love and respect, and the salutations of all my guardian spirits, and my poor human obesiance^

Vachel.

Notes

¹For background on the Peoria visit, see Letter 131.

²For additional biographical information on “Mama and Papa,” see Letters 14 and 42.

³The Brevoort, one of New York City’s oldest and finest hotels, provided lodging for legions of famous guests, including President Abraham Lincoln. Located on 5th Avenue, between 8th and 9th Streets, the hotel was razed in 1954.

⁴For the “Dawsons” and VL’s tender memories, see Letter 106.

⁵VL is working on *The *Art of the Moving Picture*, which Macmillan will publish in late 1915, with a revised edition in 1922.

163) “I want to think about Spiritual America—fifty years hence . . .”

Tuesday Evening.
[December 15, 1914]

Darling Sara:

I send you your wedding present by express.

They are two Phoenixes—those embroidered birds. They are the symbols of the Emperess^ of China. They are rising from the sea. Yet we can call them *nightengales—if we want to, now—can’t we?

The picture by Edmund Du Lac is just from Harper’s Bazar^ so do not show it where the Philistines can mock.¹ But the Princess was so much like you looked in my poem—I wanted you to look well at her. Put her on your shelf where you can see her

once in a while. The bird I 'spose is a heron but we can call it a nightengale if we want to, or not—as we please.

Mama and Papa gave me the Old Chinese Embroidery. You can make a spread of it on your present-table unabashed. They, Mama & Papa brought it from China for me. The Mandarins have these squares sewed to the fronts and backs of their coats. They are selling them off [fœ] in some desperate cases where the Revolution is making them poor. They (the squares) go in pairs—front and back—[bœ] exact duplicates—but these are odd sizes. Joy stitched up one that was for [thœ] a front—but you can take the stitching out if you want to trim a Kimono with it or something. I think they would look well framed. But as you wish.

It is a more humorous than tragic statement that I am now going to make. I am thinking of you—dear soul—a good deal as you would like to have me—and getting along very nicely, thank you.

Many absurd and lively things have happened to me of late—that only you could enjoy, with just the right alertness and clear-eyed knowledge—and I am sorely tempted to write you a little autobiography tonight—on the privileged^ licence^ of a wedding-present letter. But I will spare you—only saying that life at once becomes amusing when I think of telling you about it.

Everyone seems determined that I shall swell up with vanity till I bust, and go up and down the streets of Springfield saying “Gobble Gobble Gobble” like a Turkey Gobbler, while they gobble too. And my correspondence has become a perfect smotheration—and all and all. And amid it all I have to refuse a lot of out of town invitations etc.— And so I have fought most everything in sight to get back to this desk and this room and settle peacefully back with my soul, and my ancient self from boyhood, and take stock and say my prayers—and begin to write again. I have had several happy days just revising old verse—memorandums—and shall continue several days more—I fancy—before I take up my movie-articles—though I have rented my typewriter—ready to Bang them off for the *Herald. I shall clip them from the Herald and revise them and revise them and finally make a book, I hope.

*Joy is home—and so happy and radiant for SEVERAL reasons—and her hubby will be here Christmas. Papa and Mama are so much better for their trip—really quite fine. (In general) The Lindsay family stock is at par just now—spiritually speaking, and generally. But I have not gotten down to the important thing about just me. I was just going to tell you—good lady—that I have been struggling amid much confusion and too many external things—to get back to this room—and my immortal soul—and take stock. I prayed hard for a renewal of religion^ last night—a new form of the one I have had—perhaps—that you know so well. Our Good friend the Good God is still in the Heavens—but I must get a new hold on his presence and energy here on Earth. Buddha and Christ are not altogether dead, yet neither can help me for this next fight right ahead of me—as I want to be helped. Of course the sectarians would rush right to the front—and say “Yes they can”—but they (Buddha or Christ) only clutter up my mind in this crisis—however beautiful they may look [hœ] and will surely look, on the road, in the spring. The nearest I can say to what I want—and what I must lay hold of—is the stern yet kindly, freedom-loving God, that lived in the Breast of Abraham Lincoln (perhaps.) I

am talking about the realities of divinity—now—the realities of Daily prayer—, not the forms.

A new Character—a fictitious exaggerated caricature of my public self is being thrust upon me—I feel myself masquerading in it—and rattling around in it—like a mouse in a pumpkin or a gourd. I MUST continue to be myself—the honest mouse—and think out my next duty as an honest mouse—regardless of the pumpkin or gourd. That is—perhaps—what I mean—by the need of prayer. Or part of what I mean.²

You are the only person in the world—worth writing all this to—for you are the only one who understands what leads up to it, and all that lies behind it.

You can picture me—in your honest but humorous clear seeing way—my struggle to get hold of God by his apron string as it were—while some poor human wants me to leave Springfield for a house party that I would just as soon postpone awhile.

Its^ a most disrespectful way to speak of Diety^—but thats^ just what I'm after,—something like an apron-string.

The chemical formula for Protoplasm can never be absolutely set down—neither can the next thing to do in religion^—be absolutely set down. But I am reaching toward^ it—I know I must at least do that.

While I do not mean that everything I do is in a white limelight—I find that even Springfield has changed—I am becoming my book-self to them—and I am getting an influence I do not want—and (with a proper sense of humor of course)—I must weigh what I do—quite a little. And that is another thing that makes me pray. Everything in my life that I considered fixed seems stirring and moving except the north star of my destiny—and while I do not want to be over-anxious or over careful—and want to make a proper and honest fool of myself in unessentials—I know I must look God in the face a great deal now—or I will blunder overmuch. Well—this is getting vague—I guess—but one more thing I want to say—if I can put it in words.

The God on Earth I see now as a substitute—or rival for Buddha and Christ—is the Visible Presence in the American Heart—as it is beginning and will culminate in fifty years—we will say. Does that sound like nonsense?

Let me put it this way—:

The 90 million have a collective soul—quite vague now—but getting more real every day—grotesque—but discernible and essentially divine. I must pray to it—yearn with it and toward^ it—and struggle up with it—and think about what it will do for fifty years—with sufficient^ intensity to forget the distractions of this month and this hour. I want to think about Spiritual America—fifty years hence—and work toward^ it—as a conscious 90/millionth, so steadily that everything I do will be a part of that straight line—every love and hate—and prayer and hope.

Well—dear—I hope this letter is real to you—and not just words. I assure you it comes straight straight straight from my soul—and to have a Sara to write it to on this earth—is indeed a good gift—when I think of the recent comedies when I have tried to tell some of these things to one or two other very good and fine folks.

Very sincerely forever

Vachel.

Notes

¹For information on Edmund Du Lac, see Letter 23.

²This important biographical letter reveals some of the early distress that will only grow more intense, as VL continues to try and balance his creative life with his platform performances.

164) "I passed through St. Louis yesterday . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Oct. 3, 1915.

My Dear Sara:

I passed through St. Louis yesterday and took dinner with *Reedy and formed a very high opinion of him personally and enjoyed him exceedingly. Practically my first real session with him, and quite rewarding it was.

But I would not do myself justice if I did not write to you tonight, and tell you that just going to St. Louis is a kind of a visit to you.

I am mighty glad about your book and it is fun to see it advertised alongside of mine in the Dial fall announcement. I was in Chicago two days last week visiting the *Hendersons and straightening out my immortal soul, and I had the pleasure of looking over the foundry proof of your book and tracing the footprints of the fairies upon the sands of time all to myself. I do not think anything escaped me.

I have in my letter-pile an excellent and enjoyable letter from Zoe *Aikens[^] which shall be answered among the first. Letters have piled around me up to my neck while finishing the *movie-book—which is all done but the proof-reading. I hope for the first proof tomorrow and will be thankful to see the book in the stores by the first of November.

It is the last prose I shall write for many a day—and I worked very hard to polish it my very best. I hope it is polished.

Now I am back to poetry, and shall so continue all winter till I make my Spring tour of the East Feb. 15—March 15. Then I am East under a manager—but Nov 1-30 I shall accept a few Western dates [~~under~~] on my own hook.

But most of the winter—October December January—and much of November, you can think of me right here—finishing up many poems of which the notes were half ripe long ago. I am at present hard at work on the home stretch with *Mark Twain and enjoying it very much.

Sister *Joy is visiting us with her six months old son Vachel Lindsay Blair—a lovely boy—of course.

He brings us joy and is great tonic for the old folks. My Father in especial is very much in need of him.

I am not at all sure but what my father is fighting Azrael himself.¹ It is hard. But you have been through all these uncertainties yourself.

My work and friends are very welcome as steadyers and opiates and restorers. My home has meant so much to me—especially this past year. I do not want to see it threatened with mutability. But I did not intend to dwell upon this when I started the letter.

I just wanted to tell you that passing through St. Louis—I could not be satisfied till I had written you a letter.

My most loyal and friendly sentiments to you and to *Earnest.

When it snows this winter—catch some perfect snowflakes on the back of your glove. You will note that every one that is complete is shaped like a star, six pointed [crude drawing of a six-pointed star].

I find a six pointed snowflake very hard to draw. A five pointed star is easier.

With this October sentiment—I will close.

Very sincerely

Vachel.

Note

¹In some Jewish and Islamic traditions, Azrael is seen as the Archangel of Death.

165) “My book will reach you in a few days . . .”

Springfield Ill.
Dec. 23, 1915.

Dear Sara:

My book will reach you in a few days.¹ Meanwhile: my good wishes and choicest blessing for you and *Ernst and all of you.

Vachel.

Note

¹*The *Art of the Moving Picture.*

166) “I am through touring and reciting . . .”

Springfield Ill.
April 10, 1916.

My Dear Sara:

I send you my good wishes. Mr. Percival Chubb¹ has been kind enough to ask me to the Drama League Convention but I will be in Chicago at that time—I am sorry to say, to fill and engagement[^] made six months ago.

The one thing I want to do is to concentrate myself on my two new books—signed up by *Macmillian—One “The *Handy Guide for Beggars”—is just the revision of my old prose sketches of travel—to be out by November. The other “The *Golden Book of Springfield” will be a year’s work or more—the direct descendant of the *Village Magazine with every possible improvement that my poor soul can devise.

It will be 1/3 pictures, 1/3 prose, 1/3 verse. It will be in the Spirit of those hearth-pictures I gave you!

I send you every good wish, and my most admiring and respectful greetings to your husband. Send me that short-story the minute it comes out! Or before.

I am through touring and reciting. My excursion to Chicago is an unwelcome interruption and I am beginning to put the seal on my lips till Nov. 1—that I may the better uncork my ink-bottle. I may take a short walk or something just to take the taste of flattery out of my mouth. I have been horribly flattered and covered with Orleans molasses this time—and I pray for the rod. Write and scold me your damdest.

With love

Vachel.

603 South 5th.

Note

¹Author and educator Percival Chubb (1860-1960) was head of the Ethical Society of St. Louis (1911-32) and President of the Drama League of America (1915-17, 1918-20).

167) “Congratulations on the Smart Set story . . .”

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

[Photograph of ST pasted in the upper right-hand corner.]

Dear Sara:

Please send me a copy of this picture that is clearer. And the one that was in the *Bookman several months ago.¹

Congratulations on the *Smart Set story. It contained that hairs[^] breadth of wit which is your final gift.²

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—

April 13, 1916.

Notes

¹ST's picture is in *The Bookman* 42 (December 1915), p. 365. In the same issue, Joyce Kilmer offers a brief review of **Rivers to the Sea*: "The Autumn's Poetry," pp. 457-458.

²ST's "The Sentimentalist" was published in *The Smart Set* (April 1916).

168) "Have you a lady for me in St. Louis . . ."

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

July 21, 1916.

My Dear Sara:

It is very good of you and *Ernst to ask me to come to see you and some day I will, and give you a whole programme of everything you havn't^ heard. But I presume a contrite heart is a more acceptable sacrifice, as of old, according to the scripture. As soon as my heart gets real humble and contrite I will come, but it is still a bit proud and unruly, though I hope polite and kind.

Now send me both those pictures at once, and if there is any choice—the original of the one on the *Macmillian folder. Yes I will write a poem about your spirit.

I think it was grand to be reviewed with my M.P. book in the July *Yale Review with some mighty good poems by my good friend and intro-ducer-to-Wellesley Katharine Lee Bates and an article by my good friend and booster—at Yale William Lyon Phelps. And my good friend Sara's very best poems she ever wrote in all her born days. Or so they seemed to me.¹

Have you a lady for me in St. Louis—some sweet second cousin with shining hair? That must be in the bargain. Some one who will not hesitate to be very siren at once?

The enclosed folder speaks for itself. Most of the people that want me to recite, write to me directly, and this folder saves interminable correspondence—and says a lot of things I could not persuade a lecture-beaureau^ or publisher to say in a thousand years. But now—once printed and paid for—there are three beaureaus^ trying to get me to let them get engagements^. And I know they will be glad to send it out to inquirers. There is every prospect I myself will be able to fill up most of the time I can spare. I undertake to recite in the West in November and the East in February. I want to write the rest of the time. Hence the stern character of the pamphlet. This is the end of this page so GOODBY!²

With proper sentiments

N.V.L.

Notes

¹VL refers to a positive review of *The *Art of the Moving Picture* by fellow artist H[uc]-M[azelet] Luquiens (1881-1961) in *The Yale Review* 5 (July 1916), pp. 895-896. Luquiens' conclusion is: "Much of [VL's] book is discursive and consequently inconclusive, but the part containing his thesis is lucid and suggestive and admirably definite in its theoretical intention."

Best remembered as the author of the lyrics for "America the Beautiful," Katharine Lee Bates (1859-1929) was Professor of English at Wellesley College and author of numerous books of poetry and prose.

William Lyon Phelps (1865-1943) was Professor of English at Yale University and founder of an enduring Yale institution: The Pundits, who first convened in 1884 at the famous Mory's Temple Bar. Both Bates and Phelps sponsored VL on numerous occasions, and both have books available online at Project Gutenberg. For more on Phelps, see Letter 182.

²VL encloses a copy of his privately printed booklet: *A Letter about My Four Programmes for Committees in Correspondence*. Springfield: Jeffersons, [Summer, 1916]. 68 pp. See *Poetry of VL*, p. 255.

169) "this new book is so old . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Dec. 19, 1916.

My Dear Sara:

Please—if you are vexed forgive me, and if you can or cannot forgive, write and say so, and tell me just where to send my new book—which was written by a person you never met so you could not possibly be vexed with him. I confess he is an utter stranger to me—for this new book is so old, made up of sketches covering events of the years 1906-8 and the last one finished in 1912, but then decidedly reminiscent.¹ One or two of the songs are a bit later—but most of them are old as old—before I ever heard of such places as Charlevoix and St. Louis. I know *Reedy can find you for I have just seen a poem about a Celtic Saint of most unmitigated behavior, in the *Mirror*.

My very good wishes to *Earnst and to your father and mother.

Vachel.

Note

¹A **Handy Guide for Beggars*.

170) "I just love to size up the movies . . ."

Springfield Illinois.
January the first, 1917.

My Dear Sara:

Being at the typewriter, I very haughtily address you on the machine, which I shouldn't. Thank you indeed for your letter and all and all. I know you are both happy in New York, and therefore congratulate you, though I hate to see people saying good-by to the west. It will be just my luck now to be caught by some beautiful New-York-mad lady some day, and then I suppose you will taunt me. Well I wouldn't put it past fate and Providence.

I am sending you under separate cover the *Handy Guide for Beggars. I hope you like it. It represents a young man you never met. The fellow you met was his sane big brother. I have seen only one review of the Handy Guide, except a newspaper skit.

Good fortune to "The Answering Voice." You are a good editor. I know. You edited my most popular book. I am also going to welcome your Love-Songs by *Macmillans, and sign up for it blindly, as they did.

If you think I address you in a haughty and a free way there is a reason, which I will explain to you briefly or at length when we meet in New York, and bear in mind you have not hesitated under similar circumstances. Thank you indeed for the invitation to call. I shall indeed call, and may even go so far as to ask your advice in a certain matter, and call in *Earnst as a tactful diplomat.

I will be in New York about the fourth of February, and from then on a month in New York, Boston and environs. I have very few engagements^ this year, but my card may fill up. My big New York engagement^ is directly under Pond's February 19, New York City, in the afternoon.¹ Place not stated. But Pond and *Macmillans are going to cooperate in making it my official yearly appearance in New York and it will probably have the spot-light among my small events. I will also go to Wellesley College, and Dana Hall Wellesley. C.D. *Morley will give me a sort of publisher's luncheon at Brown's Chop House Feb. 6, and in the afternoon of that day there will be a session of the high and chosen at the Lord and Taylor Book-Shop, and I will also be at the Contemporary Club, Newark New Jersey, Tuesday Afternoon Feb. 20, and that is the whole schedule, except the Fortnightly Chicago, a joint appearance with Granville Barker in the latter part of March. From my standpoint, this will be quite enough for the spring season, seeing that I want to take part of my time getting acquainted with photoplay people in New York, and laying the foundations of a better *movie-book several years from now. I will likely have an occasional photoplay article in The *New Republic this spring. I do not want to rush the photoplay end of it. And I want to appear only very little as an article writer on any subject. But ultimately^ I hope to [slowly] get some such place with the photoplay people as *Harriet or *Braithwaite or *Jessie Belle have with the poets. [H] Understanding movies isn't so much a plan, as a craving of mine. I just love to size up the movies. And having done so, it seems reasonable to put the results down in a slow and careful record and try to have them count a bit. But I want a real place among these people and do not want to make money out of it, or write scenarios or the like. They are all biased in one way or another by the commercial standpoint, and by holding aloof

there, I can have the advantage of most of them. And it is all such a wonderful game. If you or Earnst want to do something for me in a year or two, get me asked to about six fat clubs or Universities in California. Then while there I can visit all the movie stew-kettles around Los Angeles, while ostensibly on some other business. I somehow don't see myself going there a purpose just for that. Well this will come soon enough. We need not worry about it. It will be like getting people to dance my poems. Each year the idea creeps along a bit. In five or ten years it will be somewhere. If it is a real idea it musn't^ be rushed.

Well this is quite enough about my affairs. But I remember you ask about the *Golden Book of Springfield. It has been my constant thought all December. There is a plenty of material already, but not enough of precisely the definitive quality to start out the book with. It may take a second book, a prose book, to give the idea full swing. At any rate the Golden Book will have my main thought all summer. Let us hope it will be in shape by Fall. I have just finished The *Tiger Tree, a poem for the Golden Book. A poem *Congo-length, and on a similar theme. I will send it to you for revision and will be deeply grateful if you care to revise it. Let me know. I am afraid you are in the midst of your compilation and correspondence. I will have said Tiger-tree in my pocket when I come east, and it will not be too late then.

My, how correspondence piles up! I understand Lloyd George never answers letters. I wish I could call myself in his class, except in letters to people like Sara.

With every good wish to you and Earnst

Vachel

Note

¹New York based Pond Lecture Bureau, which arranged speaking engagements for numerous celebrities for many years, organized VL's 1915 spring tour.

171) "I venture to send you my chief effort of this winter . . ."

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

Jan. 7, 1917

My Dear Sara:

Without waiting for your answer, I venture to send you my chief effort of this winter, though by no means done. There are especially ambitious projects going on in regard to this poor little poem, which assume it is a good poem whether it is or not. I wish you would go at it with your most censorious pencil after reading it once aloud to *Earnst and his reading it once aloud to you. Any of our closest friends can be present if you care—like *Edward J. or *Jessie B. but have it distinctly understood this is a rough draft and a private rehearsal^, and I would appreciate its coming back in a week or so, much marked on the margin.

My good wishes to you and Earnst and the pictures on the wall and the flowers in the window.

Vachel.

[Enclosure: Manuscript copy of "The Tale of the *Tiger Tree."]

172) "This is not a letter—but an emergency call . . ."

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

Jan. 28, 1917.

My Dear Sara:

Thank you indeed for your letter. This is not a letter—but an emergency call—which I hope you can heed. The *Tiger Tree is so familiar to me it is utterly impossible for me to judge what is obscure and what is not. Please write at least three questions to a page on the margins of the last edition, questions that embody every thing you are puzzled about or were puzzled about. I shall do my best to clear up these points, but I must have some index as to what is needed. If you can send by return mail, I can correct on the train, going to New York. If this is too much haste, please send it to the Brevoort, fifth ave and 8th st. so it will arrive some time the fifth. I expect to read the poem at the first recital.¹

Very sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

Note

¹For information on the Brevoort Hotel, see Letter 162.

173) "My heart is very heavy over the prospect of war . . ."

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

February 1, 1917

My Dear Sara:

Thank you for your note, and the suggestion.

I am afraid I have been most unsympathetic, urging my technical affairs, when you were in your private sorrow. I humbly beg pardon.¹

But I hope to present my apologies in person, and I will be decidedly at your service the evening of February the eighth. I hope *Jessie Belle will be there that evening. My good wishes to *Ernst. The war clouds are coming down, and I am afraid we will all be eating the “leaf of the tree,” even before I see you.² I certainly hope Wilson will find a way out, but it looks like hoping against hope. If Ernst is interested in my opinion, I feel now that Wilson’s last message he read to the Senate, though honestly about peace terms at the end of the war, was also a declaration of the platform on which we might be obliged to make war.³ That is, not on the avowed principles and bargains of the allies, but upon our own. So we will come to the final settlement with our own piece of paper in our hands, independent of London or Paris or Rome.

My heart is very heavy over the prospect of war, today.

Very sincerely

Vachel

Notes

¹VL refers to the death of ST’s older brother, John (“Jack”) Warren Jr., who had died at age 47, after living 20 years with the consequences of having suffered a stroke: see Drake, p. 165.

²VL alludes to his poem “The Tale of the *Tiger Tree”: see ll. 183-184.

³On January 22, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson delivered his famous “peace without victory” speech, in which he pleaded for an end to the European hostilities. On January 31, Germany formally announced resumption of unlimited submarine warfare, and the United States joined the war effort in April.

174) “confidentially, I will whisper my deepest movie-ambition . . .”

[Letterhead: HOTEL BREVOORT¹
New York]

Feb. 9, 1917.

My Dear Earnst^ and Sara *Filsinger:

Thank you indeed for the party.² I give you my two hands in blessing and fellowship. My dear friends, you do not know yet how much pleased I was at the atmosphere of the little assembly. I felt the delicacy and sensitiveness of their welcome most keenly, after several very fine moments already in New York this year. They were like a group of dear cousins to me.

My one bitter regret is that I did not take three more of those chocolate peppermints. I found myself just yearning for them on the way home.³

It is one of the rewards of life to meet *Edward J. again, and *Bynner and *Jessie Belle and the *Kilmers and all the rest. I do not like to feel that I am being jerked from my moorings in this world, or that any interest of the day has wiped out my chance of a

homecoming, and seeing these people last night was a sort of homecoming, and it reverberated in my mind all the time. I felt in harbor, among them.

My little time in New York promises to be a large part eaten up by blocking out new territory in the moving picture field: a dozen doors have opened for me in this line since I have arrived, intensely fascinating^ opportunities to follow up things I have begun to glimpse.

Just confidentially, I will whisper my deepest movie-ambition. It is not to write scenarios or anything like that, it is to mean something [œf] to the young movie-people—something like *Edward J. has meant to us. That will take a long time, of course, if ever, and it cannot be rushed. Yet it seems to me the logical deduction from my book, if I really meant my book.⁴ And this year—this spring—I have the amusing task of skirmishing on the outskirts and finding out who I really like in this new “set!”

If I hadn’t known Edward J. I would never have pictured what could be.

I shall be in to see you to report any amusing or diverting—results. In two weeks I really ought to have something to tell. It is going to be fun, however it turns out. And if I find out any folks that really ought to belong to us, I will bring them round, though I venture it will take some picking! Not but what their way may be as good as ours—but I fancy they speak a new dialect and use new moves on the chess-board all the time!

Well—I do not intend to write on and on. I simply want you to know that I was indeed glad to be with you both. I wish Earnst would “send me some of his printed matter” as the woman’s clubs say to me. I want to know the fortunes of his book—in brief, also an ad of his firm—to get it through my head!⁵

Very much yours

Vachel

Notes

¹For the Hotel Brevoort, see Letter 162.

²The “party” was the annual “poets’ party”: see *Poetry Society of America in the Glossary.

³VL’s fondness for sweets is something of a legend. On his 1912 tramp, for example, he met a “duck-pond diviner,” who, among other things, told him: “You are a Child of Destiny” and “You are fond of sweets.” VL’s response: “He hit it right twice. I am a Child of Destiny and I am fond of sweets. When a prophet hits it right on the essentials like that, who would be critical?” (**Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty*, pp. 27-28; reprinted in *Prose of VL*, p. 162). See also “*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons,” p. 961. For more on VL and sweets, see Letter 18.

⁴VL refers to his book *The*Art of the Moving Picture*.

⁵For information on Ernst *Filsinger’s business and publications, see the Glossary.

175) “I will greatly enjoy your company in this new crusade . . .”

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

Wellesley—
Feb. 25, 1917.
[Sunday]

My Dear Earnst and Sara:

To resume my discourse of Friday evening. The address of Miss Anita *Loos (the cleverest of the scenario writers) is 135 West 79th. Her bosom friend is Mae Marsh, the greatest of the photoplay actresses,¹ and they seem to travel together a deal. I have just written to Anita suggesting she (and Mae) try to get acquainted with you, and it would be pretty of you to make a similar effort. I havn't^ the least doubt the shy Mae Marsh will be the person of the two that you feel rewards the effort—but Anita is much more to the point of my enterprise. Prof. Victor O. Freeburg Columbia University School of Journalism—Sc[e]nario Class—Columbia University—is the head of the tiny class that uses my text book—and if you cared, you might have him the same evening and watch developments.²

The conversation will take care of itself in that event—for the three guests will not hesitate to talk shop. They will not leave you in darkness and ignorance.

I hope you consult your own taste entirely in this matter, and I will not heave one sigh if you do not carry it out—but I assure you I will greatly enjoy your company in this new crusade of mine, even if you only cheer on the side lines.

Good fortune to you both.

Very sincerely

Vachel

Permanent address
Springfield Illinois.

Notes

¹Mae (Mary Warne) Marsh (1895-1968), American actress, joined D.W. Griffith's company in 1912, starring in such films as *Man's Genesis* (1912), *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), and *Intolerance* (1916). In 1917, she left Griffith to become the first star of Samuel Goldwyn's new company (see Letter 177). In his *The *Art of the Moving Picture* (1922), VL discusses such Marsh films as *The Wild Girl of the Sierras*, *Man's Genesis*, and *Judith of Bethulia* (also starring Blanche Sweet—see Letter 18). For VL's tribute to Marsh, see “Mae Marsh, Motion Picture Actress” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 305-306). For more on VL and Marsh, see Letters 18 and 177.

²See VL's *The *Art of the Moving Picture* (1922), p. 30. Victor O. Freeburg was head of Columbia University's Photoplay Department. In April 1917, Freeburg made a bold prediction: “The motion picture of the future will be produced so cheaply that it will go into thousands and thousands of homes throughout the country. The projection machine

will be as common as the phonograph of today and the films of dramas and comedies will be as numerous as phonograph records" (*New York Times*, "Fashions-Society" section, April 22, 1917). Freeburg also authored a book on film, *The Art of Photoplay Making* (New York: Macmillan, 1918), in which VL is referenced several times. VL addressed Freeburg's film class on several occasions: see Letter 184.

176) "sometimes there is inevitable conflict . . ."

[Letterhead: Vachel Lindsay
603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois]

June 13, 1917

My Dear Sara:

Thank you for your letter. I have made the changes in the June Poetry, but do not be in despair over that issue. I had already marked the last two as especially good, and Refuge as the strongest in the series, and I see no special reason to change my opinion, with the others set in order, though they are now quite presentable. I had already marked "I have the good of all my pain" as an especially good line, though I admit it is better revised.¹

The July Poetry will contain some special efforts by your humble servant.² "Our Mother Pocahontas," somewhat improved over what it was in the February programme, "Niagara," something I have been thinking over two years, but now with a war stanza at the end, and "Mark Twain and Joan of Arc," a poem suggested by my review of Geraldine Farrar, in *The New Republic* last month.³

The *New Republic* will have a review of Mary Pickford and also an article on Free Speech and a Free Press soon.⁴ I do not remember the exact title, but it is an exhortation to the M.P. men to behave. And two other articles soon after that. These four articles will, probably, be scattered through the summer.

Next Fall an enlarged Congo comes out, containing the main new pieces of the last three years. On the whole I think I had rather be known by the Congo, and keep slowly enlarging it. (Say another installment in three years more.)⁵

My Movie girls met the Untermeyers, and Anita Loos made a talk out at Columbia through my intervention, so I feel that some progress is made there. (Don't worry.) Every so often the films run away with me, and then I get back and cool off. With the two articles now in hands out of the way, I expect to let the subject alone till fall.⁶ I have two big typewriter paper boxes full of notes on "The Golden Book of Springfield"—prose. I am turning that over in my mind all the time. And of course I have as many half finished poems in manuscripts, with which I trifle, ever and anon. Several have been two thirds done, for ages, and ever so often I give them a twirk^.

My auntie gave me this typewriter, at the same time she gave one to each of her boys.⁷ It was mighty good of her. I could not have afforded one for ages. It has resulted

in my sorting out manuscripts for seventeen years back, and setting all in order, which I think quite a do.

It was hard to lose Mrs. *Wheeler. I wrote my best note. She was always mighty good to me.

As to being east again:—I suppose, according to my custom, next February. More and more I want to write, and only recite to people who have read most of my books, or are likely to review them or something like that.

As I see the war now, figuring on the chances, two armies can be had from the present conscription and it will not be till next year that a new registration (31-40) will take place. So I am hoping to see The Golden Book done before that time, and if I must go my work will have reached a natural terminus. I find week by week I am more reconciled to that view. I think roughly speaking that I am a pro-Ally socialist, but I am a son of Pocahontas and Kentucky and Virginia even more. And more than that “I can but mourn and mourn again at bloodshed caused by angels saints and men.”⁸

I know *Earnst must be very much tried at these times, possibly a little more than the rest of us, and please assure him for me he has my most earnest sympathy. Everyone I know is in an inner conflict, except a very few cocksure people. ~~But~~ The people^ who do any sociological thinking are all bruised up inside. I doubt if ever a nation went to war with so tender a conscience. It really is a wild caricature of the mother punishing her boy and saying “This hurts me more than it does you.” That is always a joke till some one we care for becomes intolerable. Then we understand it, as real tragedy.

Coming from St. Louis, I venture you and Earnst are more touched than most by various grades of German American heartache, conflicts keener than ours.⁹

But reading James Russel^ Lowell for the first time for ages the other day, I realized that even then it was a case of inevitable conflict, and men had to choose. My father was a rampant Southerner when I was a little boy, and is yet, in a mild way. But when I was ten I knew he was dead wrong. It is this hard thing to realize, that sometimes there is an inevitable conflict. The world is one nation in machinery, in wireless, in everything but government. And I am beginning to hope that Wilson and the Russians will sq[u]eeze the rest of the World between them into some sort of anti-imperialist international government. The world forming a ministry, as England and France do.

With every good wish

Vachel

Notes

¹VL refers to ST’s collection of poems entitled “Songs out of Sorrow,” included in *Love Songs* (1917) and first published, with minor variations, in Harriet *Monroe’s *Poetry Magazine* (June 1917). VL quotes “Spirit’s House,” line eight of which in the final version reads: “For I have good of all my pain.”

²For “Our Mother Pocahontas,” “Niagara,” and “Mark Twain and Joan of Arc,” see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 293-297. The three poems were first published in *Monroe’s *Poetry Magazine* (July 1917).

³VL refers to his review "Venus in Armor," *New Republic* (April 28, 1917), pp. 380-381.

⁴VL's articles in *The New Republic* are: "Queen of My People" (July 7, 1917), pp. 280-281; and "Empire in Poetry" (September 18, 1917), pp. 291-299.

⁵One of several indications that ST felt VL was wasting his time and energy in pursuing film criticism and study.

⁶VL's publisher, Macmillan, persuaded him to issue a new book, *The *Chinese Nightingale* (1917), rather than enlarge the **Congo* volume. See the next letter.

⁷"Auntie" is Frances Frazee Hamilton, VL's mother's younger sister. "Aunt Fannie" was one of VL's favorite confidantes: see Letters 4 and 97.

⁸VL quotes the final two lines of "Mark Twain and Joan of Arc" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 297).

⁹German-Americans, referred to pejoratively in the World War I era as "Hyphenates," had an especially difficult time when the United States declared war on Germany. In order to encourage loyalty to the United States rather than to Germany, poet and biographer Hermann Hagedorn (1882-1964) and other German-Americans formed the Vigilantes, a group of writers and educators dedicated to patriotic propaganda, especially in submissions to newspapers. See Clifton James Child, *The German-Americans in Politics, 1914-1917* (1939); Hagedorn's *The Hyphenated Family: An American Saga* (1960); and Alan Havig, "Presidential Images, History, and Homage: Memorializing Theodore Roosevelt, 1919-1967," *American Quarterly* 30 (Autumn, 1978): 517. For VL and the Vigilantes, see Letter 181.
