

177) "So it was none of my doing young woman . . ."

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

September 11, 1917

My Dear Sara:

Miss Anita *Loos can be had care of the Artcraft Pictures corporation, 729 Seventh ave^, New York City. Miss Mae Marsh care of the Goldwyn Pictures Corporation, 16 East Forty Second, New York City.¹ These people like all the rest of the movie folks dash back and forth from Los Angeles like shuttles, though they are in Los Angeles the greater part of the time, I presume.

I am so glad to hear of your new books, and await them with the greatest interest delight and anticipation, not to speak of proper sentiments.²

Thank you for your letter of August seventeenth. In reply to same will say that I refuse to discuss the war when I have a letter to write. I refer you to my next published work, The *Chinese Nightingale and Other Poems, Macmillans, about October fifteenth. The second section is called America Watching the War, and the third section America at War With Germany. These poems trace the gradual conversion of the typical American Pacifist, (said pacifist being me,) his conversion, I say, from a sort of Jane Addams worshipper to a Kerensky follower, (without losing admiration for Jane Addams,) with all the implications, or some of the implications.³ Now I will draw a line on the war.

As to my wild campaign to become the Jessie *Rittenhouse and *Braithwaite and *Reedy of the Movies:—The *New Republic had three unpublished articles, which is a kind providence, for it gives me the self command to think of more important things while I wait. I have been invited out of a clear sky, with no intrigue whatever, to address the Chicago Art Institute twice this fall on the art of the films, and it is secretly implied in the utmost whisper that maby^ sometime the Institute will have a film policy.⁴ Also I have a conference on with the inner machinery of Chicago University about the same time, to start something like they have at Columbia.⁵ I do not expect to have anything but an advisory hand in these matters. I do not see myself occupying a chair, or running a studio.

I expected to have an enlarged *Congo, but (later) the Macmillans insisted on a new book. Then I suggested the title America At War, with the war sections first, and the Macmillans themselves insisted rather on the Nightingale as the title poem. So it was none of my doing young woman. Mr. *Marsh sorta insinuated that my war stuff wouldn't help me with the public worth a pin. I do not know what he meant, but I pulled myself together and wrote Kerensky just to show him. It is based on the old soap-box poem I have had on hand for years. Kerensky comes in for the climax, for trimmings and illustration, and the war itself only glorifies the soap-box.⁶ It is my only other thing in the style of the *Kallyope yell.

The whole *Wakefield family is here, and all but the husband will be here the entire year. Paul will be in Harvard specializing in Oriental diseases, and probably cutting some ice for himself, having been running a Chinese hospital like a lord for these seven

years, and dosing endless ragged Chinamen in every known fashion. He certainly will eat Harvard Medical alive, and enjoy it like cattle in clover. His hospital is going to be taken over by the Rockefeller^ Foundation for medecine^ in China, and made part of their system of hospitals and thoroughly advanced medical schools. It is a great victory for him, after a long fight, to get real backing, and the foundation is backing him in this year at Harvard, and opening the doors of inside medecine^ for him, as it were. We have been walking the streets together, and having a reunion in most approved style. The rest of the family will be here for the year, and I am in for a time that is good for the heart. The mother and the children are of course the dearest possible.

Curiously enough, I saw "Down To Earth" two days before your letter came. I would have written it up for the New Republic, if they were not so far behind already in printing my articles. They expect to print one a month, but now it has been two months since the last one appeared.⁷

I shall travel a little to Chicago and environs in November and in New York and Boston and environs in February. The rest of the time I shall be working on the *Golden Book till it is done. I have put so many dreams into the Golden Book that only one tenth of them can possibly be written down.

With every good wish to Mr. and Mrs. Earnst B. *Filsinger I remain

Most sincerely

Vachel

Notes

¹For more information on Mae Marsh, see Letter 175 and note 4 below.

²VL refers to ST's anthology of love poetry by women, *The Answering Voice*, and to her new collection of lyrics, *Love Songs*, both published in October 1917. *Love Songs* was awarded the initial Columbia University prize for the best book of poems published in America in 1917, winning out over, among others, VL's *The *Chinese Nightingale and Other Poems*. The prize was \$500, as reported in the *New York Times Book Review* (June 16, 1918), p. 55. For additional information, see the next two letters and Letter 182.

³Alexander Kerensky (1881-1970), Russian revolutionary, played a leading role in the 1917 revolution, serving as minister of justice (March), minister for war (May), and premier (July). He was deposed (November) by the Bolsheviks and fled to France. See VL's poem: "This, My Song, Is Made for Kerensky" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 299-301).

⁴VL spoke in Fullerton Hall, Chicago Art Institute, at the invitation of Director George William Eggers, who wrote the "Foreword" for the revised edition of VL's *The *Art of the Moving Picture* (1922). *The Wild Girl of the Sierras*, starring Mae Marsh, was the focus of one lecture: see *Art of the Moving Picture*, pp. 30-32, and "Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 973).

⁵In an unpublished letter to Jessie B. *Rittenhouse (October 12, 1917, Rollins College Library), VL asserts that he will be at the University of Chicago on or about October 20, 1917, to consult with several officials (including English professor Robert Morss Lovett) on the subject of motion pictures. However, nothing seems to have resulted from the

consultation. For Columbia University, where Professor Victor O. Freeburg used VL's **Art of the Moving Picture* (1915) as a textbook, see Letter 175.

⁶VL's poem "This, My Song, Is Made for Kerensky," was first published in Harriet *Monroe's *Poetry Magazine* (October 1917), with the title "The Soap-Box" and the present title used as a subtitle. For more on "the soap-box" idea, see Letter 6 and *Poetry of VL*, p. 867.

⁷Anita *Loos' husband, John Emerson, directed the silent film *Down to Earth* (1917), starring Douglas Fairbanks. ST, who had many health problems in her short life, was likely interested in the controlling idea of the film, namely, that many contemporary, prosperous Americans are hypochondriacs. The Fairbanks character, Billy Gaynor, devises a plan to bring these people "down to earth."

178) "Thank you for the two beautiful books . . ."

Springfield Ill.
Oct. 12, 1917.

My Dear Sara:

Thank you for the two beautiful books.¹ They are both well winnowed, as far as I can apprehend in this time. I have been cutting corn on a near-by farm for three days, as a preliminary to writing, and I am just getting back into my room to unwrap packages and look things over.

I am sending you The *Chinese Nightingale, properly dedicated. Your special copy contains in the front an acrostic—To Sara Teasdale, the Unforgotten. And in the back is a special picture, with a rhyme.²

This afternoon I pull myself together to dash at the second chapter of
The *Golden Book of Springfield.

My good wishes to you and to *Earnst, and congratulations on the two new books.

Jessie *Rittenhouse will be here the twentieth, but unfortunately, I will be in Chicago.³ She made a great hit when she was here the last time.

Very sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay

[P.S.] Mama wants to entertain Jessie. I am writing today.

Notes

¹See previous letter, note 2, and the next letter.

²The "rhyme" is "Dancing for a Prize" (*Poetry of VL*, p. 265). The "acrostic" is published in Carpenter, pp. 239-240 and entitled: "To Sara Teasdale the Unforgotten."

³See previous letter, note 5. In an unpublished letter (March 30, 1917, Rollins College Library), VL informs *Rittenhouse that she is the first of their poetry circle to visit Springfield. See Rittenhouse, *My House of Life*, pp. 292-296.

179) “The ways of engag[e]ments are past finding out . . .”

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

January 10, 1918.

[Headnote: “I am petitioning *Jessie B. to invite Dr. Arthur Paul *Wakefield Boston City Hospital—South Department Boston—to the dinner the 31st. Olive is here with us. Paul is alone there and needs cheering up.”]

My Dear Sara and *Earnst:

Thank you for your Christmas remembrance^.
Thank you for all favors. Thank you for the Answering Voice and The book of Love Songs and all.¹ I am wondering if I have acknowledged everything categorically and specifically. I should have sent a Christmas card—but I returned from my fall tour in the West so late I had no chance to set my desk in order. And the house was and is full of delightful little Wakefields.

I have no New York Engagements^ as yet for February or this spring—though some may turn up later. If any turn up for any time near—I will come to Jessie’s Party and the poetry banquet. But at present I am up to my neck in the *Golden Book of Springfield—and it seems to me the one justification of my existence. I hope you approve of it when it is done. It will take till September to finish it, I suppose.

I send you Sandburgs^ tribute to *Reedy.² I think it is a peach.

Meanwhile—I get a hint from Jessie’s card this morning that I am supposed to have turned haughtily back from New York—having reached Philadelphia. Not so, young people, not so. I had appointments of long standing to lecture for the Chicago Art Institute and for the Indiana Normal College [~~Bloomington~~] Terre Haute Indiana. The Philadelphia engagement suddenly jumped itself in just before these. And curiously enough an engagement^ just before Philadelphia at Allegheny^ College Meadville Pa. The ways of engagements^ are past finding out. If I had them all in a row in two weeks of one year I could fill them all—make money and save carfare, time, and hurly-burly etc.

About Feb 7, 8 or 9—I forget which—The *Chinese Nightingale is to be dramatized for a Girls revel at Mandle^ Hall Chicago University—Mrs. C. E. Hyman director and musician. Lorado *Tafts daughter will be a veiled figure—the Nightingale—standing by Chang. Little Ruth Lovett will be the princess (daughter of Prof. Lovett.)³ A big Joss will be the Joss. There will be a chorus in costume singing and reciting the parts—while the actors dance it and act it in pantomime only. Yeukalaley^ music of a

diluted variety written by Mrs. Hyman. Tell your friends in Chicago to go—and report how it goes. With good wishes

Vachel

Notes

¹For more on these two ST books, see Letter 177.

²As with so many other poets of this era, Carl Sandburg held William Marion *Reedy in high esteem. In the “Prefatory Note” to *Chicago Poems* (1916), for example, Sandburg especially thanks “Harriet *Monroe and Alice Corbin *Henderson, editors of *Poetry*, and William Marion Reedy, editor of *Reedy’s Mirror*, St. Louis, whose services have heightened what values of human address herein hold good.”

³For VL’s satisfaction with this event, which was held in Mandel Hall at the University of Chicago, see “*Adventures While Singing These Songs” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 941-942). Ruth Lovett was the 12-year-old daughter of Professor Robert Morss Lovett: see Letter 177.

180) “My good wishes to you and all your family . . .”

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

Feb. 6, 1918.

My Dear Sara:

Enclosed find two tickets for me and two for *Bynner.

My good wishes to you and all your family.

Probably March 1—or thereabouts I will give a recital on your street—142 West 81st. our Church—us Campbellites.¹

With good wishes

Vachel.

Note

¹VL made at least two visits to the All Angels’ Church between 1918 and 1920. Located then at the corner of West End Avenue and 81st Street on New York City’s northeast side, the church pastor was Reverend S. De Lancey Townsend. The Lindsay family church in Springfield, Illinois, the First Christian Church on 6th Street, was steeped in the “Disciples” or Campbellite tradition. See “*Adventures While Singing These Songs” (*Poetry of VL*, p. 945), and Dale A. Jorgenson, “Vachel Lindsay: The Troubadour from Springfield,” in *Theological and Aesthetic Roots in the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Kirksville, Missouri: The Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1989), pp. 279-303.

181) "The Golden Book will probably be ready by Christmas . . ."

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

May 27, 1918

My Dear Earnst and Sara:

Enclosed find "The Empire of China is Crumbling Down." Please read and return with suggestions in the margins, correcting everything from the spelling thereof to the cosmic philosophy and the theology. And particularly indicate where the poetry is sick, and mend it if possible.¹

I have sent a little earlier version to Robert Frost. I have not heard from him yet.

I will be very glad if you care to hand this poem in at the last session of the *Poetry Society if it arrives on time, but will be as well pleased if you and *Jessie Belle and *Edward J. and *Louis and Jean or any small group genuinely interested have a wake over it. And I will be greatly obliged if you return this copy with their outstanding objections. All but the Launcelot section is adapted to oratorical reading, slow and pompous.

I have just had a wonderful study in zoology called the Jazz-Bird accepted by the Vigilantes. The Kaiser will certainly tremble on his throne if he ever reads it.²

There is a heap to say, so I will not begin. I have been following the Sara as she appears in print, also many other birds of the flock. I have just pasted in The Answering Voice a portrait of the Sara from The Mother's Magazine for June.³

I will be glad of any sketch, long or short, of your recent personal history. Mine is briefly comprehended in hard work on the *Golden Book, in the midst of a sick family I am very fond of, Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay.

Papa has been so bad off Mama has gotten well, just to take care of him.⁴

The Golden Book will probably be ready by Christmas. That is, written. That means it will not appear before next spring. I hate to be so slow, but my prose will not be hustled. I am making it the one thought of my life, and hope when it is done, it will be the one book of my life.

A recent *Atlantic had a wonderful story by an Elderly Spinster, called "One of God's Little Jokes." April or May Atlantic.⁵

Thanks to the start you gave me with Robert, I had a grand time with him in Chicago about a month ago. He is the finest kind of a man.

I have had a considerable correspondence with Hermann Hagedorn of late. I think his "Where Do You Stand" a most marvelous and statesmanlike document, marvellous in its immediate adaptability to these times. If you do not know Hermann, look him up. I think that book deserves to be written in letters of gold with pictures of Silver, and I have not a doubt it is doing piles of good.⁶

Hermann's work is about the only work by the Vigilantes that has interested me. I think he is the present justification of their existence, though not all the evidence has been put before me. The bunch as a whole is a little too anti-Wilson, Pro-Roosevelt to suit me. But I presume that is a fine distinction in war-time.

I find from Wattles that Hermann is taking his affairs over, while Wattles goes to the wars.⁷

With every good wish

Vachel

Notes

¹First published in Harriet *Monroe's *Poetry Magazine* (September 1918) with this title. Collected with variations in *The *Golden Whales of California* (1920), with the final title: "Shantung, Or the Empire of China Is Crumbling Down" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 355-361).

²VL refers to his poem "The Modest Jazz-Bird," first published in *Poetry Magazine* (August 1919) and collected in *The Golden Whales of California*: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 393-394. In August 1918, writing to friend Katharine Lee Bates (see Letter 168), VL avers: "I insist that Jazz does not discredit America. I think the Jazz element in America is a sure sign of health. I have the utmost respect for Jazz in the young people, and I feel that without it there would be no American armies in Europe today. I do not claim that the Jazz Bird is a poem. It is a humoresque, of course. But it is the Jazz in these youngsters that will win this war. It is the same thing that Yankee Doodle was in the days of Washington" (Chénetier, *Letters of VL*, p. 169). For Hermann Hagedorn and the Vigilantes, see Letter 176 and note 6 below.

³This *Mother's Magazine* (there are several), ed. Elizabeth Ansley, commenced publication in 1905, David C. Cook Publishing Company, Elgin, Illinois. In 1918, the company moved to New York City and changed its name to Periodical Publishers Service Bureau. The final issue was February 1920.

⁴VL's father's frail health and the final months of his life are recounted in Ruggles, pp. 258-259. Dr. Lindsay, who had contracted pneumonia after falling into an icy Colorado stream, died September 19, 1918.

⁵VL refers to "God's Little Joke: A Story of the Polygamous City," *The Atlantic Monthly* 121 (May 1918), pp. 601-614. The story's byline reads: "By an Elderly Spinster."

⁶Hagedorn's *Where Do You Stand? An Appeal to Americans of German Origin* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918) is online at Google Books.

⁷American poet and educator, Willard Austin Wattles (1888-1950) had just published his first collection of poetry: *Lanterns in Gethsemane: A Series of Biblical and Mystical Poems in Regard to the Christ in the Present Crisis* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1918), available online at Google Books.

182) "It is no little task to write a book . . ."

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

June 23, 1918.

My Dear Earnst and Sara:

Please accept my good wishes, and the enclosed later draft of the Empire of China. It is to be read lightly with a touch of humor—till the climax. Also please accept my congratulations on the Columbia Prize. It is richly deserved, and Sara may feel more than confident, considering the reviews that have appeared the last two months. Consider what William Lyon Phelps said in the *Bookman, O.W. Firkins in the *Nation and Lee Wilson Dodd in the July *Yale Review.¹ These are typical utterances. I fancy that the prize will be accepted unanimously by all but Conrad Aiken and the remarkable Ezra^ Pound of whom you may have heard. And since I have dedicated two books to Sara Teasdale, Poet, I hope I have had a hand in the recognition of Sara's place in the world, which if it has not helped heretofore, will be classed along with Mr. Firkin's remarks in the Nation, henceforth. Firkins and Lindsay!

Yet there is a penalty to glory, and I insist on being asked to dinner next February, where I will do my best to eat up five hundred dollars worth in one evening, and if the war-prices continue, this may be entirely feasible.

As to my soul history out here in the Illinois thistles, it is hardly worth while to lift the curtain. I just sat down and wrote it out for another friend and tore it all up, and feel better. I suppose those circumstances, in four lines, are more to my credit, than the eight pages before they were torn up. The open blatant fact of my life—for the literary^ column—is that I am half way through the *Golden Book of Springfield, the manuscript will not be done till next January, and it is the fight of my life to finish it.

Harriet *Monroe is going to have an awfully amusing reply to Jephson^ in the English Review soon. Watch for it. The climax is particularly cute. Which is—by implication—if we are “plop-eyed bungaroos” certainly Elliot (I think Elliot is the name) is not an American poet. Harriet is seldom so unconsciously witty. I don't give a hang for rows, but this is funny. In private, to me, Harriet says Elliot is touchy about being an expatriate. (I think it is Elliot.) I wish him well. I remember backing the love song of Purfrock^ (by Elliot—if I remember) for all I was worth when Alice Corbin showed it to me in manuscript. But as for the London-Americans in general, Masters has done them up for all time in Spoon River in Archibald Higbie. I do not suppose one of them knows that poem is an ironic answer to all their protestations. The power of the Anthology is itself an answer to their foolishness. Tell *Jessie Bell and *Wheeler and *Louis to quote Archibald Higbie at the Jephsons. Lincoln was not ashamed of New Salem or Anne Rutledge.²

All good-speed to Earnst's new book. It is no little task to write a book and keep at business. Writing a book and doing nothing else is indeed a hard fight for me. I have no doubt the book is the longest, hardest, most absorbing and ambitious undertaking of Earnst's life, and certainly my Golden Book of Springfield is all that.

Very sincerely

Vachel—

Notes

¹At this time, Yale English professor William Lyon Phelps (see Letter 168) was in the midst of writing “The Advance of English Poetry in the Twentieth Century,” a multi-column effort for *The Bookman*. Phelps’ brief review of ST’s work is in “Part IX” (Vol. 47, June 1918, p. 392): “Sara Teasdale is a true poet. It would be an insult to call her poems ‘promising,’ for many of them exhibit a consummate mastery of the art of lyrical expression.”

University of Minnesota literature and rhetoric professor, O[scar] W. Firkins (1864-1932), reviewed books regularly for *The Nation*. VL refers to “Harps & Virginals” (June 1, 1918, p. 654), Firkins’ generally favorable review of ST’s *Love Songs*, which was awarded the first Columbia prize recognizing the best book of poetry for a year, in this case the year 1917. In 1922, the Columbia prize became the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry. Professor Firkins had written a much less favorable review of VL’s *The Chinese Nightingale* volume: “Verse and Verse Criticism,” *The Nation* (April 4, 1918), p. 400. In part, Firkins asserts: “Mr. Vachel Lindsay is a true poet and an earnest man, but he gives too much play to his elfishness, if I may so define his pursuit of freak in sensible images.”

Playwright Lee Wilson Dodd (1879-1933) authored numerous articles for *The Yale Review*. The article VL refers to, published in the July 1918 issue, is very positive: “Sara Teasdale’s lyrics will far outlast this period and become part of that legacy of pure song which one age leaves to another.”

²English writer Edgar Jepson (1863-1938) criticized Harriet Monroe and the staff of *Poetry Magazine* for overly favoring “western” writers, such as VL and Edgar Lee Masters (*The English Review*, May 1918). Monroe responded with a scathing attack of her own, so scathing that the editors of the *Review* refused to publish the response, claiming it was little more than a personal attack on Jepson. Monroe wrote a second response, this one largely negative toward T.S. Eliot: it was published in *Poetry* (July 1918). See Ellen Williams, *Harriet Monroe and the Poetry Renaissance: The First Ten Years of Poetry, 1912-1922* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois Press, 1977), pp. 233-236.

Edgar Lee Masters’ “Archibald Higbie” was one of VL’s favorite poems. A character in the *Spoon River Anthology*, Higbie flees to Italy, seeking the vision of the great Italian masters; but he is unable to free himself from the “western soil” of his birthplace.

183) “my dear cousin, Ruby Vachel Lindsay will be at the Brevoort . . .”

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

June 30, 1918.

Mr. and Mrs. Earnst B. Filsinger—

New York:

My Dear Friends:

For a week or so now my dear cousin, Ruby Vachel Lindsay will be at the Brevoort, and I hope you can have her in for Tea and Cakes some Sunday.¹ She comes from Los Angeles, and it was in her house I wrote "General *Booth", and with her help. We used to tell each other fairy stories [together], when we were tiny children, both living in Springfield. You will like her, and she will surprise you. See if she don't.

With every good wish

Vachel—

Note

¹Ruby Vachel (born November 15, 1878) was the daughter of Dr. Johnson Cave Lindsay (1845-1921) and Emma Clemens (1853-1932). Johnson Cave, VL's father's younger brother, joined the Springfield practice in the 1880s, before moving to Los Angeles. With their daughter, Ruby Vachel, the Johnson Lindsays lived next door to the Abraham Lincoln home. See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 939, 944-946.

184) "I hardly see myself as a poet any more . . ."

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

January 3, 1919

Dear and Lovely Sara:

Your letter of May 31 is before me, and the good Christmas note. And I have heard from you often, for I see everything of yours that gets into print and ponder it. My mind and heart have turned to you especially of late for many reasons, first of all—Oh most whispered. I have been trying in vain to persuade a young lady to marry me, and I wish you would catch her and lock her up in a room till she gives in, but she is far from you, and I know you are busy.¹ But please think of your Vachel as wishing he didn't have a heart, for otherwise he is getting on disgracefully well, and this is no doubt his punishment. I quit the *Golden Book three weeks ago and am not going to take it up again till I return from my Spring Tour. Whether it succeeds or fails, I shall still keep at my purpose to make dreams grow up like dandelions in Springfield, to the day I die Amen. They do grow here, and the others are beginning to see, and we have a Prognosticator's Club, to which anyone can belong, if they will prophecy^ about Springfield.

Reverting to this wedding that refuses to transpire, just like all the rest of my weddings, I will tell you and Earnst all about it in a whisper alone if you want to hear, if you will be very kind and discreet.

But also your real Vachel is much concerned with having a genuine and sincere tour this spring. It is so full already, and I do not want it to be a mere series of hollow noises. Since so many are like you, and prefer the Empire of China story told simply as a story, I am going to try that. My most successful new Poem is "Old Andrew Jackson" which should appear in the Independent soon.² That is, it is my most successful recitation, and no matter how earnest I am about it, always brings down the house. I cannot understand it, for I truly admire Old Andrew. He is just my style, but the fun in the piece always gets the audience. So please brace me up if you are around, and tell me to do it as earnestly as possible. Of course there is a bit of austere quaintness in the old hawk.

"Sew The Flags Together" keeps going the rounds, more and more garbled. Enclosed find the corrected version, for you or any of your friends.³

I never forget the last time I saw *Joyce. It was at your party two years ago. The dear boy has his picture on my wall—the memorial page from the *Digest, and I think of him devoutly. I am so glad he has won so much love in this land. Tell Mrs. *Kilmer her candle poem in the January *Current Opinion is one of the loveliest.⁴

I hardly see myself as a poet any more. I see myself as a kind of a forecaster and maker of dreams in Springfield. Watch the *New Republic. Perhaps Francis *Hackett has something to say that will help clear the way for my new work. But this is also confidential. There's many a slip.

A good talk with you would do me good today. How kind you and Earnst were about getting the Chinese poem before the *Poetry Society.⁵ Believe me I appreciated all you did about it, and let me acknowledge it now, after so long. I know you are both truly loyal. I understand that perfectly, and now that I have deep things to say to you, I am saying them.

In this love affair of mine I have been all year like a man shot out of a cannon who keeps on going like a comet. I reach out in vain to grab a few bushes as I pass by the scenery. It isn't half as funny as it sounds.

I recite/speak at the Church of the Ascension Sunday Evening Feb. 2. I spend Feb. 5, 6, and 7 at Wellesley. I recite/speak at the Brearley School (N.Y.C.) Feb. 14 at 12:40 Last Period. I speak on movies at Columbia 4:15 Feb. 17.⁶ I recite for Stamford Connecticut Woman's Club—3:30 Feb. 19. At Washington D.C. Washington Society Fine Arts 8 P.M. Feb. 20. I spend Feb. 21, 22, 23, 24 in Philadelphia with Charles Wharton Stork and C.D. *Morley.⁷ I recite for two Quaker Schools the morning of the 24th and in the Evening give my annual Columbia Recital New York City. On Feb. 28 I spend the day at Bryn Mawr under the auspices of Miss Beatrice Allard.⁸ Then there is a scattering of Western dates, going and coming. I never had anything like such a schedule in my life on the third of January. I am looking to be as busy as a cranberry merchant by the time I get to New York, so I offer you and Earnst January 30th or January 31st. I have already offered Feb. 1 to Jean and *Louis.— Please consider you may shuffle those three evenings among you. I think Louis always prefers Saturday, so he will not have to go to Newark the morning after. You will note plenty of other free time through Feb. but I would like to start with my friends this time. I love you all dearly, and truly need you. I am feeling my way into a new work. I refuse to be encrusted by yesterday. God deliver

me from being my own yesterday, when tomorrow cries out to me so. Let us talk about these things. Please send me the items about Earns' book, and every adventure you want to tell. Send me the clippings and everything, if it saves words. Don't hesitate. Clippings often cover a lot of ground.

With true affection

Vachel

Notes

¹The lady is Isadora Bennett: see Letter 185 below and Ruggles, pp. 253-254, 264-265. The description of the "Isadora Bennett Papers, 1945-1966," housed at the New York Public Library reads, in part: "Isadora Bennett (1900-1980) was a publicist specializing in the performing arts. Beginning with her work for Martha Graham in the late 1930s, Bennett became associated with dance companies, and the association would last for the rest of her life."

²"Old Andrew Jackson" appeared in the *Independent*, January 25, 1919; but in *The *Golden Whales of California*, the title is: "The Statue of Old Andrew Jackson." The work should not be confused with VL's later poem, "'*Old, Old, Old, Old Andrew Jackson.'" See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 394-396, 559-565.

³"Sew the Flags Together" is collected in *The *Golden Whales of California* immediately following "The Statue of Old Andrew Jackson." See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 396-397.

⁴Aline Murray *Kilmer (1888-1941), poet and widow of Joyce Kilmer, published *Candles That Burn* (New York: George H. Doran, 1919), which is available online at Google Books. VL refers to the title poem.

⁵The "Chinese poem" is "Shantung, or the Empire of China Is Crumbling Down," *Poetry of VL*, pp. 355-361. See previous letters.

⁶VL gave several performances at New York's Episcopal Church of the Ascension, where the Reverend Percy Stickney Grant (1860-1927) had served as rector since 1893. Grant accepted his position only after the church agreed to give up pew rents and rely on voluntary giving, an important step to help common people and thus agreeable to VL's democratic thinking. See also Letter 189. The Brearley School, founded by Samuel A. Brearley in 1884, is a private, all-girls school with an emphasis on the liberal arts. For information on the Columbia appearance, see Letter 175.

⁷Charles Wharton Stork (1881-1971) was a poet and a translator of Swedish and German verse, as well as a sometime professor at the University of Pennsylvania and an editor of *Contemporary Verse*, a competitor to Harriet *Monroe's *Poetry Magazine*. Stork's *Contemporary Verse Anthology: Favorite Poems Selected from the Magazine "Contemporary Verse," 1916-1920* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1920) is available online at Google Books. Stork had belabored VL for having a lukewarm attitude toward Quakers, so it is interesting that VL's tour includes two Quaker schools: see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 166.

⁸Beatrice Allard [Mrs. Brooks] (born 1893) received her doctorate from Bryn Mawr College in 1920 and taught biblical history for one year at Wellesley College. Her thesis

was published in 1921, with the jaw-breaking title: *A Contribution to the Study of the Moral Practices of Certain Social Groups in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Leipzig). Mrs. Brooks enjoyed a long career as professor and head of the department of religion at Western College for Women in Oxford, Ohio. See *Who's Who of American Women*, p. 170. The Bryn Mawr appearance did not go well: see Letter 186.

185) "I am communicative because I feel humorous today . . ."

May 30, 1919.

My Dear Sara:

Thank you indeed for the letter and the note received this afternoon. I have done just exactly as the note directed and there was nothing the least bit wrong with the letter and thank you for both.

I am quite sure you will persuade Isadora Bennett to marry me sometime, probably the first interview you ever have with her. She's just that near—and—far—from-me.

After all, you are a good Baptist and I am a good Campbellite, and Isadora's grandfather was a Baptist Preacher. She's a solemn little hoot-owl, often.

You will find a verse dedicated to Isadora in the May *Current Opinion. The four best lines are:

"We will sail to the end of the world
We will nail his hide
To the mainmast of the moon
In the evening tide."

These are misprinted by Edward J. *Wheeler, but I forgive him.¹

I am communicative because I feel humorous today. I met her good old dad on the street today and he gave me a Mephistopholese glare and refused my respectful salutation. He is an old actor and Mephisto was his most successful part. And he thinks I am stealing his cheeild.—

Great melo! Maybe he thinks he is being referred to as the sea-serpent!

I have been over the *Golden Book from end to end since reaching home. It clarifies, and I feel younger, and may sail to the end of the world, yet!

Yours humorously

Vachel

603 South 5th Springfield Illinois.

Note

¹For information on Isadora Bennett, whose parents were both actors, see the previous letter. The quotation is from VL's "The Sea Serpent Chantey," first printed in *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse* (March 1919) and reprinted in Wheeler's **Current Opinion* (May 1919): see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 382-383.

186) "it has been pleasant, writing to you here on the hillside . . ."

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

Empire
Colorado

July 20, 1919.¹

My Dear Earnst:

You have been moving about so fast I have not caught up with your line of march, and now write to welcome you back to the U.S.A. Be sure I am glad you have had so wonderful a trip. I have had cards from Kristiania [Christiania] to Paris and between the lines I read many conferences on the practical reconstruction of Europe and the daily demonstration of the meaning of the League of Nations. Methinks Wilson will get it over all right. And incidentally let me prophecy Brand Whitlock as the next president of the United States. The Republicans are riding to suicide on over-hate of Wilson, and the League.

Brand symbolizes Belgium, he has acquired none of Wilsons^ enemies, he represents an exceedingly dignified literary front and a very gently informal personal mood, an unquestioned foreign record, and in Toledo he used the wets to fight the corporations. And incidentally let me prophecy the most "literary" white house in the History of the Republic, under Whitlock. (File this prophecy away!)²

Sara writes me that I am to be congratulated on going to England, and I reply with apologies that I just don't give a dam whether I ever see England or not and have already postponed James B. Pond and Robert Nichols one year, who have furnished all the news items on the subject so far. And I like Nichols and Pond all right enough. But—³

You have no notion my dear Earnst how I feel about this, and there is no particular reason why I should enter into my very precious feelings at this point or ask that they be considered. (But) There are only two things in the world I want to do besides turn into a boulder on the Colorado hillside and watch the ants crawl over me and the moss spread itself: These two items are (1.) Finish the **Golden Book*. It is 2/3rds done, and **Marsh* likes every idea in it I think. But it is at present as he says—completely lacking in emotional and narrative interest, and these must be added. It is my complaint of all Utopias that they are never real adventures, and now I have struck the same snag. How to turn novelist I do not know, since the present draft of the book turned my brains to a complete mud-pie. I am at present climbing mountains, chopping wood for my Mama in camp here, and trying to get my brains back, hoping to turn novelist by

September. My Mama is about the only real intimate I have these days, that is anywhere near.

(2) The second item of my desires is to marry a leddy who does not ever want to marry me, and I am quite sure if I go to England some one will steal her outright while I am gone.⁴ Yet I must face the music, and thinking over your cards and Sara's little item about the London Times today (item nicely inserted by Pond and means nothing alas!) why, I have decided to send you two a petition! I will go to London—say in two or three years in a regular way of pleasing and conforming to the policy of the *Macmillan Company of the U.S.A. who furnish me with my entire quota of worldly wisdom, such as it is. Believe me I will postpone all I can, and when I go make the visit short and genuine as possible. But even then I will forget most of it, for here in camp with a brain of mud I have forgotten every public thing that ever happend^ to me, and only wish for a few intimates and wish I could boil the whole thing down to about six intimate friends forever. What is the use of howling across the country, when all is over you do not remember any of it, and care less?

The older we grow the more dependent we are on intimacy and the harder it is to get. Therefore I do petition that if you and Sara are amused by the game of getting me to London, you get me about two real friends in London who will keep the others off my back out of howling hours. You are about the only two people I can think of right now who care to do the trick and who are able, and who know me well enough to put it over. You might consult Robert Frost. I'll be hanged if I want to go through the wiered^ land of England and be hazed as I was in Bryn Mawr or Boston (the two most English spots in America), and have not even the consolation of friends out of howling hours.

[Marginal note: “Confidentially, I was frosted in Boston and hissed at Bryn Mawr.”]⁵

Neither do I want to join what Harriet *Monroe calls a “coterie of ultiamates^ and expatriates.” I want about two friends of the style of Frost, and I will be glad if you and Sara can find them for me.

When all is over, all I remember is a few friends and their private selves, and not how they were in public. The rest is just so much base-ball, no better, no worse, so far as I am concerned. And base-ball is fun enough, but too limited.

I am camping with my mother where the Lindsay tribe has camped for twenty years. I have been here twice before. It is a most beautiful place, worthy of a book. It is up Clear Creek Canyon just West of Idaho Springs. You buy an excursion ticket to Idaho Springs and pay cash the rest of the way. If you can bring things for Sara to eat, she would enjoy staying at the Guinella^ ranch, and looking at the lovely wild-flower valley. There are plenty of walks on level ground. You do not need to climb. It would be well worth your while to come scouting this way sometime, and possibly plan to bring Sara on a second trip, or bring her over from Denver or Manitou a day or so.

It is on the Midland Trail, but our own private camping-discovery, slowly growing into a tiny unpretending resort, of the most genuine sort, absolutely unadvertised, as yet.

Mama is cooking for me, and we are living in tents, but the Guinella^ ranch house serves well for the non-campers.

Well—it has been pleasant, writing to you here on the hillside. The best wishes to you and Sara.⁶

Affectionately

Vachel

Notes

¹Although VL does not mention the subject, he is working on “Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan” this summer. See *Poetry of VL*, p. 349. Bryan himself was hard at work promoting one of VL’s favorite causes: Prohibition.

²Brand Whitlock (1869-1934) was a journalist, diplomat, reformer, and mayor of Toledo, Ohio (1905-1911). Author of many books, including a study of Abraham Lincoln, Brand was appointed minister to Belgium by President Woodrow Wilson in 1913. VL’s prophetic power short circuited on this occasion: neither Whitlock nor Wilson was a candidate in the 1920 election. Republican Warren G. Harding defeated Democrat James M. Cox, whose vice-presidential running mate was Franklin Delano Roosevelt. The “League,” of course, is the League of Nations, ill-fated forerunner to the United Nations.

³English poet Robert Nichols (1893-1944) actively lobbied VL to bring his performances to England. Nichols authored a flattering “Introduction” to the English edition of VL’s **General William Booth Enters into Heaven and Other Poems* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1919), pp. v-xv. Also see Letter 263. For the Pond Lecture Bureau, see Letter 126.

⁴The “leddy” is Isadora Bennett: see Letters 184 and 185.

⁵For VL’s Eastern itinerary, see Letter 184.

⁶For additional information on the Guanella Ranch camp site, see Letter 1. The “Midland Trail,” so designated and signed in 1913, was among the first transcontinental auto “trails” in the United States.

187) “I feel so dull and baffled and demoralized . . .”

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

December 7, 1920

My Dear Sara:

I am sending The *Golden Book, under separate cover. I am afraid it is a failure. I have not seen one review, favorable or unfavorable.

Thank you so much, for taking an interest, and leaving the drawings with *Brett. If you see any real reviews friendly or unfriendly, please forward them. I am all at sea about the book.

I havn't^ had the strength of mind to read one page of it, and would be awfully obliged for a list of obvious changes, even correction of spelling, for the second, (the illustrated edition?) I am afraid, as things stand, "The *Village Magazine" is a much better "Golden Book" than the Golden Book is.

Tell me the worst, and the worst that you hear.

My good wishes to Earnst^. Write me some advice. I feel so dull and baffled and demoralized. I need advice.

Affectionately

Vachel

188) "I seem utterly incapable of moderation in anything . . ."

Springfield Illinois.
603 South 5th.
January 1, 1921.

My Dear Sara:

Thank you indeed for the letter, the note and the clippings. Believe me, they were a great help. I am just beginning to see my way out of the woods. I remember now my letter to you as I crossed the desert—how I dreamed of being free Jan 1, 1921. How free am I?

Well I am in debt. (1.) The *Village Magazine cost a heap more than I originally planned. That is part paid but still my main bill. (2.) The trip to England cost a bit more than I planned. This involves some bills indirectly tracable^ to said trip. (3.) I did 500 dollars worth of Extra^ correcting on the *Golden Book which will cut into next November.

Therefore:—

I must travel at least enough for a small bank account. A moderate amount of travel should clear me soon. But there is your independent Vachel—his main involvement—just plain debt, on the sacred Jan. 1, 1921!

So much for the mammonite side of it.

I can get free "financially" quick enough, if I consent to answer the stack of letters asking me to recite, I have on my desk. But I have kept some for six months, still thinking how to get free, how to answer such letters, and not be the slave of my past.

And then, since I must tell you a deal tonight, or nothing, I am only roused by a completely novel and absolutely challenging and seemingly real situation, like the Oxford audience Maesfield^ gathered for me. I remember that yet. That was a real fight.

And this month, getting the Golden Book started in this town has been a real fight, though a dull one. But it is started now—in a nominal way, about 100 copies sold, which is all right for a starter.

And there are other complications.

But meanwhile here is your friend Vachel, almost sick in bed, or dead to the world in his ordinary moments—and as I say, only well in the face of a real challenge. That is routine seems to make me physically sick; that is:— my writing-temperament is now also my citizen temperament. If I cannot use my body and blood to write with, as it were on the walls of a town, I do not want to be a citizen. And do not seem even to be living. And I am so terribly bored by all the things I am supposed to be doing, in what is the presumed routine of my writing and speaking and citizen life, public or private. The only thing that aw[a]kens me is the leap in the dark. I am afraid I am talking vague and silly phrases.

But to be brief—I have the feeling that personal freedom is only three months away—I am in the place as citizen, I was as a writer, three months before I finished “The *Santa Fe Trail,” we will say, or three months before I finished [~~“In~~] “The *Building of Springfield.” That is, after such work I always had the sense of literary emancipation. But now my writing and my body have come so close together, that my body seems to go through the processes, and I myself must be liberated and be the rhyme.

And to be in any sense free at 41, is not easy. If I am the slave of nothing else, I am the slave of my own middle-aged-ness, of my own weariness and boredom, [simply] and I am weary too often simply because I burn to the ground every time I do catch fire. So I hold off—and keep cool a-purpose. I get so excited when I am excited at all. And I do not want to get excited over trifles, or mere details.

I want to be sure it is a real emancipation that excites me. I seem utterly incapable of moderation in anything, these days—and never to my dying day do I want to do a single thing I have done in the past. So I save my strength and hope for a deliverance in three months.!

[So] I am using “The Golden Book” in the enclosed pamphlet, to beat down the door of Fate. I have the feeling that in the few towns willing to prepare for me, literally, as this folder directs, something will happen, that will be in some sense, my unchaining, the thing of which I dimly dreamed, as I crossed the desert as destined to be happening tonight.

It is just midnight.

So I will close, with this letter only started.

But you can mayhap read between the lines of the enclosed folder.¹ See page eight.

With love and good wishes for you and Earnst.

Vachel

Note

¹The “folder” is VL’s privately printed pamphlet *A Letter for Your Wicked Private Ear Only* (1920). Perhaps the key paragraph on page eight is: “The essential psychic unity of the choruses of my poems, when an audience of poets is listening, I hope some day to

transform and enlarge into a civic unity, with every citizen of the town a poet, and every poet a citizen.” Also see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 211.

189) “I do not care much whether I live or not . . .”

Springfield Illinois
Monday, January 10, 1921

[Headnote: “I am writing to *Marguerite.”]

My Dear Sara:—

Thank you indeed. Please send us by return mail thirty of your little *Macmillan Biographies. Mama wants to send them to England when she writes to England. It is the best thing she can do for me.

Thank you so much for the clipping. I will be in a decidedly babyish condition till I get my mind clear off this *Golden Book, and I greatly appreciate your interest. I simply should start some other book, head over heels, and forget this one, for this one is about started or killed, as the case may be. But I suppose for a month or so longer I will be a perfect baby about it, and I cannot help it. I know it is way below my standard. Yet in intention it is exactly what I want. Some day these ideas will come out in some couplet or short story and be accepted. But I cannot help but push The Golden Book to in a way prepare the soil. [~~for it.~~] Everybody that will buy the book in Springfield HAS bought it. With perfect broadsides in the newspapers, the piles in the two book stores do not diminish.

I hate to keep writing you on this theme alone, but I am sure I will get over it some day.

Now please. A petition! *Latham is a good and faithful friend of mine, but one thing I have never been able to get him to do:— to let me know when a book goes into a reprint, or make any changes in the book, I suggest for the reprint. At least it has been so difficult I hardly have the strength to rouse myself for a campaign on that score. I send you his black and white promise to put your pictures in the reprint, (the illustrations,) and *Benet’s preface (faulty proof here enclosed), and I greatly will appreciate it if you and *Marguerite and *Louis or anyone else handy will include in the letters that go to the good Latham, any other reasonable suggestions in regard to that reprint. Or if you will any of you send these suggestions to me, I will copy and forward them to him. But I must be backed up in this matter. I cannot go it alone any longer. I want a list of the misspelled words in that book, the grammatical breaks, and the rank inconsistencies of phrase. I cannot get these from live man or dead ghost for love or money. The company themselves promised to look the copy over for these, and it is a perfect botch. They charged me 500 dollars extra for my corrections, and made not one themselves, that I can detect. I appealed to most everyone in that office to see that the book was grammatical, and correctly spelled. And I am so nervous and overwrought that it will take more will than a whole trip to Europe to see that this clean cut illustrated Golden Book with the

Benét preface goes through without a hitch. I am wondering if you and *Marguerite cannot get on the job with your well known charm and wisdom? I know Latham is a perfectly good friend of mine, but the only way to see that such a thing as a properly illustrated Golden Book is put on the market, with clean cuts and with bad breaks eliminated is to be on the job as I was on printing the *Village Magazine here. And believe me I nursed it like a hospital patient. Latham has people at him day and night. But if you and anyone you choose to enlist, will really be on the job when it comes to seeing this edition through, I will be your slave forever. See for instance that the cuts are NOT in the book at an angle of forty-five degrees, and if there are specks in them, they are taken back to the engraver and routed out! And that they are placed in contact with the chapters they best symbolize. And that they are not reduced the size of postage stamps. And that you get the original drawings back when all is done. All this requires that you be right there on the other end of the phone from Latham about three mornings in the course of three weeks. But very firm while there! He will do it all with pleasure and ease to himself if he realizes the drawings are yours, and you really care.

I am in quite a state, Sara. I was never there before, or never for a long time. I seem to get up the highest steam of my life for two hours of a morning, or for a recital, and then I am absolutely a dead one and wish I was dead, from sheer inertia rather than despair. I really should be at a new book, if for no other reason to set my life in order, and quit fretting over details, and give myself so hard to a new project my silly excitement and silly inertia will have some justification. As it is I blow in a terrible amount of steam for two hours over routine, and then nearly die, and get nothing done, at that. And the rest of the day I am dead.

I have the material for one book of verse and three books of prose piled around me, and keep postponing, till I tend to a thousand things that seem necessary, or obligations of courtesy, or the like. For instance I have not even written John Masefield my thanks for the absolutely Royal reception at Oxford, for which I consider him entirely and fundamentally responsible. I wish if you ever write to him you let him know that I know it and have told you. And thank Benét for his review for me! I am afraid I am shoving a deal on you this evening. If you do not like it, shove it back at me again, and I will not be the least vexed. I am going to write exactly the kind of poetry you describe in your interview in you[r] pamphlet and forget all else!

Oh I almost forgot. If I live I will appear at the Woman's Club Elizabeth New Jersey, April 21. I do not care much whether I live or not, I am so bored at myself. Either I am all flame, or silly little ashes. So I should at least reconsecrate the flame. My note books are crammed with projects. And my English letters are not yet sorted, and I have hardly written one thank-you letter to England. It may sound perfectly imbecile, but I spent one month trying to pick out the American letters asking for dates from the English letters, and I havn't^ picked them out yet. They are all heaped in one corner. I am just stewed, thats^ all. I am no good except for the race course, so I might as well get on the track.

*Squire writes me that he will come to America this time next year. He simply cannot leave The Mercury office. I think letters of regret at his delay, and earnest hope for his arrival this time next year should go from you and Earnst^ at once. Be sure he will remember them. Remember he is a youth of your years, dear Sara, (and has therefore

much to learn!) and next year will be soon enough for the youth! and I certainly want all my American friends to prepare for him. I will give the *Poetry Society a talk about him the same week I am at Elizabeth, or what you please. I will not talk about his poetry though. I had better address the Editor's society, if there is one!

I suppose I will be at The Church of the Ascension the same week I am at Elizabeth. But I intend to make my stay most brief, so you had best plan your evening now, at The Beresford.¹

It will be time enough then to talk about Squire, and I will completely and confidentially elucidate him to all those you suggest I whisper to. On the whole I am thinking the whisper is the thing.

My Love to *Jessie Belle and all.

I KNOW, dear Sara, my prospectus is terribly egotistical in sound.² But I want only ONE town to take me up on it. I send it around till I find that town. Then I will get out another, based on my experience there. But some one new town a year, must set the new pace. I would like to split at least one town wide open so that all the poets can move into it. Please tell all my dear friends that I want a town they will be willing to move to.

With good wishes and all apologies for all my nonsense

Yours indeed

Vachel

[Enclosures: (1) Letter to VL from H.S. *Latham, expressing regret that The *Macmillan Company "shall not be able at the present time to get out a new edition of THE GOLDEN BOOK OF SPRINGFIELD as we have a very considerable stock of the first edition left. When that is sold I see no reason why we could not consider a reprinting with the pictures and with Mr. Benét's review. I am making a note to follow it up in this way." VL adds the following: "Please keep this letter—if you are at all inclined to take this matter in hand for me. I will be greatly obliged if you will. I have not even written to Benét." (2) Clipping from Springfield's *Illinois State Register* reporting on and reprinting William Rose Benét's review of VL's **Golden Book*. The review was first published in the *New York Evening Post* (December 18, 1920). VL writes: "Reprinted in the Illinois State Register, and then again reprinted by Barker." The clipping includes an advertisement that reads, in part, "Autographed Copies of Vachel Lindsay's books are on sale at Barker's Art Store, 405 East Adams Street, Springfield, Illinois." Purchasers of the *Golden Book* are advised that they "will receive without extra cost, a copy of the "*Village Magazine," a book of 128 pages illustrated with Mr. Lindsay's own drawings and printed on highly calendered paper." Said paper is semi-glossy, high quality paper.]

Notes

¹For the Church of the Ascension, see Letter 184. Carpenter reports: ". . . in 1916, Ernst became the Foreign Sales Manager of Lawrence and Company, a textile house of Boston and New York. This new position necessitated their [Ernst and Sara] moving to New York City, and they established their residence first at Hotel Bonta, at Broadway and 94th

Street, and then moved to the Beresford at 1 West 81st Street in September of 1917” (p. 234). The Filsingers remained at the Beresford for about ten years.

²The “prospectus” is *A Letter for Your Wicked Private Ear Only*. See the previous letter.

190) “I intended a note—and here is a letter . . .”

[Headnote: “(Later. If I had known this letter would be so long—I would have begun up here.)”]

603 South 5th.
Springfield Illinois.
Feb. 11, 1921.

My Dear Sara:

I have sent your folder to these three (no—four)—and told them to call when they passed through New York—on Mr. & Mrs. Filsinger in my name:—

Mr. J.C. *Squire—The London Mercury, Windsor House, Breems Buildings, London E.C.4.

Annabelle *Williams-Ellis—22 South Eaton Place—London S.W.1. (and her architect husband Clough Williams Ellis.)

Mr. & Mrs. Stephen *Graham 60 Frith St. Soho Square—London W.1.

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Graves—Boar’s Hill, Oxford.¹

All these people promise to make a bee line for Springfield via New York—this year or next! They are all a little vague, as to when. Now if it pleases you I will be glad if you can send them your good word of greeting, as seems best to you. Socially speaking, you and Earnst[^] are about the only people I have urged upon them, though I have quite hustled about advertising The Mercury generally. Squire seemed to need a start, and advice. But the rest were so placed they could shift for themselves. Squire was so terribly provincial and British in all connections. All the rest seemed to have as many American friends as I did, and know what to do about it.

I intended a note—and here is a letter.

Watch The Landmark—Organ of the English Speaking Union, for me[^] article on The Map of America. Mentioned in this Week’s *Digest. The Map goes with it.²

Also watch The *Dial for a possible article on The American Russians—in a month or so.³

I am started at last on a Johnny Appleseed song. And I humbly apologize for whatever I said that I shouldn’t. Whatever it was I am glad of it.⁴

Some one writes me that your old friend Zoe *Aikens is my constant admirer.

Well—I have always been hers, but havn’t[^] seen her for yearrrs and yearrrs.

I intended a note—and it turns into triolets.

I am hanging on, trying to think what I wanted to say. Oh yes. I had a tooth pulled and in 24 hours recovered from:—

A cold that had lasted 1 1/2 years by the clock. (mild description.)

The Pip—a well known trouble of young chickens that makes them gasp.

Chills in the house and fever outdoors.

Gloom.

Inability to walk, except like a tiger.

The obsession my English trip was a mess.

Other symptoms we will omit.

A throat trouble that made me think I was losing my voice. (mild description.)

Rhumatism^.

Disposition to write long maudlin letters.

This latter symptom hangs on. I suppose I will have to have all my teeth pulled to cure it.

But let us end with high thoughts. I think the *Nation's prize poems—are both peaches. Absolutely good. Congratulate both writers in my name, and everybody's name if you know them.

Affectionately

Vachel—

Notes

¹Punctuating this list of notables, poet, translator, and novelist Robert Graves (1895-1985) manifests the quality of the company VL attracted on his visit to England. It is safe to assert that, in 1920, few American writers appealed to the English literati as much as VL. Sadly, as we see from this letter, VL himself did not fully realize his success: “The obsession my English trip was a mess.” From the perspective of 2010, VL's English trip was a resounding success.

²In the revised edition of *The *Art of the Moving Picture* (1922), VL explains: “When I was in London in the fall of 1920 the editor of *The Landmark*, the organ of The English Speaking Union, asked me to draw my map of the United States. I marked out the various regions under various names. For instance I called the coast states, Washington, Oregon, and California, New Italy. The reasons may be found in the chapter in this book on California. Then I named the states just west of the Middle West, and east of New Italy, New Arabia. These states are New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, and Montana. These are the states which carry the Rocky Mountains north toward the Aurora Borealis, and south toward the tropics. Here individualism, Andrew Jacksonism, will forever prevail, and American standardization can never prevail. In cabins that

cannot be reached by automobile and deserts that cannot be crossed by boulevards, the John the Baptists, the hermits and the prophets can strengthen their souls. Here are lonely places as sweet for the spirit as was little old New Salem, Illinois, one hundred years ago, or the wilderness in which walked Johnny Appleseed” (p. 29). For VL’s map, see “A Rhymer’s Map of the United States,” *The Landmark: The Monthly Magazine of the English-Speaking Union* 3 (March 1921), pp. 161-164. For additional information on the “Map of America,” see Letter 209 and the title page of this chapter.

³The article is entitled “Avel Boone, and the Young American Poets of Russian Blood,” *The Dial* 70 (May 1921), pp. 540-544.

⁴The poem will finally be entitled “In Praise of Johnny Appleseed” and will first be published in the *London Spectator* (May 1921), but with the title: “A Song for American Children in Praise of Johnny Appleseed.” See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 428-435.

⁵The “Pip,” originally a poultry disease, is commonly associated with excess phlegm and coughing—and, in a broader sense, with disease in general, including depression.

191) “Thank you indeed for the lovely copy of a lovely song . . .”

The Brevoort.
5th Ave & 8th st.
May 20, 1921.

My Dear Sara:

Thank you indeed for the lovely copy of a lovely song I have much admired.¹

Yes I will be glad to come Sunday 6:30 at the Beresford—to meet *Aline—May 29.

I just recited for Miss Spence’s School this A.M. for enough to pay my hotel bill a few days, and do therefore feel quite serene, and in a sense idle.²

With oceans of sentiment, and no mere dabble of sentimentality

Vachel—

Notes

¹Since VL has expressed admiration for so many ST “songs,” we can only speculate as to which song this is. My guess is “Spirit’s House”: see Letter 176.

²New York City’s Spence School, like its sister school Brearley (see Letter 184), is an exclusive, private, all-girls school. Founded by Clara B. Spence in 1892, the school’s motto is: “non scholae sed vitae discimus” [“Not for school but for life we learn”].

192) “I am sending you my most earnest sympathy . . .”

[Letterhead: GLACIER PARK HOTEL COMPANY
Glacier National Park]

August 19, 1921.

My Dear Sara:

My Mother is at Charlevoix, and has written to me of the death of your father. I am sending you my most earnest sympathy and that is all I can say.¹

Your father was all courtesy and kindness to me. I remember him for myself with affection and admiration. You owe so much of what you are, that charms us all—to him—as I well know and remember, and I quite realize you are very much his child.

With all my heart

Vachel—

Permanent address—
603 South 5th
Springfield Illinois

Note

¹John Warren Teasdale (born November 13, 1838) “established J. W. Teasdale and Company [St. Louis], wholesale dealers in dried fruit, beans, and pecans” (Carpenter, p. 13). The business prospered, and the family spent summers at “Altasand,” their summer home on the shores of Lake Michigan at Charlevoix. Mr. Teasdale died at Altasand in the summer, 1921, at age 82, and the family never returned. Also see Letter 3.

193) “I am going at my letters for the first time in months . . .”

603 South 5th
Springfield Illinois.
Oct. 6, 1921

Dear and Lovely Sara:—

Pardon delay. I am going at my letters for the first time in months, and tearing up some half-dead ones without answering, and they shriek as they fall into that Hell called the Waste-basket. But thy letter being answered, dies in peace, with its beautiful eyes closed, with folded hands and feet—and the sign of the mighty Osiris shining like a great star upon its breast—Osiris being the George Washington Postage Stamp, which is certainly an August and Awesome Ornament, but we are too used to it.

In this case however—George is so excited he almost bats his eyes.

He knows I am going to write a poem about him some day.

Stephen *Graham sails via the Olymphic^ Oct. 15. He is in Milwaukee Oct. 10 and probably will take the midnight train out for New York. He has every expectation of calling on the Filsingers, and I have given him your message.

I know he will return to America, and I most earnestly hope you all can establish a permanent friendship. I enclose a rude sketch of a motto we worked out, that may amuse you. Graham is an exceedingly Geographical person—and is being entertained by the Geographical Society of Chicago and I most earnestly urge Earnst^ to interest him in South America, by pictures etc. Graham has actually proposed in his wild moments to begin at Cape Horn and trace the mountains north to Alaska and Cross Behring^ Straits. He may not do all this, but since his fancy works that way, he will do part of it.

With every good wish, with esteem, with confirmed confidence, with fraternal respect, with sober regard, with temperate but lasting admiration, with that reverence and that godly fear that should characterize thy worshipping people, I remain

With love

Vachel.

[Enclosure: Drawing of the world, with the two hemispheres joined by a cross. Written across the bottom: “THE WORLD IS MY PARISH.”]¹

Note

¹VL likely knew that John Wesley’s famous words, “The World Is My Parish,” were first uttered when Wesley was preaching at his own father’s grave site (in early 1742). ST’s father had died late this summer, 1921 (see the previous letter).

194) “I am here stopping all my wheels . . .”

[Letterhead: THE COMMODORE
Forty-Second Street and Lexington Avenue
New York]

July 20, 1922

My Dear Sara:—

I was profoundly moved to hear of the death of Edward J. *Wheeler. He was one of the noblest and most loyal of friends, and in my case bound up with some of the most intimate ties of my private life, and some of the most genuine public pleasures and adventures. I am glad I inscribed the second imprint of The *Village Magazine to him. That is a satisfaction now—it is so hard to do anything that seems honest and relevant in the face of death. So I gave Edward J. my thoughts when Earnst^ telephoned the news, but I did not go to the funeral. The funerals of my father and then of my mother were still too much in my mind to face the funeral of another. I am missing both my father and mother more now than when they died. But of that another time.

I was actually in hiding in New York, with every wheel stopped, for about ten days. Slowly I looked up *Richards and *Marsh, and telephoned you, but both you and Earnst were out of the city. I am seeing my friends one at a time, and enjoying it, but am hoping to avoid anything except parties of one to three in quiet conversation, all summer. I am here stopping all my wheels, and taking the silence cure, the rest cure[,] the modified hermit-in-isolation cure, the nice lonely metropolitan-museum cure, and the eating on-the-cool-roofs-of-hotels cure, and the study-of-Hieroglyphics cure. In short—everything that is in contrast to the barnstorming from the Atlantic to the Pacific and back again, last winter, with all its feasts, its flutterings and its slide trombone.

I collapsed here for a week, when I thought I had completely rested but I think all is well now. Yet I am looking out for most any light inexpensive quiet one-at-a-time relaxation and am beginning to feel myself again.

More later.

With love

Vachel

195) “It has been a perfectly enormous drama . . .”

[Letterhead: ANTLERS HOTEL
Colorado Springs
Colorado]

January 3, 1923

[Marginal note: “A sadly egotistical kind of a letter. A shameless kind of a letter. An awful letter. Yet mine own.”]

My Dear Sara:—

Here I am sending good wishes to you and *Earnst, and New Year’s thoughts. I have not the least notion of my personal or Spiritual history, for all my mail, some of it that miscarried three months ago and the rest the December mail is piled up at Mrs. *Moody’s in Chicago where I will be in and out the tenth through the fifteenth. You probably know more about me than I do, at this moment. I spent Christmas week at Oklahoma City, Waco Texas and El Paso.¹ I am not having an absolute rest, but things are slacking up a bit for the holidays. I make one appearance here, tomorrow, but nothing stren[uous] and then Sunday Evening a cooky-cake party at the Moody ambrosiery.

I re-read Eleanor W’s superb “Twelfth-Night” the supreme song of Jesus Mary and the Wise Men, in the *Digest, the other day and thought of the party where she recited it.² That seems ages ago. I have been all through West Canada and Washington Oregon—California Arizona etc. since. And many colossal^ adventures geographically speaking.

[Headnote: “Several pages torn out, mere maledictions.”]

Beginning next July I will proceed to draw the pictures and write the verses I have accumulated in notes for five years. It seems a short time till June when I consider it is the wind up of a two years^ national tour of the U.S. (and Canada,) and I will really have time to sit down and look the whole map over and consider what it has all meant. It has been a perfectly enormous drama, one I have been too breathless to realize—the drama of seeing the land go by in such a fashion, landscapes hurling, hurling by.

And it has, (only temporarily I hope,) greatly dulled me. While I have maledictions for enemies, I think many pretty thoughts for my friends I am too dull to write down, or to define. I am crude as an aisle in a Pullman. If I can only get as much privacy into my world as there is geography I will have a world.

My very good wishes to all good souls in New York.

[Headnote: “More maledictions torn out.”]

It is quite possible I will go back to private printing for ten years, till the whole present generation of publishers is dead! Pamphleteering and designing my own stuff gives me infinite satisfaction. I will stick to *Appletons only if they give me the best paper, type, print and Zinc etching in the Anglo-Saxon world. Watch out in every direction for the heavenly printer for me. I care not whether he be a publisher or no. I am probably through with both Appletons and *Macmillans, though I admire both firms in some respects. God Help me to be my own master as I am your friend and free slave

Vachel—

3343 Bradford Road Cleveland Heights
Cleveland Ohio.³

Notes

¹VL was in the midst of a two-year recital tour organized by A. Joseph *Armstrong. Before the end of this month (January 1923), however, VL will quit the tour, due to ill health and at the insistence of his friend “Zim” *Cox, President of Gulf Park College, Gulfport, Mississippi: see Letter 197. For VL’s physical problems, see especially his letter to Armstrong (January 21, 1923), in Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 265-266; and Letter 223.

²Elinor Wylie’s Christmas poem “Twelfth Night,” was first published in the **Literary Digest* (December 1922) and reprinted in *The *Yale Review* (January 1923). Obviously, Wylie (1885-1928) had recited the work at one of the “poets’ parties”: see *Poetry Society of America in the Glossary. “Twelfth Night” is available online at Google Books.

³The address of Joy Lindsay *Blair, VL’s younger sister. See the close of the next letter.

196) “The orator has destroyed the writer and artist . . .”

[Letterhead: HOTEL CHISCA
Memphis]

Jan 29, 1923

My Dear Sara:

It is a pretty picture you paint of the arrival of Edna Millay with her novel in her hand, and the Wylie to receive her with the gentle novelty in her squint.¹

Let them have their gentle day. We too have lived in arcady. The world was the field of the Chinese man and certainly we were the pride of a limited but select number of the sons of Han, including Miles Dawson, so we should worry!² Thus we speak proudly, and so, as James G. Blaine once said—"burn this letter." At least don't show it to them.³

What a lot of nonsense. Here I am fighting off the grip and taking the holiday you spoke of. That is—till March 2—I recite only once a week, moving slowly through the far South and taking it easy as may be. And after March 2—I think I will postpone all dates one year till the world looks a bit more like singing for. It takes strength to enjoy platform singing. When I am at par it is great sport—though crude. But below par—I strike like Sam Gompers.⁴ I want to lick my unfortunate manager. I call him "tyrant!" I wish I could come as near to composing *music*, in the musical conservatory sense, as I did the year I wrote the *Nightingale. I have wofully[^] receded from that strain. The world only loves the orator in me and hates the rest of me and the orator is to my notion nobody much. But every soul in my world is determined to cheer along the orator—even to *pay* him reasonably well—[and] if I will only speak by clockwork—and to punish *all* the rest of me, if it dares to interrupt. I know twenty times as much about audiences, platforms, crowds, etc as I did two years ago even. The orator grows monstrously[^]. The musician is destroyed. The monstrus[^] orator is developed and my manager and my two publishers and *Graham and my kith and kin and my audiences and the pretty hostesses and the pious college professors are grandly complacent about it. They hate the Vachel you knew for whom the Nightingale sang, for there is not a cent of income in him or popular acclaim for him. They hate even more the Vachel who drew the *Village Magazine—who is the real real Vachel. Nevertheless with the help of Thoth the ibis he may yet emerge. I am "taking steps"[!]⁵

Anyone who thinks he owns me is mistaken. (Said growlingly) Little Vachel still has a kick like a mule somewhere in one of his feet and he can kick his own small popularity the whole length of the alley if necessary.

One thing I am finding out, dear girl. I am just near enough to a Main Street alleged "success" now to find that even my most loyal friends want to *drive me like a slave to do my little act*. The idea of cultivating that very isolated, very lonely creative moment when *Booth and the *Congo were born—that the better poem of 1923 may be born is utterly beyond them. I am to be spatted on the wrist or tricked like a baby to make me stop every time I show symptoms of wanting to write a new poem or draw a new picture. My manager writes on ahead to the committees, and suggests to the Committees that they storm Booth and the Congo out of me—almost suggests that they compell[^] me to recite them. The idea of attempting the creative mood or working out the new stuff in public or private is utterly beyond them—and not till I have taken a vow to seal my lips for three years in spite of every friend in Christendom will I be able to step back to the days when we copied deep books and carved in jade and wove blue silks in the mulberry

shade. You know I did not recite well when I wrote well and drew well. The orator has destroyed the writer and artist and not till we have destroyed the orator will the writer and artist again appear. And it is utterly incredible to people that I am the kind of a person you knew when we first met. The orator has so poisoned their conception of me that *Graham in his kind book actually has me making speeches and shouting to the trees. Everything is completely perverted or destroyed to fulfill their Jazz or oratorical hypothesis.

Of course this is an ungrateful way to write—dear, and it is only my vow of renunciation. Please help me back to living on a penny a day and writing Chinese Nightingales, and drawing pictures of Saraphims. There is a way forward or back. Oratory has made me many friends—but I must tell them a long long good-by. They are sweet—and it has all been worth while—but I must go back to some blue day of 1913, when they treated me like the village idiot and the town drunk.

Which reminds me: I have urged Mr. *Latham to bear in mind that the manuscript of my *collected verses has been promised to *Ernst, and [he] Latham is to keep it in some sort of order if possible and pass it over to Ernst. Also [he] Latham is to note with proper respect that the book is inscribed to Sara Teasdale Poet, and since I have already read the preface to the Filsingers and taken all their corrections—he is not to hesitate but call them in to consult if he wants to fix anything in the text and is in doubt. The *Macmillans are to do all the proof-reading in the office, and in the light of these facts I hope you and Ernst capture the last page proof, just before the plates are made. [~~and here~~] In short I expect the Macmillans to correct all the spelling and grammar at their own expense. They charge me four hundred dollars when I do it. And besides I am an orator not bright enough to spell and recite all through the South the same week. Well—here comes my petition. Capture—on any nice excuse—an extra set of the last page proofs. Read it if possible—in one day. If the worst mistakes are minor—let them go. But if there is anything really awful please step straight to the phone and have it dug out before too late. Throw out anything else you do not like except the Roosevelt stanza. I think if you will study its present setting and exact implication you will like it. Throw out anything else!⁶

I think if you scrutinize the text of the LITANY OF HEROES you will see that Wilson, Socrates and Amenophis Fourth (Akenaten) are now the heroes of the story of the LITANY OF HEROES with Wilson the implied leader of the story of all history and the one person pointing straight into the future all the way from (Akenaten). And he is given a deliberately planned victory over Roosevelt when you read the text. This poem has been in evolution since about 1907. For the first time it is definitely constructed from first to last.

But back to my petition. Without telling *Latham it is your plan, Please go straight through the last proof—once, and without warning phone Latham any really howling mistakes. It is not likely you will need to phone him. But I am remembering you will carry this book to England with you and I want it to be in shape for that. I was rather expecting to correct the howlers on the second imprint, next September or the like. But now I want it ready for you at once, and in perfect shape.

And dear me—if you know a diplomat who can get it to England before you arrive I wish it were possible! I want to tell the Anglo Saxon world I think you are a poet as much as that world will be told.

The American firm of Macmillans have been kidding me about getting my books to England since 1918 and still nothing doing. The *Appletons expect to get my Appleton book of Drawings^ to England through the English Macmillans as a matter of course. But the American Macmillans find all sorts of real or pretended obstacles. There is a catch in it somewhere. As it is, the Appleton Book of drawings probably will be selling all over England when you arrive and the “*Collected Poems” will not have been heard of. There is a feud and constant bad manners between the English and American Macmillan companies. Anyhow you now have my thought—I at least desire that the collected verses accompany you to England. But I in times long past have written the American Macmillans on this theme of England, till I can write no more. I can only pray you to import a whole edition in your trunk!⁷

Well—“time will tell”—as the grasshopper said to his aunts^ little red headed baby.

I guess I am through—but I seem to keep on writing.

Epilogue.

Please let me say your firm fine hand upon my book on the very last moment of its emergence will be to me a delight and an honor. If you are ever going to give it a day of thought, editing diplomacy, prayer, incantation and singing of high mass, let it be that especial hour when your Elizabethan ministrations may really be creative, Egeria-like,⁸ big with fate, portent destiny and gentle and providing providence. I am unutterably stupid, demoralized sick and full of influenza. It will be months before I have many brains health or senses. So about Jan 23 or 29—or the like be on the job as diplomat, dictator and anything else, as little or much as you please. If you do anything awful, I will fix it anyway on the next imprint next September!

I have somehow notions that at this particular juncture one light and fleeting touch from thee would work miracles with our mutual publishing house whose attitude toward^ me is just now suspicious and soggy, for reasons perhaps lying between the lines in the first part of this epistle. I want your blessing—dear friend, and one golden hair of your wisdom—and just one day of 1913 again. Let us consecrate this silly bit of a book with prayers and conspiracy and get the same kind of fun we did out of such ventures of old. But indeed I am too oratorical. Any one silly enough to write twenty seven pages of nothing, obviously needs one day of your thought and imperial will.

She is a willfull^ little devil that Sara. God what will power. And so quiet about it!

Love to the Wiley and the Millay. Come let us be bold with our songs!

I send thee an imaginary peach from an imaginary palace garden, while the dragons roar in the sky to the purple clouds.

Most fraternally

Vachel—

Care of Mrs. Ben Blair
3343 Bradford Road
Cleveland Heights
Cleveland Ohio.

Notes

¹Edited portions of this letter are included in Carpenter, pp. 258-259. Here VL suggests that comparatively youthful writers Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) and Elinor [Hoyt] Wylie (1885-1928) may now enjoy their “day in the sun.”

²The oldest and longest lasting of the five great Chinese dynasties, the Han (206 BC – AD 220) is generally regarded as China’s Golden Age. Hence Chinese idealists tended to call themselves the “sons of Han,” the phrase VL uses in his poem “The Chinese Nightingale” (l. 55). Miles [Menander] Dawson (1863-1942) published one of VL’s favorite books: *The Ethics of Confucius: The Sayings of the Master and His Disciples upon the Conduct of “The Superior Man.”* New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915. The title page reads, in part: “ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE PLAN OF CONFUCIUS WITH RUNNING COMMENTARY BY MILES MENANDER DAWSON, MEMBER OF THE CONFUCIAN SOCIETY OF CHINA.” For the record, VL began “The Chinese Nightingale” soon after Dawson’s book was published. Also see Letter 106: VL and ST had spent an idyllic afternoon at the Dawson home.

³Republican James G. Blaine, Speaker of the House of Representatives, won the Republican nomination for President in 1884, after being denied the nomination in the previous two elections because of the “Mulligan letters.” In 1876, Boston bookkeeper James Mulligan produced letters that suggested Blaine had sold his political influence to a variety of businesses. One letter ended with the command: “Burn this letter.” In the 1884 election, Democrats were wont to chant: “Burn, burn, burn this letter.” Perhaps the ploy worked: Blaine narrowly lost the election to Democrat Grover Cleveland, the first Democratic President since before the Civil War.

⁴Labor union leader Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) founded the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and was well known for his willingness to stand up to hard-driving business leaders, using strikes if necessary. VL manifests his love-hate relationship with his current tour manager, A.J. *Armstrong, and he is about to go out on strike.

⁵Egyptian god Thoth was normally depicted with the head of an ibis. He was known for his skill in magic and in writing. VL is desperate to escape the recital/performer circuit and return to his earlier life as a creator. For VL’s personal hieroglyphic depicting Thoth, see *Poetry of VL*, p. 589.

⁶VL has reworked an old poem, “The Litany of the Heroes,” and is including it as a new work in his soon-to-be-published **Collected Poems* (1923). The long and complicated metamorphosis of the poem is delineated in *Poetry of VL*, pp. 885-888. Also see Letter 198.

⁷The “Appleton Book of drawings” will be published as **Going-to-the-Sun*.

⁸In Roman mythology, Egeria is the second wife of Numa Pompilius, the legendary second king of Rome. She is depicted as a wise counselor, and her name is synonymous with a mature, wise woman advisor.

197) "I have had the grandest imaginary geography lesson . . ."

[Letterhead: GULF-PARK
Gulfport, Mississippi]

Feb. 7, 1923

My Dear Sara:—

This will be my address till June 1.¹ Tell all who love me to write straight here. I need their letters. I have just cancelled my longest tour at a single stretch Feb 1 to June 1.

And I have just recommended^ you as a strong will and a person and a dear friend to perhaps my most loyal lady ally in England—Mrs. Clough *Williams-Ellis 22 South Eaton Place—London S.W.1. We have had a pretty lively correspondence of late. I owe my friendship with the Williams-Ellises to Marguerite *Wilkinson and please assure Marguerite I do not forget the debt, for of all favors done me by American friends writing to London to make my visit real—this letter of Marguerites to the spectator and daughter Amabel was one of the very most substantial. Tell Marguerite, at the right hour.

Do not let the proof of my book be on your mind. Leave all to chance and fate.

Isn't it funny the way Tutankaman^ is rising from his grave at Luxor six months after I scattered my grammars! Even the papers down here have two columns^ a day about him which I explain learnedly and at length when I am not on the comb of the roof—crowing like the Rooster of the Dawn!²

Even the Mummies Rise to serve us—while we recite in Saskatoon Saskatchewan^!

But now your humble servant is on this beach, recovering from every known kind of flu, and renouncing all reciting forever, and for keeps, this time. If I must earn by reading—let me teach the other poets—and read them in the class-room. I have finished my "national tour," if ever I do anything again I shall manage myself—and one town at a time.—Remind me of this vow—if I fail. But I want to read and teach the anthologies of *Jessie and Marguerite and *Harriet and *Alice and *Louis—if I am to open my face at all—and ever agin^ in the presence of the human race. I have had the grandest imaginary geography lesson—for the last four years—but believe me—lady—I am through travelling in Pullman Cars etc. Here I sit till the mice drag me piecemeal into the cellar.

I wish you the grandest possible rest in England. I am much nearer to being through with travelling than you will believe now. But give me time. I will prove it!

With good wishes

Vachel

Notes

¹Having abandoned his recitation tour (see Letter 195), VL is living at The Great Southern Hotel, Room 129, Gulfport, Mississippi (see Letter 205).

²The tomb of Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun (died 1343 B.C.), King “Tut,” was discovered by Howard Carter and George Edward Stanhope Molyneux Herbert, 5th Earl of Carnarvon, “Lord Carnarvon,” in December 1922. When the announcement was made, VL read about the discovery in a Saskatoon newspaper (see “*Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons,” *Poetry of VL*, p. 961).

Writing to Christopher *Morley in February 1923, VL explains: “The Litany of Heroes—is made up of many old stanzas—but in an order which makes them a new poem—and THE new poem—of the Collected Works of Vachel Lindsay—out presumably March 1. The Poem starts luckily with Amenophis IV, (Akenaton) the famous father-in-law of Tutankamon: Every day Tutankamon becomes more famous—by cablegram from Egypt—and the only explanation of his *real* final fame and significance is this Akenaton with whom my poem happily opens,” Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 276. “Litany of the Heroes” was first published in its entirety in VL’s *Collected Poems* (1923). See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 435-441, and Letters 196 and 200. Akenaton is normally spelled Akhenaten or Ikhnaton.

The “grammars” VL refers to are copies of two favorite books he gave to friends in 1921 and 1922. In his words: “I distributed in the summer of 1922 to many literary friends throughout the United States two grammars of Egyptian Hieroglyphics. One was Margaret A. Murray’s delightful *Elementary [Egyptian] Grammar* [1905], published by Bernard Quaritch. The other was Gunther Roeder’s Book [*Short Egyptian Grammar*], translated by Samuel F.B. Mercer, and published by the Yale University Press [1920]. Both grammars are simplified from Adolf Erman [*Egyptian Grammar*, 1894]. . . . I thrust these books upon my friends as though they were candy,” *Poetry of VL*, p. 961.

Finally, VL also distributed copies of James Henry Breasted, *A History of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1908). VL especially recommended Chapter XVIII, “The Religious Revolution of Ikhnaton” (Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 276). For the record, this book is a revised edition of Breasted’s *A History of Egypt: From the Earliest times to the Persian Conquest* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905). Both editions are online at Google Books. For VL’s desire to meet with Breasted, a University of Chicago professor, see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 324-325.

198) “Tell all my friends I am much much better . . .”

[Letterhead: GULF-PARK
Gulfport, Mississippi]

March 27, 1923

My Dear Sara:—

Where are you? Back in New York? I hope you have had a refreshing rustication.

As to your glad scheme that I shall see the King Unwrapped—who knows?¹ Stranger things than that have happened to me in the course of the year. But all the poets and all the publishers will have to send me there by acclimation—for I seem most marvellously^ rooted to this particular spot at present. Perhaps you can alter your mandate to a visit to the King's Museum after it is set up. But being born with a caul I can sometimes prophecy^, and I prophecy^ some other king will be found in my lifetime. Perhaps this next one will do.

I am beneficently^ tired tonight. I played my second hand-ball game for years and years with President *Cox this afternoon and Davies the head of the music department. We hope to keep it up every afternoon till we are dead or better!

I am much better but am never going to recite again as long as I live. I cancelled the longest most conspicuous and most remunerative tour ever, from Feb 1 to June 1 and dear old *Armstrong nearly had nerve prostration.² It was grand while it lasted, but I nearly cracked my spine, my skull, my voice and my immortal soul. I am slowly getting them all back. It was worth it, but I am here taking stock and taking counsel with your friend the Ocean which you have loved so much more than I do, but which is now becoming a friend. I walk out on the pier along about ten every night, sometimes with President Cox, sometimes alone. I think I told you he was an old fellow-student from Hiram.

Tell all my friends I am much much better.

I am slowly planning a much more elaborately illustrated edition of *Going-to-the-Sun. There is no great merit in the present book, but I hope to keep improving and enlarging it in successive editions. The great thing is that I have at last a chance to draw. I am still a puffy stuffy dull creature, but by June 1, I hope really to have something done. I teach only one class a day, a class of the modern Poets, in the afternoon.

My time is practically my own. The girl brings my breakfast in to me, and I generally sit here and work till noon. There is no sound of street car and no one is allowed to call me up by phone or make a social engagement for me. I see little of the girls, and they are quiet as mice from eight o'clock on in the evening. I sleep in a silence that is far from the Pullman Car. Really the quietest and most regular habits I have had since childhood. Yet I have enough good company in leisure hours to keep off gloom.

I am trying, dear lady, to take stock. The best article for years on my work is in the April *Century. I am thinking out the issues so well stated on the last page of that article. They are not easy. There is some simple course that is the way out, and whatever it is, certainly it is far from the maddening crowd.³

Carl *Vrooman and wife will be here to dinner tomorrow. They are near here with Mrs. Scott who is very feeble. They are spending the winter at Pass Christian nearby.⁴ They attended a session of my class this afternoon with Mrs. President Cox. The Vrooman's make mighty good company but all go home next week. Mrs. Vrooman comes to my class quite regularly on her way to visit the soldiers in the hospital, and she and I often mention thee, as thou knowest we would.

In spite of all I can do the kids in my class stick pretty tight to Eddie Guest as the World's greatest Poet, and they think me the world's stuffiest conservative because I do not agree with them.⁵

Ain't that just awful? Thats^ worsn being a jazzpoet.

Write me the news at length. I hope to send you a better letter soon. Note the Hieroglyphics on the margin. [Drawings of a "STAR," a "CLOUD," a "MOON," and a happy face with "VACH" beneath.]

I am engaged here till June 1, 1924 and will spend a deal of the summer here. *Olive is back in the summer, with her children, so I must see something of her.

My most affectionate greeting to Ernst and a world of sentiments for thee.

Vachel

Notes

¹The "King" is Tutankhamun: see Letter 197.

²Also see Letters 196 and 215 for VL's ambivalence toward Armstrong.

³VL refers to Carl Van Doren's essay, "Salvation with Jazz," *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 105 (April 1923), pp. 951-956, reprinted in Van Doren's *Many Minds* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924). The *Century* essay is online at Google Books; and although mostly positive, Van Doren does offer the following negative comment on the last page: "For Mr. Lindsay's poetical range is not very great. His eye is bigger than his appetite. That eye embraces the Anti-Saloon League and the sons of Roosevelt and Comrade Kerensky and dozens of such morsels; he gulps them down, but no digestion follows" (p. 956).

⁴Resort village Pass Christian, just ten miles west-southwest of Gulfport, was and is a popular vacation place for the yachting crowd. Mrs. Scott was the mother of Julia Scott *Vrooman, Secretary Karl Vrooman's wife. In 1918-1919, Julia Vrooman organized a jazz band comprised of various military units; the band toured American military bases in France, Germany, and Belgium. The Vroomans' book, *The Lure and the Lore of Travel* (Boston: Sherman, French & Company, 1914) is online at Google Books.

⁵Though loved by the masses, the verses of Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959) are generally scorned by serious poetry lovers. Dorothy Parker's appraisal is often quoted: "I'd rather flunk my Wasserman test / Than read the poetry of Edgar Guest."

199) "I have been to the hospital and back . . ."

[Letterhead: GULF-PARK
Gulfport, Mississippi]

April 14, 1923

My Dear Sara:—

Not a word from you, for ages.

I have been to the hospital and back since hearing from you, and am now on the permanent mend, unless the doctors think of something else. They think I am a rich poet.

I wonder when “our” book appears? I will believe in that book, when I see it!¹

With true remembrance^

Vachel

Note

¹VL refers to the first edition of his **Collected Poems* (1923), which is dedicated to “Sara Teasdale, Poet” (see Letter 196). VL is recovering from two sinus surgeries performed at the Gulfport hospital. See the next letter.

200) “I consider myself quite fortunate here . . .”

[Letterhead: GULF-PARK
Gulfport, Mississippi]

April 16, 1923

My Dear Sara:—

What in the wide world is the matter with our book?¹

I wrote to *Latham three weeks ago suggesting if there was still some proof hanging over—I was now well enough to correct it, and I would be glad to receive it and send corrections by wire, if there was anything essential. But neither book, proof nor answer have been received. Somehow or other I will never believe in that book, till I actually have a copy in my possession^. Of course it is utterly unreasonable *Macmillans should go so far, and then drop it, but I have felt there was somebody or something stopping it every step of the way. This may be mere superstition or sickness. At any rate if the Macmillan Company really want to please me, they will demonstrate the fact by issuing the book pretty soon. One would suppose it was an Encyclopaedia. I am sick of asking information about it.

I lecture on the Book of the Dead day after tomorrow.²

Good wishes indeed to you and to Ernst.

And wasn't it strange about Lord Carnarvan^ being bitten the day he re-sealed the tomb? That would make a person superstitious in broad day-light. And in the dead of night it makes musquito's^ ominous.³

Ernst has been mighty good about sending me Egyptian material. It was profoundly appreciated. Many of the best pictures have been posted here in the Library by me to instruct and amuse the girls.

I at last may be said to be well. I had an operation on the cheek-bone from the inside, then more surgery and tinkering in the same place, and two weeks to recover. I

still go to the doctor, and am still very dull, but am plainly on the mend, and I hope to do a bit of work before June 1. The first job is a revised, enlarged and much more serious edition of *Going-to-the-Sun. It is all planned, and elaborately planned. The main question is getting up fighting blood to put it through.

Please if I have said anything to you and Ernst or you or Ernst I shouldn't I humbly apologize. What's the matter?

I have just about finished a poem about "Babylon, Babylon, Babylon the Great," that I take some pride in. It is inscribed to Carl Sandburg.⁴

I teach an hour a day alternating—Jessie B. *Rittenhouse Second Book of Modern Verse and Marguerite *Wilkinson's "New Voices." The class-session is largely confined to my reading the poems [tø] in these two books to the class. You do not know what an enormous relief it is to sit down and read somebody else's poems to a quiet little class in a log-hut in a slow meditative way. I had reached to^ point where the sight of my own verses especially "The *Congo" and "*Booth," made me sea-sick.

I consider myself quite fortunate here, and if I do not get something done, it is my own fault.

With most loyal good wishes to you both

Vachel

Notes

¹That is, **Collected Poems*. See Letter 199 above.

²For VL's passion concerning the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, see Paul Horgan, "Vachel Lindsay and the *Book of the Dead*," *The American Scholar* 62 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 565-570; reprinted in Horgan's *Tracings: A Book of Partial Portraits* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993).

³Lord Carnarvon (see Letter 197) was bitten by a mosquito sometime in early March, 1923. He cut the resultant swelling while shaving one morning, and the wound became infected, leading to pneumonia and finally to death, on April 5, at age 57. Just weeks before, British novelist Marie Corelli (1855-1924) had warned that "most dire punishment follows any rash intruder into a sealed tomb," and Carnarvon's death helped to confirm what is still called "the mummy's curse."

⁴"Babylon, Babylon, Babylon the Great" was first published in Christopher *Morley's column in the *New York Evening Post* (May 25, 1923). Then, in keeping with his dissatisfaction with commercial publishers (see Letter 195), VL paid for a private printing of the poem, with an accompanying illustration: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 500-502, especially VL's end note.

201) "A splendid adventure to you in Europe . . ."

[Letterhead: GULF-PARK

Gulfport, Mississippi]

Friday, June 1, 1923

My Dear Ernst
My Dear Sara}—

A splendid adventure to you in Europe.¹

My faithful love to both.

I am up to my neck, getting ready a second, infinitely better edition of “*Going-to-the-Sun.”

More later

Vachel—

Note

¹Ernst *Filsinger’s business took him to England during the summer, 1923, and ST went with him: see Carpenter, p. 254.

202) “I am in excellent health and spirits. I was never better . . .”

Hiram College Hiram Ohio.
Thursday—July 26, 1923

My Dear Sara:—

*Olive and her three children have returned from China for a year, and are making this headquarters for the summer, so I have come North to visit them, and *Joy—near-by at Cleveland. We have had several happy meetings of the three of us, and the Lindsay family may be considered in its way a success.

I am in excellent health and spirits. I was never better. I am drawing and writing hard, and am enjoying some very old friends here in Hiram, and life means a great deal to me here, a little more than it did as a student. Between the three of us we have kept up our Hiram ties in an extraordinary way. I am amazed how all roads lead back to Hiram this summer. Earl Brewster (see page 2, of my *Collected Works) is back from Europe, and has been visiting his mother near here at Chagrin Falls, and we have been doing a deal of visiting back and forth. He and his wife are great friends of D.H. Lawrence. Also of Willa Cather. They are steady exhibitors in Paris, and it is most exhilarating^ to see them again. It makes me an “Art Student” again!¹

I will visit in Springfield a little, later on, and then go on to Gulf Park to hide for the winter. I have done a great deal of drawing and writing of verses. My plans are very simple:— [tø] greatly to improve and enhance the new editions of the Collected Works, and *Going-to-the-Sun.

I am wishing you a very happy time in England. I am thinking of you there. I will meet you and Ernst I suppose this time next year. At least I have no plans of going East

up to that time, though time and chance happeneth to all. But New York—in a year—perhaps.

I was quite well by the first of May, and quite over the flu—which this year certainly did hang on. People are still sympathizing with my ill-health, so tell them I am so well it would surprise them. The old paths bore me a bit, but there are new ones my dear—new ones!

I have promised to stay in Gulf Park till June 1, 1924. Then I might come back to Hiram Hill—it is such a cosy place. Its[^] just a little too settled. Thats[^] the main trouble. I suspect my happiness. There is not quite enough of adventure in it. Everybody has “dug in” as it were. I had better go to Alask[a] with *Stephen—than be too comfortable. I mistrust this peace—though it is great to store ones[^] battery. This time last year I was so fed up on adventure I did not want to crook one finger. Not a soul in America knows the total splendor of the memory of all of my seven years of Universities, audiences, cities etc. But I was fed up. Now I feel like adventure again, though not necessarily of the “National Tour” type. I was also fed up on climbing mountains. Now I could climb a mountain or two, very cheerfully. I will yet be riding on Elephants. Certainly I will not dig in, and get fat and snore. Anything but that!

Meanwhile, blessed be Hiram. It is a dear and beautiful place to be. And praised be our God for Sara, the beautiful, the Queen of Songs.

Write, write!

With love

Vachel—

Note

¹Earl Henry Brewster (1878-1957) and VL were students together at William Chase’s New York School of Art in 1904 (see *Poetry of VL*, p. 940). VL introduced Brewster to fellow artist, Achsah Barlow (1878-1945), and the two married in 1910. As adults, the couple lived almost entirely in Europe, with just one brief visit home in summer, 1923.

203) “On the whole I was never serener in my life. . .”

Wade Park Manor—
Cleveland Ohio.
September 2, 1923

My Dear Sara:

My address till June 1, 1924 will be Gulf Park College—Gulf Port, Mississippi.

I wrote in Hiram till August 1. Then I came here. I have been studying in the Art Library and Art Museum next door, for one month.¹ I have seen much of both sisters,

*Olive coming into *Joy's town house, while Joy went to the shack she and Ben have built North East of town on the beach of Lake Erie.

In the Art Library I have made a Hieroglyphic transcript of Akenaten's hymn to the sun, and copied down four translations.² I have become quite chummy with the Art Institute staff here.

I am glad to hear of your grand adventures in London.

"And we were the pride of the Sons of Han!"³

Don't tell anybody I said it!

But to be serious, I am very much in the State of mind I was when you and I began to correspond before we met.

You know how much of a sworn hermit I was in 1913.

Well so I was—to 33, and why not? Please assure all my friends it is the nature of the creature to hide for long periods. I am in bouncing health and spirits, and take it out in long walks alone, and reading a new beautiful Oxford Bible alone (King James version), and reading Don Quixote alone. Also the Sunday papers. I am in general enjoying the company of that awful sinner, and sublime egotist, Vachel. On the whole I was never serener in my life.

I have dropped all serious projects for the next 100 years. All I shall do is to revise and revise and slowly slowly enlarge and perfect "*Going-to-the-Sun," and The *Collected verses. It will take years of revision and of diplomacy with the publishers to make those two books as good as I have sense enough to make them. One line is omitted from nearly every principal poem in the "Collected Poems," so tell my friends, when in doubt—call it a misprint, or correct by a previous text in an earlier book.

Why worry about publishers? Even when they do beg for one's next book?

I have but one life to live, and it is to be a life of jokes, meditation, isolation, independence—and serenity, far from the maddening publisher.

I do not plan any new books, not for ages. The old ones must be perfect first.

I have had many happy visits with Olive and her children, and Joy and her children this summer, and the whole family is a little better off for having seen one another. We have had many family gatherings, here and in Hiram.

Tuesday midnight I start south.

I hope you are as happy and serene, dear Sara, as by good providence I have been of late. Life has such terrible storms, but sometimes the quiet day comes, and my quiet day is here, and I pray it may last long, and I am trying to pass you a scrap of it in this letter.

I consider I have made satisfactory progress toward^ a real terrace of rest and outlook this summer, and that by study and writing, though I expected neither to study nor write. As I see it now I will actually take a bit of a holiday this fall, feeling I have achieved a moment of pause.

I am writing to Marguerite *Wilkinson's friend A. *Williams-Ellis, of the Spectator—about you again, tonight.

With faithful affection

Vachel

Notes

¹Founded in 1882 as the Western Reserve School of Design for Women, the school was renamed Cleveland School of Art (1891-1948) and, finally, the Cleveland Institute of Art. It is located in University Circle, Cleveland.

²For “Akenaten,” see Letter 197. Also known as Pharaoh Amenhotep IV, Akhenaten ruled for seventeen years (dying c. 1335 B.C.). He is known for abandoning traditional polytheism in favor of recognizing the sun (the Aten) as a being superior to any mere god. The “Hymn to the Sun” or the “Hymn to Aten” is considered one of the masterpieces of ancient Egyptian literature and is generally attributed to Akhenaten. For VL's own “Hymn to the Sun,” see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 10-11.

³For the “sons of Han,” see Letter 196.

204) “Welcome back to this United States . . .”

Box 83,
Gulf Park.
Gulf Port.
Mississippi.
Oct. 7, 1923

My Dear Ernst and Sara:—

Welcome back to this United States. I know you return renewed in imagination, and with many lovely new friends to remember. I am so glad Sara is started with Mrs. *Williams-Ellis. I am sure that friendship is worth half a world to them both. And I am so glad I have made the friendship—if I have made it. I am sure it will last, if it is once started. This is but a midnight note—but my love to you—

Vachel—

205) “Life is a bit more light-hearted and light-footed . . .”

Springfield Illinois.
December 27, 1923.

My Dear Sara:—

Your lovely Christmas Card is here. I am with the *Wakefields, here in the old home. They are back from China for a year. It is my first return here since the death of my mother.

I have been with you in your St. Louis excursion, for have I not been through all that. But I cannot speak of it tonight. There is now a moment of peace.¹

Your friend Vachel—having returned to Springfield, finds himself very happy among his Springfield old friends. I have been however, almost exclusively with the Wakefields, going where they chose to go and seeing those they chose to see. For the most part I have been inseparable from *Paul, taking long walks with him, and getting far more out of him than on his last return from China. We have been through very similar experiences, in a spiritual way. And he is 46 and I am 44. Paul is a great blessing, and I wish I could keep him with me. There is so much we could do together in vindication of our earliest youth.

Every old Springfield tie has been renewed, and we have had some very beautiful days. The Wakefield children are love itself.

I go back to Gulf Port—to the Great Southern Hotel, Room 129, in a few days. I will continue to teach through the spring there. Also President *Cox will arrange the answers to the letters that are sent asking me to speak for the Universities—etc. in such a way that I can make one or two short trips this spring.

I am very happy, and very hopeful. *Macmillans seem to have accepted the Illustrated Edition of the *Collected Poems, though the final answer is not in. Life is a bit more light-hearted and light-footed, and less “official” than it has been in time past. I am learning to live a “private” life again. Paul helps. We take up conversations that date back to Hiram 1897 and forward till now. The harder we talk, the faster and harder we walk. We have walked miles and miles this week. I wish we could take a long walk together next summer. He wants to do the Yellowstone. His father surveyed it, and named most of the places, and wrote a classic account of it.²

The old house is a beautiful place to be, with Olive and Paul and the children in it.

I told Mrs. *Moody I was going through a quiet period of a great change, that I was like a hen on a nest with the chickens coming out of the shell in two days more. She said “This sounds almost like a confidence.”

I feel I am entering on the second fifth of my literary life—and I am in no hurry to rush it. And this statement is vague enough, Heaven knows. But The Whitman Editorial and The Mohawk have a line or two of this new mood.³ And Paul seems to have it in regard to his future work. Which makes him especially companionable and romantic at this time. I am nearer to the simple infant you first met—than I have been for ages and ages—when I am with Paul—our family affairs absorb us so—yet with many new accents.

The family that seemed almost utterly to have disappeared with the death of Papa and Mama, seems to emerge again—as Paul and I talk things over. He is a man with a great future, and I want you to know him well. He will be east sometime this spring. Certainly a wonderful new life has come with our family talks together. And he is so full of China. If I could only do full justice to our meeting. There is much of the possibility of new and noble life in it, along the line of our family ideals.

I am writing at midnight, and doubtless saying the same things twice. Recently I toured the University of Illinois—Ann Arbour^ and several other schools, including

Alma Michigan where I met many relatives of *Marsh and made him a tribute in chapel. Also at Dayton I met some of his relatives. Oh I had innumerable adventures and renewed all sorts of ties—including our dear Harriet *Monroe, in Chicago. She may have written of my visit.

Please write to Gulf Port early and often. I will be back in a few days.

There is a deal I would love to talk over with you, but a letter becomes interminable, without saying much. I admit it.

The Mohawk had two misprints. Here are the corrected lines:—

“And I cried and held hard to my mother’s warm hand.”

“And the Mohawk was gone. But my life was all planned.”

This little town is full of events, squirming with news that never gets to New York. Its^ nothing to you, of course, that the new Centennial Building is a peach! But the enclosed clipping may amuse, nevertheless.⁴

And so—no more at present.

With love and pretty thoughts for you both

Vachel.

Notes

¹Although neither Carpenter nor Drake report the trip, ST has obviously returned to St. Louis for a time to assist her ailing mother. Mrs. Teasdale had not been well for two years, and she would die February 20, 1924, just two years after VL’s mother died. For the record, February 20 was Mrs. Lindsay’s birthday. For VL’s condolences, see Letter 207.

²Paul Wakefield’s father, Edmund Burritt Wakefield (1846-1921), was Professor of Political Science and Bible Theology at Hiram College when VL was a student (1897-1900). The Hiram College Library introduction to its “Wakefield Family Collection” includes the following: “In 1872, Wakefield served one season on the U.S. Geological Survey team under the leadership of Dr. Ferdinand V. Hayden. This was the famous Hayden survey which is regarded as the most definitive of all Yellowstone expeditions and culminated in the lands of Yellowstone being designated in 1872 as the world’s first National Park.”

³The “Whitman editorial” is VL’s essay: “Walt Whitman,” *The New Republic* 37 (December 5, 1923): 3-5. The same issue also features “Doctor Mohawk,” VL’s new poem reflecting his feelings about his father: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 528-533, and Letters 211 and 252.

⁴Built to commemorate a century of Illinois statehood (1818), the Centennial Building stands at the corner of Second and Edwards Streets in Springfield. Although the cornerstone was laid in 1918, the three-million-dollar building (now named the Michael J. Howlett Building) was not completed until 1923. In order to construct the building, the State of Illinois demolished the home of Elizabeth Todd Edwards, the home where

Abraham Lincoln courted Mary Todd, the home where Mary Todd Lincoln lived her final years.

206) “I am quite content with my present outlook, here . . .”

Great Southern Hotel.
Room 129.
Gulf Port Mississippi
Wednesday January 30, 1924

My Dear Sara:

Recently I had a most charming note from Amabel *Williams-Ellis and she surely dwells upon your charm and your charms. I am proud if I have promoted that friendship.

My very good wishes to every soul in New York that loves me—my love, even more, to them. Surely I have many many friends in that city!

I think of you so often, dear poet, and last week I gave my girl-beauties a whole session on you alone. Being so partial, I have in time past tried not to talk too much, but I took the other tack, and went at Sara full steam ahead, the other day. My class takes but an incidental part of my time—four days a week, Quarter after eleven till the noon lunch. And I often lunch with some member of the class in turn. But the rest of the day is free, and Saturday, Sunday and Monday are entirely free. I have long days then in this room alone. I have stacks of manuscripts 1/10 done, some of them quite big and ambitious. The trouble is when they are done, if they are not cute little tricks, people say they are “not in my vein,” or “obscure,” so I am not specially interested in Publication. “The Mohawk” seems to please no one but Ridgely *Torrence and myself—but I have no tears to shed over that. I have scads of poems 9/10 done—new and old, here and in Springfield. Nothing in the *Macmillan Policy since *Marsh left that institution interests me very much. They thwart invention and fantasy, and muffle dreams and experiment at every turn, and I was born—inventing and experimenting, and that is all there is to me. Every new device or suggestion seems to leave them in a state of complete disgust. At last they have consented to an edition—for next Christmas, [fœr] an illustrated edition of the *Collected Poems illustrated by me. *Latham is uniformly kind, and keeps track of my ideas all right, but is weighed down by the Octopus. And so, as I say—book-publication just bores me to death. So here I sit writing scads of new poems, and just reading them to my friends—poems “Mohawk” style, or “Our Guardian Angels” style, or “The Jungles of Heaven” style, and drawing incessantly in the studio and giving the drawings to the kids, with appropriate verses. I enjoy this very much.¹

It is too cold to swim here November through March. Don’t figure me as splashing with Bathing-Beauties. The pier was smashed in October by a storm, and will not be repaired till about April 15, I fancy. April 15—May 15 the bathing-beauties will swarm, and a great sight they are, streaming over the lawn in flashing red and blue capes and a merry white-and brown rascal flashing out from under each cape. They are

beautiful, but harmless! And in the spring there are two moonlight swims, that are most picturesque.

But the Charms of Woman so far as Vachel goes, are steadily exercised directly around the fire of the little hut where he teaches. Twenty-five girls, the pick of the school, only reasonably fond of poetry, but fond of ideas, reading, and debate, and great on arguing elementary esthetics. I wish they were about five years older, but the best of them are wonders just so. And since Christmas they have begun to storm teacher with all sorts of ideas, till he is pretty well speeded up! I am not guilty of any "favorite" among them, but I confess to a remarkable infatuation with the class as a whole, just as infatuated as you please.²

I have lots of leisure to write, and am, alone in the hotel, where I make no friends, and there writing. Suppose you stir up your magazine friends to ask me for manuscripts a little more! After five letters from The *New Republic they actually dug something out of me.³ The Book-publishers, good bad and indifferent are at me all the time, and I am not the least bit interested, because not one of them wants to produce a really beautiful book, and I cannot abide bad paper, type, sloppy workmanship or the snubbing or smearing of my drawings. Not one of them is willing to leave the edge on my work and sharpen it. I will have to wait several years before I can demand such a thing. They still think me the sloppy orator or the cute infant, and think they can put off anything on me, because I do not condescend to raise Hell. Meanwhile the magazines do not ask for anything, but the New Republic which positively stormed me. I had a letter from half the staff. Why don't the others ask for things, and keep asking?

Who does ask for me? The Universities and Colleges. Letters and letters pour in every week, from Los Angeles to Toronto, and I could travel till I dropped. I give the letters to President *Cox and he fits them in week-ends etc. if he can, and his office promises to be a lecture-beaureau^, increasingly with Nettie Walker, the College secretary, signing her name, as my secretary. But I do not want to travel much. It keeps my life scattered, sloppy, sketchy.

I am quite content with my present outlook, here. And the in-look is about as usual. I am over the flu, have been over it since last May, and my only weaknesses are those of the soul. I am so glad you liked President Cox. We were boys together at Hiram, and see each other now incessantly. *Wakefield takes a holiday soon, and comes down on the coast to listen to manuscripts and take interminable walks in the direction of Biloxi. We had a splendid Christmas together in the Old Home in Springfield, where the Wakefields will be till they return to China in six months, and meanwhile Wake and I are terribly thick. He is also an old friend of Cox, so they will get together here. He and Cox both lived in Hiram for years.

I keep pretty close track of New York and Chicago affairs since I skim the magazines hard and fast—and report to my class constantly any real doings, as well as reading my new manuscripts to them. I am re-reading Emerson, of whom I have ever been fond, going into Goethe's life a little, every two or three months, take one more day for a furious onslaught onto the iron door of Egypt, and am at present making a Hieroglyphic Transcript on a big panel of Amenophis Fourth's hymn to the Sun, copied from the studies I made last summer in Cleveland.⁴ Doing all this in the Gulf Park

studio, where an old Fellow-Student from the Chicago Art Institute is teacher Sarah K. Smith.⁵ Also I have re-read Breasted's Translation of the Hymn to the Class and whoever would endure it, and re-read it for analysis every day.⁶

I have quite a few new pen-and-ink drawings piled up, made in this same studio, and more coming. But few people want me to go forward. They all want me to ape myself.

You can tell any magazine editor (though you need not say I said it) that six letters from any editor and the definite promise of a check the size of an ordinary lecture fee—might get any one of 100 manuscripts out of me! As it is I get the six letters and so forth from any University, get \$150 for one nights' speaking. And I get \$50 for a poem it took a year to write. Or a book it took ten years to write.

And they all want *Daniel Jazzes or else are quite sure I have faded away.

My standard for my work is still the second Imprint of the *Village Magazine. Certainly that is no mystery or ultra-aesthetic or cranky notion. But to reach that goal, either with book-publishers or magazine-publishers—:—the combined picture-poem-and-editorial, in a Village Magazine mood, will require years of waiting, to which I have serenely reconciled myself. The Village Magazine is my standard, not “*Going to the Sun,” a botch job by comparison.

I have a lot of stuff stacked up for a revised “*Going-to-the-Sun,” but such cheap blotty Zinc Etchings destroy the whole idea, and I am quite bored about getting it all together and shipping it off. I am a far more fastidious person than they remotely realize, also far more willing to wait and wait and wait, for my turn to come. And I have a grand new lazy place to wait in, and I draw a new picture or write a new poem nearly every day, and read Emerson, and re-read the life of Buddha. Yes. The Life of Buddha.⁷

No, my dear and beautiful, I am not married, not engaged, not likely to be by any present signs.

I am given to long walks alone.

I take a long beach walk under the stars, at midnight, nearly every night, often write till two in the morning. I am overwhelmed with letters from all over the world, and with long elaborate favorable reviews of the New Book from England, France, etc. And AE. just sent one of the best from Ireland. They seem to be all for me, dear, all such as AE.⁸

But I come nearer to being buried away from these things than I have been in many a day, Thank Heaven.

I should have a long period of hiding here. I am too sensitive to public life.

“But?” asks Sara, pertly. “What of the History of your Heart?” I say:— “tell me yours first!” I have always told you everything. You never tell me anything! Its^ your turn first, woman!

With love to you and Ernst,

Vachel—

[Enclosures: (1) “Doctor’s Report on Physical Conditions at Boone” (March 15, 1923)—Dr. Paul *Wakefield’s report on student health at Boone, a missionary university sponsored by the Episcopal Church at Wuchang, China. (2) Newspaper clipping (*Cincinnati Enquirer*, January 2, 1924), quoting Wakefield to the effect that Chinese bandits are equipped by the Japanese, who wish to exploit China’s natural resources.]

Notes

¹VL refers to his poems “Doctor Mohawk,” “Our Guardian Angels and Their Children,” and “Heart of God,” originally entitled “A Prayer in the Jungles of Heaven”: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 528-533, 301-303, and 65, respectively.

²Interestingly, VL hides the fact that he has fallen in love with one of his students: Elizabeth Mann Wills (born March 25, 1903), youngest child of Della Belle Womack and Mann Wills, Brownsville, Tennessee. See Ruggles, pp. 319-324; and VL’s June 9, 1923, letter to Wills, published in Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 287-292. VL finally hints about his situation in Letter 221. For information on Wills’ older brother Ridley, see Letter 211.

³For VL’s submissions to *The New Republic*, see Letter 205.

⁴For Pharaoh Amenophis IV, see Letters 197 and 203.

⁵Sarah K[atherine] Smith was a graduate of Wheaton College, where her father George Smith, was professor of Greek. She studied at the Chicago Art Institute, and VL was one of her fellow students. When the two were together at Gulf Park (1923-24), VL inscribed numerous books to her. These books, as well as examples of Sarah’s art, are housed in the Wheaton College Library Special Collections.

⁶For Breasted, see Letter 197.

⁷In an unpublished letter to fellow poet Theodore Maynard (1890-1956), VL advises: “As for Buddha I class him with St. Francis and Johnny Appleseed as an adventurer on the road, loving the law and the monastic order” (March 3, 1923, Georgetown University Library). For more on the Buddha’s way of life, see Letter 223. Theodore Maynard is also remembered for his numerous books on the history of the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the United States.

⁸Irish poet and painter Æ or AE or A.E. (1867-1935), born George William Russell, published numerous books of poetry. The “New Book” is VL’s **Collected Poems* (1923), which was reviewed in newspapers and periodicals across Western Europe. We can only guess as to which review Æ has forwarded.

207) “Dear Lady, I have thought of you so often...”

Great Southern Hotel.
Room 129—
Gulf Port—Mississippi—
March 19, 1924.

My Dear Sara:—

I give you my profoundest sympathy, in the loss of your mother.¹ This, then, is the end of many dreams. Dear Lady, I have thought of you so often. And in class nearly every day the girls talk of you. One of them has just produced a “theme.”

But What shall I say? I miss my own mother every day. That is what I will say. And I am sending you Dr. Arthur Paul *Wakefield. I charge you and Ernst to hold to him closer than a brother. You will find that he deserves it. He is most eager for high spiritual adventure in New York. We have spent many weeks together of late. I have been closer to him than to any other human soul, for many a day.

I have just sent to “The Christian Century,” Chicago and “The London Mercury,” “The Wrecks of the Galleons of Spain” a vision of this coast.²

Be good to Paul. I want him to know every soul in America we care for, within reach. I send him as my proxy and substitute, and you will find he is all of that and more. He will tell you all there is to tell. He and President *Cox are boyhood friends.

Bless you—Sara. My love to all our lovers in New York. And my heart to you in your trouble. How can I talk of that? But bless you, Sara.

With my heart

Vachel—

Notes

¹For the death of Mrs. Teasdale, see Letter 205.

²VL’s poem was printed in *The New Republic* (September 10, 1924) and in *The London Mercury* (December 1924). Revised extensively, the work was included in **Collected Poems* (1925), with the title: “Billboards and Galleons.” See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 520-526, and Letter 209.

208) “I am on my way to the Mayo’s, for diagnosis . . .”

[Letterhead: “BOONE UNIVERSITY
Wuchang, China”]

603 South Fifth St.
Springfield,
Illinois
U.S.A.
June 14, 1924.

[Headnote: “Write here and your letter will be forwarded.”]

My Dear Sara:

Certainly I am very much the victim of places. Here in Springfield, it seems omnipresent, though when I am away, much of it, except this room where I write, is dim.

I am on my way to the Mayo's, for diagnosis, though I feel very well and very strong and clear headed. But I have had dull spells the past year and want to get at them. It seems foolish now—I feel so well. *Paul and *Olive start for China the last of July. As near the first of July as possible I will be at the Davenport Hotel, Spokane[e] Washington, within an easy run of *Going-to-the-Sun mountain, Glacier Park. I am going to write more, and better and more earnestly about that mountain, before I am done.

I speak for a Los Angeles Summer School, August 6, 7, and 8, or the like. Then, maybe, back to Spokane. I am sending all my worldly belongings there, for I may ultimately^ keep a permanent room there, even if I am in the South a great deal. I shall teach a bit at Gulf Park, as last year. I shall use it as a radiating center for short tours the first or last of each month, and I shall write there a great deal, as at the Davenport Spokane. The Spokane group of people have always impressed me favorably, and while I intend to visit Springfield a deal, there is no sign of my settling here. My seasoned intimates are mostly dead or gone and too many people want to talk to me and want to get nowhere. There is no way out—no way to get protection, except as a visitor. To keep people from moving in on me seems an especially delicate job here. Friends of the family who thought I was the family trial, now want to sit on my lap, with the same glassy look in the eye as of old. Few of them ever opened a book. Still fewer expect to begin with mine. I get tired of being pawed over in this style.

I take my place in Springfield very seriously, but cannot help but think it can be better cherished as a visitor.

Well this is not much of a letter. I am at peace with the world, and eager for new Revelations at Spokane. I have enough material for two new books of verses, unpublished. Some of it is about the Gulf Coast. Some of the Spokane region will get into songs, no doubt. I have a notion that I will write to you quite ample letters from Spokane. It looks to me now like the adventure of my life. It is the town that has made the most impression on me, of all those that have given me what might be called a “Literary,” impression, except, perhaps, Biloxi, right there by Gulfport, a town of which I may write many songs. It is a little New Orleans, a fairy filagree^ New Orleans.

Thank Heaven for a cool day. Hot days we think that cool days would just be paradise. Well here is a cool day. Is it Paradise? Well—almost, but not quite. Almost.

With love to you and Earnst^—and the promise of a better letter after while.

Vachel.

209) “I go out West for a new deal, the same as a young Cowboy . . .”

July 7, 1924

My Dear Sara:—

I am on my way to Spokane, Washington and writing on the train. My address is Davenport Hotel, Spokane Washington. And I have sent there all my belongings in this world, seven trunks, six from Springfield, one from the South. I will teach in the south next winter, and go out reciting with the Gulf Park College office for headquarters for answering letters from committees.¹ But since I have such a good rate I am paying for my Spokane Room for a year, leaving most of my things there, and hope to be called West several times during the winter. This is one more way of taking over the map of the U.S.A. Getting a little deeper into various spots I care about, with the whole map finally in mind. For instance I recite in Los Angeles three days early in August. But I will never get it as well as I want to that way. I have always loved Spokane, and with all my things there a year, I will really get Spokane, a little better. I have more eager lifetime literary anticipations over Spokane than I ever had over the English trip. I feel at last able to get the best of Babbit[^], with a pansy in his buttonhole, by looking hard at the pansy.² In this I may be fooling myself, who knows? But, at any rate, I go out West for a new deal, the same as a young Cowboy, and expect to give a great part of my heart to the West and the South. I have so good a start in the South now, that the West can come in for intensive affection. I hope to take to the West and south the way some poets I will not name, take to New York and London. I should say, the secret, from a literary standpoint, is to be rid of the panoramic idea. To find one flower at the foot of *Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, to find one flower on the roof of the Davenport Hotel. *Torrence has just accepted my Summary of the South:— long, long, “Billboards and Galleons,” so you may expect it in The *New Republic by fall, I suppose. It is not so good, but has been written many times, and has been read aloud to many audiences.³ I have just had a big Springfield visit, and the *Wakefields are on the last lap of getting ready to return to China. I will return to Springfield in the fall and issue a big new imprint of The *Village Magazine before I go South. I may read proof in Spokane. This for a gratuitous distribution only, my Declaration of Independence up to date.

I will spend a day or so at the foot of Going-to-the-Sun Mountain, on my way to Spokane. It is not far from there. Some day I hope greatly to enlarge and improve my *Going-to-the-Sun Book, after several visits to the mountain, making it practically a new book. Cleopatra appears in the August *American Mercury.⁴

I am so eager over my Spokane Start[^]. It is like the very beginning of the world for me. So many of the literati, after the first third of their literary lives seem to slump, or repeat. Here is my chance to begin again like a newborn babe, among a great many other newborn babes. And if I need traditions, there are my seven trunk fulls of papers, etc. from the souvenirs[^] of my Austin[^] and Doniphan Great Grandfathers, to your last letter!⁵ I will write you a better letter, soon. One of my stern resolves is also to keep in closer touch by letter both with England and New York from Spokane. I will need them more.

“Literature” is a kind of an incantation. Without New York, this touch, we lose the rythm[^]. But with too much of it, we miss America. And you know I dearly love the one hundred and twelve millions of sinners. I know this letter is far too impersonal. [The rest of this letter has apparently been lost.]

Notes

¹By the end of the summer, 1924, VL had decided not to return to Gulfport but remain, instead, in Spokane. The last-minute decision angered President *Cox: see VL's attempt at apology in Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 328-330. For VL's concept of the "Map of America," see Letter 190.

²VL refers to Sinclair Lewis's novel *Babbitt* (1922), at the beginning of which we meet an archetypal American conservative: real-estate broker George Folansbee Babbitt.

³For "Billboards and Galleons," see Letter 207.

⁴"Cleopatra" is VL's short title for his longest poem: "The Trial of the Dead Cleopatra," first published in *American Mercury* (August 1924). An extensively revised version is published as the concluding poem in the second edition of **Collected Poems* (1925). See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 533-549.

⁵VL's maternal grandmother was Frances Elizabeth Austen (1827-1910): see Letters 13 and 37. For an explanation of the name "Doniphan," see Letter 223.
