

The Annotated Letters of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay to Sara Trevor Teasdale

Chapter 8 (Letters 210-241)



(Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: see Letter 227.)

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

210) “Now be a nice little girl and I will tell you something . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
July 24, 1924—

My Dear Sara:—

I will write soon. Meanwhile my very very good wishes to you and Ernst and I send you the enclosed clipping to which I not only “point with pride,” but which I also “view with alarm.”

Now be a nice little girl and I will tell you something. B.H. *Kizer was the husband of Ellen^ [Helen] *Bullis Kizer. We had a long walk and talk last night. And he is my principal host in this region and he had a lot to do with my coming here. His wife now is Mable^ Ashley Kizer—a Colorado girl, an Art-Student in Boston, and a lot of other things. They are very good to me.

As for Babylon—where you now dwell “I was a King in Babylon when you were a Christian Slave.” See the *Collected Poems, top of page 2.¹

More later

Vachel.

[Enclosure: Newspaper clipping from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* (undated):
“**TWO LODESTONES BRING POET HERE** / Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Distinguished Illinoisan, Will Make Home in Spokane. / **HOTEL AND MOUNTAIN** / The Davenport and Going-to-the-Sun in Glacier Park Draw Him From Afar.” VL marks where the interviewer describes him as looking “dreamily” at the ceiling. Where the interviewer describes his voice as “soft, musical,” an amused VL writes in the margin: “Get that word ‘soft?’” The article explains VL’s attraction to the Spokane area as twofold: the Gothic architecture of the Davenport Hotel and Glacier Park’s Going-to-the-Sun mountain, which “should be recognized as the holy mountain of America just as Fujiyama is the holy mountain of Japan.” At the top of the page, VL writes: “Ain’t it awful Mable^?”]²

Notes

¹VL quotes W[illiam] E[rnest] Henley’s ballad, “To W.A.” (see Letter 6) to emphasize that he had lived in New York City before ST had arrived. VL directs ST to his description of “The Pig and the Goose” restaurant crowd in “*Adventures While Singing These Songs” (see *Poetry of VL*, p. 940). Also see the next letter.

²Popular ballad, “Ain’t It Awful, Mabel,” written by American humorist and actor John Edward Hazzard (1881-1935), is collected in Carolyn Wells’ *Such Nonsense! An*

Anthology (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918), p. 189, and may be read online at Google Books.

211) "I am nearer to the old days when we first met . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
January 2, 192[5]—

My Dear Sara:—

Your lovely "Flame and Shadow" just arrived this day. I have been reading it most of the morning, reading the lines, and between the lines.¹

You will have coming out pretty soon—incribed to you *The Illustrated *Collected Poems of Vachel Lindsay*, illustrated by himself with a new long preface on Hieroglyphics. This new long preface will first appear as an editorial in a special Lindsay number of **Canby's Literary Review* out soon, along with some new poems and some of the pictures. The New Book will contain "Cleopatra," and "The Galleons of Spain" which has just appeared in the December *London Mercury*. And there will be several other new poems.²

The **Macmillan Company* are about as pleasant to climb as Mount Everest. They have fined me about a thousand dollars so far for changes I have made in the book, hoping to stop me and dictate the book. But I have told them to charge it to my royalty account, and go ahead. They surely think they are bone crushers, but they cannot scare me with mere fines. As it is, I am not at all sure the book will be proof-read. But time is my avenger. I am glad I am in Spokane. If I was in New York I would be vexed with them again.

I have not had a word of real news from New York for ages. Letters pour in like the snow from all over the world, and mere reading them wears me out. And no news.

I had a pleasant year and a half in the South—and am bravely started here with some splendid friends. I am writing hard, studying hard, and am exactly where I want to be. I suppose it is the ultimate difference between us, dearest Sara, I must be forever a pioneer and you forever a Parisian. I would rather have "Virginia" in the *Spokesman-Review* on Christmas Day than in *Letters of Gold* on the Golden Temple at Amritsar.³ Its[^] just the way I feel about things. I cannot help it. Yet how I understand your song, dear Sara. And when you say the word "Beauty," how well I know what you mean, my brave friend.

Your name is very often on my lips, and I know you speak of me as often, in just the same tone, and exactly the same pride. We have always sustained each other invisibly. The circumference of a circle implies a center, the center implies a circumference. After all I know I must be appealing to Sara and her inner court, when I write a song on the frontier, and I know Sara is appealing to Vachel on the circumference, when she whispers her song in the very center of things.

You cannot even imagine my many adventures since last we met. And I am even now amused that you should have had them from the Romantic Gipsy *Wakefield when he was most romantic. I am glad you saw and loved each other, but after all Wakefield's Lindsay is not Lindsay and Wakefield's Sara is not precisely Sara. And I am just about as far from Gulf Port as mortal man can get at this instant, as far as from New York.

Now I am not writing an essay to a marble or Limestone Image of friendship as you said in one naughty letter, and I am not calling you a "daughter of Babylon," as you said in another naughty letter. I said "I was a King in Babylon When you were a Christian Slave."

In the first place, that is a very distinguished Quotation from W. E. Henley and you well know it miss. In the second place, it is used with approval by J. M. Barrie in his play "The Admirable Crichton^" which I saw before you were born. In the third place—it is used by me in this way:—

I was an Art Student with nice Bohemia Cafe tables and all that in New York from 1905-8 or along there. I learned all about that city. And when I went back home I went back to stay and you know it. It was much later you discovered New York and thought it was a thrilling place. Meanwhile you had been a Christian Slave as it were, a good Baptist, the white hope of St. Louis. Now Miss. You know the rest. Why go further in this argument? [Drawings of three smiling faces.] There are several pictures me smiling.⁴

I am sending you "Virginia." I am prouder of it than anything else I have ever written. I just glory in it. I send you several copies. I do not know if there are any of my real friends left in New York much any more. I have sent copies to *Richards and to *Canby, *Benét and *Morley. Please give them to poets till you are clear tired out doing it. Say I told you to, requested, commanded, rebuked and exhorted you into doing it. I will enjoy having my day in Babylon, and your report on it, even at this distance.⁵

I am nearer to the old days when we first met, being happily settled in this room with all my things from my old room in Springfield. The old house in Springfield is closed forever and the family scattered forever. I am as near to a New Start here, as I could ask.

I hear from practically everybody in the world I have ever known, and letters asking me to speak keep pouring in. But I hate speaking with all my soul, and am writing poetry by the mile. My note-books are just popping with it, I am about twenty years behind merely on copying. A whole drawer-full of note books off and on since 1897. Only about 1/100th of this will ever get printed, and I mostly enjoy just writing it. The Macmillan Company rap me over the knuckles^ or fine me every time I try to interest myself in getting rid of all this in some kind of style and beauty. I have books and books of unpublished poems and more coming every minute. I rather enjoy writing them out long hand for my friends and over and over I draw pictures and present them to friends with poems beneath—keeping neither picture nor poem. I have left a long trail of these in the South and am now scattering them here with great satisfaction to myself. It does not mean much to me to have a poem come out in book form a year after it is written, or in magazine form. And I certainly abominate being called upon to recite it, after it is a year old. Thats^ why I much more enjoy giving Virginia to the Spokesman-Review than

selling it to any magazine on earth. Then I have the pleasure of talking about it to a friend or two, when it is still a part of my mind, and still within the range of conversation. I just love to read a poem out loud, till I am quite sure it is done. Then I am clear through with it. That's^ the reason I hate touring. It's^ reciting cold poems. Poetry and pictures are more and more a form of immediate conversation and meditation with me, and less and less Art Museum Exhibits. This is the life I led up to 1912—and I am now where I can take it up in earnest, even more than in Gulfport. I have many noble memories of Gulfport and that story may not be ended. Have you read Harvey Landrum?⁶

But here I am surely settled for a time, and I assume I am to stay forever. The town is full of interesting and beautiful people and things.

Ben *Kizer to whom I wrote to fix up my start here—has corresponded with me since I was a beggar. He knows nearly every inch of present-day American and British poetry. Then he has another great recommendation^ . He can walk like a tiger. We walk four hours every Sunday in the Woods and hills, going the fastest you ever saw me walk at my fastest, through snow or rain or anything. Then he talks the present-day British and American poets with twice the interest I ever did and knows them twice as well. To this let me add that except Stephen *Graham, he is the only man for years who has ever consented to walk with me. I am sure getting drilled and drilled, and trained down, and we have just begun. And the whole state is before me.

Now this letter may also be a tribute to a limestone image of friendship, but I guess this time it is a 19 page tribute to my own egotism. But you know you “never” wrote me 19 pages on any subject, dear Marble Image of Poetry called Sara.

What you really objected to in my quotation from Henley was that you were ever a Christian Slave. There are three things to discuss in a letter.

- (1.) Me.
- (2.) You-and-Me.
- (3.) You.

I have taken the first and third. I dare you to write a letter about the second.

It requires your delicate pen, not my crude scrawl.

I know well enough I would write with better art on your doorstep, One hundred *Chinese Nightingales. But then I would have turned into a Mandarin. As it is Virginia is not-so-good. But you know dear heart it is more honestly my own, and we must be honest if possible. I send Virginia as my Apologia Pro Vita Sua to you and all the Poets.⁷ It is infinitely nearer to me than anything they like of mine. Tell them it is my new start, my latest word to date, and they have no right to take it lightly and they are to read all past actions and songs in the light of this song, if they care to be oracles about my affairs at all.

Meanwhile—I note I have written 20 more pages than you ever wrote to me in your life. And it would be mighty sweet of you to reply in equal length—though trying in every way to avoid my cotton-batting vagueness and verbosity. And, we were the pride of the Sons of Han.

Most sincerely

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay—

Vach.

[Enclosure: Newspaper clipping from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* (December 25, 1924)—VL's poem "Virginia."]

Notes

¹ST's *Flame and Shadow* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920) is available online at Google Books. VL has received the English edition, and his enthusiasm (and grinding loneliness) dominates this and the next few letters. See especially Letter 217. For ST's disturbed reaction to this flood of letters, see especially Drake, pp. 227-228.

²For "Cleopatra," see Letter 209; for "Galleons," see Letter 207. The "New Book" is the second edition of **Collected Poems* (1925).

³The Golden Temple of Amritsar, Punjab, is one of India's most photographed sacred buildings. The name was first used for the lake, then for the temple complex, and finally for the surrounding city. The name means "pool of ambrosial nectar."

⁴For Henley, see Letters 6 and 210. The servant Crichton recites the Henley lines in Sir J[ames] M[atthew] Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton* (1922), Act 3. The comedy is available online at Google Books. For another reference to Barrie, see Letter 216.

⁵VL's poem "Virginia" was first published in the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (December 25, 1924) and included in **Going-to-the-Stars* (1926). See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 569-572.

⁶Journalist, poet, and novelist [William] Ridley Wills (1897-1957) published his second novel, *Harvey Landrum*, in 1924. Ridley Wills is the older brother of VL's former student and love interest, Elizabeth Mann Wills (see Letter 206). Generally recognized as a minor figure in the Fugitive literary group, Ridley Wills co-wrote a book of poetry with Allen Tate: *The Golden Mean and Other Poems* (1923). After working for newspapers in Memphis and Nashville, Wills became editor of the *New York World*, until it closed in 1931. *Harvey Landrum* is a psychological study of a chinless man who hides his inferiority complex behind a false front of bravado. VL's "Doctor Mohawk" is inscribed to Ridley Wills (see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 528-533), perhaps hinting that some of the doctor's fierceness may be an attempt to hide feelings of inferiority. Also see Letters 205 and 252.

⁷For VL and John Henry Newman, see Letter 214 below.

212) "It may be many years before I get to New York . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.

January 2, 192[5]—

Now I have mailed the long letter, and write a short one.

Why is Sara like the Good God? In her there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.¹

It may be many years before I get to New York. I feel more like changing my name, and going on utterly disappearing forever a completely free man, on the road, than either lecturing at the Universities or being a plain citizen, a lion, an ex-lion or super-lion in New York City.

But dear heart—how I turned to you tonight when I posted my letter. I sang the old Troubadour song on the street till people stared. I may never put foot on your doorstep again. But if there is a wind under your window tonight—think of the old old silly sweet song:

“Hark, tis the Troubadour,
Breathing her name.
Under the balcony,
Softly he came.
Singing from Palestine—
Hither I come.
Lady-love, lady-love,
Welcome me home.[’]”²

If this song is on your proper conscience, show it to the Lord of the House with my earnest apologies, but surely there is no harm in a wind under the window, so many miles sent.

Why is Sara like the Good God? In her there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. In the name of our youth—dear heart—I write.

The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent, one from another.³

Vachel—

Notes

¹Cf. James 1:17. VL will use this allusion as something of a refrain in several letters below.

²This is essentially the third stanza of Thomas Haynes Bayly’s (1797-1839), “Gayly the Troubadour.” Bayly also wrote “Long, Long Ago,” and is credited with popularizing the adage, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder,” a line which occurs in his song, “Isle of Beauty.”

³The so-called “Mizpah benediction”: see Genesis 31:49. VL uses the benediction in the traditional sense. In context, Laban is speaking to Jacob, and the implication is that, because Jacob is so wily, someone needs to keep an eye on him at all times.

213) “I know till the day I die I should write and draw only for you . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
January 4, 1925.¹

Dear Sara:—

You are a queen who sends out eagles, and doves and nightingales to the uttermost parts of the earth, sends out wild swans and strange dragons. And they all die on their adventures except the eagles that come back with broken wings and bloody beak, years and years afterward. Tonight your eagles come home. I surrender. I wish I had sentences to tell of how we differ—for our agreement is always plain and clear. Our first difference is that I am just exactly where I want to be in Spokane and if I went further it would be Alaska, not New York. I cannot write or think or breathe in the exotic world which is your essence and to which your book pays tribute. Yet I pay them the same tribute from this distance, and I know you and yours are my final audience. Way way in my soul I know I am writing to please your sense of beauty and nothing else on earth.

I want twelve sons. I would rather have a wife and twelve sons in an Alaska log cabin than all the honors of Milton Homer and Dante. If I am an honest man I will try to get them yet—or as near as they may be had in this modern life. You always took this side of me a little lightly, my beautiful girl, you thought I might be led from it in a red-rose chain, and you “almost” made a little face at Stephen *Graham, bless you.

On the other side, dearest—I have never yet given way—as I give way tonight. I know till the day I die I should write and draw only for you. Your hand should always be on my wrist, or at least your letters in my pocket. I should write the song of the Alaska log cabin and the twelve sons for the poet furthest from them in all the world, yet the dearest memory of my life.

When I write to please you I write better clearer, more beautiful things than all else I have done. The *Rachel Jane is you—I wrote that song under your hand, and the *Chinese Princess is my Sara.

I see very little in this matter of writing yet the world will not let me do anything else. Since I must write, surely I must write for you, with the utmost consecration for I write for you the best.

I do not want to do anything wild or wicked. I want you and Ernst to help me to be very noble in this matter. And I want you both to be very noble. For my heart is coming home to you Sara—there is no other way out—if I am to write and draw nobly, from the uttermost depths of my heart and my love and my sense of beauty. How curiously our sense of beauty was always the same. How sweet it was to have you change my manuscripts—you always made the changes I was hunting to make. We met and had a treaty at a half-way place between Homer the Greek and Daniel Boone. You flirted and looked sweet and really helped.

I have many and great adventures ahead of me here. I am prepared to swallow the State of Washington whole. But you must care dear, and you must write henceforth as much as Earnst[^] is willing. I write in the name of our youth—and our goldenest days.

I am past all the transition period, my strength is all back—and I have many new veins and lines of writing. But for lack of your hand on my wrist and your faithful letter in my pocket my sense of absolute beauty grows dim. There is a New Vachel the Literary world has never met. Only you can introduce him, in New York and London. I see it now.

*Macmillans and the critics spat me on the wrist every time this new man emerges, and Macmillans fine me—all the way up to 1000 dollars to terrify him out of existence. He is very Kin to the *Village Magazine Vachel, plus a whole lot more of Daniel Boone. Do you remember Witter *Bynner in a New York Boarding house told you to write for a Village Magazine?

Well the person who sent it to you is writing to you now. You know how utterly he differs from Vachel as Advertised.

But he is the Vachel that surrenders tonight. Really I must give you my heart—dear dreamer. I have held back too long. I give you my Village Magazine heart.

I need love and a steadying hand as never before in all my life. The old home closed forever in Springfield—the *Wakefields back in China, and never writing—the *Blairs in Cleveland, loving me a great deal—understanding not at all. And the biggest projects of my life just ahead.

You can say I have been driven home by the storm—but surely driven home. Tonight your eagles come home. I surrender. You were made to tend doves and not eagles—and you are exotic, and grow more so, through the years. But do your best with the eagles.

You can say nothing but the most unutterable loneliness has driven me back—but surely I have come home.

I am here with many noble people. They are very loyal. I might marry a girl in the North-West or Alaska. They are as brilliant as cultured as vigorous and as resolute a set as I have ever known in my life—in a city glittering like an Inland Venice. But it is not home, dear. I must give you my heart, my pen, my sense of beauty. Only my desperate need has shown me how deeply you were written on my heart. I have been a good boy. You and Ernst know I have been good and loyal to both.

I know I am writing on and on, and saying it over and over. (You have been nearer than you knew. I taught “The *New Voices” and “The *New Poetry” in Gulfport, steadily.)

With my strength and sense all back, after my long struggle with the flu, and with new plans very clearly laid—still those plans had no objective till I saw they were ultimately[^] to please Sara. I had to admit to myself that she was the one I imagined reading my books and looking at my pictures. For her I might put up a real battle to have my pictures classed with those of Rackham and Willy Pogany—that is—a real battle to win the field for my fancies whatever they might be. I am jammed full of new fancies.²

The loss of my mother and father lamed me terribly, for all my hard battles with them. Now they are gone—and all the others gone, you are surely home Sara. There is no other home. Take care of me dear—all you can, by letter—be as good to me as you and Ernst think you have a right to be.

Since the death of Edward *Marsh there has been no friend in New York to send my work to. Macmillans have ordered me to write poetry like a convict ordered to break stone. If you want me to sing you must sing too. We must be happy. No wonder my name has grown dim. No one in the throne room cared whether I lived or died. All high adventure and noble glory was taken out of the whole thing.

If we do not write for the splendor of life, and our writing does not maintain the splendor of life, establish it, extend it, we have NO business to write at all. If you will be good to me, and help me again toward beauty—it will be worth while to take them by storm again. Otherwise I am weary and lonely, and do not care to ape myself. I surrender to you, my dear. Why is Sara like the Good God? In her is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.³ I sleep in peace, tonight.

With love—

Vachel—

Notes

¹Edited selections from this letter may be read in Carpenter, pp. 260-261.

²For information on Arthur Rackham, see Letter 23. Like Rackham, William Andrew “Willy” Pogany (1882-1955) illustrated many popular works, especially classics like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Robinson Crusoe*.

³For the allusion, see Letter 212 (note 1).

214) “I am a little too lonely, isolated, self-bored and uninterested . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
Monday Jan 5, 1925.

My Dear Sara:—

I am very tired tonight. I have done a very hard day’s work. But I am at least at peace with myself.

I am wondering what you will do about my letters. I want to write as often as you and Ernst are willing—for a month or two—and as much. Some of the letters will be rather wobbly, written when I am retired to the junk-heap for the night. If I can write a note a day—I will do a better days’ work.

I used to be able to plan stunts by three months or a year. Now the whole day's work must be done in one day. I am a little too lonely, isolated, self-bored and uninterested to plan and drive through big yearly projects. I suppose I am growing up—more dependent on three meals a day and a daily rhythm—and something to keep me at it every day, a kind word every day.

People and Universities have been poured over me by the thousands for ten years. Every intellectual stimulus that could be applied to me has been applied, every electric wire, to my nerve-endings. So I do not want any form of personal or psychological hooch. But I do want daily kindness. I must live an inch at a time.

My plans are all laid, they are clearly before me and I know my powers and limitations. But the point has come where I must write for the only one I ever cared to write well for, Sara. She must say “Have you done well—today?”

Otherwise I hardly care to copy off a poem—though I write them by the ream—as good first drafts as I ever did. And polishing just bores me. Yet Possibly I am at last becoming through the will of the world, in spite of everything a MAN OF LETTERS. I never respected the title or the ambition. I loved beauty when it was a riot of beauty with you, and I cared to put down an adequate record. Your literary conscience and beauty-conscience was always sharper than mine. I am wondering whether with both of us the world has not forced more ink into our veins than blood—through the years?

We did not want ink there—But there it is—in increasing proportions. We are both stained with the crime of writing—both grubby with it? So I am more dependent on you than of old? And more kin? Certainly by dint of long long hammering I have learned the exact corner in this world that belongs to a Man of Letters, be he Homer or George Ade.¹ Ink goes just so far. We have a paper play-ground only. Just paper.

Yet since it is our world, dear, and our one chance in this mortal life, let us take it, partial as it is, and live and help each other, on paper.

Surely to the extent to which I am a Man of Letters I submit to you as Newman with a heart deeply thankful to God, made his submission to The Catholic Church.² I have loved you a long long time. But submission-and-love are utterly different from hidden-love.

[~~As Walt Whitman says—~~]

I turn to you as the Queen of what I shall write “Hoping to Cease not till death.”—³

I do not want to do anything worldly minded or double-minded. Where the writer ceases, to become merely a man—where the man ceases to become merely a writer it is hard to say. If I was “merely” a writer, “merely” a man of letters I would certainly be in New York or London. You are woman—the nest-maker. It is more natural for you to take to the brilliant nest, more normal, inevitable with your special sense of beauty.

But every member of my tribe to my last cousin and most of the second cousins has gone West—or else stood still. Not one has gone to the eastern sea-board. There is a suppressed log cabin in every one of us. It is a strange passion. But I dream of many

sons—all on the Pacific Coast—and the dream of my sons and grandsons is as plain and clear to me as any dream on earth, even the dream of you.

I wonder if this struggle was always in my heart—and I did not think a simple way out. I surrender. Surely I surrender forever. But, dear, you know I cannot bear to be worldly-minded. It hurts me through and through.

I saw “The *Thief of Bagdad” for the sixth time, tonight. I am going to write a discussion of it. It has seemed to me your singing soul was the Princess of Bagdad in the tower.⁴

All I can bring to the Princess is the story of my wanderings. I could write a modern Odessy^ if you cared. Henceforth all my books are to be inscribed to you. I guess that is what I am trying to say. That puts it the simplest way and leaves us both free. A paper gift for my dear paper doll.

“This Book is inscribed to Sara Teasdale, Poet.”

Why certainly. That is it.

I do not want to talk to you or see you or trouble. I may never see you again. Surely I do not plan to come to see you, or to New York soon. Do not think I am cynical. I have found peace, at last.

This is a long long letter. I am writing myself to sleep. It is just what I want to do, with your hand on my wrist like an ouija board. I am way too tired and sleepy and put through too big a project today, to write well, or briefly. Pardon words and words.

“There is a Queen in China—
Or maybe she’s in Spain”⁵

Why is Sara like the Good God? In her there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.⁶ I sleep in peace, tonight. With great love and respect to Ernst and to yourself indeed.

Vachel—

Notes

¹Indiana-born humorist George Ade (1866-1944) wrote numerous stories satirizing country people aspiring to city life, especially Midwestern country people, since Ade’s roots were in Indiana and Chicago. Sometimes referred to as Mark Twain’s successor, Ade is an interesting contrast to Homer.

²John Henry Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1865) remained one of VL’s favorite books for much of his adult life. See Letter 211.

³VL quotes Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself,” from *Leaves of Grass* (1855).

⁴Starring Douglas Fairbanks, *The *Thief of Bagdad* was released in March 1924 and depicts a struggle for the hand of a beautiful princess. VL’s “discussion” developed into a book-length manuscript not published in his lifetime but available in ours: see the “Glossary” entry: “*Movie-book.”

⁵VL slightly misquotes the opening line of William Butler Yeats's poem "Phoenix": "There is a queen in China, or maybe it's in Spain," *The Wild Swans of Coole* (1919). Disturbed by VL's sudden avalanche of letters, ST advised reading the *Wild Swans*, advice that, as we will see in the next few letters, VL took to heart: see Drake, p. 227.

⁶For the allusion, see Letter 212 (note 1).

215) "I hope you and I can be the closest we ever were in our lives . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
January 6, 1925.

My Dear Sara:—

This has been one of the hardest-working days of my life, and I have not a bit of sense left, but thank Heaven a day's work is done, and so it has been all week. New and great things are happening to me here, and you will see the flower before June, I hope. It is wonderful to be sure I am working steadily.

I laid a simple plan today. It will save me a vast amount of Energy if, instead of delivering myself to my Texas manager [*Armstrong] the next time I go broke—simply move to his town for a month and go to the Hotel and insist he get acquainted all over again. He keeps ding-donging at me all the time, but has no notion of cooperation except driving me as a football coach drives a football player. But I think one month of independent residence in Waco would change his views for life. He and his wife are splendid people, and it is mainly a case of beginning over with them the right way. I really love them dearly, and they are most loyal. But they broke me like a glass bottle on the railroad track and I have been a long time thinking what to do. But I see now its^ just a question of getting absolutely in tune with them, and taking all the time necessary, before we undertake any practical projects.

I feel the same way about *Macmillans. There you can help me enormously. There ought to be some way to get out of the nightmare with them since the death of *Marsh. *Latham has done his best—but you know for me Marsh was the last really personal link. Since then they have asked poems and pictures of this poet like asking, nay commanding a convict to break stone. Now that general attitude makes a man hate the very idea of books and publication at all. Such a method might get arithmetics^ out of me, but certainly not good poems and pictures. They pull out all my tail feathers every minute and then ask me to act like a peacock. If I cannot strut I cannot breathe and every strutting step of mine seems to vex them and they fine me and fine me without getting into the game. My last check, received last November was cut in half without notice or explanation, sent along with a mimeographed letter about how wonderfully sociable and kindly they were getting to all their help. I havn't^ even pulled myself together to ask why they cut my check in half. They do not even know I noticed it yet. To keep them from overhanging me like a headache I just forget them all I can. Yet I do not expect to

change publishers. Another would be as bad. Like Armstrong they would break me like a glass bottle on the railroad track—any of them if I let them. The only way out is to be at the very top somehow. Is there any way of ever having a real friend at court in Macmillans—some one who can take as much of a sporting interest in our adventures in Literature in 1925 as Marsh took in 1915? Is *Brett Jr. anywhere near the head of the firm? Is there anyone approaching to steady diplomatic authority in the firm who would take just the same sporting interest in some bran^ new Arabian Nights adventure of mine Marsh took in the days of old? I see the way out is ultimately^ to get to the very top with Armstrong and the very top with Macmillans. I assure you I have no grudges at all.

I have promised to teach at Fort Worth two or three weeks this spring and I am going to spend all that money in Waco right afterward. I am going to be as independent as a Sunflower.

Meanwhile the Preface to the New *Collected Poems announces in a general way I am about to start out on a New National Tour and I will have enough letters to show Armstrong to make him dizzy. But my dear, my dear, my life must get down to this—to genuine relations with the dozen people at the very top of my life—a sort of cabinet, and I must let the rest go. I hope you and I can be the closest we ever were in our lives. And I want to key all the other eleven relationships to that sincerity. I want to live such a life as you do, seeing only a very few people, and those very essential ones, who can speak for me to the rest. I am nearer to your state of the skin and nerves and blood, where mere casual contacts wear me out. I am now like you, far more sensitive to positive and final relations with a few.

You are in your own innocent way such a shrewd and clear thinking and worldly wise little woman, with such a strong and simple will. You reduce everything to a clarity and simplicity, and I keep thinking about that.

Do not be alarmed, dear and noble lady over this flood of letters. I will moderate my pace to your wishes, and am only waiting your first letter. Surely you should have the evidence, that I am turning to you, that I am indeed surrendering, that I am breaking floodgates shut for many and many a year. How easy it is now to be even and kind and IMPERSONAL with people, now my ideas have a definite center. I am as impersonal as George Washington, Robert E. Lee or some noble character like that!

Do you know no way has ever been invented for a man to live from 45 to 105 with steady progress, doing better every year till he stubs his toe on the 105th birthday? Well thats^ my plan, and you must help. Lets^ lay long plans. Lets^ write an Odessy^ at 46 and 96.

Why is Sara like the Good God? In her there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.¹ I have gone a long long way but indeed the Troubadour has come home. Lets^ keep it a secret for ages! And work miracles just for fun with all America. Miracles of song!

With my heart

Vachel.

[P.S.] Send me that song—written so long ago—that has the line “Bound with a bleeding hand.”²

Notes

¹For the allusion, see Letter 212 (note 1).

²VL alludes to ST’s “Words for an Old Air,” finally collected in *Dark of the Moon* (1926), but first published in *Scribner’s Magazine* 70 (August 1921), p. 170, then in *American Poetry, 1922: A Miscellany*, ed. Louis *Untermeyer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922), p. 97 (available online at Project Gutenberg, EText-No. 25880):

Your heart is bound tightly, let
Beauty beware;
It is not hers to set
Free from the snare.

Tell her a bleeding hand
Bound it and tied it;
Tell her the knot will stand
Though she deride it.

One who withheld so long
All that you yearned to take,
Has made a snare too strong
For Beauty's self to break.

216) “its^ like owning a three ring circus and being obliged to put up all the tents myself .
..”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
Wednesday January 7, 1925

My Dear Sara:—

This is the greatest lovliest^ hotel in the world. One great thing about it is the great open fire by which I am writing you this letter at midnight in the empty lobby, where I love to prowl when it is empty.¹

Who shall I write to near you—if I do not write to you? Who among our oldest and most mutual friends must I approach again?

I am swamped with letters from all over the earth. And all from people who think they have a lifetime claim—and some of them do. And I love them all Sara. My heart goes out to them. But its^ like owning a three ring circus and being obliged to put up all

the tents myself. I want to hide in the hollow of your hand or the bottom of your ink-bottle or in the feather of the hat of some friend near you.

I want to renew every old tie that is to you also a real and strong tie. I want to look down the very vistas of friendship we once saw together. It must be with your planning and hopes. I feel more like J.M. Barrie than N.V. Lindsay—more like a few sure quiet ties than a thousand friends.²

How much I want to understand again the best in your world, how to please them in a simple way, how to be keyed to them.

Your first letter has not yet arrived from New York. I wonder if it is on its way. I hope I am not disturbing your peace. I look straight into a wonderful log fire and write and write my good-night.

I did a good days^ work today, and I sleep in peace tonight.

Sara I have just reams of unpublished verses. I could keep a newspaper column full, for several months!

But somehow I just leave those verses in grubby note-books and the like.

I wish some of the old crowd would pass through Spokane. I think my friends and my setting would surprise, delight and amaze them. This fireplace, for instance, is worth a lot. It is no ordinary fireplace!

Goodnight—princess of Bagdad!³

With love to you and to Ernst and all the old circle

Vachel—

Notes

¹For a picture of the Davenport Hotel lobby, with the fireplace in the background, see Higgins, p. 145.

²For Barrie, see Letter 211.

³For Princess of Bagdad, see Letter 214.

217) “Well child, I am lonely . . .”

The Davenport Hotel.
Room 1129.
Spokane Washington.
Thursday January 8, 1925

My Dear Sara:—

I want to know your adventures, and who are your friends now. Who helps you most in writing? Is there anything left of the old group? Are any of our mutual friends still left, who like our writing equally well, and talk to you often?

I am writing again, at the end of the day, at the end of a long good day's work, thank Heaven. I dictated the fourth chapter of a book about Douglas Fairbank's^ *Thief of Bagdad. Then I did mail off to *Torrence of the *New Republic several of my best new poems.¹

What must I do to be saved Sara? What is my future? What must I do that will please Ernst and you most? I want you to put your hand on my future as a writer all you dare. I want you to care about all the details you can. I wish we could run paralell^ in the same magazines and poetry societies. Are you active in any of them?

Am I simply struggling with a shadow of the past when I try to bring back your first letter to me asking me for a *Village Magazine, and my first letter to you when you were at Charlevoix?

You passed through Chicago the week after I had been entertained there by Harriet *Monroe.

I am wondering what it all meant, or are we to go it blind to the end?

I know I am saying the same things over and over. But if I wrote in the morning when I had my brains I would not get that book dictated! It dictates so easily, I am thrilled! Maybe I have found the way to feed the wolves at last! One dictated book a year about that year's best movie!

Well—of course there is no real way out, we are always in a bit of a snarl, but I do want to have more glorious singing days with you than ever I have had. We approach the hour in American history and in our own hearts when epics are written if ever they are to be written. I am full of songs and epic dreams—and no one much to sing them to.

It seems to me you really care, whether I sing well or ill. You at least are one human being in the literary world who will not express surprise that I have sent out a curse for the Saxophone.

Is there anything in that poem "Our Guardian Angels and their Children" to make you think I could love a Saxophone? People have confused the light ironical touch I have given to such things with infatuation.²

How people are cartooned in this world—cartooned beyond all mortal semblance. The Million boats of the Angels in the Climax of the *Congo are left out in the publics^ mind. All they hear is the drum in the first ten lines. I suppose it would have been the same way if I had put in ten billion boats of the Angels.

Well child, I am lonely. What an appalling^ difference it is when both parents are dead and the old house shut up forever. My sister and brother-in-law in China never write and my sister in Cleveland only writes to scold me. So here I am and the ties of blood are about cut off and it is about the same as if hands and legs were cut off. You are surely the next of kin—and the hollow of your hand is the nearest to home. I have indeed had a stormy time trying to center my life and settle it in some fashion, for there was never a human being more naturally domestic. A great many people are enormously loyal, and very close to me, and I love and adore and admire so many for so much. But here I am at midnight in a hotel room alone, and the nearest to home for that Vachel the world has forced to be a man of letters—is the hollow of your hand. In some ways the pen is an

even more sensitive thing than the heart, for the heart can love Oh so blindly, in a headlong way forever. But of all those we love in such a way—there may not be one who actually rules the pen, who knows how to keep one finger on the wrist of the writer as he writes.

I wonder if I am going it blind? I wonder if I am writing to a lady who will only be put into a flutter by this flood of letters? Oh dear, I have been so driven and harried by my very greatest successes and my most ardent friends. Is there no hand that is as full of peace for me as a scrap of moonlight? If there was only one point of rest in my life the size of a snow-lily, why then there could be storm to the very borders, and I would not complain. I would “strive to build a shadowy isle of bliss midmost the beating of the steeley^ sea.”³

I wish you would boldly make a scrap-book of every song you ever wrote me.

Did I tell you *Canby was going to issue a Special Lindsay number of The Literary Review soon? I am rather proud of that. And did I tell you “The London Mercury” had printed “The Galleons of Spain?”⁴

I have friends enough—God, knows. And a good big letter from Stephen *Graham the other day urging me back to London, as *Squire often does. But somehow it all turns to smoke. Even my first London Adventure was 2/3 my mother. She went to the parties while I stayed at home half-dead, and only appeared to recite.

I had made a complete national tour of America just before and was trained to a razor edge on just what I could recite well, and what was always most effective. Out of seven American programmes I chose one British Programme of Sure-fire stuff. But it was my mother’s interest made all this worth while. It is a dull game played alone, and no one else cares as she did.

Well I have read often enough we are all isolated at last. I have never quite believed it. It may be so, pretty lady. But one of your jobs is to find me a wife who will give me twelve sons like me! I want my wife and twelve sons very much! I do not know where to get them! I suppose twelve sons would crucify me twelve times. But I am so full of patriarchal dreams and ambitions—I want my own castle and my own tribe. It is just born in me. The appalling^ picture of seeing myself slowly robbed of my own castle and tribe through the years almost takes all the fight out of me. I am just naturally patriarchal as Methusalem or however you spell him.⁵

Then, with this dream slaughtered before my eyes—I am asked to act a sort of pasteboard literary part. Please dear—if I am to be forced to be merely a man of letters to the end of my days—even at this distance from you—let all I write be for the lady who makes me desire to write beautifully and well.

Pardon—if I have poured myself at your feet too much, these few days. I will do what you say, as near as I can. I know your strong will, your steady hand, your great tact, your great sense of honor, your great loyalty. All this series of letters to you began with the arrival with the English Edition of Flame and Shadow.⁶ I suppose I am the shadow. Am I, after all Just exactly the Vachel you first knew? And are you just exactly that Sara? Am I hopelessly isolated from the beginning of the world? By my very nature?

Surely there is a way forward, with your steady hand. Surely I end as I began:—

“Why is Sara—like the Good God? In her there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”⁷ I sleep in peace tonight—because I have written to you.

With my heart

Vachel—

Notes

¹Ridgely *Torrence published three VL poems in *The New Republic* 42 (March 25, 1925), pp. 124-125: “These Are the Young,” “The Rhinoceros and the Butterfly,” and “Nancy Hanks, Mother of Abraham Lincoln”: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 557-559, 754, 575-576.

²VL’s “A Curse for the Saxophone” was first published in the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (December 16, 1924) and collected in **Going-to-the-Stars* (1926). Also see Letter 221.

³VL cites William Morris (1834-1896), “Prologue of the Earthly Paradise,” ll. 38-39.

⁴For “The Galleons” poem, see Letter 207.

⁵Methuselah: see Genesis 5:21-27.

⁶For *Flame and Shadow*, see Letter 211.

⁷For the allusion, see Letter 212 (note 1).

218) “if one can only steady himself, he can go on . . .”

The Davenport Hotel.
Room 1129.
Spokane Washington.
January 17, 1925

My Dear Sara:—

Your letter of January 7, mailed in New York January 12, came two days ago—your first letter in answer to that series I suddenly imposed upon you.

This is only to say the letter is here, and I have ordered “The Wild Swans of Coole” which I have read very little. I will read it most carefully when it comes.

Please write more to me till you have written yourself out—the whole first flood of new thoughts. I am taking your letter very seriously.

I am dictating one long chapter a day on the *movies “The *Thief of Bagdad,” and “Scaramouche.” It is the most steady work I have had for many a day. The book is now 138 pages, legal size.

Ben *Kizer comes tomorrow morning for another four hour Sunday walk, as hard as we can dig. Then here is your letter. So I am steady mind, body and soul, and am content. Aside from all sorrow—if one can only steady himself, he can go on.

I cannot answer your letter tonight. I dictated too hard this morning. I can only say it was what I wanted, your letter. I am glad you are meditating. "Nymph, in thine orisons, be all my sins remembered."¹

In this first tide of our new days, I am hoping for several more letters from you. Then I will sit down and think them through. You may be sure I will read every line. Thank heaven for a great woman, Sara the good.

Sara, as I write I look at the Picture of Ruth St. Denis pinned to my wall.² I had only one day with that woman in my life. Yet how well I remember her! How profoundly I respect her! There she sits, a Spanish Princess fanning herself! She has something of the same steadiness of soul you have. There are great women on earth.

I have had many interesting glimpses of life.

This is but a note. Good night, and bless you. Your devoted

Vachel.

Notes

¹See *Hamlet*, III, i.

²One of the founders of modern dance, Ruth St. Denis (1877-1968) and her husband, Ted Shawn (1891-1972), established the Denishawn School of Dancing (1915), one of the first dance schools in the United States. The Denishawn dancers performed in Spokane November 29, 1924, at which time VL recited "The Trial of the Dead Cleopatra" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 533-549) to St. Denis, who expressed an interest in dancing the poem (Ruggles, p. 328). VL's poems for St. Denis ("Butterfly Picture-Writing") and Shawn ("The Voyage") are collected in **Every Soul Is a Circus*. See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 682-683, and Higgins, pp. 106-107.

219) "I am reading The Wild Swans at Coole . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
Thursday.
February 5, 1925.

My Dear Sara:—

Please write. Answer every letter. I am reading [*Yeats] The Wild Swans at Coole.¹ My [*Movie] book is all typed and nearly ready.

Most devoutly

Vachel.

Note

¹For the *Wild Swans*, see Letter 214.

220) “I think the movies are incurably adolescent like foot-ball and Hollywood . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
Feb. 6 — 1925.

My Dear Sara:—

My book is typed, ready and bound, the swiftest clearest single piece in my life—about 300 pages.¹

It will be full of interludes to the loves I took to the movies—so I am all of a perspiration^ over that idea of dedicating all my books to you. Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll dedicate most of my SOLEMN new books to you. How’ll that do? You said you were doubtful about this un^ anyhow.²

This is a kind o’ book for the southern cuties I spent the last two years with. Movies and chewing-gum and thousand dollar dresses, that was their style, the low down little things.

Psyco-analysis^ teaches us we had better tell it beforehand than afterwards, so here you are, my angel. This book is merely the record of my awful past. It is one heroic revel in shameless innocent adolescence. I think the movies are incurably adolescent like foot-ball and Hollywood.

But I must not write the book to you in this letter. There is more than one kiss, for your hand, in the book, Cynara, and a big laugh for you in the last line.³ I must not repudiate the last two years. They were too beautiful. They shall have an honest book. This book is not Spokane. It is farewell to Gulf Park.

With love indeed

Vachel—

Notes

¹See the “*Movie-book” in the Glossary.

²A carbon copy of ST’s short note to VL, dated “January 23, ’25,” is included in these letters:

Dear Vachel: We have just read your letter and are wondering, both of us, whether so much work put in on a book about moving-pictures is the right idea just now. Do think it over before going too far.

I leave to-day for a rest in the country, so no more letters for a while either received or written. I shall take books with me and hope to rest and read and eat and come back fat and jolly.

Affectionate greetings from us both.

Sara.

³Cynara alludes to Ernest Dowson's poem "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae" (1896). The final line of VL's "Movie-book" reads: "We are going to make Hollywood not only the capital of the United States, but the democratic capital of the United States in all matters of art and beauty, with the motion picture art, which is the American art, the dominating force" (p. 381).

221) "There is a New Vachel, and you will like him . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
Feb. 14, 1925

Dearest Sara:—

Nearly every evening I say "I have had no victories this day. Let me have one small victory." Then I sit up till midnight looking for it, prowling through this town! The victory is sometimes only a tiny new thought in the note book, or the discovery of a stuffed owl in a show-window. Sometimes it is just reading a new poem of *Yeats. I read all of his verses for your sake and he is a true bond, for I have never made much of him before. But I always think of you when I pick up the book, of which the "Wild Swans at Coole" is a section.¹

I am a wild walker now-a days[^]. Every night Ben *Kizer and I walk like a whirlwind from 9-10 and I am just in from our walk, now, writing in the most amusing and interesting hotel lobby in America. If I must live in hotels, this is the one. Read "The Bitter Country" by Anita Pettibone, and imagine me having tea with the fair authoress. It is a Doubleday Page first novel.²

What do you think? I had an anonymous valentine from Mobile, Alabama today, Special Delivery! Some one had a sudden pang of hearts-affection. The first unsigned valentine for years and years and almost the only one for years and years! The verse was kinda sweet, too. The only girl I know in Mobile is married! It couldn't be her, could it? Dreadful! But how intricate and interesting!

I have fooled around a week and start in Monday morning for the final drive to correct and mail off the *movie-book. Just like the movies it runs all the way from chewing-gum to Parnassus.

I walk four hour's[^] every Sunday with Kizer. He is the wildest walker I ever knew. He beats Stephen *Graham all to pieces. Kizer just whirls along, and often in the dark I catch this dignified Lawyer running, he is so determined to be in trim. He is 48 at

that! He is an excellent literary companion but the mere fact he is a wild walker is the real turning point right now. I am getting strong as a wild-cat, walking is so much my natural style. That will be one great Spokane turning point. It is incredible how few walkers there are left on American soil. One good walker with anything resembling interest in what you and I care for, is worth a King's ransom. And Ben is a splendid man.

This movie-book dictated at one month at amazing speed, just because the right movies were coming through the town, may turn out another stroke of good fortune! But it must speak for itself. It is an utter novelty. So many new poems fit it for interludes. For instance "Virginia" fits the "Covered Wagon" chapter precisely.³

I am overwhelmed by letters and schemes and petitions from all over the world. Just tearing up mail wears me out, without answering. It is hard to keep simple and keep ones^ health and head and imagination and strength. I cling to the dear memory of you Sara. Our first hour was a simpler hour, and just to remember it helps.

I am so serene now it is hard to believe I turned to you so desperately so short a while ago. But be sure that henceforth on very short notice the dam may break again. I will hold you in reserve before I take Rough-on-rats! Or drink wood-alcohol! Some days seem so clear and life looks well, and then almost instantly we are incredibly capsized. We have to put on the life-belt mighty quick.⁴

I have had such a happy day and happy week. And vivid letters and messages from dear old friends like Christopher *Morley, besides those Southern Sweeteys I taught who send Honey by the Freight-Car-full when they send it, when it occurs^ to them, in between dancing like dervishes.

What do I miss the most? The Greek Collections of the Metropolitan, especially the pre-historic Greek Ornaments! That is—after the rest in the south—I revel in the splendid energy here. But after all I live in my eyes, and my Heaven is perfect marble and perfect gold. My wildest line of verse is after all carefully measured as to its exact distance from the Prehistoric Homeric Cups and Bucklers. And They^ are growing too dim. I hunger again for the final standards of form. They can grow tyrannous, but not to me here! I think of your advice about Yeats all the time. Please say it again.

Please write me beautiful reminders of perfect form. Send me some Metropolitan Museum Postcards, with something dear on the back. I would like to carve my words like marble in the movie-revision.

I want the serenity of the Saitic period of Egypt.⁵ If I can get that, the book will be a triumph, for it is lively, orderly, timely and clear, if I may speak of it modestly.

How much do you want to know of the story of my Southern Romance? I will tell you as much or as little as you want to know. Ask questions.

I suppose you know anyway. It is as *Paul said he told you. I am still waiting for a child to grow up who does not yet know her own mind. Meanwhile my work must be done. I must not betray my friends, nor my work nor my past nor my dreams. I am burying myself as deeply as I can in new work and vivid enterprises. But the Spartan Fox gnaws. I am determined not to be defeated by waiting or heartbreak, and I am as far from the south as I can get, in everything.⁶

I have made a whole lot of general progress in work and thought and strength and ideas, and I think that you will approve of the Spokane Vachel you meet in the movie-book. My fighting-strength is back and my newest beautifullest thoughts are with me. But I know my sense of form needs to be sharpened, not by verse, but by pictures. I will re-translate it into sentences, if you will put it into postcards, or the like. Above all I want the serene and balanced sentence like the shoulder of Venus, both in prose and verse. I do not want to be any less conscious of Spokane, but I want to be a little more conscious of the Gods. The South was Olympian^. If one could only write and work there. The picture was Greek. Oh those naked Girls in the Sea foam! I will never forget them to the last day I live. But alas, the South was Opium—an Opium Olymplus^, a great place to recuperate.

If you will be patient with your Vachel, and hold him to the Metropolitan Museum Olymplus^, I think in two or three years he can tell the Gods the story of The West as it has not yet been told. Anyway a new Vachel is coming as strong as the one that went to England, and as fortunately placed. It will take two or three years to reach and pass the point I reached in general public force in December 1920, but it will be then a little beyond the old, I hope. I have been quite aware that I was going through an interregnum. I look from the Roof of the Davenport West, and see an imaginary row of log cabins from Canada to Mexico along the Pacific strand. The last pioneer skirmish line. Well there is something to be said about that dream. My whole imagination leafs over the states West of the Rockies—I take them as my special province for awhile and my heart and mind are ready for the battle and I have a lot to say. Spokane is peculiarly a center from which all the country West of the Rockies can be understood, owing to my special circle of friends here.

This is a long letter!

Bless you my Sara, here I have written you a book. But I have been happy every minute I wrote. Surely our destiny since the first *Village Magazine has been strange!

Surely we have had a strange adventure in this world, and it will never be written down. But we can smile over it. After all it has had its many humors, even meeting Amabell *Williams-Ellis which seems ages ago, but wasn't. Did you know "The Curse for the Saxophone" by your servant and Stoddard King had turned Chicago over? Three columns a day in the Daily News for a week. Well that is enough! Interviews with Bathhouse John, etc.!⁷

When I am really sure I am bringing my sheaves with me, I will come to you. You know it. But I have not yet again reached a place that is equivalent to the old days like my annual visit to the *Poetry Society with a new Song. There is a New Vachel, and you will like him. He is quite a healthy brute. But he is different. And his real song isn't written. God Grant it may be Andrew *Jackson in my pocket now in the notes. I would be crucified just to write the right poem on that old wildcat. I sure admired him, and still do. I would write if I could, a poem about Jackson, that would just burn up the country. Old Hickory for me. I can just see him bending over the fire the evening of the ina[u]guration after everybody was gone. I would like to write a "Raven" sort of song.⁸

Midnight in the White House!

Well, dear, I want to bring my sheaves with me, when I come to you, in two or three years, a hard-won harvest. Keep your hand on me, and send me Athens itself. With love to Ernst

from Vachel.

Notes

¹For the *Wild Swans*, see Letter 214.

²Illustrator Anita Pettibone's first novel, *The Bitter Country* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1925), draws "upon the somber atmosphere of Swedish and Finnish fishing communities on the Naselle and Chehalis Rivers in southwest Washington," according to *Washington: A Guide to the Evergreen State*, a publication of the Washington State Historical Society (Portland, OR: Binford & Mort Publishers, 1941), p. 123, and available online at Google Books.

³For VL's poem "Virginia," see Letter 211.

⁴Widely advertised for many decades, manufacturer E.S. Wells's "Rough on Rats" promised: "Clears out Rats, Mice, Roaches, Flies, Beetles, Moths, Ants, Mosquitoes, Bed Bugs, Insects, Skunk, Weasel, Gophers, Chipmunks, Moles, Musk Rats, etc." Suggesting suicide by drinking poison seems portentous, although newspapers in VL's day frequently reported such suicides, even when they occurred far away from the publisher's venue.

⁵The Saite Period or Dynasty 26 (664-525 B.C.), following Assyrian withdrawal from Egypt, is generally viewed as the last native dynasty in ancient Egypt, the last gasp of ancient Egyptian culture. Named after its capital, the Delta city Sais, the dynasty ended when both Babylonia and Egypt fell to the Persians. As VL indicates, the Saite period was relatively tranquil.

⁶VL finally hints about his courtship of Elizabeth Mann Wills: see Letter 206. The "Spartan fox" is an allusion to the ancient legend that a Spartan boy stole a live fox and hid it under his cloak, whereupon it commenced to gnaw him. He died from his wounds rather than reveal his theft.

⁷VL's "Curse for the Saxophone" was reprinted in the *Chicago Daily News* (January 13, 1925) and initiated a barrage of letters, pro and con. See *Poetry of VL*, p. 900. See also Letter 217. "Bathhouse" John Coughlin (1860-1938), Chicago First Ward alderman, was widely associated with the unsavory side of Chicago life and politics; and, as such, he was in the middle of many controversies. He acquired his name because he first worked in a bathhouse and then owned several.

⁸That is, a popular and well-known poem, like Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." "Midnight in the White House" is likely from an early draft of "Old, Old, Old, Old Andrew Jackson."

222) "the greatest poem written in America 'since the Pilgrims came over' . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
February 17, 1925

Dear Sara:—

I
Will not forget
That golden queen,
For whom I wrote
The best song
Of my days.
Her hand
Was on my hand,
And on my heart,
And we were no more
Than one breath apart,—
The day we wrote
The best song
Of my days.¹

Vachel—

[Enclosure: clipping from the *New York Tribune* (February 11, 1925): "**JAMES STEPHENS PRAISES AMERICAN LITERARY TREND** / Irish Author Says Poetry Outdistances Prose and Cites Vachel Lindsay." Stephens is reported as proclaiming that American literary technique rivals "the best Europe has to offer." "Mr. Stephens says the United States has developed poetry far beyond the present reach of its prose. He expressed the view that Vachel Lindsay's 'The *Chinese Nightingale' is the greatest poem written in America 'since the Pilgrims came over.'" The "Nightingale," of course was written for and dedicated to ST.]

Note

¹See Carpenter, p. 263. VL inscribed these verses in ST's personal copy of **Collected Poems* (1925) and in his own copy of **Selected Poems* (1931). He also sent the lines to ST on Christmas day 1927 (see Letter 246). Fortuitously, Stephens' praise arrived at just the right time in VL's life, coming on the heels of several months of grinding loneliness and depression.

223) "I know I write on and on, dear lady . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.

Feb. 26, 1925

[Headnote: "William Rose *Benets 'Whale' in The *New Republic for Feb. 18— is the greatest thing he has done."]

Dear Sara:—

The two cathedral post cards have come, and the quotation from A.E. Please thank Margaret [*Marguerite] for me.¹

I am so glad you think of me as consistent. So many think of me merely as a series of irrelevant surprises and that is ALL. It gives me a kind of peace with you.

I cannot join the Catholic Church. No. But I thank you for thinking of that. It shows you are thinking for me. I cannot believe in miracles, virgin births, Hell, priest craft or any of the rest of it, and never have. I take in religion^ as one does a tree. I love an empty cathedral and burn candles. But all sermons make me angry, so do "miracles"—alleged. I would be glad to meet Father Daly sometime.²

I am thinking seriously of utterly disappearing sometime soon, like Perun Bhagat in Kipling's Second Jungle Book. I will cut off all mail and have no address, change my name, keep no note-book, write no letters, and just explore these 48 states like Ambrose Bierce. You know he utterly and forever disappeared. I'll bet he is having a good time now.³

I know the road now. And my parents are dead, and there is not a soul to worry about me, nor a soul dependent on me. I love America as a whole, and it is impossible to live with the real farmer Americans I love any more. The people who crowd me closest are the most separated from "the people." I really meant a lot of Johnny Appleseed, though most people thought that was "just poetry." I really meant democracy, I was never so strong or well, and never so lonely. The girl I have courted so faithfully, and I have been truly faithful to her, Sara, sees nothing in me at all. I have no reason to plan or hope for her.⁴ I have nothing keeping me in the conventional world. Do you remember when you wanted me to come to N.Y. Incognito? I was too proud then, but not now.

And I am weary unto death of the tricks and whips of publishers, they seem all alike, mere machines, and all the rest of it. It is incredible to any soul that has made use of me that I would cheerfully burn all my papers and disappear forever but that is my style. I am far far more independent than they know. And once I am loose I will be gone for good. They will squirm a day, then forget it. Who remembers even dead McKinley?⁵

I will have my affairs cleared up by summer and then will most cheerfully go. I want you to understand this, dear, when it comes, and know it is deeply thought about.

As long as I live this conventional life my privacy is incredibly invaded, and I am pestered with letters from cranks and the like and the longer I live the more my oldest friends and even my dearest kin consider it their privilege^ to try to hector me into being "Vachel on the Rampage" as it were—Vachel of 1917. I love that memory dearly, but I have no idea of reviving it. Vachel of 1917 is not Vachel of 1925. And I am utterly weary of every form of writing and books, and because I am in health it seems I am to be hectored into doing more and running a race with myself, just because I am well.

There is an incredible speeding-up process at the top of the world, and the better health, the better position I get, the more I am speeded, [~~the more~~] though I am here sheltered by tact and Splendor. I am right now more private, more sheltered, more indulged and honestly helped than any man I know in my place. But where is Johnny Appleseed? If he passed through this town, what would these people who are so loyal to me think of him? I want to live some form of the Johnny Appleseed, Buddhist-Franciscan life—and there is no way but to [~~utterly~~] renounce all, so far, and begin again. Changing my name, like a monk, seems essential.⁶

I am writing way into the night, dear Sara, and I know I am repeating and repeating, and I know, dear, this is a long shambling letter. I know it. I am perfectly aware of that, but (in spite of your example of an epigrammatic note!) it is a comfort to keep on, for some of the new thoughts still come, along with the old ones on page 5. In the South I did not have a fair chance to size myself up. I was getting well much of the time, recovering from *Armstrong's ferocious and absolutely murderous driving of a very sick man, jam full of percolated Coffee and influenza. In the South I was recovering, most of the time, and there is so much opiate in the air. I cannot regret an hour of that slow recovery, and the love that began there.

But right here I am trained within an inch of my life, walking hard every day and Sunday, and living as natural a life as one in my place can. I am surrounded by sincere and brilliant friends, and my brain is as good as it will ever get, and I am able to use my judgement.

[~~Also~~] If I remain an AUTHOR, known as such, this is as natural and democratic a circle as I will ever find. The only way to be one of the real people is to quit being an "author," change my name and disappear. I have not one thread of ambition to do another lick of artistic work to the end of my life. I have seen so many names rise and fall—before, during and after the great War that the whole business of holding a position seems nonsense, if it is done at the expense of peace of mind.

I will never write as good a poem as "The *Chinese Nightingale", nor draw as well as The *Village Magazine nor Speak as Well as I did at Oxford. But my exploring is all ahead of me. The whole continent waits to be explored, and I love every inch of it. It looks as near to peace from Passion as I can have in this troubled world, and I seem incredibly destined to thwarted love, except the love of the whole nation. I love a strange village the minute I step into it, and it often seems to like me.

Of course I may not feel this way next July or June—and I know you smile, my dear, when I say such rigid things about disappearing utterly. You think I love the comedy of Publicity too well. But I remember when I wrote you from the train crossing the New Mexico and Arizona desert, that I did not want to go to England, and you assured me you were one of the few people in the world that believed me. So while some incredible hardship may toss me to the surface again, you must believe me again when I say I am likely to stay pretty well hid for a long long time. Not gathering "Literary Material" either! Hells fire! This room is stuffed with twenty years of unpublished unpolished poems and note-books. Why gather any more?

This is the first year I have put nothing in my note-book and I know I am through. It all looks like an old garment. If I had a gay girl with me I might keep up the game to

amuse her, but certainly all amusement for me in a solitary Hotel-Room has ended. But I can just smell the rain and snow in the woods.

I pay all my debts, pay cash, but I get more and more lambastings for not meeting all other obligations that Bore me more and more. I get an incredible flood of letters asking me to speak, more than ever before. It will increase tenfold when these two new books are out. But it all separates me from the people.

As long as my father and mother lived a stream of patients for him or of penitents for her poured through the house. They were good democrats my parents. It is incredible how I miss all that rag tag and bob-tail. All Americans have democratic hearts—but their very efficiency, if they are successful, separates them from the unambitious more philosophical crowd I love. God knows I would rather beg ten years incog, than give one more lecture in a dress suit.

And I will not “come back,” bringing poems. I have no intention of coming back at all, or of writing another line. I want to live like a robin the rest of my days. All the poets say that kind of a life is good. Is it all rhetoric? Why not try it for one lifetime?

If the ten books in the hands of “The *Macmillan Company” have not earned me the right to beg if I want to, the books were not worth printing in the first place. They have my life-work in their hands, 20 years of my life-blood, but have not the remotest intention of giving me an income from it. My account called for \$800 this year. They sent \$400 with a mimeographed letter on keeping on good terms with the company. I am tired of working for such asses. I would rather beg my bread one slice at a time and get a little honest first-class decent contempt along with it. It is better than the mimeographed variety. I rather enjoy being treated with contempt at back doors, but could never endure it in front offices. The Doniphan wakes then.⁷

I have written out many words to thee, as much from love as from argumentativeness. You are one of the few I want to have know my heart in this world, my egotistical egotistical heart. I tell you I am finding a little peace from a most desperate passion in this idea of the road, and it has greatly simplified my life the last few days. It has come over me—all at once—that at last—at last—the time has come. The last time I took the road, I spent three months planning it—March, April, May—1912. I never asked for a public place. I merely fought off the Springfield people that would make me the town fool, and the public place was thrust on me. I always wanted as natural a place in The Village as The Village Doctor. Surely the Village Beggar is better than the Hotel Lion, or any other kind.

I have written almost into midnight—but I have found peace and hope with thee, Sara. Art thou more than a natural woman—above all jealousies? Tell me thy heart. How much may I tell you of Elizabeth?

I am sure Ernst will go to sleep half-way through this letter if he is a proper husband, but wake him up at this point and thank him for me for the loan of your good heart—much needed for just a little while.

There is just one place where you are wrong, dear Sara. My heart has not grown old, and the tiger fury of my love for that child Elizabeth has been to me incredible. I have been beside myself for two years, every day another unsuccessful fight for self-

control. For her own sake I should let her rest for a year or maybe a thousand years. Certainly she was not intended to be burnt up like a haystack. But she has been making everything in my life that was supposed to be me, so dim—that I would gladly hide from her and all life as I know it now and change my name and begin anew. I wonder if I can hold out, on the road? I will need to be Leonidas.⁸

I suppose back of every ascetic[^] resolve is some incredible heartbreak—appalling and world-devastating[^] that, in the end, becomes new strength in a strange way.

I am at least myself in Spokane, working well and pleasing my friends. But it seems to me it will take ten thousand miles of dusty highway to end the fever in me. I could sleep in a potato field in the rain and laugh.

I was not intended by nature for any kind of unfaithfulness and heartbreak is heartbreak with me.

It has sometimes seemed to me I was intended to take America for my bride, I have been so incredibly thwarted and misconstrued in private life. I seem to be understood by a million people, never by one person. Surely it is better to take one's fate boldly, rather than trifle with it.

I know I write on and on, dear lady. But as long as I write I have a kind of peace.

With love

Vachel—

Notes

¹Benét's "Whale" is in *The New Republic* 41 (February 18, 1925), p. 340. For AE, see Letter 206.

²"Father Daly" is likely Jesuit priest James Daly, with whom Joyce Kilmer had an ongoing correspondence. See James J. Daly, *A Cheerful Ascetic and Other Essays* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1931).

³Periodically, when distressed, VL threatened to return to his tramping days. Two of his favorite examples were Purun Bhagat, who takes to the road leaving everything behind in Rudyard Kipling's *Second Jungle Book*, and writer Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914?), who tired of American life, travelled to Mexico in 1913, and simply disappeared.

⁴Elizabeth Mann Wills: see Letter 206. VL alludes to his poem "In Praise of Johnny Applesseed," first published in 1921. See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 428-435.

⁵VL's point is that even a popular and highly praised figure like President William McKinley (1843-1901) is soon forgotten once he is gone.

⁶For more on the combination of the Buddha, St. Francis, and Johnny Applesseed, see Letter 206.

⁷According to family historian, Frances Frazee Hamilton (see Letter 4), one of VL's maternal ancestors was Don Alphonse Jphan, a Spanish cavalier and warrior who

flourished in the mid-to-late 16th and early 17th centuries. Although knighted by Philip II, he soon afterwards incurred the wrath of the King and fled to England, where his name was anglicized to Doniphan. VL often associated his anger and “hot blood” with this Spanish ancestor, as in the following quotation from “What It Means to Be a Poet in America”: “Also there is red Indian and Spanish in me. Possibly this may account for the fact that I exasperate fearfully any publisher who really knows me. He finds to his astonishment that I am neither humble nor broken, though forty-six and poor. It is a state which the clique of the publisher will undertake to punish, if possible,” *The Saturday Evening Post* 199 (November 13, 1926). In a little more than one year (May 28, 1926), VL will name his daughter Susan Doniphan.

⁸Leonidas, King of Sparta, was so brave and strong that he was thought to have been a descendant of Heracles. He was killed in the battle of Thermopylae (480 B.C.).

224) “Tonight I am more the master of myself . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
March 21, 1925

Dear Sara:—

When I began to pour out the ink in your direction the first of the year you were surely a Godsend. Tonight I am more the master of myself and your kind hand greatly helped. This has been a good evening with the one family of cousins I have in this town and I return from their place with that pleasant domestic feeling so rare these days in my bird-in-the-cage life.¹ I have just finished a long rhymed oration on *Andrew Jackson I read them, and I am all in a glow about it. First everyone these two weeks has liked it so well, and second it seems to stay in my memory, with finality, which shows it is a more natural poem than many for a long time. I will send it off to Ridgley *Torrence at once. The more I try to change it, the more it slips back to the last weeks^ draft in my memory, which shows that is the final form. It reads just like an oration. And I nearly know it by heart, which is quite exceptional now.²

Somebody who did not give me his address wired me to come all the way to New York to recite the “*Daniel Jazz” on a “Seven Arts” Programme.³ That is a deal to do at my own expense. Take ten minutes for an act I abominate, and go all the way from Spokane to New York and then I presume ride as speedily back, for these utterly utter affairs seldom last more than one afternoon. The gentleman was quite important and quite impatient. But here I stay, till something like Jackson can make a new audience for me, or I take to the road forever. How do you like my new pen? I think it is grand. One can draw pitchers with it. [Drawing of a pitcher in a basin.]

Or write poems to fit the pitchers:—

“Oh how the memories

Over me roll—
 Of the old fashioned
 Boarding-house
 Pitcher-and-bowl.”

(Jest.)

What is the news of Jean and *Louis? I havn't^ heard a word from you about them.

Jackson rouses me more than anything I have written for some time. Maybe I can gather together the old and the new audience in poems like this.

I am so grateful to *Ernst for sending me the “Daniel Jazz” programme, and for going and for taking a fraternal interest.

At about the same pace the *Blacksmith's Serenade set to music by Frederick Austin is being put over by the *London Mercury set.⁴ I myself am working up a poem-game much in advance of these things, here, but no man may know what will come of it.

First I write a name, then make it into a picture then we make a poem to fit it, then it is danced and acted right there in the parlor that same evening. We have done several quite successfully with trained dancers and actors, of really fine interpretive skill.

This letter ambles along to nowhere much. Its^ just gossip for Sara, late Saturday night by the Davenport Hotel fire. I seem right now to be at peace with most everyone I have ever had anything to do with, and I have heard from most all of them. My pockets just bulge with “important” unanswered letters. Letters just pour in from everyone I ever knew. I answer only a few, of course.

I wish I could take the surface of the literary and art and platform world as literally as when you and I first met. As it is, I have just a few domestic hungers, and they make all the rest most inconsequent. Did I tell you—The *Movie-Book creeps along on what purports to be its last revision? Dr. Pease, a Californian with an enormous natural movie-interest and of great precision of English, helps me with the last revision two hours every day, correcting his duplicate copy as I correct mine.⁵ Meanwhile I design initial letters for the book and prepare poetic interludes etc. and work on Jackson, which is, incidentally, the epilogue. The book drives straight through to the question of Democracy and Art, the old issues of my prose books.

Here I sit in the most luxurious and delicately appointed hotel in America, and write you about Jackson and Democracy. Still I may beg, yet.

Happiness has come to me tonight, without warrant, and that is the main thing I am writing you. I have had such a troubled heart, dear, but for a little while there is peace. I simply marvel that it has come, when I have been so full of heartache.

Sometimes pain is so unreasonable. And when it goes, we say “Well why did you go? You were told to go long ago, and stayed on, without excuse. Now you leave, and without excuse. You had more reason to leave—a month ago! You are most unreasonable, mister PAIN.” If I could only keep the serenity of this hour, I could conquer my whole little world as never before.

But too soon the glory goes.

It is now midnight in this gorgeous lobby, Saturday night. As I write by the fire I am somehow happier than any midnight before, in this lobby. I know I have been in pain, for the pain has gone a moment. Pain that clawed like a dragon has left me as lightly as a butterfly. It is most unreasonable!

Well here is quite enough of your bachelor admirer, thirteen funny pages, that do not pretend to be very sensible. I am writing on, just to keep company, not that I have another thing to say. I am still thinking of taking the road, before Christmas, and disappearing like Ambrose Bierce, changing my name and all.⁶ I will first of course, square every obligation.

With all my heart I remember you, and Ernst, and you have been real treasures of all treasures to me this month and last. May your light never grow dim.

With love

Vachel.

Notes

¹VL's cousins were Jim Robinson; his wife Lucy, editor of the *Spokane Woman*; and their young daughter Jean. See Ruggles, p. 341; and Weston, p. 13. On April 5, 1905, Lucy May Cunningham (born 1878) married James Holton Robinson (1878-1927), son of VL's mother's younger sister, Susan Frazee Robinson (1851-1891). Their daughter Jean was born February 8, 1914.

²*The Seven Arts* little magazine, founded in November 1916 by James Oppenheim, with associate editors Waldo Frank and Van Wyck Brooks, caught the attention of many American writers, including Robert Frost, H.L. Mencken, and Louis Untermeyer. The magazine, as the title suggests, focused on all art forms but specialized in literary criticism, prose fiction, and poetry. The avowed purpose was to generate an American cultural renaissance. The magazine's overt pacificism in the face of world war, however, alienated its sponsors; and the periodical lasted only one year. Leading contributors transferred their loyalty to *The Dial*, but succeeding years saw several attempts to revive the traditions of *The Seven Arts*.

³Torrence published "Old, Old, Old Andrew Jackson" in *The New Republic* 44 (September 2, 1925), pp. 67-68. See *Poetry of VL*, pp. 559-569.

⁴English composer and baritone singer Frederic Austin (1872-1952) is perhaps best remembered for his arrangement of the first modern performance of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, produced by Nigel Playfair at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (1920-23). His compositions include many songs, chamber music, and incidental music for plays.

⁵Dr. Charles Pease was minister of Spokane's Unitarian Society. In *Going-to-the-Stars*, VL dedicated his poem "These Are the Young" (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 557-559) to Pease, but dropped the dedication in his *Selected Poems*. Dr. Pease would soon marry VL: see Letter 227.

⁶For Ambrose Bierce, see Letter 223.

225) "I am beginning to see my own white horses again . . ."

[Letterhead: "DAVENPORT HOTEL"
"Spokane, U.S.A."]

Room 1129.
March 23, 1925.

Dear Sara:—

It is a great comfort to read a little Whitman these days, even a little exhilarating[^]. Consider:—

"Solitary, singing in the west, I strike up for a new world."

This line has haunted me all day.¹

I am writing to you by the midnight fire of the Davenport lobby, thinking new thoughts.

Now let me extemporize:—

I have raved, with swear-words of low grade, to you,
Here are words more weighed and fancies new!
With one foot on the vigorous neck
Of the *Blacksmith's Serenade—
(Now the London Stunt—)
And the other on the neck
Of the *Daniel Jazz parade—
(Soon the Venetian stunt—)
I would like to stand,
And put the strength of A lifetime—
Into the best song ever made.
Better than this—(I hope,)
But I am full of sleep like dope!
I would like to make a serenade
Good as an angel-raid
Upon the wicked streets of night—
I would trade all my past
To sing a white swan song that would last,
And set my old songs right,
Then take the road and disappear forever,
And by no hand be stayed.

Which is a bad improvisation.

Which is no rhyme at all. But I have been at absurd war with my "Jazz" past—
and I only wish I could keep seeing it as I do tonight, more tolerantly. I ought to go

forward, instead of stopping to contradict my past, as Ruskin contradicted his in foot-
notes.² I would like to build on even my most popular stunts toward Beauty, and not
contradict them. It is so very late, I know this is a mixed-up letter, but I hate to leave you
and this peaceful fire. It is by this fire and on the roof of this Davenport I finally evolved
*Andrew Jackson. I have him by the White House fire and on the White House Roof, the
second inaugural night, March 5, 1833 till dawn. There is no doubt I am in possession of
my own soul tonight, Sara, and I have written you so many feverish letters you have a
right to know the patient is coming through.

Here are some lines from Andrew Jackson:—

“He thinks of secessionists, counts all their numbers—
Then he looks in the embers and sees his white horses—
Cantering, cantering, cantering, cantering.”

I am beginning to see my own white horses again, my white horses of good fortune and
good hunting.³

I should not write on and on, when I am too tired to prop my silly eyes open.
Great good fortune to you, my dear.

“Solitary, singing in the west, I strike up for a new world.”

Let us find and proclaim the new world.

With love

Vachel.

Notes

¹The haunting line is from Walt Whitman, “Starting from Paumanok” (l. 14).

²Charges of self-contradiction began in John Ruskin’s own lifetime, and continue today.
The title of Robert Simpson McLean’s article is representative: “Altruistic Ideals versus
Leisure Class Values: An Irreconcilable Conflict in John Ruskin,” *The Journal of
Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 31 (Spring, 1973), pp. 347-356.

³These are the closing lines (233-236), slightly altered, of Part I, **“Old, Old, Old, Old
Andrew Jackson,” Poetry of VL*, p. 565.

226) “Every progressive of 1912 has turned bitter Tory . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
March 31, 1925.

My Dear Sara:—

You may care to know I had in three of my men friends in my room for lunch today Ben *Kizer, his chum George Greenwood, and the Rev. Dr. Pease. (See *New Republic.) Well, I read them all of *Yeats I could for an hour, including the *Wild Swans of Coole*. And I thought of thee.¹

In so many ways these days, both private and public, make me think of 1912 just before I started on the road the last time, and about the time you wrote me for the first *Village Magazine at the suggestion of Witter *Bynner—why these days are so like 1912 I may write a song about it—to the Refrain: “Oh say can you see, by the dawn’s early light—What So Proudly we hailed, at the twilight’s last gleaming!”

Every progressive of 1912 has turned bitter Tory. Let us raise them from the dead, before we start Ambrose Biercing! More later²

Vachel.

Notes

¹For Reverend Charles Pease, see Letter 224. VL’s poem “These Are the Young,” dedicated to Pease, was first published in *The *New Republic* (March 25, 1925), p. 124. Banker George H. Greenwood was an accomplished amateur musician and one of VL’s earliest and closest friends in Spokane (see Higgins, p. 14). For the *Wild Swans*, see Letter 214.

²For Ambrose Bierce, see Letter 223.

227) “an engagement one night, a wedding the following night . . .”¹

[Enclosures: (1) a clipping from the *Spokane Spokesman-Review* (May 20, 1925, front page): “**ENGAGED ONE DAY, POET WEDS NEXT** / Vachel Lindsay Wins Elizabeth Conner, Popular Maid / Is Simple Event / Dons Hiking Clothes—Omits Word ‘Obey’ from Ceremony”;² (2) picture-clipping from the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (May 20, 1925, p. 10): “**VACHEL LINDSAY JOINS BENEDICTS** / Poet Engaged One Day, Wed the Next to Miss Elizabeth Conner.”]³

Notes

¹VL’s letter is missing or was never sent. A copy of ST’s response is extant:

Mr. and Mrs. Vachel Lindsay
Davenport Hotel.
Spokane, Wash.

Just received clippings. We are very happy over the news and send both of you our loving congratulations.

Sara and *Ernst

²The article reads, in part: “Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, heralded by many as America’s greatest poet, was married last night to Miss Elizabeth Conner. The ceremony was conducted in Mr. Lindsay’s bachelor apartment at the Davenport by the Rev. Charles Pease.

“It was simple through wish, and because it was the culmination of a romance that happened after the fashion that poets describe—an engagement one night, a wedding the following night.

“And then because Mr. Lindsay is a poet and because poets do not walk in the cut and dried mold of the world, something of the romance of Mr. Lindsay’s early days was brought into the event of his wedding.

“Mr. Lindsay among his many accomplishments is known as a poet of the highway. Once he begged and sang his way through the south with poems he later collected into ‘*Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread.’ And last night he was married in hiking clothes with a black shirt suitable to wear on a tramping trip, and following the ceremony he and his bride departed to tramp the highway, not figuratively but literally, or rather both. Miss Conner is a gifted young woman who has also written poetry and so America’s greatest poet and an embryo poetess tramped the highways somewhere about last night following the wedding.

“There were no ‘obeys’ or responses in the ceremony. Dr. Pease gave a beautiful and impressive talk and then pronounced the couple man and wife. The ceremony was witnessed by but a few friends who were informed of the plans during the afternoon.”

For Reverend Charles Pease, see Letter 224.

³The picture is of Elizabeth Conner: “Bride of Vachel Lindsay.” “Engaged Monday and married Tuesday, following a two month’s acquaintance; so reads the story in brief of the courtship and wedding of Miss Elizabeth Conner and Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” Benedict or Benedick is the confirmed bachelor who falls in love with and plans to marry Beatrice at the close of Shakespeare’s *Much Ado about Nothing*.

228) “it is very dear to think that now I may love you, too . . .”

[Letterhead: DAVENPORT HOTEL
Spokane, U.S.A.]

June 26, 1925

Dear Sara,

Your telegram, your letter, and finally the beautiful Chinese shawl have all brought us much happiness. You and your husband are very kind to think of us, and be with us in our great happiness, and we rejoice in it and are grateful, indeed.¹

You were especially good to think of me. It is sweet and noble of you to draw me into the magic circle of a very long and very dear friendship; and a thing that is most precious to me.

I must beg you not to be exercised over my pedantry—one of the degrees was the usual newspaper error, and the other, the lesser, as nominal as most are.² My eyes, too, are non-descript; and as to where we plan to live, the answer, for the present, is, here. We

shall probably be on the wing rather consistently during the next year, and expediency is the law. When we are “at home” we are either intensely literary or intensely out-of-doors, with occasional lapses into the social gesture; and, although we speculate upon our possible castle, we do not reach conclusions. At least, not as yet.

We are just emerging from a tussle with the new *movie book, and the revised edition of “*Going-To-The-Sun,”³ and will just have time to snatch a deep breath before we board the train next Tuesday for Los Angeles, where my distinguished husband will hold forth at the University of California summer session on “Poetry and the Movies.” That is as far as our definite plans go.

Thank you again for all your kindness. I have loved your songs so long, it is very dear to think that now I may love you, too.

Yours most faithfully,

Elizabeth Lindsay

Notes

¹As a wedding present, ST sent her “cream white Chinese shawl,” in Elizabeth Lindsay’s words, the shawl that helped inspire the final version of VL’s poem, “My Lady in Her White Silk Shawl” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 237-238). See Carpenter, p. 265, but also see *Poetry of VL*, p. 859, where we learn that an early version of the poem was written before VL met ST.

²Both Spokane newspapers (see previous letter) report that the bride earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees in English at Mills College, Oakland, California.

³The manuscript will be published as a new book: **Going-to-the-Stars*.

229) “the Camel has at last got his nose under the tent . . .”

[Letterhead: “DAVENPORT HOTEL”
“Spokane, U.S.A.”]

Room 1129.
Oct. 5, 1925

Dear *Ernst and Sara:—

If all goes well I will be with Elizabeth Connor^ Locust Blossom Lindsay at the Brevoort Oct. 15 to Nov. 15. Our plans are as simple as yours have always been in New York City. We want to see about two friends in our room every afternoon at tea, beginning with the strongest quietest ties, and as for the rest of the day long walks alone around the town, for Elizabeth is a great hiker and as fond of avoiding crowds as yourselves. We do not want to go out to dinner or in the evening any at all. We will walk then and explore.

I know I have written you utterly inconsistent letters this last year, most of them from the deadliest loneliness combined with the most relentless but kindly publicity I

ever endured. I was bombinating[^] in a vacuum. But I hope we four can get together for an evening or tea on Sunday and prove to one another this is a good and beautiful world on such occasions.

The literary news is simple, but delights us. With the help of Elizabeth I prepared a book of fifty pictures, and all the poems written in Spokane, and *Appleton's accepted it with a bang. What is far more to the point they seem willing to let me experiment with my silly little pictures to my heart's content, and not be everlastingly spatting me on the wrist about them.¹

We have prepared and submitted to *Macmillans, with the help of the man that performed our wedding ceremony, Dr. Charles Pease²—a 300 page book on the movies, with 50 pictures—(or rather initial letters) made out of butterflies. There seems every prospect this will be accepted. Do not let any one say we are leaving Macmillans. We have just “put over” Stoddard *King with Dorans.³ He is a friend of ours and a great man of letters disguised as a wit. He is the deepest real reader I know, and every light line shows it.

Andrew *Jackson—a much better version than that in “The *New Republic,” comes out in the “*Going to the Stars” (Appletons), also in the October or November *London Mercury. It will occupy about 1/3 of The Mercury!

We have just prepared a book with 150 pictures and decorations as well as parallell[^] poems as a successor to “Going-to-the-Stars,” with Appletons. It is probably called “Rising Wolf” after the wildest mountain in Glacier Park.⁴

We need you two very much our first week in New York. Bring Marguerite *Wilkinson if you can find her, or send her to us or us to her. Please share this letter with her and her husband as much as you see fit. I dearly remember all their loyalty and devotion. If the Macmillan *Movie-Book succeeds we want Dr. Pease to get out a movie-year book yearly while we send out special small monographs on the movies.⁵

If the “Illustrated *Collected Poems” (Macmillans) ever sells out, we want to add sections XII[,] XIII[,] XIV, XV etc. with as many pictures as they will take.

The general policy with Appletons is to crowd them with my pictures, since that is the only place where they are heartily welcome, right now. But the Camel has at last got his nose under the tent.⁶ Sending Appleton's pictures of Glacier Park Butterflies is infinitely to be preferred to booming the *Congo tell I pop.

With great good wishes to you both

Vachel

Notes

¹The collection will be published in May 1926, entitled **Going-to-the-Stars*.

²For Pease, see Letter 224.

³VL refers to the publishing house of George H. Doran Company. Doran published his memories of the company in *Chronicles of Barabbas, 1884-1934* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935). Doran merged with Doubleday, Page & Company in 1927.

⁴The book was finally entitled *The *Candle in the Cabin*.

⁵This “Movie-Book” is one VL idea that did not come to fruition until long after his death: see “Movie-Book” in the Glossary.

⁶The camel and the nose under the tent is a reference to an ancient Arabian proverb, likely known to VL from Horace E[lisha] Scudder’s “The Arab and His Camel,” published in *The Book of Fables and Folk Stories* (1915). The basic idea is that once the camel gets his nose inside the tent, he is well on his way to getting the rest of his body in as well. And when the camel gains access to the tent, his Arab owner is forced outside. Thus the moral: “It is a wise rule to resist the beginnings of evil” (p. 72).

230) “I can honestly forget everything but chanting awhile . . .”

[Letterhead: HOTEL BREVOORT
New York]

Friday Morning
[October 23, 1925]

Dear Sara:

I very deeply felt the goodness of you and *Ernst and *Marguerite and Jimmy last night and must hurry to tell you so. I am writing a note to the Wilkinson’s also.

It is a great deal for dear Elizabeth to take over and understand instantly—the whole picture of all my old ties and responsibilities, and the willingness of you four to give her the picture of my New York life is to me most touching and beautiful. I could say much more, but it would only be in her praise and your praise. I remember the roses. With four new books apparently accepted and “Your” own *Collected Poems* just launched, I feel I can sing a public song now again with a single mind, though I have to re-memorize most of the pieces yet. I can honestly forget everything but chanting awhile.¹

The more you four stand by me the more grateful I will be. I will understand your moral support by wireless, even if you do or say nothing more, and I will be grateful.

Elizabeth is learning “Poetic” New York superbly, and really raising me from the dead.

With love to you and Ernst

Vachel—

Note

¹VL refers to the help ST gave him in publishing the illustrated edition of his **Collected Poems*, which coincidentally was issued the day of his marriage (May 19, 1925). ST’s *Collected Poems* (The *Macmillan Company) was not published until 1937.

231) “we send you, as always, our love and our good wishes . . .”

[Letterhead: HOTEL BREVOORT
New York]

November 11, 1925

Dear Sara,

I am so very sorry that we did not get to see you and *Ernst again. We have you to thank for so much that has made our month here a beautiful one, and a most memorable one; and, quite aside from the question of one’s devoir, we miss just so much happiness, each time we are deprived of you. I wish there were some way of placating the malign fate which causes you such suffering, and your true friends and lovers so great loss.

Meanwhile we send you, as always, our love and our good wishes, and the promise (to ourselves as well as to you) of return.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Lindsay

232) “I suspect you of being good to us . . .”

[Letterhead: HOTEL BREVOORT
New York]

November 11, 1925

Dear Sara:

This is a sunny day and we take the train for Philadelphia happy and well, despite our big days and the exhaustion of even yesterday. Everyone has been so good, and our start in New York is a real start. Dorothy Scarborough did wonders for us in Columbia.¹

Good wishes to *Ernst and all. And good wishes to your muse.

As for Columbia: We had a packed house, and standing room only, and I saw your fine Italian hand in enlisting the valiant Dorothy. I am of a suspicious nature where you are concerned. I suspect you of being good to us, ever and anon and erstwhile, with that loyal mind of yours, and will like steel. I will remember the Dawsons.² Most truly yours

Vachel—

Notes

¹[Emily] Dorothy Scarborough (1878-1935), born in Texas, taught creative writing at Columbia University and published several books of prose, as well as some poetry. Her novel *The Wind* (1925), arguably her most famous work, was made into a film with the same title, starring Lilian Gish (1928). Carson McCullers was one of her more famous

students. Scarborough arranged for VL to perform at Columbia on several different occasions.

²For the Dawsons, see Letter 106.

233) “The course of our wanderings has been varied . . .”

[Letterhead: THE DRAKE
Lake Shore Drive & Upper Michigan Ave.
Chicago]

December 20th [1925]

Dear Sara,

It was good to get your letter, which finally came to port in Washington D.C. We hope that you are feeling superior to wisdom teeth and other ailments by now, and that you will be able to enjoy an unblemished Christmas tide.

This is our second time in Chicago, and Vachel is reading for “Les Petits Jeux Floraux.”¹ We are having luncheon with dear Harriet *Monroe to-morrow; and we shall hope to see Mrs. *Moody, who is just back from Europe. We really did our public duty the other time we were here, when Harriet Monroe had almost every one in to tea for us, and gave us generally a most charming welcome.

From here we go on to Springfield, for two recitals, on the 28th, and we hope to be home very early in the new year. The course of our wanderings has been varied, not to say illogical, and we have simply lived from one telegram to the next. We surprised ourselves by going to Toronto two weeks ago, where we had a very strenuous but immensely interesting four days, and renewed relations with the British Empire. Since then we have been making family visits—to Vachel’s family, that is. That, too, has been pleasant, but likewise strenuous. Relatives are relatives; I’ve long since lost track of mine; and I am just callous enough not to have one single pang over it. But Vachel’s keep track of him, and that’s different.

We send all love to you and *Ernst, and the season’s greetings.

Yours most faithfully,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹See *Moody, Harriet, in the Glossary.

²Springfield’s major newspapers announced VL’s performances scheduled for Monday, December 28, 1925. The *Illinois State Register* reported: “**MANY EXPECT TO HEAR VACHEL LINDSAY, LOCAL POET, DELIVER HOMECOMING LECTURE ON MONDAY**” (December 27, p. 5). VL’s initial performance, however, was before the Mid-Day Luncheon Club at the Leland Hotel, with the title: “Billboards and Galleons and New Poems.” The *Illinois State Journal* reported: “**TWO HUNDRED GREET**”

LINDSAY" (December 29, p. 2): "Mr. Lindsay said that many persons have the idea that a bard must come from another place and that he is a mysterious sort of person with no human attributes. He smiled when he said, 'that isn't true. I grew up here among you. You have known the worst about me and suffered it. I take this noonday banquet in my honor as a token of forgiveness on your part.'" The *Register* headline, on the other hand, reveals that VL was not entirely congenial: "**VACHEL LINDSAY IS HONORED AT MID-DAY LUNCH CLUB MEETING; TAKES RAP AT WOMEN'S CLUBS**" (December 29, p. 6).

The "Homecoming Lecture" was at 8:00 p.m., for the Dramatic Club of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, a club that VL had helped to found. The title of this lecture was: "Censers Are Swinging over the Town and Springfield Poems." The *Register* summarized VL's talk as follows: "How his own prophecies regarding the development of Springfield are coming true was discussed by Vachel Lindsay at the First Methodist church Monday evening. Mr. Lindsay's subject was 'Censers Are Swinging,' taken from one of his poems ["The Soul of the City Receives the Gift of the Holy Spirit," *Poetry of VL*, pp. 197-212]. He read a number of his works, especially those dealing with Springfield" (December 29, p. 3).

Both newspapers reported the presence of the new Mrs. Lindsay. For a rousing 1914 performance at the Methodist church, see Letters 105 and 111.

234) "I'm glad you think the Lindsay baby is good news . . ."

April 5th [1926]

Dear Sara,

I'm glad you think the Lindsay baby is good news—we are hoping that he (or she) will be healthy, happy, and good-natured—and continue to be good news forever. You are sweet to be sending something, and we are grateful to you, the three of us, for thinking so kindly of us.

Vachel told me how much he enjoyed dinner with you; he is always so happy to see you and *Ernst, and I am glad this trip East had so much of a reward in it, for him.

I am very much interested in your account of your southern trip—especially your incisive and conclusive words about Florida. The same seems to me true of some parts of California.¹

We shall want, very much indeed, to see "Dark of the Moon," when it is out. It will be a joy to have your more recent things together, so that one may read and re-read them. I especially love "There Will Be Stars," and "Parc Monceau," in the last "Miscellany." Will they be in your book? But of course—they must be. I, too, like the title very much.²

I am very busy these days, despite a growing desire to curl up somewhere and sleep until my time comes. In the first place, I have moved the Lindsay's into a little furnished apartment on the hill—the upstairs of a house, among the pines, with, of course, our own entrance, and two pleasant screened porches; and there is the usual

amount of cleaning, arranging, and refurbishing to be done. Also, a few more little clothes to be made. Also people wanting to see me—mostly with the kind intention of keeping me from being lonely. Also letters and Vachel's tour, to be cared for—as always. This week-end was a very happy one with Harriet *Monroe here to lecture, and to be very kind and witty and charming as she always is.

Thank you for your good wishes.

Love and good will to you, always.

Elizabeth

Note

¹According to Carpenter, "Seeking better health, Sara went to Florida in the early winter of 1926 and stayed for a while at Winter Park, where she saw quite a bit of Jessie *Rittenhouse and attended a meeting of the Poetry Society of Florida. February found her in Charleston, which she immediately took to her heart" (p. 271).

²The "Miscellany" is *American Poetry, 1925: A Miscellany*, ed. Louis *Untermeyer (see Letter 215). ST's poems were, indeed, published in *Dark of the Moon* (1926).

235) "This is not really morbidity—simply a pensive reflection . . ."

April 7th [1926]

Dear Sara,

The sweet parcel came to-day, and is an occasion for wide-eyed wonder and rejoicing on the part of mother, grandmother, and aunties-to-be. Despite the blue ribbon in which it came, I really think anything so very dainty should belong to someone feminine. Fancy starting life in something from Lord and Taylor's! I'm sure I should be a different woman, and doubtless a more effective one if I had.

As a matter of fact, I have no prejudicial opinions about our baby, one way or another; and neither has Vachel—despite his famous response to the Neo-Malthusian Conference that he was (and is?) looking for the Seven Sutherland Sisters, and intended to marry them, and have twelve strong sons, seven feet tall.¹

He's always thrilled to death by little girls, from what he calls the "ostrich" stage (at 6-8, when their little skirts stick out, above bare knees) on up to the "innocently wicked" and "innocently wise," of "These Are the Young"—and I think it really sweet of him.²

Of course, I shall be rather sorrier for a baby girl than for a baby boy—because I do think life is very awkwardly arranged for any woman who is not a mere female (and sometimes hard, even then)—but then, when one stops to think about life, one is sufficiently sorry for any little sprig of humanity who has all of it before him. This is not really morbidity—simply a pensive reflection. Perhaps, too, I am tired. Perhaps, too, the infant will inherit^ his father's glorious, high-hearted, and adventurous disposition—

along with his blond curly hair—both of which we are magnificently in favor of, in case we are asked.

I'm still “settling” into our little nest, sorting papers and books, getting up drapes, and acquiring the essentials of life—assisted by my kind family and our good friends. Also, I've gardened a bit these last sunny days—and loved it. But enough.

All love to you, from the three of us.

Yours,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹Normally billed as the amazing Seven Sutherland Sisters, they were “America’s first celebrity models,” according to Brandon Stickney at the website SideShowWorld: “In the 1880s, fashion's era of bustles and puffs, they became one of the sexiest, most popular performing attractions in The Greatest Show on Earth, claiming a World Record for the longest haired family. P.T. Barnum called them ‘the seven *most pleasing* wonders of the world’ as they attracted great throngs along the glittering midway. They came from the poverty of Cambria, New York, a rural farm community, and rode their dynamic singing talent and exotic looks to wealth and international fame, becoming global trendsetters, and even marrying into royalty”: <http://www.sideshowworld.com/tgod7sutherlands.html>

²For VL’s “These Are the Young,” see Letter 224.

236) “On the Way to Kalamazoo—singing all the way . . .”

Detroit—

On the Way to Kalamazoo—singing all the way.¹

Dear Sara:—

I have made many vain attempts to render this lovely picture. I have no right to keep it any longer. So I do now send it back with my most earnest apologies, and say it has been a good lesson to me and I cannot draw and you have proved it to me very tactfully. But I can decorate and some day I will do decorations for my books.

*Richards is drawing better every day, and if you can get a sight of his wonderful series of The Heart of Midlothian for *Macmillans—I wish you would. He has made a great leap forward and seems to have taken my place in the affections of Macmillans, which I do not grudge him since I am likely to spend most of my next few years among the Spokane Indians, learning arts utterly foreign to a publishing house, be it young or old. Meanwhile watch the rise of the patient and Sphinx-like Richards.²

[VL’s stationery includes four of the five drawings for “The Five Seals in the Sky” (*Poetry of VL*, pp. 728-731), omitting “IV.” Under “The War-Path” drawing, he writes:]

Beneath, this, the war bonnet of
my rumored ancestors I sign my name

Nicholas Vachel

April 22, 1926.

[P.S.] My good wishes to *Ernst.

Notes

¹VL is alluding to his poem "Kalamazoo": see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 339-340.

²See Sir Walter Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*, abridged and edited by Archibald Paterson, illustrations by George M. *Richards (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1926).

237) "I am running a race with that Stork to Spokane . . ."

[Letterhead: HOTEL STATLER
Washington Street at Ninth and Saint Charles
ST. LOUIS]

April 29, 1926.

Dear Sara:—

Do you know it just makes my heart ache when I think of the way *Louis and Jean seem to feel estranged. Necessarily our views must differ more and more as time goes on. But I wish you and *Ernst could convey to them the best way you can the fact that Elizabeth and I most truly and earnestly want to be friends and if anything we have done seems to indicate anything else, we regret it most sincerely.

Enclosed you will find the second half of Elizabeths^ article extorted from her, almost, by her fellow educators. She has an extraordinarily^ fraternal feeling for teachers having taught two years, and they are the only set of people on the face of the earth who could have extorted urged or sweated such a chronicle out of her. Well the northwest has hardly been heard from, but has its own tone of voice and I am proud of the simplicity of the ladies Chronicle. Words can never convey the humors of our Toronto visit, though it was a darned good visit just the same.

I am just at the end of a second tour alone, with packed houses and increasing interest and I am a little proud of myself to have been heard to the very tip top of the last gallery of a big packed house last night (Columbia Missouri). Also there are other big things doing in publishing world, of which more anon! But the main news is I am running a race with that Stork to Spokane. Everyday the Mama wires me one more engagement for she sure wants the cradle paid for. I go to Racine Wis. Monday and then I hope straight home. All the symptoms are we are to have twelve twins all at once that are infant Sandows. And most any minute. No wonder I yelled till they heard me to the top gallery last night. Well it is all very sweet and we are both very happy about it and no doubt I will get home in time.¹

Bless you both. And in any way that seems fit and proper—please tell us whatsmatter-with them-*Untermeyers?

Most affectionately

Vachel—

[P.S.] New address 514 West 15th Ave. Spokane Washington

Note

¹Eugen Sandow (1867-1925), born in Prussia as Friederich Wilhelm Mueller, is generally considered the first of the modern “bodybuilders.” He viewed his muscular body as a work of art and traveled the world, giving shows that he and the legendary Florenz Ziegfeld billed as “Muscle Displays.”

238) “We are terribly sorry about Jean and Louis . . .”

514 1/2 West 15th Ave.

Spokane, Washington

May 11th—Tuesday [1926]¹

Dear Sara,

Vachel has asked me to acknowledge the two letters which were awaiting him when he returned Saturday. He knows (as well as I do) that he should be writing himself—and he truly hopes to—but he had to rush off almost immediately to fill a coast engagement, and meanwhile he asks me to send in a word of thanks, and his love.

You were certainly very good—and Jean, too—to be so patient and explanatory with him. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you both. I have written a note to Jean—I know not adequate—but Vachel was over-tired, over-excited (the two go together) rather morbidly sensitive—and he admits it, and wants you to know that, normally, he would have had more sense, and would not have troubled you or Jean or *Louis about an attack of imagination. You are good not only to explain, but to soothe—and he is grateful. We are terribly sorry about Jean and Louis.

Baby is (as you may infer) not here yet. The official date is May 16th—but it seems that the younger generation has a tendency to choose its own time, within limits. Vachel and I were so happy together this last day or so, and so occupied in settling into the new rhythm of our life together in this new environment—our little attic apartment, with no servants, and many charming inconveniences, and a bit of woods outside the window, pines and lava rock, and larkspur, and blue birds nesting—and crickets and frogs at night—that we are almost tempted to wish that we could live so, and without further excitement for a while. But, of course, we are just a bit late in planning.

Your name heads the list of telegraphes—so, unless Vachel is completely non compos after the event (and since he is to be kept in the absolute outskirts, he SHOULDN'T be) you will have immediate word.

Our love to you and *Ernst.

Faithfully

Elizabeth

Note

¹In March 1926, VL was back on the road, this time without the pregnant Elizabeth, who nevertheless had arranged all of his engagements. “While Vachel was away on this tour,” according to Mildred Weston, “Elizabeth went house hunting, found an apartment on Cannon Hill, furnished it and moved in. Everything was in shape and waiting for him by the time he came home in the middle of May. On May 28, 1926 their first child, Susan Doniphan Lindsay was born” (p. 40).

239) “SUSAN DONIPHAN LINDSAY WAS BORN YESTERDAY . . .”

WESTERN UNION TELEGRAM

SPOKANE WASH 225P MAY 29 1926
 MISS^ ERNST B *FILSINGER 228
 THE BERESFORD 1 WEST 81 ST NEW YORK
 SUSAN DONIPHAN LINDSAY WAS BORN YESTERDAY AND SHE
 IS A NICE CHILD AND ALL IS WELL
 ELIZABETH AND VACHEL
 605P

240) “Vachel is really a model father . . .”

514 1/2 W 15th
 Spokane
 June 4th [1926]
 Saturday

Dear Sara and *Ernst,

Your telegram, and the dear letter which followed have made us very happy. The pangs and perils of the first week and a day being over, we take advantage of the present moment of peace, and returning strength, to tell you all about Susan.

We spare you the clinical details, except to say that she arrived just at dawn of a perfect May morning, after only five hours, although they were not very short. She weighed 8 lbs. 8 1/2 ounces, and is perfectly healthy and normal in every way, except that she sometimes has to be spanked to make her cry, or so they tell me. When first seen, at the advanced age of three hours or so, she had a deeply meditative look, enhanced by her inheritance of the famous Lindsay brow—but her very dreamy gaze (common, I

believe, to all tiny babies) and her very curly mouth and little pointed chin are very feminine and frivolous. She has changed every day since, and now begins to be a little pink and roly-poly, as a proper baby should. The snap shot will be forth coming at the first possible moment, and we hope you won't be disappointed.

Vachel is really a model father. We were fortunate in that he went home the night of the 27th firmly convinced that nothing would happen until morning—and when he arrived at 9 the next morning, and was introduced to his daughter, for once he was completely astonished, and admitted it. He wandered about in a daze the first day, and since then has grown fifteen years younger and pinker and prouder, and walks about town swinging his cane, and looking so big that the populace get off the sidewalk to let him pass. He has the true paternal attitude, as well, for when he comes to see me, he asks, first, “Has the baby gained to-day?” and then “How are you?” and he holds her very sweetly, and is generally a darling father.

As for me, of course I'm very happy, and, just now, wonderfully at peace. The whole thing is more of an ordeal than I was willing to admit—and I wore myself out with excitement and worry the first few days, and had some rather dark hours in consequence. One doesn't dare think about it too much—especially when cultivating a Jersey temperament is a prime duty.

Our love to Muna and Luis—and our dear love to you and *Ernst.¹

Elizabeth and Vachel

Note

¹Poet and translator, Muna Lee (1895-1965), met her future husband, [José] Luis [Alberto] Muñoz Marin (1898-1980), a Puerto Rican poet and journalist, in New York City. She was a feminist and a co-founder of the Inter-American Commission of Women, an organization promoting feminist ideals in North and South America. Later, Marin was elected the first democratic governor of Puerto Rico (1948). Muna and Luis married in 1919 and were the parents of two children; the couple divorced in 1946.

241) “Making a living is really a tragic procedure for us . . .”

514 1/2 W 15th
Spokane
July first [1926]

Dear Sara,

You are too kind to me, but I enjoy it so that I can't bear to dissuade you. Praise from you is like an accolade; as I know you better, I realize more and more how it is that you have long been Vachel's dream of a pearl among women, and more and more I love and honor him for it, as well as you.

I am really beginning to feel quite myself again—Vachel and I have had several short walks together; I am letting my maid go for all but one morning, and evenings when I have to go out; and I feel quite calm about Susan. At first I worried terribly when she

cried; and then, when she went to sleep, she was so still that I would go fearfully, and look at her, just to be sure she was still breathing. A baby at home and a baby at the hospital are two quite different creatures, really; and it's very hard to be scientific the first week you are in sole charge. Nor did I work out my salvation alone—we have indulged in the justifiable extravagance of a baby specialist, who, in the Chinese fashion, guarantees to keep her well, instead of waiting for her to be ill. I called him in because we had had one very fretful day from a usually very amiable and sleepy child, and it was a good thing, because we found out that poor Susan had been going on half-rations—so now she is given all that nature provides each time, and weighed before and after, and the results kept on a chart over the kitchen table, and averaged and reported on—and all is well. She is gaining more than is required, really, and now weighs 9 lbs. 8 3/4 oz.—so you see, she'll soon be quite grown up.

Interim—

July 5

It's disgusting the way I don't get letters written. Every time I sit down to write, the infant immediately wants changing, or a drink of water—and by the time she's quiet again, then it's time to begin dinner or supper, or Vachel wants me to read or walk with him—and the letters go again.

It's been boiling hot the last two days—and we have more or less melted, every one. However, it's a dry heat that doesn't really hurt one, and the nights, and twilights are cool. Dawn comes at three every morning, just when I tuck Susan away after her first breakfast, and the birds in our little woods are wide awake. There are robins and flickers, yellow warblers, violet green swallows, and chipping sparrows, not to mention blue birds, and various wood-peckers unknown to me—and each one sings in his own voice.

Vachel and I were thrilled to find tall, pale purple mariposa lilies growing among the rocks and pines outside our window—six of them, with fragile, silvery stems. We shan't bring them in the house again, though, because they go to sleep and most of them don't wake up.

The one cloud on the horizon is Vachel's lecturing—three engagements, the first this Friday. Making a living is really a tragic procedure for us—but Vachel will only be gone a few weeks this time—and he is well-rested to begin with.

I hope Maine will prove more pleasant than you anticipated.

I doubt whether we shall have a formal vacation this year. We may try the Park a little later—and I have a secret desire to go to one of the many lakes near here, to swim and row, and hike and sleep outdoors—but that, too, must be postponed at present.¹

What you tell me of the *Untermeyers is very sad. The middle period is certainly the most devastating known—far more so than youth or age, with their more obvious disasters—and it's a pity that two such fine people are so hopelessly embroiled.

Especially is it tragic for Jean. I am firm in my conviction that the woman gets the heavy end of it, almost invariably. There is much to be said for the refrain of Kipling's well-known, if somewhat melodramatic, poem; but whether Mary, or any other higher power, pities women, is a question. Jean is certainly bearing up as nobly and high-

heartedly and unselfishly as ever any one could—one reveres and loves her for it, even though it is impossible to help.²

July 9

Vachel asks me to say thank you for the clipping, and for your letter, which came just on the eve of his departure for Lewistown and his first speaking engagement. Stoddard *King had looked it out for us its first day here, and we are pleased with it—although Vachel says he’s getting tired of these reviewers that think they have to say he is mad, in the last line. *Macmillan’s started it, in one of their blurbs, and the fashion, seemingly, has stuck.

Our first attempts at photographing Susan have been unsuccessful, but you shall surely have the fruit of the first effective effort—so don’t be discouraged.

We are very, very sorry to learn of Katharine Lee Bates’s illness. She has kept up so long, and so bravely, that there is a double sadness in the final surrender.³

We send our love and all good wishes to you and *Ernst, always.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth

P.S.

Vachel has sent on your copy of “*Going to the Stars,” and he is hoping that you will care for it a little bit: The verses represent the work of his last two years of bachelorhood, when he was living alone in his room at the Davenport. The pictures he made in two days, about this time last year. He is happy that you like them. He seems to be in more of a picture than a poetry mood of late, and it means a great deal to him to have his drawings well-received.

E.C.L.

Notes

¹The “Park” is Glacier National, one of VL’s favorite hiking venues. See *Graham, Stephen, in the Glossary.

²ECL refers to Rudyard Kipling’s poem, “Mary, Pity Women” (1896), available online at www.PoemHunter.com

³For Katharine Lee Bates, see Letter 168.
