

The Annotated Letters of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay to Sara Trevor Teasdale

Chapter 9 (Letters 242-264)



(Home to Springfield, Illinois: see Letter 248)

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

242) "I'm sorry I'm in the picture . . ."

July 22 [1926]

Dear Sara—

Here you are! Our stern and reproving gaze at Papa is due to the unaccustomed outdoor light—for we really have a sweet disposition and ordinarily frown only when being given cod-liver oil, or when being blanket-pinned in, so that we won't kick out.

I'm sorry I'm in the picture—but Vachel and Susan are nice, and that's 2/3 to the good. I was so interested in the baby I forgot to move and that's the truth.

The three of us send love.

Elizabeth

243) "but I hate to be the family disciplinarian . . ."

[Letterhead: GLACIER NATIONAL PARK]

August 12th [1926]

Dear Sara,

We have so much enjoyed your letter, with its kind words for our baby and our book. And you are indeed sweet to be sending our little Susan your baby silver things. We shall treasure them, and so will she, in time to come.

We are glad to know that your travels turned out so satisfactorily and we are hoping that ours will prove equally pleasant and tranquil. At present we are at Glacier Park entrance, and we plan to go on to Two Medicine chalet, and log cabin life early next week, when we are a little rested and more adjusted to the climate. We're really not much higher than at home, but one feels terribly tired and sleepy, despite that.

We sent Susan's Kiddie Koop on by express, and she spends all day on the veranda, wrapped in a Baby Bunting, and developing very pink cheeks. She has been very little upset, considering all her adventures, and is almost as contented and famously healthy as she is at home. However, I'm free to confess that it's the sort of thing that I'd NEVER do, if Vachel didn't tease so—home is the best place for babies and mothers, Zane Grey theories to the contrary notwithstanding.¹

My sister is with us so I have an occasional brief respite from hovering over the chee-ild; but I want her to have her time to walk and explore and swim and dance, so I'm pretty stationery at present.² Vachel wants us to hike and ride, at Two Medicine, and we shall do all that the three hour limit and our somewhat listless attitude toward life permit, if not more. It's a shocking extravagance being here, all the way around, but I hate to be the family disciplinarian; life will do that for us, soon enough.

We shall look forward to "Dark of the Moon," and meanwhile we send you our best wishes for complete success in intimidating the *Macmillan Company. When you

have discovered just how it's done, please tell us, for we need to know, as much as anyone.

Incidentally, Vachel's various roarings and ragings seem to have been not altogether wasted, for they have sent us a royalty accounting which amounts to almost a living wage. The shock was tremendous, and neither of us could quite believe our eyes, when we read the amount.

I enclose another version of Susan Doniphan and Vachel, taken at home. The child changes so from week to week that no picture is valid for long. At present, Vachel says she looks like an Ivory Soap advertisement. The maid brought us a big green and white bowl, for a bath, and Vachel made the above remark while the ritual of the tub was in order. I really have a more convenient nursery here than at home, and boiling hot water, day and night, which helps a lot. What we'll have when we begin leading the Nancy Hanks life I know not.³ The head ranger told me yesterday how they had reared three children, living in a rubberard^ [RubberGard] tent, at 30 and 40 below—but, somehow, I'd like to talk to his wife about that. These men—I distrust them, however guileless seeming.

Our love to the two of you, and all good wishes.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹Author Zane Grey (1872-1939) famously enjoyed outdoor adventure: camping, horseback riding, deep-sea fishing, etc. Often one or more of his three children accompanied him.

²Elizabeth's sister was Judy Conner: see Ruggles, p. 341.

³Nancy Hanks was the pioneer mother of Abraham Lincoln, and the subject of a VL poem: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 575-576.

244) "Susan Doniphan is at the very height of prosperity . . ."

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

Thursday—October 14, 1926.

New Address:—
2318 West Pacific
First Floor.
Spokane.¹

Dear Sara:—

We read and admired your new and most noble book, "Dark of the Moon," and it has a most honorable place in our library. There is so much to say this letter will not say, but surely it is your best book outside and in, and everyone will say so.

Louis *Untermeyer sends me a scrap of “the Book of the Dead” from The British Museum where he is preparing a study of Israel in Egypt. It has always been my theory that Queen Tii or Ty or Thi was a Jewess, and if you go into Egyptian history with that hypothesis even for one evening, you will have a lively time. Her history is that of all supremely intellectual and high minded Jewesses in supreme power among aliens, including a religious and artistic revolution.²

I study often in the Davenport Hotel, where Elizabeth joins me for Tea, etc. Hence the paper. The Davenport quite rules this town, as the Raleigh Tavern ruled old Virginia.

We were very glad over Stephen *Graham’s two new books, and “The Gentle Art of Tramping” is the nearest to the real Stephen, and the smoothest reading-matter I have read of his for years. It is well worth your while. There is the essential Stephen without a struggle.

I hope some day to make the “Illustrated *Collected Poems” a little more worthy of the lady to whom I have inscribed them, but I will have to have far more influence than I have had for years with the publisher.

When this happens, surely it will be my best acknowledgement of your book. “I hope to try to do as well as you have!”

Here in the North-West I have had all sorts of good fortune of late and no ill-fortune. Alas-alas, a bad pen, and so I must change my ink.

Susan Doniphan is at the very height of prosperity. And so is Elizabeth Conner Lindsay. We are all three quite set and confirmed North-Westerners, and I have made my price for a speech five-hundred dollars, and only a few have come to it or will come. I am likely to live by my pen at last, though this is a changing world, and who can say?

Now that I have graduated from the gentle ministrations of the too-diplomatic I seem to get “literary” offers from everywhere, magazine and book-houses.

This is no letter at all. I keep going round Robin Hood’s barn.³

Well, I am proud of your book, dear Sara. It does you infinite credit. I will let it go at that. My love to *Ernst, and all the old gang. Most sincerely—

Vachel—

[Enclosure: clipping of a *Spokane Spokesman-Review* newspaper column entitled “Facetious Fragments,” containing verses by Stoddard *King: “The Handsome Brutes!” An epigraph indicates that a charm school for salesmen is about to open in Chicago, and King concludes: “But I wish to serve fair notice that he’s squandering his fee— / For there’ll be a dirty murder if he tries his charm on me!”]

Notes

¹Weston reports that the Lindsays “moved to a house on Pacific Avenue in Browne’s Addition” during the summer, 1927 (p. 45). This letter, however, indicates that the move was made as early as October 1926. For a picture of the home, see Higgins, p. 16.

²For VL's interest in Egyptian history and mythology, see especially Letter 197.

³Robin Hood's "barn" was the countryside around Sherwood Forest. In order to go around Robin Hood's barn, one would have to wander far and wide.

245) "I am simply loaded down with writing projects, but then I always am that . . ."

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

Direct address:—
2318 West Pacific. 1st Floor.
Some day Early in November, 1926—

Dear Sara:—

Elizabeth and I are both writing our thanks, also Susan Doniphan makes her mark [/] thanking you for the lovely set of baby table silver which you had your own self when a child. [Drawing of a flower.]

We are all three sorry these lovely things had to make such a go-and-return journey, while we happened to be out of town. The girl we told to go and get our mail did not do it.

For this month, at least, I am in my old room at the Davenport part of the day, and Elizabeth and I sometimes eat in it and receive our friends.

Please imagine Susan Doniphan being reared tward^ the majesty of her spoons and being slowly taught to do gratefully by her bright napkin-ring-set! At present one spoon, in the hands of her Papa or Mama, serves in the daintiest kind of a way to give her her cereal. She is a very rosy happy, eager, well precocious baby, and I wish her well, I am sure. I am simply loaded down with writing projects, but then I always am that. These spoons lift the weight of the days.

Watch the immaculate and Ivory-tower pages of the Lyric Compendium "The Saturday Evening Post," not only for an assemb[l]y of the less esoteric of my newer verses, but also for a chatty little article—of which [drawing of a flower] I have already read the proof—entitled:—

"What it Means to be An American Poet." [Drawing of a flower.] It is in answer to a list of questions furnished by the Post. Each question is listed with a chatty little answer. I know you do not care for Sanskrit, but the Aryan Races ought to thrill all the way to India.¹

I might have ended it:—

"You do not know my pride
Or the storm of scorn I ride."²

Most fraternally to you both—

Vachel—

Notes

¹“What It Means to Be a Poet in America.” *The Saturday Evening Post* 198 (1926): 12+. This essay is available online at: www.VachellLindsayHome.org on the “Biography” pages.

²VL quotes the opening lines of his poem “A Kind of Scorn,” *Poetry of VL*, pp. 387-388.

246) “I shall not forget that golden queen . . .”

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

Christmas 1927.

For Sara—Again!
I shall not forget that golden queen—
For whom I wrote the best song of my days.
Her brand was on my hand and on my heart
And we were no more than one breath apart
The day I wrote the best song of my days.¹

Vachel Lindsay.

Note

¹For the origin of these lines, see Letter 222.

247) “It is all like the breaking up of the Round Table . . .”

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

2318 West Pacific—Spokane Washington
Saturday, January 14, 1928¹

My Dear *Ernst and Sara:—

This has been indeed a hard day for you, and a hard day for us all. I laid awake all night last night—and I see now why, for your wire came this morning.

Elizabeth and I have just sent our word of affection to James, and that is all we can do, except hold in noble memory, the good and beautiful Marguerite *Wilkinson.

It is all like the breaking up of the Round Table to me—and if we are to live at all we must gather new circles about us to hearten ourselves. I have not forgotten a single

thing in which Marguerite had her hand—she always was a stateswoman for us-all, a friend and destiny-maker, just by being naturally a high adventurer for poetry, with such splendid innocent enthusiasm.

So many things happen now—that make us say:—“It was not like that in the olden days—in the days beyond recall.”² I have been so fiercely “discussed” and almost villified[^], and all my friends—you would suppose we were worth destroying, if mere dust on the wind could destroy.

For a long time we had the privacy of a comfortable circle that understood one another—and we had nothing that any man coveted. Now we all have so little—yet the little we have we must watch.

If we are to be poets at all—it is with a second courage—that rises above all shadows and death—and I confess I am merely struggling—not triumphant. I am no Christian Scientist.

Our circle was the most innocent circle of birds that ever sang. That we can boast of to the end of time. And we truly know it now—when we must face death and infidelity at every step, at this hour.

I pledge my belief in the eternal soul of Marguerite and its eternal goodness. Her prayers were not in vain and not shadows and we know she died at peace with the dear God.

We were all singers together in those old days—innocent singers who loved the sun—and I have not forgotten a day of it. We asked for nothing but to please our own circle, and had not the remotest notion of trying to please the world. “Bluestone” should be on Marguerite’s monument—in bronze.³

With love from Vachel and Elizabeth

Notes

¹Wilkinson drowned while swimming off Coney Island in January 1928. “Marguerite had been driven by religious anxiety, interpreting each crisis of her life as a divine test of her strength of character. She had suffered a nervous collapse in the summer of 1927, and, to recover, she had set herself one arduous challenge after another to prove herself unafraid. She had been taking flying lessons almost daily throughout the fall and had begun swimming regularly in the ocean in winter against the remonstrations of all her friends” (Drake, pp. 248-249). For VL’s long letter to Wilkinson concerning religion, see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 400-406.

²VL quotes the refrain of a popular song, “In the Days of Old,” from *The Yankee Consul: A Musical Comedy* (1903), words by Henry M. Blossom, Jr., music by Alfred G. Robyn: “It was not like that in the olden days, / Which have passed beyond recall. / In the rare old, fair old golden days, / It was not like that at all.” The comedy is online at Google Books.

³“Bluestone” is the title poem of Wilkinson’s *Bluestone: Lyrics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920): available online at Google Books.

248) “It was the last thing on earth to have happened . . .”

603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois
September 24, 1929

Dear Sara,

We were simply stunned when we had your letter this morning. It was the last thing on earth to have happened; and you are being unimaginably brave and self-contained about it. It would make us love you the more—if that were possible!—as it is, you are right. We are still here, and always will be, for you—mind heart and soul.¹

You are so good to want us to come to New York. We should love to. I am sure you will see Vachel this winter—I hope, often—but I am more of a fixed star at present, for the usual domestic reasons. We should so love having you here—our guest-room is always ready, and I think you would be comfortable and happy in it. When next you are lonely, don’t just think of us, come to us. Please!

The infants flourish and send Aunt Sara their love, now and always.

Vachel, of course, is writing, too. I think he is too shocked for speech right now.

Our hearts for yours, gallant lady!

Elizabeth

[Marginal note: “We have the bust here. Come and see it! E.”]²

Notes

¹In late May 1929, ST traveled to Reno, Nevada, with the intention of quietly divorcing *Ernst. The divorce was finally granted on September 5, 1929. See Drake, pp. 256-259.

²Sculpted by French artist, Adrien Alexander Voisin (1890-1979), the bust was completed in 1929, while Voisin and VL lived in the Pacific Northwest. In all, Voisin scheduled twenty sessions with VL, sessions he described as “a lively time.” Slightly larger than life size, the bust may be seen at the Vachel Lindsay Home, 603 South Fifth Street, Springfield. For additional history, see Carl and Roberta Volkmann, *Springfield’s Sculptures, Monuments, and Plaques* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), p. 68.

249) “we must put on a far sterner and more solitary harness . . .”

603 South 5th
Springfield Illinois.
September 26, 1929.

My Dear Sara:—

Your letter came yesterday and left us stunned. The best comment from us is no comment. I send you both my good-will, and earnest prayer.

An entirely impersonal comment, about the whole New Poetry Movement, and all the great brave days of the past, naming no names and calling no names, and praising the glory of 1910 to 1914 comes out in *The Landmark*, organ of the English Speaking Union for October.¹ I am sure all members of the old gang however separated will highly approve for it says in substance we met late, rejoiced exceedingly as poets and companions, and separated soon, first because of death by the war and grief over the war causing death, and secondly because of death by natural causes, such as the death of *Marguerite and Jimmy and the death of Amy Lowell [May 12, 1925]. I try to say that those who are living are still singing, though they seldom meet. I want all the old gang still under your hand to approve of this article. I am tired of the critical dictum that the New Poetry Movement has grown careless, as though it were a matter of the fading away of technique, when it is a plain case of the death of your parents, the death of my parents and all such, and we must put on a far sterner and more solitary harness to go forward.

Certainly all the survivors are still singing though separated, and it is merely^ the separation of the once bright banquet board that the critics are talking about, though they do not know it. They merely mean there is no longer a clatter of Poetry-Society Conversation to enlighten them.

Tell us more, tell us everything, and come to see us, noble lady.

Most fraternally

Vachel—

Note

¹VL's essay is entitled "United States Bards and Scotch Reviewers," *The Landmark: The Monthly Magazine of the English-Speaking Union* 11 (October 1929), pp. 599-610. VL's "Map of America" had been published in *The Landmark*: see Letter 190.

250) "We took a ride in a flying machine (the whole family)...."

[Letterhead: "LINDSAY
603 SOUTH FIFTH STREET
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS
U.S.A."]

July 7, 1930.

My Dear Sara:—

No doubt you and Margaret Conklin are together somewhere. Nevertheless I am sending these enclosures to both of you. I hope you both view them with a proper sense of humor. I am sending Margarets^ care of The *Macmillan Company.¹

I want all the news about you, and the log-book of your travels and events.

We are deeply settled in Springfield to this hour and the weather alternates from cool to blasting hot, then cool again.

Elizabeth and the babies wear sun-suits in our private sand-yard in the back-yard on the hot-days and they are a most amusing and diverting trio.

Susan and Nickey get off smart things as fast as firecrackers these days, and we have quit trying to keep track of such endless wit.

They have just survived a month of Flu, with temperature taken all the time. So:—

Yesterday Susan found the house-thermometer on the wall for the first time in her little life.

“Papa what’s that stick.”

“A Thermometer. It tells whether the house has a fever or not.”

“No you silly thing. Peoples have fevers. Houses don’t have fevers. Houses are hot, houses are cold. Peoples have fevers.”

Five hours later she told the story faithfully to her mother in my absence; winding up:—

“Isn’t papa funny?”

Again this morning Susan bursts into the room:—

“Mama, Mama, Im^ killed to death with this hot!”

These are warm-weather stories indeed.

Later.

“Mama, Mama—what makes bones?”

“A germ.”

“What makes bleed? (blood) Does a germ make bleed too?”

“Yes.”

“Mrs. Grey (the cook) says a bird called a Sturk (stork) brings babies. That isn’t the way you told me, Mother.”

Nickeys^ best stunt is his exactitude. A Miss Nancy on order.

Every doll in place. The toy broom in place. He will correct your English very gently, and explain just why a dining room chair is temporarily in the library. We took a ride in a flying machine (the whole family). He has a passion for microscopic toys, and seeing from the air Motor-Cars in long line this size [drawing of an automobile] he climed^ out of the machine when we landed absolutely determined to pick up a few—and ran back twice to the field, he was so sure they were in the grass along with his friends the ants. Quite vexed not to find them!

Well thats^ enough about the kids. We are so happy they are well again. Elizabeth celebrates by playing her new piano seven hours a day.

There is no personal news with me, except I will likely tour the next two seasons for Feakins harder than ever.²

With all my heart

Vachel—

Notes

¹Margaret Conklin was the young Rochester student who wrote ST in July 1926, asking for an autograph. Within months, the two became fast friends. Although there is endless speculation on the nature of their relationship, the simple fact is that no one really knows. See Carpenter, pp. 267 ff.; and Drake, pp. 239 ff. ST named Conklin as her literary executor.

²VL's wife Elizabeth arranged his performance tours before the birth of their second child. When she no longer had time for the job, VL hired William B. Feakins, Times Building, New York City. For VL's uneasy relationship with his new manager, see Ruggles, pp. 385-392. In February 1931, VL made arrangements with Feakins for Elizabeth to make several appearances in New York: see Chénétier, *Letters of VL*, p. 449; and Letter 264.

251) "Bless you my dear. I remember everything . . ."

[Letterhead: "THE BOLIVAR
230 Central Park West
New York"]

January 23, 1931—

Darling Sara:—

I have called, and phoned, and no reply.

Here is the new book for you—my due return for Stars Tonight which was received with silent devotion.¹

Fred Melcher of The Publisher's Weekly is my host for over Sunday, out at Plain Field New Jersey.²

Stoddard *King is in town, burning up the banquet tables for about three days.

Bless you my dear. I remember everything.

With all my heart

Vachel—

Notes

¹The new book is *The *Selected Poems of Vachel Lindsay* (January 1931). VL sends the work as thanks for having received ST's little book of children's poems: *Stars To-Night*:

Verses Old and New for Boys and Girls (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), with illustrations by Dorothy Lathrop.

²Frederic G. Melcher and VL met many years earlier, when Melcher was a young man working in an Indianapolis bookstore. Melcher went on to New York City, where he served as Co-editor of *The Publishers' Weekly* (1918-58). See "Vachel Lindsay: An Account of a Friendship Recorded from Memory, August, 1957," *The Indiana University Bookman* 5 (December 1960), pp. 12-20.

252) "But I will write to you . . ."

[Letterhead: "THE POWERS HOTEL
Rochester, N.Y."]

Feb. 21, 1931.
Permanent address.
603 South 5th
Springfield Illinois.

Dearest Sara:—

I speak this noon on the talkies, then go home for four days. Sunday I will arrive just in time for a cross to be dedicated to my Papa and Mama in the old church. Sister *Joy will be there, and possibly other members of the family.¹

The Hearth Eternal expresses my mother. Doctor Mohawk, a very bad piece of writing, nevertheless represents vaguely my father. Sidney Strong soon brings out a sketch of him in prose—along with other tributes in *Prose to Fathers* by Roosevelt, Rabbi Wise and others.

I have given that prose sketch and the Arizona Sheriff to *Latham for *The News Review*.²

I was so sorry to find you sick and did not have the heart to call again. Nevertheless I will write notes like this, hereafter—also will call a bit more devoutly when Passing^ through Manhattan.

Always write to Springfield when in doubt. Elizabeth has all my forwarding addresses and has answered every letter since marriage.

Otherwise I would be like Robert Frost, not answering any. But I will write to you.

I am full of nonsense but the main question is—are you well? That's^ what you are to tell me about.

Most affectionately

Vachel—

Notes

¹Springfield's *Illinois State Register* (Saturday, February 21, 1931) reports: "At the morning hour of worship at the First Christian Church, Sixth and Cook streets, the beautiful new altar cross given to the church by the Via Christi class in memory of Mrs. Catherine [Catharine] Frazee Lindsay will be dedicated. Mrs. Lindsay was the founder and for many years the president of the Via Christi class. Members of the class will attend the service in a body and seats will be reserved for them. In keeping with the dedication of the cross the pastor, Clark Walker Cummings, will preach on the subject, 'The Cross, The Christian Symbol'" ("Society and Churches," p. 2).

²VL's tribute to his father, Dr. Vachel Thomas Lindsay, "The Buggy-Breaking Doctor," was first published in Macmillan's *The News Review* 1 (March 2, 1931): 4; then reprinted as "To Vachel Thomas Lindsay," in *What I Owe to My Father*, ed. Sydney Strong (New York: Holt, 1931): 99-108. VL's poem, "Ballad of the Arizona Sheriff," was also included in the March 2, 1931 edition of *The News Review*: see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 772-773. For "The Hearth Eternal" and "Doctor Mohawk," see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 123-124 and pp. 528-533. Also see Letters 205 and 211.

"The Buggy-Breaking Doctor" may be read online: www.VachelLindsayHome.org on the "Biography" pages.

253) "I want one soul on earth to say 'create, create, create . . .'"

[Letterhead: "CENTRAL STATES LIMITED
Detroit-Kansas City"]

Feb. 22, 1931—

My Own Dear Sara:—

All my notes to you will be purely selfish, and bristling with what I have of egotistical aspiration.

What I want you to get out of me the next few years are

(1.) Bran^ new tunes—proper successors to the tunes of The *Nightingale. Greet will record them yearly.¹

(2.) Proper words that come with them and elaborate and fitting rhymes.

(3.) The concentration on your part—maybe only half an hour a year—that will make it an objective, to get them into fitting form, worthy of the dedications of my books to you.

I am not overconfident. I am in as strong health and new original creative force, as when we first met, but am no more placed to do all this than when I worked in a factory three months in New York, twelve hours a day.²

I obey now

(1.) My Publisher [Macmillan]

(2.) My Lecture Manager [Feakins]

(3.) The long string of bill collectors that Elizabeth has to shoo away from the door nearly every day of her life.

All this obedience is easy to me—and to scorn these three would not help.

But I have no old or new gang. “Vachel Won’t you please do the Congo Just for US?” I hear it till I nearly crack. Every town it is the same, “Why don’t you like “The Congo” Mr. Lindsay?[]” In Springfield it is the same. I wish *Canby would write a big lead denouncing such people.³

I want one soul on earth to say “create, create, create, do nothing but create! You will see or hear very little more of me than you have since 1920. But when I do come, this is what is on my mind, as a fellow-artist.

You would suppose I could ask this of hundreds. It is not so. They look vague if I talk about it.

I have no chance for a group of the inner ones. I have no strength left—after my tours, to form one. When we first met—that was all I had. I concentrated on them as I now do on audiences.

Even at Rochester where I have recited seven times and where they are as letter-perfect in my work as any crowd could ever be—sententiously apologetically etc and audibly^—behind my back after the recital was over:—

“Mr. Lindsay is reg[r]ettably touchy about the Congo—” etc. Not one inch of artistic curiosity about new ms. of which I read three. Twenty people yelled “Congo” to me between every piece. You have in you the power to save me from the exhaustion of this running fire.

With love

Vachel—

Notes

¹After having been rebuffed by several large recording companies, VL approached Columbia University English Professor, William Cabell Greet, in January 1931, and recorded many of his poems (38 records in all), albeit on aluminum, an inferior medium even at the time. See two Greet accounts: “The Lindsay Records,” *The Elementary English Review* 9 (May 1932), pp. 122, 128; and “Records of Poets,” *American Speech* 9 (December 1934), pp. 312-313. Several Greet recordings may be heard online at:

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pemnsound/x/Lindsay.php>

²In October-November 1905, in a desperate attempt to become self-sufficient, VL accepted a job at the Nicholls Gas Tubing Company, a factory owned and run by the father of one of his New York friends, George M. Nicholls. VL exaggerates a little: the job lasted less than two months and the work day was ten hours, as he advised his friend Susan Wilcox in 1905: “. . . I worked in [Nicholls’] factory ten hours a day and never enjoyed anything more in my life”: see Chénetier, *Letters of VL*, pp. 15-16.

³For Henry Seidel *Canby, see Letter 211.

254) "Vachel doesn't know me at all . . ."

[Letterhead: "LINDSAY
603 SOUTH FIFTH STREET
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS
U.S.A."]

March 15, 1931

Dear Sara,

How thrilling to have your letter here on this gray, chill afternoon. Yes, I am fascinated by Proust, although I know him not nearly so well as do you. I have read only about half of him, part in the Scott-Moncrieff translation, and part in French, through the first half of *Sodomme et Gomorrhe*. For the rest, I had to content myself with all the reviews I could get together, and innumerable commentaries, which you would scorn; but I did find Dandieu's very illuminating. Nor do I deserve credit for the initial act of beginning on him. He was just coming out in French my last two years in college; and though I wanted to read him then, time and opportunity failed. Then I read *Swann's Way* in 1925, but it seemed rather shadowy in comparison with all the other things that were happening to me in that famous year. Finally this fall I was assigned him as subject matter for a quaint Victorian club to which I belong here, hight [named] the Anti-Rust! It seems they wanted somebody to do him, who would see the good side of him, if you can think of anything more screaming, as a request. I can't. The poor dears have been just shocking themselves into fits doing continental novelists, and suffering over them. So very much with my tongue in my cheek (secretly so, since one lives here!) and with a real shout of joy at having something real to do, I plunged in; found it a tremendous experience; and shall be reading and re-reading him the rest of my days, more or less, I am sure. I was afraid he would still seem shadowy and tedious, but not so. Hence I must have grown since 1925. And not even Vachel's husbandly horrors over such delving, and his stern forbidding of the middle section feazed[^] me in the least. I did it, and I loved it; and I shall do more. But unobtrusively! Always.¹

Yes, I know "My Heart and My Flesh"; and have wondered much why everything else that lady has done is so talked about, and that not at all. And just last month I read "Look Homeward, Angel," and found it rather tremendous: streaks of the best of Joyce in it, all of it rather emerging from the rough like a Rodin sculpture, and a curious impassioned metaphysical quality about it which made it inescapable, at least for me; and real poetry, if anybody can say just what that is! I know it when I feel it.² Incidentally, I had tried in vain to get it here in town; and it was finally sent on to me by a boy whom you might like to know. He was the one who first talked to me about it: Vachel's poet at Harvard, Robert Fitzgerald. He is just as different from Vachel as may be (you would know that) but he is from Springfield, hence the connection. Vachel liked his stuff some years back in the high school annual, and has interested himself in what Robert has done since. He likes Proust, too. Just now he is a sophomore, very young, of course; is taking Greek and astronomy and French criticism and one thing and another, and is very shy and proud and Irish and Catholic, and is having his first sheaf of verses in *Harriet's

magazine this spring; and if you ever permit yourself to be written to or called upon by college boys, I do think you would like him. And of course he would be thrilled to know you. Do let me know how you feel about it, if it's not too much bother.³

Mrs. Woolf I have not read since Orlando, which was rather patchy, I thought. I do want to read "A Room of One's Own." Her earlier things I liked very much.⁴

As to knowing me, Sara dear, I doubt whether there is anything left to know. Vachel doesn't know me at all; and the few glimpses he has caught have been so disconcerting to him, that it seemed wiser to adopt a kindly anonymity, and I do fear that it has become a permanent gesture. Perhaps not. We shall see. At all events, I shall dream of and plan for the quiet hours with you, here or there, and hope that they may come soon. I am afraid you would find me very dull and plodding, and be horribly disappointed. You might have to be wise and free and starry-hearted for two; and employ all the Greek as well as the Roman virtues, and what a strain that would be! I shall try hard to grow up to you.

Of course, I spend my days tutoring in the morning, a high school pupil, all subjects; and attending to all Vachel's routine and business affairs; and managing the house, and looking out for the babies, who by the way are flourishing, and full of delicate surprises; and getting up these eternal talks and book reviews of a mildly cultural nature (I detest the word culture!) and making outlines for the religion study group of the local A.A.U.W., and worrying; and trying very hard to give a tremendous tug to my bootstraps and be a mystic, instead of twenty-nine and happy, and interested in spring clothes. And I see our friends here who are dears, one and all; and try to do everything I think Vachel wants and nothing he doesn't want, which is not Christianity but pragmatism; and of course I don't succeed. And I think I have not had a really healthily rebellious feeling about anything since Susan was born; just sort of cowed and subtle reactions. And does that sound like a person anyone would like to know? I doubt it! Anyhow, you can't say you weren't warned.

And thanks a lot for your letter. I'd love more, when you feel up to it. And can't you come to see us here? It's not so terribly far, you know; and it is quiet, once you are here. Do, please.

My love to you,

Elizabeth

[Enclosure: "Ballad on How to Write a Poem," with VL's note: "Dear Sara: I think this is my best song since The Virginians are Coming Again. Vachel—"]⁵

Notes

¹For Springfield's Anti-Rust literary society, see Letter 14 (note 5). In appreciating the works of Marcel Proust, ST and ECL found a literary sisterhood (see Drake, pp. 266-268). The commentary ECL refers to is Arnaud Dandieu, *Marcel Proust sa révélation psychologique* (1930). Meanwhile, VL's dislike for Proust is evident in the next letter.

²Kentucky-born novelist and poet Elizabeth Madox Roberts (1881-1941) published several novels, including *My Heart and My Flesh* (1927), featuring a darkly emotional

central character named Theodosia Bell. ECL is immersed in the avant-garde writing of her day, including Thomas Wolfe (1900-1938) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941).

³Springfield-born Robert Stuart Fitzgerald (1910-1985) was the nephew of VL's boyhood friend, Art Fitzgerald. A graduate of Harvard, Fitzgerald was a newspaper man, a critic, a professor, a poet, and a translator of the classics. His essay, "Vachel Lindsay: A Springfield Memoir," first published in *Poetry Magazine* (October 1982), is reprinted in *The Third Kind of Knowledge: Memoirs & Selected Writings*, ed. Penelope Laurans Fitzgerald (New York: New Directions, 1993). In the essay, Fitzgerald recounts VL's help in submitting poems to *Poetry*, several of which were published in the August 1931 issue. Also see Letters 256 and 259 below.

⁴The final three paragraphs of this letter are reprinted in Carpenter, p. 305.

⁵VL's "Ballad on How to Write a Poem" was first published in Springfield's *Illinois State Register* (March 1931): see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 774-776.

255) "I was born talkative, telling everything . . ."

[Letterhead: "THE FRANCIS MARLON HOTEL
Charleston, South Carolina"]

March 21, 1931.¹

[Headnote: "I never write letters. Elizabeth writes them all, and has since marriage. I am not given to outpourings like this to anyone, and have been CORKED since about 1920. Corked myself for good, in fact!"]

Dearest Sara:—

God knows how long this letter may be, maybe a page, maybe a book. But do not be alarmed, Golden Eyes, you are not going to be overwhelmingly corresponded with. But if you care for what is left of the man who dedicated his best song to you, you will forgive his egotism, and bear with him while he tries to clarify his artistic battles in the presence of your own clear brain. Most every one else seems satisfied with a photograph a little out of focus.

I did NOT see any of the *Selected Poems book till it came out. I knew *Spencer would have a hard enough battle to get it printed at all, so I left him utterly unhampered. It had been vaguely postponed several years. But one of his petitions to me was that I throw out all dedications as personal. I said yes—if you put the *Nightingale first and leave it dedicated to Sara. Please admire him. He has fought like a tiger to put that book through. Fee \$100, from the publishers.

So far as I know, to the day of my death I will have to spend my days away from home, earning my living and being only a nuisance the few hours I am at home. Speaking is the only thing the public will pay me for, or anyone really wants and I can hold 5000 as easily as one, and often that many have been turned away because the committe^ knew so

little about me they rented a parlor. Yet every big auditorium (2 or 3 thousand) has been packed. Often for weeks at a time no books are present, and I am vagu[e]ly known as the “Author of *Booth and the *Congo” from peewit literary histories circulated in 1916, etc.

So the bigger the crowd the bigger the ignorant persecution for these two songs, and even if I recite two hours, as I did here in Charleston, the chairmen or the crowd mob me like Lindberg. Its^ Booth and The Congo, and thats^ all I came for apparently. The *Building of Springfield is nothing to them, The *Chinese Nightingale nothing, even though their own reporter says these are well done. Generally they work me politely politely politely, but I give you my word if I recite two hours to the point of Complete exhaustion till my will power and sense and even power of refusal seem completely gone, the Committee will drag me to the private Home of somebody, and load themselves up on Liquor, (which I generally refuse) and keep me till one A.M. if possible till they have extorted these two poems out of me before I get my check, DUE the instant I leave the platform. Obviously that is all I mean to them, a stunt artist. [~~when~~] I tell you with my soul I would be crucified for the ideals in The Building of Springfield, and people who do not welcome me as representing such ideas should let me entirely alone, Springfield tea-cup hell-cats likewise, should let me alone.

I have been travelling too fast for my nerves, but must travell^ EVEN FASTER and speak even harder if I am EVER to support my two children. Elizabeth has been wearing other womens^ cast off clothes ever since I married her, and I travell^, till I am ready to fall flat in the aisle of the Pullman, and No one comes to the rescue, and hardly a soul in America knows “The Building of Springfield” represents the very soul of my soul, and I have been crucified more than once, because there I pinned my faith and there is more immediately impending. I do not want to have anything to do ever with people who do not like the ideals in that poem, with people who utterly ignore The Congo as a memorial to a missionary, or who sneer at Foreign Missions, or People who think “General Booth” lovely, but would not sleep in Salvation Army Quarters as I have done, no, not if their lives depended on it. I want to take to the road so bad I am nearly frantic, I want to meet the real people again, and Elizabeth is still fighting off the Bill Collectors at home. The *Selected Poems and The *Johnny Appleseed were sold to *Macmillans on flat contracts of \$250 in advance and \$500 in advance, and by contract I cannot ask them for a cent more, on those books though they sell those books everywhere. And I want to take the road leaving Elizabeth provided for and serene. If I stay home and write till I drop I will be in a worse case financially. I get \$15 to \$50 for poems. I hate dress suits and dress suit crowds and tea-sets as much as any ploughboy and always will, and offer no apologies. I stand with the majority on this: with the people who elect Presidents. Yet I have smiled and smiled 19 years [~~while I~~] while I was tea-partied to death, in and out of Springfield, and at Spokane till I was ready to yell murder.

But all this is merely human—and I want to appeal to the artist in you, for there is where we meet more than ever before.

I do want to write, and keep my standard as crystalline as yours, and long after we parted, I kept it there. The Chinese Nightingale and The Building of Springfield represent as near as I can do, our standards of Art and happy aspiration.

I have never had so much creative force in me in all directions, as right now yet I am thwarted in EVERY direction, since my only way out is to ape my 32nd year in public, doing Booth, and my 33rd year, IN PUBLIC doing “The Congo.”

You know how much the Nig[h]tingale was keyed to the hour it was written and if anyone in the world applied such a literary standard to my fresh work in writing I could go on as never before. But where is the leisure to find or argue with the people or form a circle? I loafed all last summer, dead in heart and mind through furious recital tours charging like a bull in the ring in the winter all to pay the summers^ bills and poor Elizabeth is hectored to this hour by bill collectors for last summers^ bills. And we wear our clothes till they drop off.

So when I have the leisure, even on tour I havn't^ sense left to seek out the most intelligent person on the committee and take a museum tour, or draw the picture that begins every poem. Do you know we have five very big dragons in Springfield in color, and somewhere an old poem [~~from~~] around them about an old laundryman, done in 1909—as the beginning of the Nightingale?

Museum tours and years of Art Study and pen and ink drawing are the very substance of Literary Concentration with me. I have said in everyway I know how, (to yet be polite) that nearly every drawing in the *Collected Poems was done one to five years before the poems it illustrates and nearly every one illustrates in some fashion three or four poems [~~drawn after~~] written afterward. Look at the Cencer^ Drawings for the beginning of The *Golden Book of Springfield. I drew for years in all fashions, however crudely “The Boats of the Prophets” and finally it came out in the Congo Climax:—

“There where the wild Ghost Gods had wailed
A million Boats of the Angels sailed.”²

Booth goes all the way back to a 1902 Chicago drawing I made, which was a variation of Jacob's Ladder—long lost by whoever I gave it too. It was then called “very obscure” a picture with crowned and robed saints climbing a ladder to the sky. Booth at least is not “obscure” till it is very carefully read. And Booth began in an “obscure” drawing!

Why do I insist on this point? Because yours is the most pointed and concentrated brain I have ever known and it is by Art Study and Museum Study that I have kept pointed and concentrated, being otherwise the log-cabin brand of a human being. Museums, and drawings in pen and ink—(and I was still packed with them when we met)—are my civilized substitute for Teacups, Dress Suits, Reception Lines, Yale, Harvard, Princeton and Columbia. Why that silly list of Egyptian boats around my map of the Universe? They are Egyptian Hieroglyphics of the Boats of the Sky, cut with scissors from my “Ch[a]pters of Coming Forth By Day,” boats which I found were close parallels^ to the Boats of the Prophets which have haunted me so long. But no one in the world wants to talk Egypt with me, tho it fits my movie-theory.³

The mere accident that I inherited a good voice from my father seems to have destroyed all this with the Public, the Publishers and the Critics, and it is the only way I am allowed to function whatsoever,—vocally! No other outlet!

After a lecture where I have interpreted all my drawings they say reprovingly “Why, did you draw those Pictures,” or “I have been trying to read the Congo for years out of that book but hadn’t the remotest notion you drew the pictures” etc.

To the point: My literary concentration has always come inversely by long lonely Art-study, and all I need is a chance for leisure, concentration and Art Study to WRITE something that represents the 51st year of my age and will make people forget to try to hector my far distant past out of me. You know I teem with new ideas. I wake up with as many every morning as I ever did in my life. Yet I have to kill them with a fly-swatter and have quit all note-books in despair. If I spring them (the ideas) on Publishers they are killed with fly swatters unless they come once in three years. If I try to write them I have not time and strength left after holding people 3000 at a time to put them down with the old force.

Over and over, in nearly every recital new ideas and images and tunes for new poems and drawings float through my mind and eyes so vividly as to confuse me—till I have to literally howl them down, and find my place again on the page, for that audience is demanding stale poems I FORGET. So ALL the new creative force in me that has been on me of late in a tremendous tide is not completely exhausted by my audiences, but only thwarted and dammed up to the torture point by their howling for old things. I think of at least one new poem or drawing every day, yet do not even put it down, knowing that when I get [~~it down home~~] to Springfield I will not have force enough left to concentrate as I did in the old days, and have to use all my energy not being angry about my situation away from home.

In the old days I saw only three things (1) Beggary when possible, and log cabins. (2). Museums and Art Study. (3) Small groups of Artists, and later poets. Now I see none of these three things. I begged, loving with all my heart the shanty-living American People. I talked with artists and Poets, begging them as you well know for the most critical scrutiny, and accepting it, and putting down all their amendments to my poems as you well know, and now I have to howl for gangs who want “that wonderful poem about the Indians called “The Congo” or that other one about Edwin Booth, no—it was Bramwell Booth? no—Evangeline Booth wasn’t it?”

Beggary was the freest and most emancipating thing I ever did. Now it would cost me wife, children and home, yet I consider its possibility with more and more conviction. I am only waiting a gentleman’s chance.

They are civil to me in Springfield but I am not specially wanted. I dont^ like the drunk country club, or the addled woman’s club. It will take twenty years for them to begin to rebuild the City. If I recite, I want to recite my Springfield Poems everywhere till Springfield in spite of itself builds Lincoln’s city and it will not be the tea cup set that rebuild it! I BELIEVE in the apotheosis of LINCOLN the Railsplitter. The people who hate it love tea-cups and hate Log Cabins. I believe with all my heart and soul that Christ is King of the Universe and Lincoln is the nearest to the Christ type the world has seen since. Now let the swine who love psycho analysis^ do their worst with that. I have been psycho-analyzed till there was not a shred of me, my books drawings or recitals left, worthy of respect.

I abhor the preaching of free-love and the dirt of men like James Joyce. The world is not the Parrots cage these people think. Certainly my world is NOT.

I believe in faithfulness and clean love and high aspiration all the way to the cross.

I do not believe the Cross is a phallic symbol and the Jews can say it a million times without convincing me. Let the psycho-analytic swine do all they please with that too. I believe in Christendom with all my heart and I am not going to have Fraziers Golden Bough argue it out of me. I believe in Clean family life and am not going to have Bertrand Russel[^] argue it out of me. I believe in clean living and High thinking and United States Art.⁴

I do not consider men like Proust or any other Frenchmen the ultimate oracles of my life and am not going to be nagged about that. Every word I have ever written testifies to these things and I was not striking an artistic pose when I wrote them down.

I do not believe Cannabilism[^] was merely a religious ceremony, the real beginning of the Lords Supper, nor any other supper I ever ate.

I do not believe my return to Springfield was a “Matriarchal Complex,” though my love of my father, honest patriarchal respect such as you have for your parents, abundantly testifies that honest family feeling had a decent part in my return.

I LOVE everyone who was ever GOOD to me, and only the utter exhaustion of platform work gives me that dead eye and stopped heart and quenched laughter that makes them think I do not want to see them any more. I was born talkative, telling everything but I am so full of the things in this letter I would unload and be bad company so I sit in my hotel rooms alone swearing not to say any of these things to anyone and in Pullman Cars alone too frustrated to read or think, when every creative force in me is at its height, and completely thwarted by the only way I am allowed to earn my living, or even function. Sara I have to keep still to every intimate about the things in this letter till gag rule ruins me. Lest I tell all this to everyone with an indecent explosion I tell it to you, and to you only. I will never write any of it again. Do not be afraid of an avalanche of words, from me, again.

I wish you would read this letter through ten times when you have the kindness. I doubt if I will ever write you anything more than notes henceforth. Let this letter be a 100 letters. But it ought to be something worth doing for you to raise Chang from the dead. You are a great clean diplomat. The Nightingale might sing again, and in a bran[^] new tune.

And I don't believe in the future? Sure. For instance:—I believe in all the best skyscrapers [~~for instance~~], and have lectured on them since I used to take my classes to the foot of the Flatiron Building and the Times Building, the only ones in town at the time and I prophesied[^] then the present New York Architecture [~~then~~] and in like measure I prophecy[^] a future America. I believe in every line of prophecy in the Litany of Washington Street with all my soul. That book was NOT written to sell, and did NOT sell. In a sense it is a prose re-writing from an oblique angle of “The Building of Springfield.” It is from the heart. It is not rhetoric or any form of kidding or bluff whatsoever.⁵

Do I believe in the future? Sure—I outline about once in two months for audiences who want my lecture on the Subject, “THE FUTURE TALKIE” and prophecy^ with all the faith in my heart a Talkie that will be to the present Talkie as [~~the Old Flatiron was is to~~] the newest and most beautiful New York Building is to the old Flatiron.

Do they want prophecy? No.

They want that Congo and Booth stunt and after I am through my prophecy about the talkies they mob me for them, and forget the talkie lecture.

My very life routine and increasing audiences, (the bigger the more ignorant) cut me off from the thinking I want to do clearly.

And poor dear Elizabeth pays a BIGGER price—hounded by bill Collectors every day who are the meaner because I am so much advertised. They do not know that even when travelling as fast as I do now—the fastest for years [~~I do not~~] I have to put 51 per cent into car-fare and hotels and 25 into lecture fees. She has put up a brave brave fight and though young and strong needs a rescue party—a real one, not one lecture with a fat fee, but genuine public understanding that we are dead in earnest about things.

With love

Vachel—

Notes

¹Much of this long letter, with a few variants, is published in Carpenter, pp. 297-302.

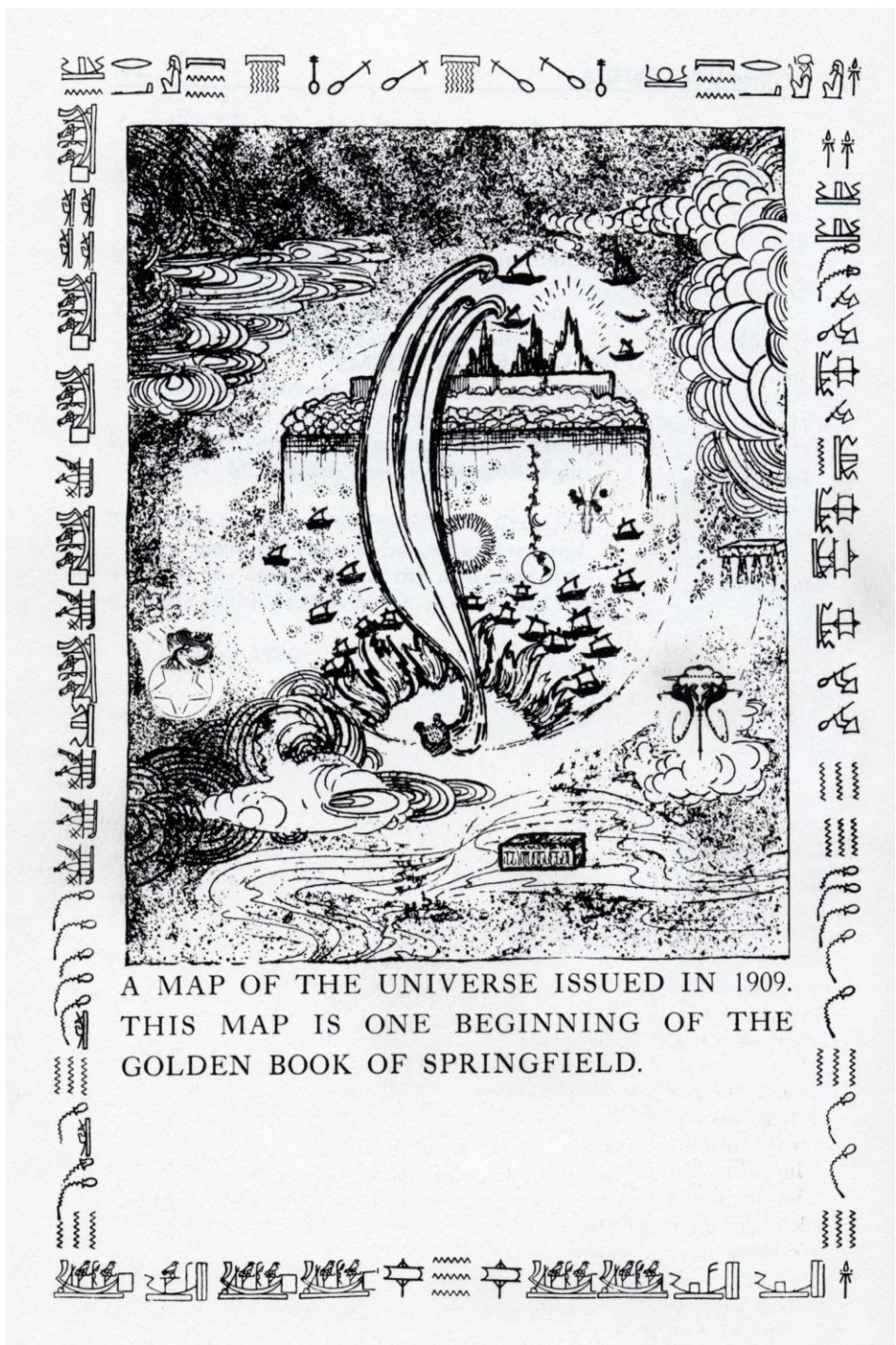
²VL quotes lines 138-139 of “The Congo.” For the boats of the prophets, see “Outward Bound,” *Poetry of VL*, pp. 65-66. For the “censers,” see Letter 13 (note 1).

³For the second edition of VL’s “Map of the Universe” (1926), showing “the Boats of the Sky,” see the next page and *Poetry of VL*, p. 496. In fact, the hieroglyphics were added for this edition of the “Map.”

⁴Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) published *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1906-15), in which (to VL’s disapproval) he presented religion as a cultural rather than as a theological phenomenon. Sir Bertrand Russell, 3rd Earl Russell (1872-1970)—philosopher, mathematician, pacifist, and social critic—was an outspoken atheist. In one of life’s interesting ironies, Susan Doniphan Lindsay, VL’s daughter, married John Conrad Russell, 4th Earl Russell (1921-87), son of Bertrand, on August 28, 1946. Two daughters were born of this union: Sarah Elizabeth (born January 16, 1946) and Lady Lucy Catherine (born July 21, 1948). John and Susan divorced in 1955. Lady Lucy Catherine died April 11, 1975; Susan Doniphan died November 22, 1990. For more information, see: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p7496.htm>

⁵VL’s final prose book, *The Litany of Washington Street*, was published in 1929 (The Macmillan Company) and proved to be anything but a best seller. The work is yet another expression of VL’s democratic principles, pitting Washington Street (representing past American patriotism) against Babbitt’s Main Street. VL includes lengthy excerpts from Whitman’s poetry, because he viewed Whitman as democracy’s great poetic spokesman.

Map of the Universe (1926 Edition)



256) “Vachel . . . is quite himself again, and very gay . . .”

603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois

May 10, 1931

Dear Sara,

This is not a proper answer to your delightful letter. That will be along presently, perhaps just after school is out. This week I added eight hours[^] of work at the high school to my other duties, and am a bit limp an[d] preoccupied as a result. I am most apologetic about it; but this is just the time of year when such an opportunity would help this family most; and I dared not refuse. And if you don't mind, I shall write you reams just as soon as I am "out."

I am sending a not[e] to Robert, giving your very kind permission for him to call, after a note has been duly written. It would mean so much to him to know you, and I do think you might enjoy him, too.¹

The babies are very well, and growing tall and quite out of babyhood. It does take such a very little while.

And Vachel, about whom I was rather distressed for a while, is quite himself again, and very gay and full of devices and inspirations.

Truly, more later, if I may. Meanwhile, there are several hundred papers to correct; and all the poetry from a village down state to judge for an annual school poetry prize. So forgive me this inadequate response.

I do hope there will not be any more pot-boiling for you, nor pot cleaning, either. It is most inappropriate, to say the least.

And I hope you are feeling "chipper," or as much so as may be. All our love.

Yours,

Elizabeth

Note

¹That is, Robert Fitzgerald: see Letters 254 (note 3) and 259.

257) "Vachel has quite recovered from the Sturm und Drang . . ."

May 23, 1931

Dear Sara,

This does seem to come in instalments[^], doesn't it? And I can't promise that this one will be any too thrilling. I do hope that the hack work and the cramped and breathless feeling that comes with an inadequate economic basis have both let up a bit for you by now; and that the spring in New York is as lovely as it is here, and that you are able to enjoy it a little.

The babies and Vachel are very well and thrive amazingly, even though working hours cut me off from them during the day. My devoted black Irene who has been saving our lives regularly for five dollars a week ever since my so-called lectures made possible her addition to our ménage last December, is just as good, if not better, when I am not at

home; so my mind is easy on that score. I am very glad of the chance just at this time of year, though really all seasons are much the same that way, to be doing a little something; but I notice a difference in myself when it comes to teaching, though I still enjoy it. It's rather as though one had been standing too long in a very high wind, on an exposed place, and the wind had thoroughly searched every hidden path of nerve and blood and marrow, until the lightest murmur in the trees is as remorseless as flaying. Which is one way of saying, I suppose, "I'm tired." But that's no news. And fortunately it doesn't matter.

Vachel has quite recovered from the Sturm und Drang which frightened me so this spring; and with quiet days here, and the prospect of some kind of rest and shake up before the summer's over, quite his most inventive and delightful self.

He has all kinds of grand schemes for next season and its adventures, has been writing and going over old verses quite a bit. I must at least start on the typing of the same before this week-end has slipped by; and with his speaking reduced to a more enjoyable amount, and perhaps the possibility of a complete let-up in the not too distant future, I'm sure he will get on nobly. Margaret will have told you about his inspirations on the George Washington theme; and there are many others.¹

I have not been reading much of late. Chiefly books on mysticism which you would gently scorn, right now a study of Jacob Boehme *The Mystic Will*, which I find very real. And von Hugel and even Rufus Jones. Don't you smile at that? Yes, and the pagan mysteries, which have always fascinated me; and about which they begin to discover a few things. I can't seem to get religion as I should like, that is, as one gets a very hard case of measles; but I am very sure there is nothing else to be had.²

This seems to be written on the assumption that the reader will stand on her head for at least half of what is being said! Now that's asking too much, don't you think? I do apologize. And shall try to be more sprightly and technical next time.

Do you have those radio automobiles advertising talkies under your windows, too? They have come to our village just this last week, and there have been six past the house just to-day. Well, well, what can one do about it? Last summer the day we got Nicky back from the hospital there was a four trumpet magna vox advertising a garage a block away, which went from 6 a.m. till 10 p.m. He stood it very well till about four in the afternoon, when he said very plaintively, "Mother, aren't those music men going to eat any lunch? I want my nap." Fortunately next day they were gone. But enough.

My love,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹"Margaret" is ST's companion and literary executor, Margaret Conklin: see Letter 250.

²Further examples of ECL's wide-ranging intellectual curiosity. Howard H. Brinton's *Mystic Will: Based Upon a Study of the Philosophy of Jacob Boehme* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1931) is still considered a sound introduction to the ideas of German mystic and theologian Boehme (1575-1624). Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925), better known as

Baron von Hügel, was an Austrian Roman Catholic thinker and writer who emphasized the “three elements” of religious thought and life: the historical/institutional, the scientific/intellectual, and the mystical/experiential. American Quaker, Rufus Matthew Jones (1863-1948), emphasized “affirmative mysticism,” that is, viewing and seeking God as a personal being.

258) “that is one subject on which people can't bear the truth . . .”

603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois
May 30, 1931

Dear Sara,

No, I'm not brave, just the female of the species, and Kipling be damned. And if I'm a lady at all, getting more like Black Agnes day by day, than any other fair of the days of castles and crusades.¹ But let it be. Teaching will be over in a week or so, and what follows that, I know not, except that I shall continue to reach out in all directions and try to be an honest woman and still work both ends against the middle and gather in any tangents, that seem to tend toward the economic stability of poetry. Which is all about me. Mencken has taken one of my so-called poems, the longest of the lot, God bless him! and I do think it very decent of him; and shall try not to let it waken the sleeping pride of the Irish kings too devastatingly. And continue to say to myself that all that I am and all that I hope to be etc. I owe to my angel husband. Except what we owe jointly to the grocer and such gentry, which is ever a chastening consideration.

We shall be looking for the poems in Harper's Bazaar and The Saturday Review. Vachel had one in Harper's B. last year, called *Kissing a Rose*—a pleasant lyric of the Gulf Park period, about which he indulged in a variety of botanical persiflage (when the last word arrived from Charley Towne) saying that it would seem to have been more expedient to have kissed a chrysanthemum, or perhaps even to have embraced a spineless cactus, this being a world of such sorts. So we know a little about Harper's Bazaar. But if I don't get off this you will be utterly sure I am a vulgarian without a thought in my head but pounds and pence.²

I do hope the trip to England will prove refreshing and delightful; and of course you will meet Virginia Woolf, and it will be a mutual joy to the two of you. “*To The Lighthouse*” was among my earlier adventures with her, and *A Room of One's Own* I am promising myself very soon. That is, the book!

And I am sure the obdurate landlord will become reasonable, as the season advances. And I think we are all fortunate in looking forward to Christina Rossetti as edited by you. Why shouldn't there be coolness and clearness in any age? And how is the heat of the day and confusion of the heart to be endured otherwise? I can't imagine, for one.³

Of course you are a lady. The Living Authors people are absurd, without doubt; but they are merely truckling to the common, and it is an exceedingly common, idea, I think, in every sense, that any literary person should live and die like a goldfish.

Sickening, I call it. Like that damnable spreading around of the better-kept-quiet fact that I felt that I couldn't refuse \$180.00 for six weeks' teaching! As though it were anyone's affair but ours. And as though it weren't bad enough to have to snatch at this and that, without having to explain oneself breathless. I abhor and despise it. There are good and sympathetic publicity people, to be sure, like little Margaret, but they are so few and far between. And most of them are just a pain between the eyes, no matter what one has done or not done.

Then, too, you have written more bravely and beautifully than any woman living about love; and I think that is one subject on which people can't bear the truth. They want it to be something slick and stupid or expedient or humorous or obscene or meaningless, or a cynical convenience—anything, in fact, but what it really is; what they all know they can and should make it, if only they weren't such cowards and so self-indulgent and such wasters; and they can't bear either the assumption that there is a truth about it, or the truth. And they will try to punish anyone who tells it, however nobly, or perhaps because it is nobly and simply told. They didn't forgive Sappho, no, not in a quarter of a decennium, so why should they you? It's an oblique honor, but an honor, nevertheless.

Vachel and the babies are very well. Vachel is quite rested now, and busy at one thing and another. And Susan had her fifth birthday this week. And we had a party! You should have been here and worn a crepe paper hat, and helped blow out the candles. There were eight infants, and six grown-ups, including parents and one grandparent; and Susan was so excited she couldn't sleep the night before; and presided at the table with all the solemn grace and heavy air of social responsibility fitted to a dowager of sixty years. She is rather like a dowager in some ways; and Vachel and I shall be very glad when she is old enough to take us in hand. None of our guests cried or fought, so the event goes down in history as having been safe and successful.

Please don't overdo packing and making final arrangements and all that. And we shall be thinking about you, and sending you love and good wishes every moment.

You see, I talk to you as though we were already friends. It's something to live up to, if not for; but don't regard yourself as committed to the affair, if I begin to annoy you.

Love to you from us all, now and forever.

Yours,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹In Rudyard Kipling's *The Story of the Gadsbys* (1899), Chapter Two ("The World Without"), there is a famous toast: "To the only wife in the Station and a damned brave woman!" (p. 35)—online at Google Books. Agnes Randolph, Countess of Dunbar and March (c.1312-1369), was known as "Black Agnes" because of her dark olive skin. She is renowned for successfully defending Dunbar Castle against a fierce English attack. For ECL's modest success in publishing, including a work in Mencken's *American Mercury*, see Ruggles, p. 421.

²Charles Hanson Towne (1877-1949) was a prolific writer in many genres and an editor for several magazines, including *Harper's Bazaar*.

³ST was traveling to England to research a biographical-critical edition of the poetry of Christina Rossetti: see Carpenter, pp. 308-315. The work remains unfinished, although parts are extant in the Wellesley College Library. ST's proposed "Dedication" reads: "TO THE MEMORY OF / VACHEL LINDSAY / WHO LOVED THE POETRY / OF CHRISTINA ROSSETTI" (Drake, p. 282).

259) "there is something like hope ahead . . ."

603 South Fifth Street
Springfield, Illinois
August 27, 1931

Dear Sara,

Your card with the Ypres Tower came this morning, and I make haste to say thank you, and to assure you that we are quite all right, and have thought of you very often.¹ Vachel had a splendid letter from you when you were first in London which he greatly delighted in, and I know has intended to answer; but his initial inertia for everything seems to be increasing with the years. He [~~has~~] is at present away on his vacation in the Wisconsin woods for a month or so; and even that required that I lead him by the hand to the spot, engage his rooms, find a guide, and spend a day with him, before rushing back to the babies. He seems to be having a quiet but restful time, a complete change, at all events; and he plans to do some tramping before he comes back. I write every day, and though he is lonely I am sure it is all very good for him. This is such a noisy hot place, and he had done as much as anybody ever does in the summer time, some revisions and two new poems, a child's jingle, and a longer thing to come out in the September L. H. J., so it was time he got away.²

We have all been well except that last week the babies and I had flu. We are all well now, though. They made a fine recovery; mine was a little belated because of course I had to be up night and day with them, giving enemas and baths when I had a fever and was all achy myself. But that's over, and we are all enjoying the sweet fall weather, sunny, and yet cool. July here was ghastly; but it's not that bad every year.

I have been busy tutoring about six hours a day all summer, algebra, Latin, French, English, anything; typing such manuscripts as I can lay my hands on, for anyone who will trust me with them, and hoping to get time for some more or less hack writing projects which vary from writing up some short stories on China for a friend of mine, to helping outline a new course in creative design for the elementary schools. There is some chance that I may have occasional substituting this winter at school, though I'd far rather teach at home, and I have about twenty-five lecture dates, at everything from ten to fifty dollars already engaged for. The result of all of which being that we have gone less into debt this summer than ever in our lives; that we may just possibly get out this season, and that there is something like hope ahead. Vachel will not have quite so much speaking,

because in the first place there isn't quite so much; and in the second, his nerves won't stand it. I only wish I knew better how to care for him.

Young Fitzgerald called the other day, and said he had had a note from you in London. He still hopes to meet you. He goes to England this year, Cambridge, for two years, after two brilliant years at Harvard. *Harriet had a group of his things in the August POETRY. I think you would like them.³

Let us have news of you, when you can. Our thoughts and our love are always with you. When are you coming to see us?

Yours,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹The frequently photographed Ypres Tower is in Rye, Sussex, England. Now a museum, the tower is the earliest remaining fortress in England, dating back to 1249.

²For VL's Wisconsin "vacation" in August 1931, see Ruggles, pp. 419-423. VL's poem "The Philosopher" was published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* (October 1931): see *Poetry of VL*, pp. 777-780. The "child's jingle" is "The Ting-a-Ling Jingle of Wallpaper Willy": see Ruggles, p. 419.

³For Robert Fitzgerald, see Letter 254.

260) "With love and eternal good wishes[,] Vachel . . ."

603 South 5th.
Springfield Illinois.
October 7, 1931—

My Own Dear Sara:—

About a month ago I read through twice again Dark of the Moon, and all your other work once.

Your letter of July 3 came from England and was most welcome and I have been answering in fancy ever since.

What a talent for silence we have sometimes!

Elizabeth is toiling on a paper on the Greek Drama down stairs for a local literary Club.

The babies are flourishing and are almost too bright but a great joy to us.

Elizabeth is popping with enterprises and has thirty lectures and book reviews (terms cash!) in and around here this winter and new books to review pour in from the stores every day. In a book way we are as well off as we could ask, for not only is there the first class and very indulgent City Library, but the enormous State Library with a big staff that nobody uses is in connection with the state House and Miss Skoog president of

the Librarians of America is the head over there. And there is also the State Extension Library so all three are just waiting for orders, and will buy anything in the world!¹

And the four book-stores are not so bad. One is brilliant. So, in a book-way there is enough deep water to swim and I suppose we average fifteen library books a week in this Mansion.

I went through *Paradise Lost* four times this summer, with copious notations. I seem to have a lot of private opinions about that poem, but be doubting if they would rouse anybody, even if clearly stated. I like that old blind man. Really I think I have his number. I would like to have Robert Herrick for a week-end visitor at the Powells during Milton's courtship historical or not. Eve was a Gigantic Ivory Julia, Julia a microscopic Eve. Adam a Cromwellian, Eve a Cavilier[^]. If you will catch a playwright for me, I can dictate a play about his one month's visit to those whirlwind Powells just before his marriage to Mary Powell, the model of Eve.²

A house with five Cavilier[^] Ladies in it to help Mary with her courting dancing in circles around John who unbent for once.

Well I am through with that subject.

The best news is your Rossetti book. I begin my winter's tour in a week. I have not looked up the schedule, but will call when I pass through New York. This letter ends where it begins. I read *Dark of the Moon*, twice, carefully. I keep trying to think up some news. The news with me is I am writing this note.

With love and eternal good wishes

Vachel—

[Full-page drawing with a floral design and a notation: "Wall Paper Design For Sara from Vachel—"]

Eve was for King Charles.

Yes, Adam was a Cromwell man,
And Eve a God-Made Cavilier[^].
And Eve kept high the honeymoon,
Drinking to Heaven, with no fear.

"Oh wavering, naked Cromwell man!
Why do you thunder still, and scold?"
Said Eve—"Here is another bower.
You know you are not iron, nor cold!"

Though Adam preached till he stood blind
Her whisper broke his sermons down.
The Angels gave the blind a song
But gave his girl the future crown:—

The secret crown that Heaven keeps,

Of Woman's graciousness a sign,
 When she despoils the overstern
 With more than love or pascal^ wine—

Two famous ones, who came to flower!
 They did not kiss, and ride away!
 And Eve is Heaven's Marble tower,
 And Eve is, in her fashion, gay.

Something indeed it was for both
 From his proud heart, such blood to wring.
 The conquering lady Cavilier^
 Is Queen, this only, keeps him king.

Copied from my Milton

For Sara

From

Vachel.

Notes

¹According to the 1929 *Springfield City Directory* (Jeffersons Printing and Stationery Company), Miss Harriet M. Skogh was the Superintendent of the General Library Division of the Illinois State Library. The *American Library Directory* (1927) lists Skogh as president of the Illinois Library Association. Jeffersons Printing published VL's *Village Magazines*.

²For the significance of Milton, see Ruggles, pp. 421-422. The enclosed poem, "Eve Was for King Charles," is unpublished.

261) "It was the completion of the pattern, but we didn't know it . . ."

603 South Fifth Street
 Springfield, Illinois
 December 27, 1931

Dear Sara,

How shall I thank you for all your kindness, your wire, the flowers, your letters, the beautiful memorial song? They have all meant so much, helped so much; and the poem I am particularly glad of, because it has been shared with so many who loved him, and who heeded such a brave word to let him go free, as he wanted to go.¹

I am so sorry to know about the burns.² What a very serious and distressing and agonizing thing to have happen. I hope you will be better soon. I have thought about you so much, but until now have lived in such a rush of people and circumstances that there was no moment for a letter. I had no idea of what that part of it was like, for I had never

been through it before. But everyone here, and everywhere has been so more than kind and good; and helped so much with all the endless details, which are there, however meaningless they seem, that I can never be sufficiently grateful.

Dear Sara, you have been with us all the way. I am sorry this had to come to you, as well as to us, for, first and last, you have had so much. Because you are brave, I suppose. And now you help me to be brave.

I am glad he had a visit with you in New York this time. He saw you and he saw so many of his oldest and dearest this last time, and came home to an overwhelmingly successful recital here. It all seemed so happy. And it was. It was the completion of the pattern, but we didn't know it. Some day we can say that it was right and beautiful, but now it is too near, and too hard.³

Fortunately I have a terrific amount to do, and to think about. We are moving next week into a two room apartment, which we get for \$25.00 a month, with light and gas and heat and hot water included; renting the house, which for a long while we have been unable to keep up; and I am going on with the various things I have been doing. They are a motley lot, but they will bring us food and a little bit ahead, if all goes well; and the payment of the back debts, which are up to about \$4,000.00. It will not be so hard, for there is a small amount of insurance, taken out just last spring; and the townspeople, through the Abraham Lincoln Association have collected a sum of \$2,000.00, which they call a memorial fund, and which they are saving, before they make other plans, until they are quite sure the babies and I shan't need it. Of course all our valuables, manuscripts and pictures and so on, go into storage; and books. And the piano goes back to the store. But those are the things that don't matter.

The babies are well and had a glorious Christmas. It is a good thing to be only four and five. They know, of course, but they are so wise and dear; not lost and frightened as grown-ups can be. It is foolish, for he was very tired, and never quite belonged in such a world as this; and I know he will rest, and then be happy, and find his full stature and glory, and we must be glad of that. It's just too soon.

All my love to you, and please get well. I think of you every day. There is a wonderful picture of Vachel which was mailed to him from Washington on the day he died, taken by Harris and Ewing. I wish I could give it to you, but I can't give it to anyone. They gave it to him, as they had evidently requested the sitting, a thing that often happened; and the price is rather awful. Some of our friends here have written in and found that they are much less expensive, only about \$5.00, if the order is for a dozen; and if you think you would like one, it could come as part of their dozen. I feel contemptible and niggardly not just to be sending you one; and later on, I know I can do things like that, the things I should like to do. Now I simply don't dare begin. And it is a lovely thing, so young and peaceful and strong, so beautiful, with a light on the forehead—so like your poem. One of my last summer's tutoring pupils who is home from Miss Madeira's for the holidays told me to-day that they have a full length copy of it in their window in Washington, illuminated from the back at night. I'd give a good deal to see it, though it would probably be too much, at that. It was a strange thing to open the package, just a week after he died, not knowing what might be in it, and find him there, more the real Vachel than even I had known him, many times.⁴

Harriet *Monroe was able to come down for Monday and Tuesday, and it was a comfort to have her here. There's a gallant soul. He was one of her fledglings, and she never forgot. Her article in the January POETRY, which she wrote here on the Tuesday after the funeral, and flew back to Chicago with, to be in time, is beautiful and conclusive. Full of the memory of golden days, a memory you have, too; and strong in faith to the end.

And as for Springfield itself, that little town, for a season at least, the censers were swinging over the town, everyone knew it; and Springfield, the symbol, and Springfield, the reality, came close to being one.⁵

Does it help any to say these things? At all events, I have said them. There must be comfort somewhere, but chiefly, I think, in the slipping past of hours and days. I do hope you are better soon.

Love from the three of us,

Elizabeth

Notes

¹ST's poem, "In Memory of Vachel Lindsay," was first published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* (December 12, 1931). Also see Letter 264.

²Drake explains ST's "burns": "On December 6, the day after [VL's] death, a benzoin inhalator that she was using to combat a chest cold exploded in her face, causing minor burns. She hired a nurse to take care of her, and she feared permanent disfigurement, although the accident turned out to be merely noisy and frightening, and not harmful" (pp. 278-279).

³In the society pages of Springfield's *Illinois State Register* (Tuesday, December 1, 1931, p. 12), we read: "**Lindsay Charms Audience with Poetry Recital.**" The unsigned article begins: "A touch of school boy impishness, an accent of sophistication, a deep sincerity, a streak of scintillating wit and irony, a fervent love of beauty and an impassioned imagination, these were found in Vachel Lindsay, Springfield's poet, as he gave his annual recital Monday night at the First Christian church before a large audience which he held rapt from his opening greeting to his final bow." Poems recited include: "Yankee Doodle," "John Brown," "Our Mother Pocahontas," "The Philosopher," "The Virginians Are Coming Again," Nancy Hanks," "Mentor Graham," "Sew the Flags Together," and "Abraham Lincoln Walks at Midnight." This latter poem, according to the reporter, is "magnificent, and the poet's interpretation of it brought out the poignancy, the pathos, the majesty, the bitterness of the lines." VL ended the regular program with "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes" and then closed with an encore, his final public performance: "The Lame Boy and the Fairy."

On the morning of December 5, 1931, the *Register* headlined the death of VL. In the ensuing article, written by V.Y. Dallman, the *Register's* chief editor, we read: "His [VL's] gratification over the affectionate acclaim accorded him by Springfield reached its climax following Monday [November 30] evening's recital." VL's pastor, the Reverend Dr. Clark Walker Cummings, added: "'I feel that at last I have won Springfield!' exclaimed the poet, at the conclusion of the program. 'The people seem to be receiving

me for my own sake!’ . . . Dr. Cummings remarked today [December 5]: ‘I never saw Mr. Lindsay so happy as he was on this occasion. He seemed inspired. He was brilliant with his poetic talent and seemed to feel the spirit of Springfield as he had never felt it before’” (p. 1). One week after this recital, Dr. Cummings preached the sermon at VL’s funeral service, which was performed in the same sanctuary as the November 30 performance.

⁴The Harris and Ewing picture of VL is reproduced on the dust jacket of Edgar Lee Masters’ biography: *Vachel Lindsay: A Poet in America* (New York: Scribner’s, 1935) and may be viewed online at Google Books.

⁵For the “censors,” see Letter 13 (note 1).

262) “The mountainous details are beginning to appear less overwhelming....”

1210 S 7th, Annex A
Springfield, Illinois
January 27, 1932

Dear Sara,

Your letter is so good to have. You mustn’t admire me, though. Anybody else would do just as I am doing: and many would do much better. It’s my best, but that’s really all one can say for it.

I’m so glad to have the clipping. I’m cutting off Romeike’s shortly, and shall be doubly appreciative of such from now on. Edgar Lee Masters sent on the Chesterton article, which I am happy to have. The Saturday Review leader I do not have, but should like to; nor the *Literary Digest article, nor their reprint of your poem, which I was glad to know of. I think Margaret Conklin may be able to let me have them, for I do want them, all.¹

The mountainous details are beginning to appear less overwhelming; there is still much to do, but I think in another month, life will be almost normal from the point of view of hours and duties, and that will be a vast relief.

I’m glad you’re to see *Harriet. She’s such a darling. I quite understood how it was with you about the funeral. There wasn’t one of Vachel’s dearest friends but wanted to be here—but one can’t always do that. And, after all, it’s not a matter of ultimate consequence. I’m so glad you did see him in New York in November—that is something that matters—and so much wiser to hold in memory than the other, though there were beautiful things about that, too. Even that.

The babies are wonderfully well, and Susan is in kindergarten, now, and loves it. I hope you are quite over the burns. My love as always.

Elizabeth

Note

¹Clipping bureaus were the Google search engines of their day, and The Original Henry Romeike Press Clipping Bureau was one of the largest. Latvian-born Romeike (1855-1903) emigrated to New York City and began his Bureau in 1887. For a fee, Romeike's scoured hundreds of newspapers and magazines in the United States and Great Britain, seeking articles pertaining to any person or subject.

ST has obviously called ECL's attention to "Vachel Lindsay Entering Heaven," a memorial essay printed in *The Literary Digest* 111 (December 26, 1931), p. 19. The anonymous author quotes the following from the New York *Herald Tribune*: "Poetry suddenly became exciting and important; the whole nation was conscious of the battles that raged about the 'new' poetry; American poetry swung into a period of triumph that already seems like a distant Golden Age."

G[ilbert] K[eith] Chesterton's essay, "On Vachel Lindsay," first published in Chesterton's *Illustrated London News* column, is collected in *All I Survey* (London: Methuen & Company, 1933). For ST's memorial poem, "In Memory of Vachel Lindsay," see Letter 264. For Margaret Conklin, see Letter 250.

263) "it would be the height of selfishness to wish him back . . ."

1210 S 7th, Annex A
Springfield, Illinois
February 11, 1932

Dear Sara,

I am glad if you care for the etching of the house. It's a sweet old place, and could be made charming to live in. I am so sorry we never had the joy of welcoming you there during our all-too-brief occupancy. Perhaps the good day will yet come. I am able to take better care of it now, than before, by a curious irony. This last month, having made arrangements for the right tenant, I have been able to have plastering (every room but two—the plaster in the nursery was three inches down from the latus[^], and ready to fall—none of it had been touched since 1850) flooring and painting done that was desperately needed all the while we were there: we could only attend to roof, cellar, drains, foundations etc.; and once I get the \$1500.00 or so paid off that we owe the sisters, we shall be able to think what next to do. I am hoping it can be bought and put in beautiful order for a permanent and somehow vital memorial—but that will take about \$42,000.00 to begin with; \$10,000 a year to keep it up—and the right people, impersonal but enthusiastic, to administer it. And I don't know any group here which is ready to undertake it, as yet.¹

Yes, that is the picture, the very one. The other proofs, which I saw through Dr. Cummings, our minister, with the exceptions of one lovely profile, are a bit drawn and haggard. Of course you would feel differently from me about this, or any portrait. The young, eager, undefeated Vachel whom you knew and loved—the boy for whom "life was a rebellion with banners" was scarcely a remote relative of the Vachel of twenty years after.² I always believed in that boy, and tried to find him—but it could not be. He had lost himself. The lonely-lost, weary-hearted, self-tortured man for whom I tried, quite in vain, to build up some kind of livable universe, was beyond himself or any of us,

beyond anything but temporary memories of what he had hoped might be, and such small surface alleviations as could be sought out from time to time. Such a world as this was both too small and too cruel for him. The one comfort in his death is that, tragic as it is, the tragedy now is ours; whereas before, it was his. He has passed beyond that, too, now—and it would be the height of selfishness to wish him back. There is no suffering, I think, worthy the name except that of watching another suffer—and knowing that there is nothing at all to be done about it. I wish I had been better able, stronger and more fortunately circumstanced, to care for him, protect him, find for him, somehow, peace, happiness, rest, and after that, the way forward. But one cannot begin so late; and even with a perfect world at hand, perhaps it would have been the same, in the end. The unraveling of old causes, unhealed wounds burning more with the years—consequences of events before I was born; even, some of them, before he was. So it is that a picture which shows strength, peace, a steady forward look with light, not darkness—is very precious to me—almost like an act of faith—the image, if not the substance, of things hoped for: the evidence of things not seen. Naturally it could not mean the same to you: one wouldn't want it to. I am glad that, knowing half the truth, I had the courage to attempt the impossible. Had I known all of it, I could not have. But it was not altogether without meaning for him; and in the larger pattern, which, again, we cannot see, but only believe in, may take its appointed place.

I'm glad you saw little Harriet. I've not heard from her for ages. As fast as I can, I shall be typing off the posthumous poems for her inspection. She was kind to offer to look them over. It was a great comfort to have her here.³

Susan has started to kindergarten. She says it's fun but they don't teach you anything! Nicky missed her for one whole morning, and now is very happy with Johnnie and Al and a flock of other little imps with whom he gets on admirably, if strenuously, after the manner of little boys. They both have slight colds, but nothing serious. I was able to be home with them all last week, and that helped a lot. About two weeks ago when I got in from the Styx somewhere for about the fourth time in as many days, they looked me up and down, amiably but very philosophically, and Susan said, "Well, mother, you're getting to be just a friend of ours. We never see you any more!" I do hope they'll always regard me as a friend! After all, it's no small destiny—and all one has much right to, any how, past a certain point.⁴

About \$2,500 of the debts are paid off now. There was a small amount of insurance, taken out last spring. Vachel had always loathed the idea—but I felt that we really owed it to the children—and he finally consented to a joint policy. I was teaching at the time, and could help with the first payment or so—and felt it was not too much of a burden on him—and as it will just about level off the debts now, I can't be sorry that I did ask for it. My household budget is down to \$125.00 a month, and we have all we could possibly want. So that's sensible. And last month, working only part time—because of all the things that had to be done and settled, I made \$185.00—so, in such a season as this, even, there should be reasonable hope of getting on. I have about forty lectures—book reviews, poetry—Vachel, too, which I don't approve of my doing, but it's bread and butter, and one can't refuse—certainly his true greatness doesn't need any feeble words I may be able to offer—mediaeval art, travel, biblical literature etc. Naturally I don't know anything about any of it, but what of that? And secretarial work—typing, getting together

stories, etc.—and the organization in Illinois of a national educational sorority—nine chapters completed since November—so thank heaven there IS work to be done. I'm very eager somehow to get a job where I can be at least in the same town with the babies most of the time; and if there is any way to re-open old opportunities, or create new ones, I'm going to take it, as fast as ever I can. I'd like to get the children, especially Nicky, into a more reasonable climate—though this winter has been very good that way.

I've been tired as a dog a good many times lately—but not more so than one would expect; and I have a mixture of iron, alcohol, arsenic, and strychnine to take which is supposed to be good for anaemia, nervous exhaustion, shock, or anything—and it appears to be so. At all events, I take it when I think of it, and it helps.

I do hope you are well. Write when it's not too much bother, please. And my love to you—and every good wish.

Yours,

Elizabeth

[Marginal note: “Robert Nichols writes that the Bodleian has gratefully accepted his letters from Vachel, and “The *Village Magazine”—to be shewn^ in the summer in the room with Milton's hair and Shelley's ms. I am grateful to him for thinking of it. Perhaps Margaret would like to know. E.C.L.”]⁵

Notes

¹The Lindsay home at 603 South 5th Street, Springfield, Illinois, has been restored to its 1890s appearance and is a state historic site. See: www.VachelLindsayHome.org

²Dr. Clark Walker Cummings was pastor of Springfield's First Christian Church, the Lindsay family church (see Letter 261). ECL quotes from the “Dedication and Preface of a **Handy Guide for Beggars*”: “[This book] is also dedicated to the younger sons of the wide earth, to the runaway boys and girls getting further from home every hour, to the prodigals who are still wasting their substance in riotous living, be they gamblers or blasphemers or plain drunks; to those heretics of whatever school to whom life is a rebellion with banners; to those who are willing to accept counsel if it be made counsel” (p. vii).

³Harriet *Monroe published six VL poems in **Poetry Magazine* (July 1932), under the title “Poems He Left Us.” The six may be read in *Poetry of VL*, pp. 781-784. For Monroe's remarks, see *Poetry of VL*, p. 919.

⁴Styx, in Greek mythology, is the river of forgetfulness.

⁵For Robert Nichols, see Letter 186. For “Margaret” Conklin: see Letter 250.

264) “It will be hard to leave Springfield, for I love the place....”

1210 South Seventh Street, Annex A.
Springfield, Illinois.

April 6th, 1932.

Dear Sara,

Indeed you are most welcome to the permission I gave in respect to the publication of Vachel's letters to you. The time is absolutely for you to decide; so far as I am concerned, this may be anytime. I view the placing of his work before the public in an absolutely impersonal way and am glad for any words of his which have characteristic beauty to see the light of day. I am sorry that he destroyed your letters to him. I feel that as a real loss to literature. Perhaps if you edit the volume of his letters, or leave directions for Miss Conklin, the loss can in some measure be made up.¹

I am eager to see your article in the April ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW; and grateful to you, sight unseen, for writing it.²

I am looking forward, with nothing short of joy and a sense of release, to my California adventures. It will be hard to leave Springfield, for I love the place and the people, and I have learned how much they mean to us. But what I need is a steady job in one place to pay off back debts and support the children, and that is one fundamental reason for my going, over and above my joy in return.

Your lovely picture looks down from the wall and is familiar and dear to us all. It was good of you to send it. I hope that you are well and that the spring is coming up Central Park to you. I shall hope to see you in California in the fall.

Yours, with love,

Elizabeth

[Enclosure: "These beautiful letters for your autobiography—I hope! And again thank you for them.

"The enclosed folder indicates my address after June first—and I hope you'll come to see me there!—and one of my jobs—the others being, aside from house and babies, a teaching fellowship in English—a Master's in the classics—articles about the college—speaking for Feakins—and my own writing. So wish me luck!³

"All our loves to you!

E.C.L."]

Notes

¹For Margaret Conklin, see Letter 250.

²ST's "article" is the poem "In Memory of Vachel Lindsay," reprinted in *The Elementary English Review* 9 (May 1932), p. 116. See Letter 261.

³For the Feakins Lecture Bureau, see Letter 250 (note 2). ECL had accepted a teaching position at her alma mater, Mills College, in Oakland, California. It was here, as a college girl in 1922, that she had first met Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (see Ruggles, p. 335). Elizabeth Conner Lindsay died August 7, 1954; her poems were published posthumously, with the title *Angel at the Gate* (Monterey, CA: Peters Gate Press, 1975).

