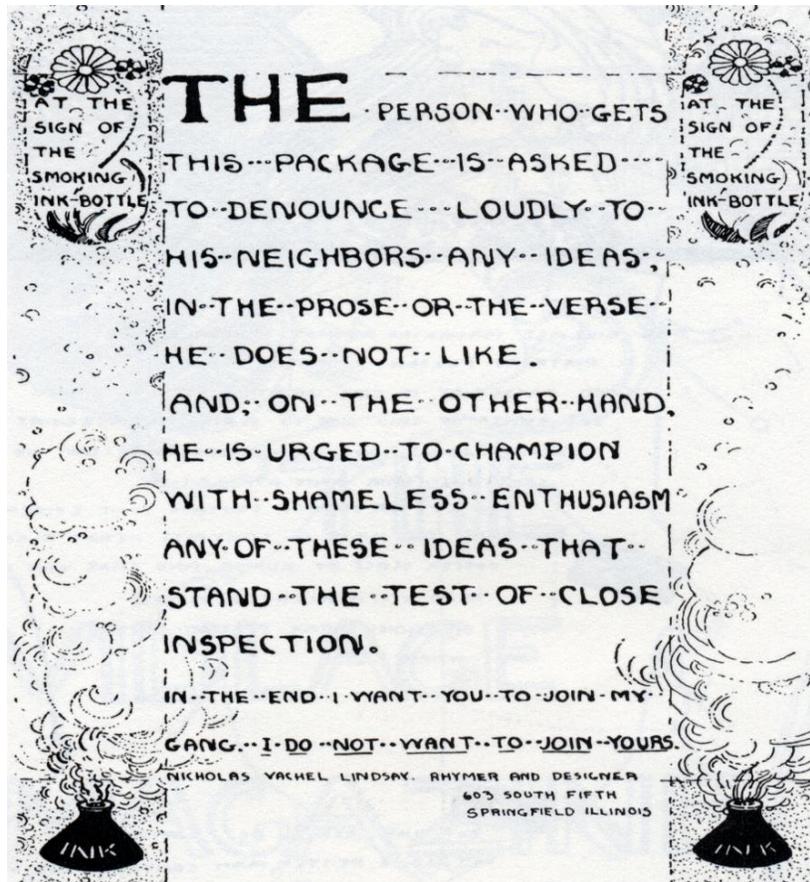


Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Ten



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

by

Dennis Camp
Professor Emeritus
University of Illinois at Springfield
Springfield, Illinois

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



10. CHICAGO: WORKING HARD [1901]

“I am working hard and harder, and keeping serene and sticking to my purposes.”

1

Vachel’s energetic attempts to publish his poetry during the early spring, 1901, led to a barrage of rejection slips. Typically, he was not discouraged. On April 10, William Dean Howells returned “The Battle” (which temporarily had been retitled “Sing Me a Song of Love”), along with a personal response: “I cannot answer your general question, but as to this poem it seems to me the work of a man who could do better work, with more self-restraint and calmer insight than you have used here. The piece is both fantastic and frenetic; it lacks clearness of meaning and repose of manner. I am sorry to answer it, but I could not otherwise serve you. Yours truly, William Dean Howells” (Virginia). The poet-contributor recorded the rejection in his datebook on April 12: “Howells said my work was frantic frenetic and obscure. Went home to eliminate obscurity.” However, he left no indication as to the nature of the “general question” that he had asked Howells to answer.

Three days later, Vachel mailed a full rewrite of his “Lucifer” poem (completed, according to the manuscript, “April 5”) to Aunt Fannie. In an accompanying letter, he explained: “You have done so many things for me, that I am going to do one little small thing for you, and for myself. I will please myself by securing a patient reader. And I will try to please you by writing a short explanation^ of this series. If you ever work yourself up into a terrible enthusiasm over this bunch of jingle, work it off writing to me or spanking the babies. Do not make the mistake of trying to read the verses to your friends or relatives to any immoderate extent. If you are sure they are prepared to sympathise^ of course I do not strictly forbid. But I have a vague feeling they will put me down as unpractical^, etc. mooney^, etc. . . . While some of my friends have copies of parts of this series, you are the first person to receive the series complete” (Blair).

Fannie’s version of “Lucifer” extends to 290 lines, divided into four parts, with the unlikely title: “A Bunch of Lucifer Matches.” The Hiram poem, “The Last Song of Lucifer” (part “IV” in this version), remains essentially unchanged at 166 lines. The new material amounts to three prefaces: “The First Dream of Lucifer,” “Merely an Explanation” (a page of informal verses written to clarify the work for a puzzled Fred Bogardus), and “Silence Borne from Afar.” For Fannie’s enlightenment, her nephew added a prose summary:

Here is the story:

I. The first dream of Lucifer is happening in Heaven, and Lucifer vividly narrates it in the present tense. The “Sun” that he sinned against, is the sun of perfect music—a mere abstraction, and intentionally an obscure symbol. I was more zealous that this first dream should seem dream-like, than that it should be a definite prophecy. It

vaguely fortells[^] that Lucifer shall fall once, but shall fall even farther at last on account of his last song. It does not give the reason for his fall from Heaven. That comes in

II. Merely an Explanation. A hypothesis of his first fall.

After this fall Lucifer lay chained a million years, till he thought to sing again, turned his chains to a lyre and sang his last song. For this song he was cursed by Hell and Heaven, for desecrating the sacred functions of music, and he fell to the abysses far below Hell.

[III.] And one of the small fiends who helped curse him, thought it over, in silence. Hell was cursed with silence, or he would have sung the words of IV. The Last Song of Lucifer. [Note 1]

Vachel's "Explanation" in part II, like the prose introduction in the published poem (*Poetry* 361-362), asserts that Lucifer and Satan were not the same being. Satan, the poet avers, fell from heaven because of militaristic rebellion. Lucifer fell because he led the angel choir, and his fellow singers conspired "To pitch their leader to the fire." They were jealous because Lucifer was "Taking pleasures in his leisures as Angels shouldn't do / And irritating enviers as Geniuses may do." According to the "Explanation," the first fall of Lucifer is recorded in Isaiah 14 and did not occur until after Satan's fall (unpublished manuscript, April 15, 1901, Blair). Two days after "Lucifer" was mailed to Aunt Fannie, the editor of the *Outlook* sent a letter "commending" several submissions, although publication was denied (datebook entry, April 17). Nonetheless, Vachel was inspired to submit more poems, including parts of "Lucifer," to several other magazines. His renewed enthusiasm brought no further commendations, but did bring more rejection slips. [Note 2]

From his parents' perspective, Vachel's art school work seemed to progress nicely. With obvious pride, they began addressing letters to "Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Intermediate Department, Chicago Art Institute." That is, until he protested: "Trust me, 'Art Institute' is ample and sufficient. And I might be guyed about it" [that is, teased by the other students at the reference to the department] (April 14). Meanwhile, during afternoons, he was attending a non-credit, clay-modeling class upon the advice of Miss Vanderpoel; and he found the change beneficial, as he informed his parents: "I like modelling[^] very much and am sure it will help my drawing. I am learning it fast and, draw harder in the morning for the change. Some of the casts I draw from I am modelling now. It is hard to draw in the P.M. and the results do not compare well with morning's work. But one is obliged to stand up to model, and it is exercise for the fingers—and the back as well. I feel more physically tired at night and sleep solider, and get much inspiration from it" (April 26). He was amusingly confused, however, as to the names of his teachers: a Miss Parker and, he reported quite seriously, "Leonardo [Lorado] Taft" (May 25).

Occasionally, Vachel attended a guest lecture, including Hamlin Garland's talk on what, in the near future, would be one of Uncle Boy's favorite subjects: "the artistic-city." Vachel's Laodicean judgment was that the presentation "was not inspiring but fairly good" (April 14). In addition, he made it a point of walking the galleries each day, in order to study the Institute's holdings: "I am beginning[^] to feel the value of the galleries. The first floor is full of classified sculpture, plaster casts of famous works,

various rooms for various periods. I am going to learn all the sculptors represented before I get out of there” (April 14). He found additional value in the Institute’s collection of “16000 photographs, of old and modern masters.” By mid-April, he claimed that he had been through the work of Millet and Tintoretto, adding that his primary point of view was that of the common man: “I always try to take the standpoint of the masses, in studying the standpoints of the work and criticisms of masters and critics” (April 14).

He not only was keeping up with his peers, Vachel insisted, but in sheer energy he surpassed them: “My principal advantages are that I have a better field finally ahead of me and am putting in my spare hours reading, and from that final standpoint. They leave their art the moment they leave their easels, and read superficially^ and intermittently” (April 14). He did confess that, “night before last,” he had called on a girl for the first time since he arrived in Chicago, but he used the occasion to punctuate his industry: “This long denial of the society of the lovely^ ladies is in itself a strong evidence that I am very busy with Art. I had a very pleasant time though, and may not wait three months and a half before I call again. I have no fair friends at the Institute, and do not cultivate^ the boys much. Such an existence is satisfactory to me, but I do not suppose any one else would enjoy it so solidly. If association with people is necessary^ to my mental health, I get enough to last on Sundays at Church, Sunday school and such like things. So don’t trouble yourselves about that” (April 14). (Although he was not visiting “the lovely ladies,” he was exchanging occasional letters with Ruth Wheeler, Mayme Tiffany, Adaline Mugrage, and Mary Humphrey, as well as with his now close, personal friend, Susan Wilcox.) Meanwhile, his mother’s response to the above letter counseled him, he wrote in his datebook, “not to be impractical, also to avoid female Bunko people” (April 19).

Two days after this datebook entry, with obvious satisfaction, Vachel reported that his hard work finally had paid dividends: “I have some more good news, to begin with. I am still Intermediate, but the best five out of fifteen or twenty have been selected to go into a smaller room with a skylight instead of a sidelight. We go in Monday—that is, I am one of the five. We have a new critic, Mr. Frank Phoenix. I have been advanced because I was ‘so much in earnest’ Miss Vanderpoel said. The change is encouraging, for I will work harder for a new teacher under new conditions” (April 21). His goal, he maintained, was to graduate to the antique sketch class by summer.

The day of the above “good news” letter, Sunday, April 21, Vachel said good-by to the 17-year-old boys in his West Side Sunday school class. With Bogardus about to leave, he was forced to seek less expensive lodging. Tuesday, April 23, was graduation day, and Bogardus was honored as one of the top five students in his class. Roommate Lindsay attended the ceremony, which was held in Chicago’s Studebaker Hall. When the celebrating was over, Vachel’s finances had dipped to a mere twenty cents: “Walked home. Tired. Hungry. Twenty cents for three meals—5, 5 and ten,” he wrote in his datebook (April 24). Fortunately, though, a check arrived from “Papa” the very next day. [Note 3]

After several weeks of indecision in regard to living quarters, Vachel chose to rent from a Congregationalist minister and his wife, the DeLongs, taking a room in their home at “6409 Jackson Avenue,” on Chicago’s South side, just a few blocks south of the University of Chicago. Although his room was only two blocks from the Cottage Grove

station on the South Side Elevated, limited funds often dictated that the trip to the Institute be made shanks' mare—a walk of two or more hours. The actual move occurred on Saturday morning, April 27. After paying the eight-dollars rent, Vachel was again nearly penniless. He went without breakfast and walked to the Institute, where he tried to read in the library. By 2:00 in the afternoon, he was unable to concentrate: “Got too hungry to read. Bought ten cents worth of Pork & Beans and felt like a King and spent the rest of the day in the Chicago Library.” He walked home, and went to bed without supper (datebook entry, April 27). After church the next day, his friend Casey Allen took him to dinner: “I ate heartily, in sooth” (datebook entry). When a letter from Papa arrived Monday morning, with a twenty-dollar check, Dr. Lindsay’s son was down to his last nickel. [Note 4]

Although he chose not to share the details of his financial problems with his parents, Vachel did offer a few hints: “I am very well fixed, in a pleasant room and a quiet family, and my time is all my own without the least interruption, which is all my heart could desire. There is nothing in my present scheme of life left to wish for but an income, for all my activities are being put to the best advantage to be easily imagined. I am working all the time I am awake, and changing my work, so that no faculty is strained and I am always fresh. I draw 8 to 12 A.M.^ Lunch and read, 12-1, model in clay 1-5 P.M. and 5-7, read, or work at home, studying up side questions of Art etc. I have really done quite a little thinking on the questions that seem to have been agitating the minds of the critics of the various schools. I have a note-book almost full now—that I study in the Elevated Railroad, or think over while I walk, when there is not something of Art value to study on the road” (May 3). He maintained that the walk to the Institute was beneficial, as he used the time to study Chicago from the perspective of an illustrator. Moreover, he was pleased to be away from the West side, where people “seemed to have had dirty faces, or to have just had their faces washed, and were unduly puffed up about it.” The South side, by way of contrast, had “an unwholesome, gritty odor of fresh laid briks^, that have not yet become reconciled to the duty of sheltering mere men, that have not yet been humbled by the baptism of street dust and soot smoke and cinders, and blackened into the uniform hue of perpetual servitude” (May 3). [Note 5]

In many ways, Vachel continued, Chicago must be studied. As a leading American city, it was the epitome of what he wished to correct in his chosen profession as a Christian cartoonist-illustrator: “Everything in Chicago in general is too young or too old. Either raw or burnt—either rotting in age or blundering in youth. The sorts of people in the Churches have the same contrasts with those in the cars. . . . I am thankful I have lived away from a large City so that all these things appeal to me with the zest of novelty. I am anxious to get as much of the fragrant essence of inspiration from them as I can before the peach bloom of novelty wears off from them. I am going to do my best to let them be fresh and new to me till I have gotten the best from them. Chicago is the market-place of America, and I want to understand it and all its phenomona^ of leading forces, that can be seen from the street corners. The Art Institute is in the very heart of Chicago, geographically, and for me, in every other way. I have explored some of the arteries to the West. Now I go to the South” (May 3). As it turned out, Vachel was not required to change ministers, since Brother John Wells Allen had recently accepted the pastorate of the First Christian Church (Disciples), then located on Chicago’s South side (at 47th Street and “Grand Boulevard,” now S. Martin Luther King Drive). In fact, Vachel had

transferred his membership even before he moved into the DeLong home. Brother Allen's new church was some 13 blocks, Vachel estimated, from his room. Much of the way was through Washington Park (a few blocks from the DeLongs), where Vachel liked to study and walk for leisure.

At the time of his move, Vachel was immersed in a biography of William Morris, probably J.W. Mackail's two-volume *Life of William Morris* (1899). He felt that, in spite of the fact that Morris was a socialist, Morris would, Vachel advised his parents, "bring me around to some large political conclusions He was a socialist, but I am speaking of his work as an artist and decorator, and house furnisher. The laws of the arts he followed are necessarily^ Anti-trust. So as an Artist I may some day be able to furnish the great Bryan party with new arguments. Wholesale production is at war with good art" (May 3). Two weeks later, he elaborated further: "I have finished reading the life of William Morris and he has opened out another new world to me. There is room for one William Morris in every town the size of Springfield, and there is no equivalent for him in the country. He was the great home beautifer^, maker of supremely artistic and uncommercial wall papers, carpets, books, tapestries, tiles, cabinets and general furniture. We need such men to idealize and beautify American homes, and fill them with household^ gods in which they would take a just pride and hand down from generation to generation. Morris said he never entered a rich mans^ house that would not have been made the more artistic and (convenient) by a bonfire of most of the furnishing. He was the apostle of simplicity and beauty of furnishing. If we had enough Morrises we could change America from a nation of hustlers and movers to a nation of homekeepers and homesteads, small and simple yet the centers of just pride and content. Now rich folks buy ugly things and the rest imitate."

Here was a gospel to be preached, Vachel maintained—and as well by cartoon as any other way: "It gives one a rather definite and vivid idea as to what ought to be done, and what must be preached before the people will demand it. There are hundreds of campaigns of education that can be carried on yet, that the people need and that can be cartooned. As an artist learned in these matters I can speak with authority and they will listen more respectfully than they would to cartoons on politics, etc. I always like to evolve some sort of 'practical thought' like this from my reading. It keeps my work centralized and my purpose before me" (letter to "Papa and Mama," May 19). Indeed, in a few years, Vachel's thoughts on Morris would be incorporated into a philosophy he would call "The New Localism," but now we are ahead of the story.

Meanwhile, Vachel continued to create and submit poetry—with little or no success. On May 4, he wrote to Howells but apparently received no further response. On May 7, he recorded in his datebook that he had contacted an authors' agency directed by one W.A. Dresser and that he expected some kind of response within a week. He continued to reassure his parents that his financial situation was sound: "the South Side is profitable, financially" (May 3). When Kate wrote that she was scheduled to address Chicago's Central Church (Disciples) on Thursday, June 6, her son enthusiastically itemized all that they could see and do together. ("On the whole while I have a great many elementary things to learn about Chicago Geography, I feel that I know enough for Sunday or Weekday sight seeing.") He encouraged his father to come as well: "It will make you forty years younger, and do me lots of good" (May 9).

By mid-May, however, the Lindsay son's finances again dwindled, in part because of his inability to resist the Chicago theaters. "Saturday," he confessed to his parents, "I am generally at work in my room all day, and at a cheap theater at night Speaking of the theatre—I was talking to a bunch of the fellows, about in my fix financially, that is, trying to save money, some of them working at night. It seemed that we all got around to the show about once a week, and could not afford it oftener. But it seemed to be the consensus of opinion it was worth a little closer eating, to have the change from the art atmosphere, and the rattle to be artists. I have not attended for two weeks now, but I shall go to the tip top of Power's[^] Saturday—to see Maxine Elliot, the most beautiful woman on the American Stage, and Nat Goodwin the peerless comedian. They are going to play the Merchant of Venice. I have given the play a close reading to get the worth of my time, as well as the money I pinch for, and write for so often after all" (May 9). In contrast, the Lindsay son's datebook entry for May 15 reads: "Ate grape nuts bought yesterday, a satisfactory diet." The next day, when no letter arrived from home, he borrowed fifty cents from the DeLongs in order to eat dinner. Papa's check for fifteen dollars arrived the following day, and Vachel was again solvent. This time he did plan ahead and bought a \$3.00 meal ticket at nearby Hill's Lunchroom (datebook, May 18).

2

On May 14, Vachel doubled the length of "The First Dream of Lucifer," changing the word "Dream" to "Dreams." A few days later, he mailed a copy to his parents: "You may not consider it very cheerful news but I feel serene over doubling the introductions to the last Song of Lucifer. It is now a production of four hundred lines minus eight, and stronger than in its shorter form. It is in three sections and the whole is entitled 'A Bunch of Lucifer Matches' or 'A King of Infinite Space.' It begins with the 'First Dreams of Lucifer' where his fate is foreshadowed while he dreams innocently beneath the golden trees of Heaven. The second is 'Silence Borne from Afar' being the story of a worn demon warrior who heard the last song—and the third is the Demon's description of the Last Song—just as you have known" (May 19). Indeed, the datebook entry for May 18 confirms that "Lucifer" has reached 392 lines. Almost apologetically, the author tried to underplay the amount of energy that went into his poetry: "I find it is an easy matter to write up new poems on an old theme. The imagination has already blocked out the elementary masses, and the new work is merely a readjustment of them on a new pattern, and a more careful ornamentation by the fancy, left the freer."

Obviously feeling some guilt, the Lindsay son went so far as to apologize for the poetry itself, using a metaphor from his afternoon class: "My work is all very crude yet, according to my own standards. The individual lines and ideas I consider respectable enough, but when it comes to rounding up the grand whole, I merely get the clay patted together and do not put much mature artistic conception in the general form. For instance, in this series ["Lucifer"] I have managed to tell the story, but have had no brain force to spare to make the personality of Lucifer much more than an abstraction. I did not tell his doings except for their own sake. He is merely the manipulator of psychological[^] fireworks, the man behind the skyrockets" (May 19).

Kate Lindsay was not impressed with her son's poem and even less impressed with his apologetic explanation. On May 23, her son recorded in his datebook that he had received: "A Letter from Mama. Roasts my poetry and theorizing. Says I must decide on some definite line. I think I have." Kate's letter is extant, and it must have reminded her son of several others he had received, especially when he was at Hiram:

So seldom have I any rest from responsibility and the daily struggle to keep my mind and life in even a little way connected with the world outside of our lot together with the effort to be a faithful wife and mother is very, very wearing. It's no wonder that so many women neglect entirely either the one line of duty or the other.

As to the "Dreams of Lucifer," you no doubt feel panicked^ sometimes at the seeming want of interest that your father and I take in your poetry. It is for this reason.—not a matter of opinion, but of fact. You must concentrate your mind on some one line of work soon that will be a means of support. It is impossible through your poetry. [Vachel wrote "of course" in the margin here.] Your father is broken down, prematurely, deeply in debt, weighed with melancholy, much of the time by the burdens he must bear to get money enough to keep the family and pay your expenses and Olive's. We think we can see a prospect of her being able to support herself after heavy expenses in Boston one more year.

She reported that she had asked Olive to consider the money as a loan: "I see no other way to save your father from wearing out entirely." Then she further admonished her poet-son, this time with one of her own extended metaphors:

You will be twenty-two years old this fall. You must not, possessing, so to speak, a little stream of water, and that only, turn it out to spread over a section of land which you have not the facilities for cultivating but dam it up into so narrow a channel with so steep a fall that you can make it turn a wheel: then adjust the wheel to a mill to correspond, not too large, and grind out something that people are hungry for and will come after, if it's only corn meal. This is a serious matter, and you must give it careful consideration and act upon it. (May 22, 1901, Virginia)

Kate's son's lengthy response was written on Saturday, May 25. He began with circumspection, including more than four pages of detail on his hard work at the Institute: "This has been an unusually busy week. Every day has been very full and I have worked hard and with progress drawing from the antique, modeling and sketching. I think I will make the Antique class by the last of this term, that is, at my next examination. I generally get to school an hour or so early, 7:30 to 8:30. I have been drawing from a cast of M. Angelo's Julian De Medici, merely a mask. I have started now another paper on the same position. It is hard and very interesting. I have modeled the same head, and in general in the modeling room I have been doing in clay the stuff I have drawn and shall draw in charcoal—and it is a great help." In the afternoon, he was laboring over a clay model of "a big bust of Cicero," although the next Monday (May 27) he expected to begin modeling from life for the first time: "This is the usual promotion after the student has run the gauntlet of so many casts. So I am making respectable progress in modeling." He attended sketching class from 4:00 to 5:00, and the clay-modeling served as a stimulating contrast. He hoped, therefore, in his own words, "to make considerable progress immediately in sketching, a thing I did not hope to do very markedly for some months." Lest he seem too optimistic, though, he cautioned: "Do not be disappointed if I

do not make the Antique class immediately. I am progressing, and will do it just as much almost in one class as another, but they say there is much luck in the monthly examinations. Still I am going to try to have the right sort of a drawing, when the second week of June comes to an end.”

Then Vachel turned his attention to his mother’s concerns: “Mama seemed to be a little too anxious in her last letter. She says I much ‘choose out some one line of illustration’—as though I had not. As to illustration I have chosen it and stuck to the choice for the past two years or so. As to some one line of illustration I am focusing as fast as possible on the business and the only way is to be a good draughtsman such as they make here. As to my special ‘line’—it is my business to be able to draw anything the newspaper or magazine may require, which^ I expect to be in three years. A draughtsman is a draughtsman, and by the time I am a draughtsman I will know what my ‘one line’ is. I must get to that point as fast as I can first.” He then defended his reading of William Morris, whose life and ideas, he explained, would help any established newspaper cartoonist. Of course, he knew that he was not such a person. He was keeping his reading in proper perspective: “But any such ideas are merely the possibilities of a man with a fixed matured standing as an illustrator whose fortune is made. I have no hope or desire the first ten or twenty years of my professional life to do anything except what I am told by my newspaper or magazine. That is the only function of an illustrator, until he is forty or fifty years old with standing enough to make money by doing the thousand things possible then.”

As to Mama’s views on poetry, he wrote that he was in full accord: “Mama says it is ‘impossible for me to live by poetry.’ I agree most heartily. All I said about my poetry was that I did not yearn to have anybody interested in it. It is my idlest dissipation, and I do not indulge more than once in six weeks or so, when I am too tired for anything serious. I may enjoy it occasionally, but I expect to make my bread and also my butter by being an illustrator, nothing but an illustrator and forever an illustrator. I have put a date in seven note books^—June 15, 1903. That is the date I ought to finish at the Institute if I hustle. I am not going to go to school after that date, graduated or not. I am going to get out and dust. If I cannot make my living drawing alone, I will patch it out with something else to start. But on that fifteenth of June I am going to become self-supporting, as sure as I have arms and legs. And I am going to keep on learning to draw all my leisure hours for the next fifty years, because it is my business and I must keep advancing therein^.” Since others had done it and were doing it, he maintained, he would too: “So do not let your misgivings get the better of you, especially if they are roused by minor allusions to Morris, Poetry etc. But do not misunderstand me, and lets^ drop the debate. Mama’s last letter did me a tremendous amount of good, even if it was too hopeless.” Finally, the dutiful Lindsay son closed with reference to his eager anticipation of Mama’s arrival in Chicago: “I have a great deal to talk about” (May 25).

What the Lindsay son was not ready to talk about—or write about in his letters to his parents—was that he had received predictable encouragement from Dresser at the authors’ agency (datebook, May 20). On May 23, two days before the above letter was sent home, Vachel mailed Dresser a copy of the new “Lucifer”—along with \$2.25 of Papa’s money to pay for a professional, critical evaluation. (Dresser did not respond until July 15, when Vachel noted in his datebook that he had received “Good criticism” of

“Lucifer.” The “Good criticism,” however, must not have been encouraging, as Vachel essentially stopped writing poetry during the rest of the summer and fall, 1901.) He was also not ready to talk about his problems as a “draughtsman,” although he entered in his datebook: “From henceforth I shall sketch only heads, and make more of the class. I am confused by full figure” (May 23).

On June 3, 1901, Kate Lindsay arrived in Chicago. What was talked about, of course, is not known. On June 5, however, the day before his mother spoke at the Central Church, Vachel wrote in his datebook that he had drawn a full figure for the first time. He also noted (on June 3) that he and Mama planned to attend a performance of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Whether or not Dr. Lindsay was ever told is also unknown. Perhaps he was: his wife clearly had a mind of her own. So did their son—and he was mature enough, on occasion, *not* to talk about some things.

3

After her speech on June 6, Kate Lindsay boarded a train for Rushville, Indiana, her girlhood home. The following day her son left for Springfield and a brief, subdued vacation. When his sister Olive sent a picture of Japanese student, Yao Ho Torada, Vachel admitted to his friend Paul Wakefield that he was still “smitten” but generally in control of his emotions: “My appetites and desires are well corked and on ice. But my cruel fancy will wander away with my heart you know, occasionally.” He also suggested that his poem “The Idol and the Ghosts” (*Poetry* 791-792) was autobiographical: “they are the ghosts of the hopes of one heart” (July 1, 1901, Ward). (In April 1902, Vachel explained to Mary Humphrey that the poem was written “in a season I thought I was jilted. It was all a mistake” [Lindsay Home]. Although he did not identify the girl involved, she was likely Adaline Murgage.)

Vachel did not return to Chicago until Monday, July 8, the day before summer session began. His student ticket for the summer, 1901, is extant (Virginia). It was punched 48 times between July 9 and September 21, representing 48 days in attendance. Although Chicago sweltered in record heat during much of July, Vachel assured his parents that the Art Institute basement was comfortable and his room at the DeLongs was “the coolest place in any building” (July 21). He was sketching from casts in the morning and attending the “nude life” class in the afternoon: “In the regular course I would have been obliged to wait for this last till about next Spring. It is much more interesting than cast work and requires less sand to keep at it. I can work in the gallery too, if I please. There is also a morning portrait class which I shall enter as soon as I have made a good cast drawing or so” (July 14). And since it was the beginning of a new term, Vachel’s optimism was at full blush: “One great beauty of this summer work is that grading is thrown aside and all classes are open to the lowest or rawest student. So one can keep his work more varied and interesting. I will probably be ranked higher for my summer work than for any other three months I have done. I will select my best work to enter on, in September and will receive full rank for it. I am due in the gallery, anyhow, and I hope to be able to do such good gallery work it will be all behind me by September” (July 21). By late July he was drawing classical figures in the gallery and had dropped the cast drawing for “head life,” that is, for the portrait course. A datebook entry from this time

reads: "A busy day In P.M. after the criticisms I made a good sketch, the best of my life" (July 19).

Vachel had returned to Chicago with a new watch on his wrist and with new determination to find employment. His plan, he advised his parents, was to work days during the fall term and take night classes at the Institute: "The days will not then [September] be too hot to work in and I can always draw, day or night. I want to try night-school for at least one term soon. Many fellows are making a good standing who spend no longer working in a day class than the hours of an evening class. I must try it for a term. It will at least keep my hand in and I can get a better business outlook meanwhile." In line with his aspirations, he had decided to try for a position as a newspaper reporter: "I want to get to that place in the newspaper world where I can observe all lines of my business. A reporter is in the midst of things and can hunt them all up from the very inside" (July 21). A few days earlier, down to his last two dollars, he had stayed home from the Institute and had written, he noted in his datebook, "to all the Chicago newspapers (seven) for jobs" (July 16).

On Friday evening, July 19, Vachel paid "a long-promised visit" to his former roommate, who was now an intern at the Cook County Hospital. "[Bogardus] eats sleeps and works altogether in the Hospital," Vachel advised his parents; "he leaves for an hour by securing a substitute only, from among the rest. . . . His work seems to be very interesting, very crowded and a great opportunity. His ambitions for surgery seem to be crystallized and I have no doubt he has made a place and standing for himself in the Hospital. I saw one major operation. A small boy was deprived of one leg and three toes by a street-car. Fred assisted and I watched the patching up with a great deal of interest, and much gratitude that I am allowed to refrain from doctoring" (July 21). In a second letter, this one written to Olive on the same day, Vachel insisted that his art work was "Very respectable Not worthy yet of adjectives, but I insist, quite respectable. . . . I am working hard and harder, and keeping serene and sticking to my purposes." He was also reading Emerson "a little" and had some advice for his sister: "You ought to read him. You are just at the right place. [Olive was a student at the New England Conservatory]. If you yearn for medicine he is what you want. I have his essays all here. You might try the poems. You need to be uplifted a bit. Take him slowly but steadily this summer and make up your mind what little you read you will understand" (July 21).

For his own uplift, Uncle Boy was again teaching an adolescent Sunday School class, this time at Brother Allen's First Christian church. (On Sunday, July 21, he noted in his datebook that he had taught that morning and added: "Hot as Hell was the weather.") On several occasions, he met with Susan Wilcox, as she was visiting other Chicago acquaintances. He also welcomed Hiram friend John Kenyon, who had arrived in the city to begin graduate study in English at the University of Chicago. And he continued to exchange letters with Ruth Wheeler, but the relationship remained very casual. "I may write to Ruth," he informed Olive: "Her letter was July 8." Then he thought better: "I guess it can wait two or three weeks yet." Instead, he decided to write to Aunt Fannie (July 21). [Note 6]

Even in the midst of Chicago's sweltering heat wave this July, Vachel attended several stage plays, and especially enjoyed a performance of R.D. Blackmore's *Lorna Doone*. He assured his parents, though, that he was eating well: "Don't fret too much

about my meals. I would like to have some of the clean fried chicken, but I think little about eating. I get along very pleasantly with the lunch counters and find plenty of good stuff" (July 21). His datebook entries, as we may suspect, tell a different story: "An idle day. Felt bummy from bad eating—(soda and chocolates)" (July 26): this in spite of the fact that, on July 22, he had received a \$25 check from Papa.

By Wednesday, July 31, Chicago's temperatures had moderated, and Vachel advised his parents that he was "busy hunting work . . . I think I will have something soon." Meanwhile, that very afternoon the Institute galleries boasted a distinguished visitor, the Vice-President of the United States (soon, tragically, to be President), Theodore Roosevelt. "This noon, at the Institute," Vachel reported, "somebody said a large alone man down the gallery was Roosevelt":

There were many incredulous. Those who doubt are lost you know so I walked up to the man—and since he looked like his picture I said "Isn't this the Vice President?" He said "I am" etc. and we shook hands with mutual pleasure. Then we had a flow of mutual soulful smiles for several seconds and I expressed my pleasure in meeting the Gentleman. Then he wanted to know my line. I told him I was just a student learning to draw. I said "You don't want anybody to walk around here with you or anything like that—do you?" I was keeping step with him. We walked abreast in sooth. But the V.P. answered with his blandest tone of toot that he preferred to enjoy the works in solitude, etc. Then I tried to change the subject and asked how the Art Institute compared with similar museums. But the V.P. said he preferred to admire all and compare none. I cannot give his exact words. Then I shook him kindly by the hand and said "I am pleased to have met you Governor" and left him to the smiles of the plaster nymphs. He strode our honored galleries for an hour alone, and I am the only one who dared to beard the lion so far as I know. I am glad I met him, I think I did him good. (July 31)

A little more than a month later, on September 6, Vachel wrote in his datebook: "McKinley shot. Read electric Bullitines^ till 12. [A.] M." Anarchist Leon Czolgosz, with a handgun concealed in a scarf, shot McKinley while the President was shaking hands with crowds outside the Temple of Music at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. Eight days later, on September 14, McKinley died; and Roosevelt, at age 42, became the youngest man to date to be President of the United States. (It was McKinley, of course, who had defeated Vachel's beloved William Jennings Bryan—in both the 1896 and the 1900 elections.)

Early August, 1901, was not a good time in Vachel's life. At the Institute, his critic, one "Wilson," in the student's own words, "said my drawing was thin and I had not studied edges nor relation." The chastised student, though, had finished his first portrait: "It was fair for the first" (datebook, August 2). He had applied for work at every newspaper office in Chicago (even at one advertising agency), with no success. On August 8, he related to his parents: "The weather is very cool now. I am plugging along at the Institute and am making some progress. There is no end to this business of learning to draw, and I am going to arm myself to go at it and get it all, by making my way. As soon as this term is past my sole consideration is going to be an income. The Chicago

papers claim to be overcrowded with help, but I am going to make a place for myself. It will take me ten years to learn how to draw as well as I know how to write now. Therefore my first try is for the newspapers. I want to thank you for my Art, and I do not want to come home at the end of this term. I want to have all my days to scour the city for a job. . . . But these two things are settled with me,” he continued: “first that I shall pay my way, and secondly I shall live and die an artist.” After some quiet reflection, the dependent but bemused Lindsay son added: “The paying is the most important now—there is plenty of time left to live and die in.”

The *Chicago American* did ask for free-lance articles on the Art Institute, and Vachel obliged. Nothing, however, seems to have appeared in print. He interviewed, “personally,” he claimed, “every important Managing Editor.” He also reported that he had “written for any work—day or night—to every English paper here, but they all refuse.” Of course, he was not ready to despair: “My resources are by no means exhausted, and I am restless for September 21 [the end of term], when I will cease conspiring and start out to find any sort of work. It takes two weeks or a month to find work in Chicago, but I am going to get something” (August 8). He remained convinced that his search for a newspaper job was the right idea: “I read yesterday that many successful cartoonists found it necessary[^] to have an ordinary journalistic experience first, so my idea of being a newspaper reporter first is neither irrelevant nor lacking precedent. I cannot lose sight of my main purpose, but will approach it better this way” (August 9). In spite of extensive efforts, however, the employment story during August and early September amounted to: “Don’t call us,” etc.

In the meantime, Vachel found renewed inspiration in a summer religious program called “Divinity House.” Held on the nearby campus of the University of Chicago, the program featured a few of the more prominent figures in the Christian (Disciples) church, including University of Chicago professor, Herbert Lockwood Willett (1864-1944), and Reverend Charles Clayton Morrison (1874-1966), pastor of Chicago’s Monroe Street Church (Disciples). Morrison already had established a daring “open membership” policy at Monroe Street, arguing that baptism through immersion was a stumbling block in the Disciples’ ecumenical movement. (Morrison’s views were later expressed in his book, *The Meaning of Baptism*, 1914, in which he maintains that “baptism does not consist in immersion, though that was doubtless the original form, and is not necessarily invalid without it” [see McElroy 183].) Willett defended Morrison’s views in *Our Plea for Union and the Present Crisis* (1901), and the book resulted in a major controversy that is reflected on the pages of the *Christian Century* (where Willett also served as editor) well into the following summer (1902). Many conservative members of the faith viewed the so-called Chicago Disciples as heretics, and the troubled *Century* lost many badly needed subscribers.

For his part, Vachel admired the Chicago Disciples, and on several occasions he urged his reluctant parents to subscribe to the *Century*: “You ought to take the Christian Century, and think over what it has to say. It will give you ideas for Missionary Union. You can have it for a quarter till the first of next January. I think I will subscribe as soon as my next cheque comes. If the Century is in existence when I have learned to draw I shall leave my mark upon it, I hope” (August 9). He was determined to number Herbert Willett among his friends; and apparently, as Vachel himself told the story in later years,

he sent a soulful letter, telling Willett about his plans to save the human race through the art of Christian cartooning. On May 18, 1904, Vachel described this earlier effort in another soulful letter, this one to his friend, Edward Scribner Ames, Willett's colleague at the University of Chicago and pastor of Chicago's Hyde Park Church (Disciples): "When I came to Chicago I sat down to write such a letter to Dr. Willett as I now write to you, stating my cause as I might best. I am afraid he marked me down for a colossal egotist. I believed implicitly those YMCA and College axioms—that one determined and consecrated man could butt into the world and paint it all white in a generation. I cheerfully undertook the task, with Art for my principal weapon" (Chénétier 3). Years later, even more after the fact, Vachel elaborated on his efforts in a confessional letter to Harriet Moody (December 2, 1914): "I remember how in Chicago . . . I wrote a long and ardent letter to Herbert L. Willett—from my very soul—asking for his friendship and help—and was treated in a grand and scholarly manner for my pains. I wanted to know someone no matter who—whose brains and position I could respect with whom I could thrash out the questions that were shaking me to pieces. As it was, I trod the winepress alone" (Chénétier 111).

Surviving documents from 1901, however, yield little evidence that Vachel was being shaken to pieces or that Willett considered him a "colossal egotist." In fact, Vachel advised his parents as early as July 21, 1901, that he had met Willett "several times of late, and he will call at the Institute some time^ this week . . . I need such a friend even though I may see little of him. His attainment in his own line can make me anxious for a parallell^ sucess^ in my own." Within a few months, as we shall see, Vachel would be working with Willett in the offices of the *Christian Century* and recommending that his skeptical (that is, conservative) parents read *Our Plea for Union*. With Willett and others of the Chicago Disciples, he attended several functions at the Hyde Park church (at 57th Street and Lexington Avenue, next to the University of Chicago campus). Pastor Ames was to become a lifelong friend, but only after Vachel first sought the good will of Ames's controversial parishioner, Herbert Lockwood Willett.

As for "Divinity House," Vachel announced that he "wished Mama could have been there . . . it would have roused her to the significance and importance of her own union work. It makes me want to do something to help her work in Springfield and help her to spread it as a national Institution. She must put most of her religious^ thought and energy in that direction if she desires to do something that will count in the next generation. She is capable of much more concentration and success in that line of Missionary Union than she has ever saved her strength to do" (August 8). In little more than a decade, although he could not have suspected it in 1901, Vachel himself would return to Springfield with an avowed missionary purpose. That is, he would return preaching his "Gospel of Beauty" (c. 1912), a gospel that featured the belief that all art students "*should come back to their own hearth and neighborhood and gather a little circle of their own sort of workers about them and strive to make the neighborhood and home more beautiful and democratic and holy with their special art*" (Prose 158). In fact, Uncle Boy's distinctive missionary zeal ultimately led directly to his most successful creative work and, finally, to fame (but not, alas, to fortune).

In August 1901, the art student's religious sense of purpose was directed primarily toward his planned career as a Christian cartoonist, although he was also intent

on assisting Pastor Allen in establishing his new church. The goal, Vachel proclaimed to his parents (who were members of Springfield's First Christian Church), was to make Allen's church "First in fact as in name. Thus I give you my religious[^] outlook at present" (August 9). There was no expressed interest in making any personal attempt to save Springfield. Indeed, he proclaimed: "I always feel surrounded by definite duties peculiar to the place, in my room or at school or the Church or the street, in Chicago. Everything I see or experience I try to bend to my main purpose." He added that he attended prayer meetings at Hyde Park and at "Divinity House": "This is the set of people it will profit me most to know in Chicago, in the long run of things." Pastor Allen's church, however, commanded his priorities: "I feel it my duty to be identified with Allen's Church though, as a Church-member—because there are the elements of the average[^] Disciple Church, and in Hyde Park everything is modified by the University and conditions are altogether exceptional. Brother Allen's church needs to have the Endeavor Society developed—and in general needs a new awakening or it will go down" (August 9). It was entirely characteristic of Vachel that his avuncular side led him to expend his energies in helping a struggling young church, in spite of what he could gain personally through association with the prestigious members at Hyde Park.

No matter what his intentions, as the month wore on, Vachel's money woes grew worse. On August 9, he dined on Uneeda biscuits and wrote in his datebook: "At home thought out several cartoons and re-wrote the Hills of Rome [a new poem]. Spent my last five cents." Three days later, a stark datebook entry reads: "First Paste Breakfast" (August 12). That same afternoon, a \$20 check arrived from Papa. Most importantly, the physical and mental suffering led Vachel to rethink his relationship with his parents; and a new tenderness is evident in his letters. On August 8, for example, he thanked them for his opportunity: "I have had the start in the Art Institute I needed, that is I understand in an Elementary way what the Art field is, and what it means to learn to draw. I now feel able to push the thing for myself as fast as it needs. . . . But if I had not had a little art-training planted in my system before I started out to make my way, I might never have had the strength of will to go back and finish. Now I will have an ultimate[^] goal, no matter where or what is my work—and I will practice all the economic virtues, because I remember the art school and desire to send myself back."

Ten days later, Vachel sent his "Dear Papa" a remarkable, 16-page letter, further expressing his gratitude and love: "The cheque of twenty dollars came last Monday morning [August 12, the morning of the paste breakfast]. I was very glad to get it. I thank you very much. Children are not naturally grateful I do believe, even when they feel it is their duty to be. Their parents are like the elements, and the sun—taken so much for granted that they are not realized. . . . But I have begun to truly realize in the last year or so how much I owe to you, in every way, and I have felt it more especially here in Chicago, where I might be facing the city alone, like many of the fellows here, and while I hope to make myself financially independent as soon after school as I can, I will realize more every day what it meant for me to have you start me out here."

His gratitude, though, went far beyond mere financial support: "There are many other ways in which I will never be independent and in which I am more of late realizing my enormous debt, in all my fundamental tastes and powers. This comes upon me more when I see that a man's essential success depends upon the strong fundamental impulses

within him, rather than any arbitrary set of circumstances or set of ideas. The forces that I have discovered to be constant in me, only by long-continued experiment and observation, are the ones I center my hopes and plans upon and give the most time to exercising. This is vague—but it means a great deal of painstaking, past and future; and in that process I keep discovering that any hope of mine is built upon the fact that several valuable constant impulses in me I owe entirely to you, and I would be a total failure in my peculiar hopes if I was without any of these. I am often accused for many superficial reasons, of being preeminently a child of my mother—and while I owe her an infinite debt, she is half of me—the things I get from her are a set of qualities rather than the center of my individuality. Of course this is impossible taken positively—I speak in a relative way. All honor to her.”

Dr. Lindsay’s son then mentioned his “profound passion for the dissection of people,” especially himself, and he declared that such dissection was “an irresistible[^] impulse tonight.” By way of comparison, he felt that he could surpass the achievements of his maternal uncles—John [Paul], [Edward] Austen, and [Lewis] Anderson Frazee—his mother’s brothers. And he credited his superior potential “to the Lindsay in me. I think I have better prospects, fundamentally, owing to the right royal and rare qualities which I owe wholly to the Lindsay within me, and which I have learned to guard of late with jealous care. I speak without vanity. I will tell you what those things are later, but I conclude this climax by saying that I am speaking only of prospects—I may not do as well as any of my Uncles, from any point of view. It will take all the wisdom and ingenuity[^] I have to put myself together into a successful mosaic—but I am sure it can be done. It will take not so much power as persistence, not so much haste as a jealous using of the best within me for a long time—till I have accumulated treasures[^] worth while. What I mean by success is first— self-support—secondly—a definite work in the world which no man has ever done before, that will use all my personality and force, and help a great cause.”

Papa’s grateful son then itemized what he considered to be his Lindsay qualities: “Now the things that I owe to you I can depend on—are first—steadiness and persistence of general aim—however it may work itself out—my mother has the same—but mine is the Lindsay kind, for the most part. Secondly, a thing that is kin to it—a loyalty to my past work—and a desire to maintain not only a loyal consistency to ones[^] past—but to accumulate old thoughts and purposes along the main purpose—till they become strong enough to use. I have found this will stand by me in my tiredest hours—in my thought life. I have a passion for being loyal to an old thought—though I may never think it again. This enables me to build up my note-books with an eye to the past—and also to the future—knowing I can depend upon myself to be loyal in the future. I try to think the things that will be no discredit to me, and will be of use in my future brain. And it is remarkable how consistent the elements of the newst[^] and most novel idea are with my oldest and most forgotten memorandum. From all this I will be enabled to put up a final appearance of a larger thought-life than is truly mine, by being loyal to the old as well as the new.”

The thankful son admitted that “all this is vague” and claimed he would try to “be more definite”: “When I alluded to what I consider the rarer Lindsay qualities—I meant none of these—but had in mind things of more commercial value—things rarer in the

intellectual and artistic world—that will help me as a journalist and make it possible to be an artist—clear to the top. I get from my mother the impulse to draw and the passion for creation that will enable me to start in the illustrating world, and make it possible for me to earn my bread, but if I ever win a high place—it will not be from this—for it is not with me in as strong elementary force as it was in her, but I here become hopeful of rising higher because of a keen sense of romance within me, which I am surprised to discover is very rare, and which is the best commercial asset of a popular artist—from Gibson up. I find that Rossetti, in a few illustrations of Tennyson triumphed because of this quality, and that the world is before me, because there is in the United States no Romantic School of Illustrators—the Shallow Gibson is the solitary conqueror.”

Vachel the conqueror would do much better, thanks to yet another Lindsay quality inherited from Papa: “So any dim hope of high triumph I may have I owe to this—and to the next thing—a fundamental passion for the dramatic aspects of life—genuine—not insincere or shallow—this also is rare as thunder at Christmas, at least in the illustrating world, and when it is present it means leadership and a ‘school’—a new style of workers. These things, since I have become certain of their rarity and value—I have been deeply grateful for. I have studied out the secrets of the success^ of the biggest illustrators—and they started out with no better assets than these—generally only one or less.”

Since arriving in Chicago, Vachel judged that his “outlook” had taken on “new colors” and had changed or broadened “in atmosphere.” However, he assured his father, “the duties ahead are still the same, and my path will not bend at all, if I am to judge what will be by what has been”:

I have the making of a good fanatic—in the best sense of the term—and this also I owe to you. As I go farther in my work I will become one—wholly on fire for my purpose which all these new beautiful discoveries will keep strengthening. I am merely in earnest now—not fired with any of the fury of conquest that I am sure will take hold of me after I have gathered myself together in a year or more of labor and of building up an atmosphere for myself in this Disciple center. As I see the conditions—in a year or so I will feel myself and my mission most seriously, for the Disciples keep coming and going here—and the one theme of the Divinity House Lectures and the Hyde Park prayer meetings is “What new good thing can be done for the cause?” Of course none of them will know what I hope to do, except my confidential general, Willett, but they will enable me to carry the Disciple Atmosphere into the Art Atmosphere with me—and make an inspiration distinctly worth while.

Vachel interrupted his thought to state matter-of-factly that he was “obliged to break my vow to myself (not to any other deity) to buy no trousers^ till I earn them.” He also claimed: “I am making a decided progress in sketching—I am the prize pupil at ‘large’ work.” Before closing his thank-you letter, however, he returned one more time to his primary theme: he was more a Lindsay than a Frazee: “There is much other Lindsay within me that will make me more successful as an artist than any other thing; a breadth of feeling that deeply gives body to the less profound Austen passion for critical discrimination; a sense of the consummate and varied beauty and worth of woman—which seems strangely lacking in Mama’s rather ungallant though fundamentally refined brothers—something absolutely indispensable to the successful artist and illustrator; and

many things else—which I could state with modesty, since they are qualities in art, rather than virtues in essence.” Graciously, then, he added: “But I will abstain.” Vachel did not develop this thought, but no biographer can emphasize enough the value that Vachel Lindsay recognized in women: from his many “inspiration girls,” to his high school teacher Susan Wilcox; to his future romantic interests, including his wife; and to his paragon among all women, Esther Catharine Frazee Lindsay.

“There are many ideals of success in the world,” Vachel continued to his beloved Papa: “I would prefer those of Emerson to those of Napoleon . . . that is I am capable of only one ambition that is far off, and selfish, and still strong enough to hold me when I am not working for the loftier purposes of my better hours. I would like to be a master at the thing I do—not necessarily[^] to have fawning disciples or reverent imitators, but to feel that I am doing a work that when it is as big as I can make it—young men of the coming generation will see that it is something absolutely new—worthy to live, and they will carry it forward and bring it to its perfection, when I have gone. Yours with love, Vachel” (August 18).

About this time, while he was still in the throes of his self-dissecting mood, Vachel turned to the back pages of his 1901 datebook (the section entitled “Memoranda”) and wrote an analysis of the letters that he had sent home from Hiram. He listed “the mistakes in them,” concluding that his judgment was awkward (“Unhuman[^], unctuous, complacent egotism. Rosy optimism, bridging possible suspicions or misgivings. No sobriety”); that he was overly sensitive and defensive (“A readiness to dodge criticism fundamentally sound”); that he made rash promises (“I am a chronic starter, full of bland unbusiness likeness and glib prophecy, and worst of all, I am prodigal of wild schemes in a crisis of failure”); and that he told “hysterical lies” (“I am always prone to hasty devices, unscrupulous evasions, with a tendency to fry cold facts and readily condemn what I inwardly endorse”). Sherwood Anderson suggests that “There is a time in the life of every boy when he for the first time takes the backward view of life. Perhaps,” Anderson suggests, “that is the moment when he crosses the line into manhood” (“Sophistication,” *Winesburg, Ohio*). If there was such a time in Vachel’s life, and I believe there was, it was mid-August 1901. His vision turned backward: to Papa, to his Lindsay ancestors, to letters written when he was a college boy. He was not thinking childish thoughts like: “what am I going to be when I grow up?” He knew what he was going to be: he had become a grownup. [Note 7]

5

Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay, meanwhile, feared that their boy was again wavering in his life goals, that he was losing interest in art. Both wanted him to continue as a full-time student. On August 31, their son wrote reassurance: “My work is not getting irksome to me. On the contrary I would like very much to go to day-school this fall straight on, but I do not think it would be right. If I could have my days in which to hunt work, I think my conscience would allow me to go to night-school, especially if I found the work. I do not want to break up the ‘continuous application’ if I can help it. Papa’s letter and Mama’s were both very much in accord with my own plans and hopes all through, except they failed to realize that I want to pay my way because I have promised myself to try to do it, and not because my visions of Art have become less inspiring.” He alluded to his one

effort in pure concentration at the Stuart grade school: “I think I am a more regular and progressive student of Art, than I have ever been at anything, even the ‘fifth grade’” (when he had become class spelling champion). He was honest, though, about his current standing. He was not ranked at the top of his class: “Papa says something about being first in the class. I believe with a free hand I could get some such eminent place in six months, if my home folks demanded it of me in all their letters. . . . At present my work keeps on a level of progressive mediocrity with the lower nine-tenths of the class. With a bit more concentration and a little time I could begin to win the small glories of the Institute. I hope to do that way in the winter night-school, if I get there. I am doing as well as can be expected of the most, and better than many. . . . Rest yourselves and have a good time,” he counseled his vacationing parents: “Pleasure only hurts the giddy. Serious minded folks need all they can absorb of pleasure” (August 31).

Although he had discontinued mass submissions to magazines, Vachel’s datebook records at least one additional attempt at publication. On August 19, he sent “The Idol and the Ghosts” to the *Century*, only to collect another rejection slip. A few days later (August 31), he mailed revised versions of two parts of “Lucifer” to Mary Humphrey: “Silence Borne from Afar” and “The Prince of Art” (Lindsay Home). The latter features “Israfel” as the protagonist, instead of Lucifer. The change was temporary, but the variant reading illustrates Poe’s continuing influence on Vachel. It also suggests the likely source for the Lucifer poem. Poe’s Israfel, we may remember, possessed the sweetest voice of all Heaven’s creatures, a voice so sweet that his song silenced “the giddy stars.”

Meanwhile, down on earth, Vachel’s datebook entries are increasingly perfunctory: “Bought Pants—\$2.50” (August 23). A few days later, though, his thoughts again turned backward, back to the past. He was saddened to learn of the death of his young Hiram friend, Jim Henry, who had succumbed to typhoid fever. The datebook reads: “A Usual day. A Letter from Marcia Henry—stating Jim’s death” (August 28). A few days later Vachel answered Marcia’s letter:

When I received news of Jim’s death I had been remembering very vividly our old times together and I am not much given to dealing in memories. So it was an especial shock to me to lose him then—he was a friend I never will forget. I have never lost a friend before, and it made death and the grave seem more a part of life than I thought they could. We were all loyal to Jim and proud of him, and I had great visions of his future. No doubt his masterful personality will have wider wings in his new life. I never was so tempted as I have been for Jim, to beat at the gates of mystery and by sheer force of will demand an answer that I could understand—what the new life truly is and how near it is in its ways and customs and hopes to our own. I think it is more human than the devotees have painted it.

It is something remarkable and unexpected to me, the sense I have of the comradeship of Jim vividly abiding with me. I am not a coarse spiritualist’s disciple—but sometimes when I read I feel that we are reading together, after some dim fashion. Jimmy was a great unequalled comrade in many moods of my life, a very satisfying friend. I feel that in some other existence we will be able to fill out the understanding more thoroughly. But meanwhile he is gone, and it is very hard. (Typescript copies of this letter, dated September 3, 1901, are at Hiram College and at the University of Virginia)

On the day of this nostalgic letter, Vachel wrote in his datebook: “Did not draw. Read in the two Libraries” (the Art Institute and the Chicago Public).

Two days later, Brother Allen “promised,” Vachel recorded in his datebook, “to find me a place at Marshall Fields.” On September 9, though, he was disappointed: “Allen failed to meet me at Marshall Fields” (datebook). The following week Olive traveled to Chicago to be with her brother for several days. Then, on September 17, she left to return to the New England Conservatory, stopping on the way to visit Ruth Wheeler in Akron. Her brother boarded another train, headed for Springfield and a short vacation. However, at 8:30 Monday morning, September 23, he was back in Chicago and back at Brother Allen’s door. One hour and a half later, he had a position in the toy department on the top story (8th floor) at “the merchant prince,” Marshall Field and Company, the “‘big store,’ as the rural visitors called it in awe” (Lewis 167, 175).

The new employee began immediately, recording in his datebook: “worked sorting boxes till 5:30.” That night he described his new life for his parents’ benefit: “There is nothing but good news. Bro. Allen went with me to Marshall Field’s this morning, and secured for me just such a position as I imagined would be best, when I planned to go to work. It is manual labor mainly, with no strain on the muscles, but requiring just the sort of mild stirring-around exercise I need. I am a sorter of boxes in the holiday department, top floor—principally boxes of dolls, light but bulky. They are wheeled around and filed ready for the filling of orders. This requires the pushing of light trucks—or rather wagons. Then they (the boxes) must be loaded, unloaded and stacked. I have handled thousands today. It is interesting enough, mild enough and clean enough work to leave me in good shape for anything in the evening. It requires average[^] intelligence and attention. My fellow worker is an ex-student of Chicago University—a very interesting fellow.” The hours were 8:00 to 12:00 and 1:00 to 5:30 weekdays, 8:00 to 1:00 on Saturday. The pay was “\$6.00 for the week—fully as much,” Vachel averred, “as I hoped to have on the start” (September 23). (In later years, he reported that he had made \$7 a week, perhaps reflecting a late pay raise.) The second day on the job, he wrote in his datebook: “Rose at 6:00 A.M. Breakfasted and reached business at 8:00. Work not tiresome nor straining. Feel fresh tonight rather.” He had found adult employment, and it was refreshing. He reveled in the knowledge that he was no longer a dependent boy, and he also felt the excitement of another new beginning. [Note 8]

The datebook entry for the following day is very brief: “Worked all day—slept all night” (September 25). There is no entry at all for September 26 or 27. On Saturday, September 28, Vachel moved boxes of dolls until 1:00, and then attended a show with Paul Wakefield, who was in Chicago as a first-year student at the Rush Medical College. Afterward, Vachel returned to his room and decided to end his datebook-diary altogether: “Feel mighty good. But have decided to discontinue this record since it represents a past epoch. I soon will be my own supporter, unless I am over confident, and Thursday week I draw my first pay of twelve dollars, and become financially independent and my time and money are wholly my own, and not requiring the double counting required when they belong to anyone else. And I find that I can only by very special effort find time and place for this hereafter. When I undertook it I did not mean that it should represent a special effort. It has served well its purpose of a crude pencil-conscience. It is a record and may become a reminder of many things hereafter. From now on I will write more

intermittently and more at length, stuff not in note-books.” The datebook, after all, was a record of Dr. Lindsay’s money; Dr. Lindsay’s adult son was now earning and spending his own money (at least for the time being). [Note 9]

Since it was a new beginning, Dr. Lindsay’s son was also very hopeful: “I think tonight it would be quite possible to hold a place for two or three years at Field’s, by being extra useful this fall, and holding to that one place until I know enough about art and the Institute to get just as good an income as the big Chicago Art Reporter. There is nothing else more hopeful to plan for as I see it tonight. There is nothing better than Field’s except better wages with the pen, and that will be not so good for my health as swinging the hammer, nor so good for my art, I believe.” He thumbed ahead to the page for October 10 and mused: “If I keep my job, I will be able to receive my first twelve dollars on this date. Let us hope for the best.” Underneath the entry we read: “I received it.” He also noted that he had begun night classes at the Institute on October 1; otherwise the datebook pages are blank—until late November. [Note 10]

Three evenings during the week, Vachel was at the Art Institute for three and a quarter hours, beginning with a sketch class from 6:15 to 7:00. He wrote very little poetry and comparatively few letters; he also stopped recording notes on his limited studies. On occasion, he did find time to attend the theater, as he informed Nellie Vieira in 1909 (Fowler 182). The few letters that he did send home are partially responses to his parents’ continuing concern that their boy was about to abandon art, especially since he seemed to be enjoying his manual labor:

Everything is promising so far. My work keeps me busy in the day and leaves me wide awake enough to be able to draw in the evening. I have done my full share of the work this week, and have learned about all I need to know to go on with it. I am anxious to be a satisfactory workman. I will always be grateful to brother Allen for my start, for they say it is very hard to get even a minor position at Field’s since they are all on the line of promotion, and Field is fastidious in his selection. . . .

I was especially commended for my industry this week, by the boss of my department. So I think with the present amount of effort I can hold on tight.

However, he hastened to assure his parents that he was “anxious to begin” art school and “quite hopeful of great progress. . . . Art is long, but I am strong and young, and in the cause of art am content to labor as I may. . . . Night and day students have the same general privileges” (September 30).

Then, on October 4, with deep regret, the Lindsay son was forced to cash one of his father’s \$25 checks, explaining, “my cash box is empty. . . . I hope this is the last time I will be obliged to lean upon my indulgent parent for many days. I say I hope. We must wait and see. Too many gorgeous anticipations are disastrous.” Again, though, he was reassuring: “Don’t fret yourselves about my making ‘a success of some one line of work.’ I am in for drawing till I drop, in to the death, from now till I am seventy five years old, and it is going to be the business of my life to do it supremely well, and I am going to pay for it any way I can; and I hope that this year will establish the habit for all time to come of supporting myself and spending every cent above that on my art education. It takes half a life-time of education to be the kind of an artist I want to be, and I have set myself the task of paying for that education as I go. . . . Give me time enough and I will do

anything. There is nothing in the Art Universe I am afraid of except a time-limit on my education. By assuring myself by experience that I can remove that bugbear forever by enabling myself to pay as I go, the last barrier will be removed between me and my faith in my future." His goal, he concluded, was to be "the best draughtsman that ever put pencil to paper" (October 4). Interestingly, he had not entirely abandoned poetry. He sent a new poem, "The Great Supper" (*Poetry* 791), to his sister Olive as a birthday present (October 10). It was the kind of present he would give on many occasions to many people in the years to come.

Apparently, however, Kate Lindsay remained unconvinced as regards the wisdom of her boy's life choices. And so he attempted to defend his decision yet one more time: "In reply to the first page of your letter [which has not survived]—you are always skeptical—let me again reassure you. I am enjoying my night-work very much, especially this week, and the three evenings have counted a weeks[^] work all right—much more progress than in several weeks this summer. I can work with much more vim than of old, as I hoped. . . . There is a freedom about the night-school which is very invigorating to me, just the thing necessary[^] for the present state of my drawing-mind. The academic system is always rather irksome—and the history of art schools is the history of breakings away from it, by oppressed students. This danger is greatly amilorated[^] in the night-school, and I will be able to push so far in that by the time I can afford to go to day-school, no system will be able to 'stunt my growth' or 'crush my soul.' [Note 11]

As a celebration present, in order to mark his new financial independence (and likely to redirect his mother's thinking), he sent home a copy of Brother Herbert Willett's *Our Plea for Union*:

I agree with you about the Century etc. But you must read the celebration present I bought for you and Papa, to mark when I came to my financial majority. There is certainly no heresy in it, even for a heresy-hunter. I want you to understand the aims of Willet[^], and here you have them all. If he does not work for them the right way—why then, maybe you do. Certainly you are the same in purpose.

Future history will decide whether the Missionary Union or the Christian Century will be the largest force or best medium to carry out the plea for union. Certainly this book has set forth the plea with the exact terms of a thinker and the wide views of a statesman among theologians. You need all the suggestive thought therin[^] contained. You can get a new text for a Union Speech every page, and you may do the thing in your work that he has thought out more thoroughly than you, but has been less able to accomplish. (October 20)

This same day Vachel sent separate letters to his father and to his sister Olive, explaining to his sister that it was the first evening he had had off from work in a week. To his father, he wrote that Willett's book "sets forth the plea for Union much as you and I see it in general, though more elaborately, from a professor's standpoint. . . . It is obvious that it is much better written than most pleas for Union or anything else. Yet it will have little effect. All because moder[^] civilization is swamped in a marsh of printers[^] ink, and the new and valuable message must be printed out in a new medium or fail. Here is the chance for the religious[^] cartoon. Picture-writing may count where the best scholarship must fail. As you read the book, with its forcible paragraphs, most of which you can heartily indorse[^], perhaps all—why you can imagine a set of cartoons carrying

the points just as forcibly,—and see what a much wider set of readers they might attract. . . . My idea is to make my work before I die as artistic and effective as this work is scholarly. . . . I am settled into my work now, keep fresh through the drawing hours, and wake at par in the morning. I am quite happy. I never was better satisfied with the whole world and myself” (October 20).

Olive, meanwhile, was congratulated on her second-place position in her class at the New England Conservatory. Her brother was very proud: “It means you have brains and are willing to live up to them. You and I are getting to be regular angels nowadays—I am making my living and in sight of a new suit of clothes, and you are in sight of rank one. Now let us try together. If we both be good as we can we will get there both at the same time. If you want to beat, I am willing you should try. You just get rank one and see what I do about it. I will astonish you.” Without any sense of irony, Olive’s brother’s thought then turned to adversity: he reported having seen “more broken toys than you have ever seen whole ones almost—four big truck loads were taken away the other day” (October 20).

As October drew to a close, Vachel remained optimistic and confident: “I think you ought to write and congratulate me. I am living within my income, keeping my health, pushing along my art, and getting lots of exercise. I hope so to continue. . . . I am perfectly happy and cheerful these days. I feel that my sister is pushing along to her highest development, and that she will satisfy our pride in her someday. And I am prouder of my mother and father each new week, when I realize what rare people they are Love to all. Yours forever, Vachel” (October 28).

6

Dr. Lindsay acknowledged his son’s gratitude: “We appreciated your very kind letters and we are very anxious to live in such a way that we will at least not be a drawback to our children. We have reached a period in our lives when we live more for our children than for ourselves. Children may not always be able to appreciate the sacrifice that parents make and are willing to make for them. We feel a sense of pride in our children as well as the deepest affection for them. We are more anxious for them to make a grand success of life than to feel that we are doing so much ourselves” (November 3, 1901, Virginia).

One week later, on Vachel’s 22nd birthday, Grandmother Frances Elizabeth Austen Frazee wrote to express her pride in her grandson’s efforts, and her concern: “I can’t realize that you are twenty-two years old. You still seem to me to be a boy. . . . I read with pleasure the accounts that I hear from your Mother about you but like her I fear that you may overwork yourself in your anxiety to help support yourself. I feel very anxious that you should take care of your health. Your Mother overworked herself while at school and has always been nervous since. So I wish that you will be cautious about your health. Eating in a hurry and running to work immediately is sure to be hurtful to health” (November 10, 1901, Virginia). Vachel was no longer detailing his diet in his datebook. It is unlikely, however, that Frances Frazee’s wishes had any pronounced effect on her grandson’s eating habits. We should remember Olive’s terse comment in her copy of the Masters’ biography, cited in the previous chapter, “diet always erratic.”

As November wore on and Christmas shopping escalated, Field's toy department became one busy place. Vachel found himself working nights, as well as days, and missing many classes at the Art Institute. On November 20, he recorded in his datebook that it was the first Wednesday night in weeks he had not been working at Field's. Instead, he was in his room, sending a letter to Ruth Wheeler, along with a copy of his poem "The Great Supper" (*Poetry* 791). On Sunday, November 17, he advised his parents that Ruth had sent him a book for his birthday: Henry Van Dyke's *Fisherman's Luck*, "just my kind of a book, in beautiful style—and full of well sugared sermons." He added that Ruth was "a dear girl to remember me. I really would like to see her again." [Note 12]

After November 17, 1901, Vachel's datebook pages are blank until December 5, the day he quit his job at Marshall Field's. On the page for December 5, he recorded his explanation:

I guess the night-work did it.

On this date I quit Marshall Field's from sheer impatience. I may go home within a week if I can find an excursion. I have \$15.90 in my pocket. I may move further up town. I do not know. But I will take a week off to look things over.

I have had a valuable commercial experience, am worth at least \$6 a week to the men in the market-place—and I can live on that, so I am commercially justified for existing. I want to write this week two or three poems that have been haunting me—Mary of Bethany— metrically an imitation of the "Burden of Nineveh" [Dante Gabriel Rossetti]—"The Dead Angel" and "The Pleasures of Babylon" [see the next chapter] I desire to revise the "Great Supper." This has all been on my soul since before I entered Fields[^]. I desire to break into the Chr[istian]. Century if possible or make arrangements for some kind of a business start in January before I go home, advertising or some such thing. . . .

I should have done this before I quit Fields[^]. I am not justified in my own eyes, though I have been prudent enough from the art stand point[^]. The night-work at Fields[^] spoiled all my chances at the Institute.

But I need the rest, and had exhausted my interest in the department 23, 8th floor, Marshall Fields[^] Wholesale[^]—holiday Goods. So it was time to stop. [Note 12]

Ironically, when Vachel wrote home on December 9, four days later, he made no mention of having quit his job. Instead, he reassured his parents about his clothes: "Do not fret about my clothes. I neglected to tell you that I have had a bran[^] new suit for some weeks, and Paul [Wakefield] thinks it is all right and Paul is like the Sun—if he says it is so." He also reported having seen Springfield girl Mary Coleman (born 1880), then a student at the University of Chicago: "she looked stunning." He continued with a brief reference to Paul's progress in school and added a typical, avuncular assessment: "I have great hopes for him, if we learn to keep him at his best. He sadly lacks self-control, self mastery[^], self-possession and these lacks are the keynotes of any failures he may make aside from his venomous hatred of anything that jars on his particular taste. But at his best he is a noble fellow and growing fast. . . . He wants to come to Springfield and get well acquainted Christmas. He makes friends and no enemies here, and that is a very radical change." There is no comment concerning Paul's friend's current unemployment.

Finally, on December 12, Dr. Lindsay received a letter addressed to “My Dear Father.” The first sentence sounded an all-too-familiar note: “I would be highly honored indeed if you would send me \$5.00 to come home on.” At last the Lindsay son was forced to make his confession: “I quit Fields^ about a week ago to look around for something better after Christmas and I think I will have it all settled before I start home. I am going to break into something right along my line, and make the day school beside, I hope. Wait till It^ is all over. I will come as soon as it is settled, in about a week.” After a few sentences of mere news, Vachel continued:

On the whole I like my outlook at present. I suppose you have been able to gather from my letters that I have broken my heart again, contrary to all my resolutions, and my principal source of worriment is the bearing it has on my financial future. It makes me feel that the day-school is a shorter cut to glory, so I will attain it after Christmas I hope, and without much extra expense to my father. I have learned the gentle art of Economizing^ this fall as never before. I find that when I supply the cash I am likely to hang on to it. Yours with love Vachel

He wrote nothing about his intent to spend a week finishing the two or three poems that had been “haunting” him. Moreover, if his parents did “gather” from previous letters that he had broken his heart, they were very skilled at reading between the lines, or they received other letters that are now lost. This letter of December 12, anyway, is the first and only surviving document in which Vachel relates his decision to quit his job at Field’s, and it has all the appearance of an initial announcement. No other letter even hints at dissatisfaction. On the contrary, as we have seen, the Lindsay son’s consistent messages from late September to early December, 1901, reflect nothing but confidence and something very like “gorgeous anticipations.”

7

Of the poems Vachel had in mind in late 1901, “The Dead Angel” was reworked and finally published in *The Tramp’s Excuse* (1909) as “The Angel Frozen-Wings” (*Poetry* 59-60). It is a thinly disguised expression of self-pity, in the form of a lament for a dead angel/artist who has “died too soon.” The narrator depicts the sorrow of a young “Indian Girl” who falls “half in love” with the angel’s lovely corpse and chooses to sleep nightly with the jeweled harp he left behind. The “Mary of Bethany” poem, on the other hand, was sent to Mary Humphrey as “To Mary of Bethany” (*Poetry* 793) in January 1902 (the manuscript, misdated 1903, was at the Lindsay Home). The poem daringly depicts “Christ the first of Chivalry” wooing Mary. The narrator relates that he will bring “a prayerful maid”:

And lovers dear we four will be
 And preach all holy revelry
 To one another merrily—
 Tomorrow, tomorrow
 In the Gleaming Garden of Art! . . .
 There is peace from pride, rest from pride, genial rest
 in the Garden of Art,
 Yellow Garden, Holy Garden, Gleaming Gleaming Garden of Art!

Vachel certainly had a specific “prayerful maid” in mind, perhaps Ruth Wheeler, perhaps Mary Coleman (whose name likely suggested the poem). Mary Humphrey, on the other hand, was an important confidante but not, at this point in Vachel’s life, a special love interest. [Note 13]

The most important poem of late December, 1901, is “Star of My Heart” (*Poetry* 3-4). Written in Springfield, on Christmas Eve, it was first published as the second poem in *The Tramp’s Excuse*, where Vachel’s “Preface” identifies the work as “my first poem of pilgrimage” (*Poetry* 927). Like the “Magi-Kings” of old (who are dead), “a foolish Saxon seeks the manger-bed” and “Jehovah’s child.” The Saxon dreams of “that far sky where mystic births begin / Where dreaming ears the angel-song shall win.” The future utopia, though, lies beyond “death-black deserts, doubts without a name, / Past hills of pain and mountains of new sin.” Once achieved, though, by individuals who follow the stars of their hearts, Christ’s promised kingdom will come:

Our Christmas shall be rare at dawning there,
And each shall find his brother fair,
Like a little child within:
All hearts of the earth shall find new birth
And wake, no more to sin.

The religious feeling in “Star of My Heart” is genuine, but the poem may also have served as an attempt to appease two disturbed parents. How could Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay remain discouraged when their son expressed such profound moral and religious vision—even when that son returned home without any prospects for self-support? The wandering, star-led search and the “hills of pain,” after all, were necessary preludes to future happiness. Indeed, both the quest and the suffering were harbingers, as none other than Alexander Campbell himself had proclaimed, to something the entire Lindsay family believed in and preached with fervent anticipation: the imminent Millennium, Christ’s soon-to-be-established kingdom on earth.

Notes for Chapter Ten

[Note 1] Biographer Trombly quotes Fred Bogardus on Vachel, his poetry, and his art life in Chicago: “A medical student [Bogardus] with whom he [Vachel] roomed during the first year gives us this glimpse of him. ‘Our Sundays were spent in going to the Field Museum, the Art Institute or church. In the evenings Vachel practiced drawing and wrote. He wrote without effort and would read aloud what he had written to get the sound of it. He spent much time in rewriting and polishing his work. During the winter he sent one of his poems to a well-known literary critic of the day. We waited anxiously for an answer, and when it came it was not especially encouraging. Vachel expressed the opinion that poetry had followed beaten paths so long that something new was needed. He had an idea that perhaps he could establish a new era in literature’” (26-27).

Edgar Lee Masters speculates that Vachel’s poem “The Ding Dong Doom Bells” “evolved at last into ‘The Fireman’s Ball’” (108). Actually, the “Bells” poem is an early version of the introductory material to “The Last Song of Lucifer.” The bells are part of the imagery of hell. The idea for “The Firemen’s Ball” did not occur to Vachel until some ten years later.

[Note 2] Occasionally, Vachel was sending new verses to his friends, Maud and Mary Humphrey, in Springfield. One work, "Inscription for the Entrance to a Book," is dated "Spring, 1901." It asks Mary Humphrey to "find within the book your heart, Oh friend, I pray!" (Humphrey). There is no indication, however, as to what book Vachel may have had in mind.

[Note 3] Vachel's eagerness to teach Sunday school is a further reflection of his avuncular instincts. In his "Culture" notebook, he averred: "He is a man of wide resources who is equal to the emergencies of a Sunday school class of small boys. They emphasize the limitations of the most self confident. Every decent man should have one" (p. 23, c. August 1900). Writing to his parents on April 21, 1901, he observed: "I told my Sunday school class boys goodbye^ this morning, and it never was so hard to say goodbye^ to fellows I have seen so little of. I move next Thursday. I will get another class like that as soon as I can, and stick to it. I do better with boys of seventeen than boys of seven. I will be at the University church on fifty seventh. A Sunday School^ class is a splendid balance wheel for me. It keeps me at that practical point that Mama Talks^ about, and I have an ample opportunity to learn to adapt myself to the minds of cotemporaries^. And then I can feel that it is a serious effort to influence my kind for right living, and the only effort of the kind I will have a chance to make for many a day."

He changed his mind in regard to churches, however, deciding to assist at Brother John Wells Allen's First Christian church rather than at the "University" (that is, the Hyde Park) church.

[Note 4] There is no Jackson Avenue presently in Chicago's Hyde Park area, but Vachel would have lived close to East 64th Street, a few blocks west of Jackson Park, one of the sites of the Chicago World's Fair (World's Columbian Exposition, 1893), about 8 miles south of the Art Institute. Vachel's indecision as to lodging is reflected in Masters' biography (108). Meanwhile, Vachel's letters and datebook in early April, 1901, indicate that he was planning to move in with a family named Craxton, at Kenwood Avenue and 50th Street. Even the decision to rent with the DeLongs was at first seen as temporary, although Vachel ended up staying with the DeLongs for the rest of 1901.

[Note 5] Tensions between Vachel and his parents concerning money continued during his Chicago years. On April 1, 1901, he wrote: "Papa's short note with the check was gratefully received. I wish he did not have to write checks so often and could thereby^ write longer letters." When his parents inquired about his expenses later in the month, he responded: "You mention expenses in your last letter. It is hard to go on very much less. I have held to my last money as tight as I could, but by May the first I will be out" (April 26, 1901). Both the inquiry and the response would be repeated many times over the next several years.

[Note 6] Apparently, John Kenyon's new wife, fellow Hiram student Myra Pow, at first refused to join her husband in Chicago. Her actions gave Vachel an opportunity to write to his sister Olive about their parents' representative commitment: "Thus does Romance undo itself. Our parents certainly are the best examples of persistent honeymoon I know of. There is no striking instance otherwise that I remember. 'Where are the roses of yester-year^?' Let us hope to be saved from the commonplace or the tragic along this line" (July 21, 1901). By early fall, however, Myra was back with her husband.

John S[amuel] Kenyon (1874-1959) graduated from Hiram College in 1898 and returned to Hiram as head of the English Department and Professor of English from 1916 to his retirement in 1944. Known as the “dean of American phoneticians,” according to the Hiram College Library website, Kenyon was consulting editor of pronunciation and phonetics for the second edition of *Webster’s New International Dictionary* (1934). Kenyon also published *American Pronunciation* (1924) and, with Thomas A. Knott, *A Pronouncing Dictionary of American English* (1944). The “John S. Kenyon Collection” at Hiram includes Lindsay letters and manuscripts.

[Note 7] On September 12, 1901, Vachel had another opportunity to praise his parents when several Chicago ministers (Disciples) visited Springfield: “It always makes me feel good when the preachers tell me my pa is better looking than I am. It means he has gone before me in making a good Lindsay impression. My best letter of introduction to the brotherhood is the hospitality the Conventions and itinerants^ make compulsory for you. You, my parents, must mesmerize all the preachers you are compelled to entertain, that they may differentiate you from all other thousands that entertain them in the years. Don’t feed them extra, just mesmerize them. Everybody feeds the preachers well. Just give them a masterful general impression. . . . Impress them in your own behalf,” he concluded, “leave me out entirely, and if I meet them the rest will be easy. The world is full of remarkable sons that preachers are bored to death about. But there are few remarkable parents.”

[Note 8] Vachel sent another description to his sister Olive: “Our single department is one third of a block—that is, one third of the top floor, the eighth. The big building from the outside looks like a castle or fort, gigantic and cubicle, very plain but imposing. There are thousands of men employed in it, and it is owned by the richest merchant in Chicago—Marshall Field” (October 20).

By 1921, though, the department tripled in size, at least in Vachel’s memory. Stephen Graham reports: “Vachel told me once, to save his self-respect, he took a job in Chicago in a department store at seven dollars a week, and was employed in the wholesale toy department; a whole block of toys, where was to be found every imaginable plaything for young and old, from dolls as large as three-year-old children to family portrait albums that, having a musical box in their binding, played ‘The Old folks at Home’ and various hymn-tunes when you opened them. He told how a lad called Timmins wound up all the albums he could lay his hands on, and laid them open and went away to another part of the building, and of the wild din that ensued.” Predictably: “Timmins was ‘fired’” (133-134).

[Note 9] The University of Chicago hosted the first two years of the Rush Medical College curriculum, and Vachel thought about having Paul Wakefield share his room at DeLong’s. “I will be in my room so little that my general objections to a room-mate^ do not apply here,” Vachel explained to his parents (September 30). On October 4, however, Vachel wrote: “Paul has moved to the University dormitory. His time was so cut up he could not room with me.”

[Note 10] At the end of his 1901 datebook, Vachel itemized his expenses for the spring and summer terms at the Art Institute: meals, carfare, laundry (the entry for January 10 notes that he took his clothes to “Uncle Sam’s Laundry”), tuition, candy, etc. In addition, he estimated his Hiram expenses, as we have seen, apparently for the purpose of

reimbursing his father. Ironically, these last pages include a list of publishers' addresses, demonstrating that the Lindsay son had more than one unwavering aim.

[Note 11] In 1947, Olive Lindsay Wakefield advised family friend Willis Spaulding that, at the time, she had supported "Vachel's plan to work at Marshall Field's for awhile that second year in Art School, going to classes at night, because I thought it might teach him something of the value of money which he needed to learn. Papa and Mama were opposing the plan for fear he would be over doing^ his strength, though he was always a strong healthy person who was used to sitting up half the night reading if he so desired" (unpublished letter, October 27, 1947, Ward).

[Note 12] In an untitled article in the *Chicago Tribune* (December 3, 1916), an anonymous reporter quotes Vachel as saying: "I came up here and got a job in Marshall Field's wholesale and registered for the night school at the institute, but I had to work overtime every night but two during the first term, so I didn't get much out of that winter" (Hamilton scrapbook clipping). The reference to "every night but two," however, is an obvious exaggeration.

Not all the night work, according to Stephen Graham, was in preparation for Christmas. Graham relates: "He [Vachel] told how he lived amid acres of dolls and how, to satisfy the fire insurance inspectors, a three-foot clearance was made between the top of the toy heaps and the roof, and how all one night they did overtime slamming down rows and sections of dolls and toys on to waiting trucks, and they were rushed to another place. Then the inspectors came and passed the building. And when they were gone the Ghetto came and bought the 'bum dolls' from the 'smash dump,' and Vachel and the rest were soon building toys up to the roof once more" (134).

[Note 13] Although Vachel did not mention the poem in his datebook, "Song of the Michigan Waves" (*Poetry* 790), celebrating Chicago as "the Queen of Youth-unspent," was likely written in late 1901. The manuscript is dated: "Chicago 1901." Several Vachel letters from late 1901 and 1902 recount happy excursions to the Lake Michigan beaches with friend and future brother-in-law Paul Wakefield.

