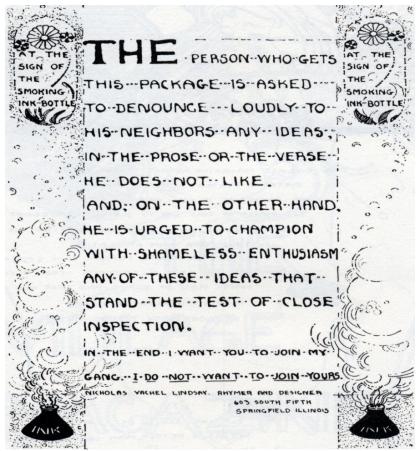
Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Twelve



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

by

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[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.]



12. From Chicago to New York: Another Chronic Start [1903]

"I have other dreams now."

1

During his first two years in Chicago, Vachel's social life was largely separate from the other students at the Art Institute. Surviving personal letters from January 1903 disclose little change in this pattern, although we do learn of several new acquaintances. Paul Wakefield remained his closest companion, often spending nights in his friend's room on the University of Chicago campus. (According to Vachel's notebook dated "January 19, 1903," the room was "75 Middle Divinity.") The two Hiram friends read aloud together Chicago pastor Lymon Abbott's Life and Letters of Paul the Apostle (1898), as well as the works of Milton, Carlyle, and Keats. Upon occasion, Vachel returned from the Art Institute and found John Kenyon in the room, reading for his graduate course in the historical drama. The University of Chicago had assigned the room to Kenyon, as we noted in the last chapter, and Vachel was enjoying free lodging, albeit some seven-plus miles south of the Art Institute. Vachel, in turn, spent several evenings with John and his wife Myra, who were living off-campus. Two former Springfield men were also part of the Lindsay-Wakefield-Kenyon circle: Edgar Inslee, a mail clerk who aspired to studying architecture, and Freddy Brown, who was a student in a Chicago YMCA training school. For a time, when Brown was a member of his school debate team, volunteer coach Uncle Boy agreed "to get him all primed up He will be an orator yet. It will be an affair like the Delphic [his Hiram oratorical society] Monday night affairs I presume" (January 25). [Note 1]

Vachel continued to correspond with Ruth Wheeler, exchanging letters with increasing frequency and seriousness. He began to refer to her as "my lady" and, as we shall see, he would suggest interesting reasons as to how they were ideally suited for one another. (Knowing the pathway to her friend's heart, Ruth had sent a box of candy for Christmas.) Interestingly, Vachel was reading Dante's *Divine Comedy* (in H.F. Cary's translation), taking advantage of the time necessary for his commute to and from the Art Institute. Like Dante, Vachel yearned for an inspiration girl or, in his words, "an Eve in my garden." Since their return from Colorado in August 1902, Ruth was his Beatrice, and he looked, not to heaven but to Akron, Ohio, for artistic stimulation.

For occasional entertainment, Ruth's admirer continued to prefer the Chicago theaters, advising his parents that he had seen Mrs. Patrick Campbell in Hermann Sudermann's *Magda*. When Kate Lindsay inquired about Campbell (one of the great actresses of the age), Vachel sent his appraisal: "The notable thing about her is that she

impresses one as a woman of as much intellect as beauty and she chooses roles that demand such an effect. Her impersonations are various types of the modern woman who is at war with society or conventionalities because she is or has been the victim of some social injustice or other. War is always declared in a highly intellectual and generally in a self-posessed way. She always fills one with a sense of her deep experience in high practical problems of the individual conscience; is as earnest, more spirited and more self-possessed and more practical in her atmosphere than is the atmosphere of George Elliot "." In other words, Vachel intimated, Mrs. Patrick Campbell was a lot like Mrs. Vachel Thomas Lindsay.

At the same time, Mrs. Lindsay's admiring son tried his hand at literary analysis, foreshadowing his later efforts in film criticism: "The chief value of such plays as those of Pinero and Sudermann is that the social problem is carefully stated in the first three acts or so, and one can think it over in the weeks after as often as he pleases and devise his remedy as he will. But the very fact that it is a problem worth setting on the stage means that it cannot be solved in an act or so—else we would all get the secrets of right living fast enough to bring a premature clammy millenium^ day after tomorrow. The best we can ask of the playright^ is an artistic finish that will not do too much violence to probability and give us a sense that dramatic justice has at least been done to the situation. Pinero is apt to solve things with a very cynical marriage in the last act. The two Sudermann dramas [*The Joy of Living* and *Magda*] I saw Mrs. Campbell play this winter were solved by death."

The Pinero plays on which Vachel based his judgment are *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (starring Mrs. Campbell) and *The Gay Lord Quex* (starring John Hare). Each drama, Vachel claimed, caused the audience to view their "fellow sufferers" with pity, admiration, or disgust: "Our main duty in life seems to be to mind our own business and pity those in pain." On the other hand, according to Vachel, Sudermann, "in Ruskins^ phrase, 'Crowds up the steps of the Judgement throne of God—to divide it with him." With all that he had written heretofore about sympathy and democracy, we may suspect that Vachel preferred Pinero. However, his surprising conclusion is: "I do not know which is better" (January 25). [Note 2]

In spite of her query about Mrs. Campbell, Kate Lindsay continued to worry that her son's extracurricular interests would detract from his professional studies. She recommended that he read Elbert Hubbard's *A Message to Garcia* (1899), an inspirational essay focusing on one event in the Spanish-American War. The essay's praise of concentrated energy made it very popular at this time, and industrialists printed special editions to promote efficiency among their employees. Vachel responded: "Mama reccommends^ in her letter 'A Message to Garcia.' I have read it I suppose 'six times' already so it may not be neccessary^ again. I am glad to see her so zealous for Hubbard. He and the Editor of the Craftsman—Stickley—(owner or editor) are two very different illustrations of the influence of William Morris in this land on very varied disciples" (January 25). Vachel also emphasized the importance of the inspiration he derived from the Chicago Disciples, such as Edward Scribner Ames (whom he seems to have grown close to in early 1903): [Note 3]

Sunday Prof. Ames took me at 2:P.M. over to the West Side to [Charles Clayton] Morrison's old Church—the one he built—Ames delivered the charge at the

Installation of the new pastor—Edward Amherst Ott. It was an interesting occasion. The Prof. brought me back and to supper. Since we were talking all this while we got well acquainted. Ames is a fine boyish fellow—very sincere—a little cold seemingly to strangers but as far as I can see very much beloved by his acquaintances. He seems to inspire loyalty. He did not say anything hetrodox^ or Unitarian to me. He seems to be a thorough Campbellite in many little ways that a scholar does not neccessarily^ need to be. He is very much in love with the Disciple cause—so full of enthusiasm it gives me hope for the future of the Church. Next Sunday I am to eat there again. [Note 4]

Knowing the Chicago church leaders, Vachel maintained, was "just what I need as counter irritants to keep me from going too mad over art" (February 20). [Note 5]

At the Art Institute, Vachel was finally promoted to the Life class, and he chose a section taught by Lawton S. Parker (1868-1954), who he predicted would remain at the Institute no longer than two months: "I will get all I can out of him. He has all the medals Europe can furnish and has studied under all the great international masters, by far the biggest man in the Institute. It is my own fault if I do not profit by such an enthusiastic and inspiring and generous man" (January 10). Once again, a Lindsay prophecy proved correct. On March 2, he reported that Parker had quarreled with French, the director of the Institute, and had left to start a rival school: "Art never prospers without two political parties—just like Politics—so I am sure next year will be the livliest[^] the school has known. It has been a very slow and self-satisfied place all because it had no respectable competition. But Parker is a man of more medals and training and ability than the whole Institute Faculty put together—and as soon as I learn enough to make it worth while[^] I may go over to him. Possibly not till next Christmas. . . . I hardly know enough for such a man to have any patience with me yet—so there is no rush." As a teacher, in Vachel's words, "[Parker] is a calm forceful young fellow, inspires confidence and teaches without confusing the avarage^ student, is very systematic and exacting and stimulating." On the other hand, he confessed, Parker "gets his classes working at such high pressure it is exhausting—and untill^ I learn a little more it will be parylyzing^. However they all look rosy enough when it is all over, so I guess they keep their health" (March 2).

Lawton Parker's success abroad was not all that Vachel found attractive in his new teacher. He relished the fact that Parker was from the West (he had grown up in Nebraska) and that he remained proud of his Western roots, in spite of his European medals and training: "[Parker] says he wants to live in the West and be an American again. He is a native of Nebraska and feels a Westerner yet. Which is very pretty if true" (March 2). Parker's admiring student was rereading Whitman and was deeply moved by such poems as "Passage to India" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." He was also delighted with his own Midwestern background, and especially with Springfield's Lincoln heritage. Indeed, the "Mild Hopes" notebook records many thoughts on Lincoln and on the West, including speculation on a possible poem entitled "The Land of Lincoln," opening with lines that would read:

This is the Land of Lincoln—Sons of the Land—be true! (January 5, 1903)

Admiration for Parker as a teacher, along with the belief that Parker was proud of his Western roots, provided Vachel with additional inspiration. [For the record, although Lawton Parker (1868-1954) grew up in Nebraska, he was born in Fairfield, Michigan.]

Within weeks following Christmas break, Vachel had written "Sons of the Middle West" (*Poetry* 794), another poem that reflects his renewed devotion to the West. Two additional poems from January 1903, "The Song of the Temple Sparrows after the Temple Fell" (*Poetry* 792-793) and "To the Sweet Singer of Israel" (*Poetry* 34-35), suggest the apocalyptic vision that Vachel associated with the Chicago fire. In the latter poem, instead of "new pioneers who will hew down the stairways of horrible shame and likewise the marble halls of ugliness" (an already-cited passage from the "Mild Hopes" notebook—see chapter 11), Vachel beseeches King David: [Note 6]

Go, hew down the stairways of horrible shame.

New towers in the Ghetto may lighten the Gentiles.

New dreams in the Ghetto could master the world!

Step forth, oh David, the darling of God

From the books and the hearts

Where your banners are furled—

Go—

Hew down the stairways of horrible shame,

And the name of Jehova give furious fame,

"That thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies,

And the tongue of thy dogs in the same." (Poetry 35)

Meanwhile, on March 18, Vachel finished yet another poem of the West: "The Earth-Hunger" (*Poetry* 17-18), a work that envisions the West as the mother's breast of the world, the locus of peace and good health:

And now I yearn for the high-valleyed West.

Bring me the ease of gold-miners at rest:

By the cold mother, Earth, are their cheeks caressed.

They are deeply asleep on her grim hard breast,

And are nearer the moon by far than we;

Wild is their peace. Bring it to me! (*Poetry* 18) [Note 7]

The day after completing the work, he boasted to his father: "I wrote the best poem of my life so far, the other evening. It is one that pleases me very much—but probably would not sound important to any one^ else. Paul liked it pretty well, too, I think" (March 19).

As well as writing a number of poems, Vachel continued recording his more or less random thoughts in his notebooks. Some entries reflect his reading; others are ideas from his classes at the Institute. When the "Book of Mild Hopes" was filled in early January, he began two new books, one with the unlikely title: "A book of gathered information on Art—and sundry remarks concerning the God of Mystery and beauty, and the various means of worshipping Him." The opening page of the second notebook has no title; Vachel simply signed his name and listed two dates: "January 19, 1903" and "February 7, 1903."

One of the earliest entries in the "gathered information on Art" notebook is dated January 9, 1903. The thought manifests the independent thinking and missionary zeal of Herbert Willett and Charles Clayton Morrison, both of whom preached against the dangers of blind obedience to tradition:

Truly the most creative and original thing is to be in the center of things—the search for the very king of the Jews is the thing worthiest of a magician. The fewest rarest souls are not the men seeking the edges and queer places of Beauty, they are the men seeking the best thought and life of the beauty of the age—those that desire to make it most aware of itself and hand it on to the next generation so swiftly advancing. The center is the one place, most seldom occupied it is.

Behold how the next age crowds upon us! Every day is a new century—if we think of the army of children crowded upon us. . . . How wise we must be in choosing the traditions we must honor, infusing into them new life and giving them the eternal garment of Art.

Although he seems not to have realized it at the time, Vachel was beginning to speculate on a quest theme that would finally lie at the heart of his first "book": Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?. In this work, the "magician" plays a lead role, but the mysterious search for "the very king of the Jews" is transformed, instead, into an ongoing search for Aladdin's beauty-engendering lamp. The entire work was designed to promulgate Uncle Boy's ambition of bringing "the eternal garment of Art" to succeeding generations. (A second lead character in the book is called the "Counselor.")

The first version of *Aladdin's Lamp* was completed by the end of summer, 1904 (see the next chapter). In it, the quest theme is depicted in poems, stories, and drawings; and the visionary world of the magician's search stands in stark contrast to the background imagery of Chicago's streets and buildings, the dirty Chicago River, and the nightmarish bridges and tracks of Chicago's railroad yards. (The Chicago images were recorded, in part, in the "January 19, 1903" notebook.) *Aladdin's Lamp* mystified nearly all who examined it, including Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay, and all would-be publishers. But Vachel's purpose is clear: he wished to place the art-spirit life in the "center of things," to seek the "best thought and life of the beauty of the age," and to "hand it on to the next generation so swiftly advancing."

To grasp the essential nature of the age, Vachel believed that he must understand what he considered to be THE REAL, that is, the visionary and the mystical. A second January 9 entry in the "gathered information on Art" notebook reads: "It would be well to know the bottom of the question of mysticism. Jehova is a great mystifier, and in the face of him what man shall attempt any smaller mystery than the praise of him and the proclamation of him?" The mysticism, though, was not to be syntactic: "Let us hope to make of this a note book^ using plainer English than any former note-book of mine." Indeed, the entries from early 1903 (the end pages contain notes from 1905) have very little to do with "the God of mystery." Instead, Vachel records ideas and quotations from Richard Muther's *History of Modern Painting* and from various books on Kant, the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin, Poe, and others. Many entries reflect his continuing interest in the artist and democracy, the artist and beauty, the artist and truth, the uniqueness of the individual, and the virtues of the designer versus the utilitarian approach of the "draughtsman." One entry reads: "In line work search for the man who has found

delicacy, simplicity, force and Symbolism[^], who is farthest from the grotesque and the heavy line." Vachel was paying attention to his mother's advice: he was thinking about beauty.

2

The quest for beauty, by way of contrast, heightened Vachel's awareness of what H.L. Mencken scornfully refers to as the American "libido for the ugly." The 1903 notebooks, especially the "January 19, 1903" book, bristle with entries that deplore Chicago's materialism and general lack of aesthetic appeal, although, Vachel admitted, the prospect improved after nightfall: "The sky is more accessible, the streets seem wider—and cleaner by night than day." Consistently, he observed that Chicago's dirty streets and buildings stood in contrast to the mystical beauties of art and nature, and he dreamed of a time when the latter would overcome the former. One notebook entry reads: "Magic of Overhanging trees. . . . Prophets of the time when trees shall grow on the crumbled skyscrapers—are these trees tonight. They will have their gentle revenge." Similar apocalyptic observations are recorded in *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?*—and later Lindsay works as well (see "The Ghosts of the Buffaloes," *Poetry* 310-313).

Other notebook observations are simply realistic attempts to capture big city scenes and language, such as Vachel's reflections on two well-dressed lovers whom he met while walking "on twelth^ street Her delicate smile—their enthusiasm—they were dressed all in black—but they should have been red as her lips—for life was so to them, or in gold—" although, he commented matter-of-factly, "the only gilded glint was the gold of his watch-chain." On other occasions, he jotted down impressions of big-city scenes: "so cosy—viaduct on 51st street, passing under, iron above—stone each side—pavement beneath with a wheezy hissing electric light beneath with white ground glass globe. . . . even the squalidest houses look smug, unlighted. But light in a window means fever." Or he recorded what he had heard on the street: "Follow your nose and it will lead you to Hell' said the man as I asked him the way home."

Jackson Park, the site of the great world's fair that Vachel had attended almost ten years earlier, proved an exception to the prevailing Chicago atmosphere. Memories of the great "White City," when compared with the current natural setting, likely reminded him of the sands of time and "how the next age crowds upon us." The park also provided important imagery for *Aladdin's Lamp*, as we shall see in the next chapter. Here is a representative entry:

Monday March 30

Over to Jackson Park at midnight. Fear, beautiful fear. Reverence akin to fear. Machinery of solemnity in Church and in Park at midnight. Here is a last resource to make man reverent. After the cencers' seem but gold and silver, and Chiors' [Choirs] seem but a row of singing sinners, here is a place where reverence can begin again. Bushes and the trees, I am as much of an intruder among them, and have as much of a feeling of unexpectedness as a bush would have if it walked into an evening party of people. Individuality of grass and of pavement—made of strange stuff. This is not the land of lights. Lights are as much intruders as I am, and the two or three hanging about the Field Columbian Museum have a fellow-feeling for me.

At 6:20, the next morning, he started walking toward the far-off Art Institute, noting that the sunrise was "too bright to look upon" and that the path before was changed into a "flaming sword pointed straight tward" us. If you go in search of a sunrise," he mused with typical optimism, "you may not find a sunrise, but you will find some good thing. Have faith" (entries from the "January 19, 1903" notebook).

Some of Vachel's recreational walks were taken with friend Paul Wakefield, others with girls of the Art Institute. Although he considered Ruth Wheeler "my lady," he sought at least a Platonic acquaintance with several Institute girls. In fact, spring, 1903, was the first time he actively pursued chivalrous socializing during his three-year stay in Chicago. On March 2, for example, he related to his father that the students were painting "an awfully pretty girl in Miss Baker's class this week—she wears a light blue gown and is graceful as a bird. I am doing my desperate best to make a picture of her, but in the present stage of my painting no doubt it will be a sorry sight when it is done. I have been surprised a little though at the unexpected commendations of Miss Baker—and Alice Cleaver. Certainly my painting has been praised all that it deserves. I hope to get to the place where I can bring home a few things that look pretty to the ordinary eyesight before June. I had a pleasant call on one of the Institute girls last night—who won first place under Vanderpoel this month. We talked things over to some advantage."

Two weeks later, Vachel described an evening's entertainment in the company of Miss Baker: "I am on excellent terms with my teacher, and visit her in her studio across the street in the Studebaker. She is a very winning little woman, about the age of Miss Wilcox I presume. Did I tell you that I attended a [Theodore] Thomas Concert with her again Saturday—and after it was over she took me over to her studio with another coupel^ and we four had a midnight lunch—sitting on the floor in very Bohemian fashion. I may go again tomorrow evening" (March 15). He also kept company with fellow student Alice Cleaver, and it was about this time that Cleaver used Vachel as a model for one of her paintings. She depicted him at work in the Art Institute cast room, and the painting (now apparently lost) was entitled, appropriately, "The Cast Room." [Note 8]

At a later time (1910), when Cleaver sent a photograph of herself, Vachel waxed reminiscent: "The old days come back to me, packed with pure Romance, though we hardly knew it at the time. I don't mean the sentimental novel sort, but a mass of unworldly and curious winds from the edge of the Universe swept in upon us as we pursued our lady called Art up the difficult stairs. . . . Well—don't you remember the beefsteaks we used to cook, and all that? Lord, the Art Atmosphere was so thick you could cut it with a knife" (March 16, 1910, Hiram). In another letter to Cleaver, Vachel inquired as to the whereabouts of several other Institute girls whom he had seen socially during the spring, 1903: Jessie Kalmbach, Bessie Crombach, Mary North, and Belle Silvera. (August 23, 1908, Hiram).

Some of Vachel's growing popularity may have been due to his improving art work, as we learn from the following letter to "Papa": "I think I have already twice mentioned that I appeared in the honorable mention frames in sketching—two frames,—and the critics in both classes—Saturday and four o'clock have commended my sketching personally. And a small boy unsolicited assured me I could make the Art Student's league^ if I would hand in my sketches. I will do it before June—and next fall, or rather

this time next year I hope to be an exhibitor. The League exhibit is going on now. . . . And one of the students was so smitten with one of my sketches she insists that I trade with her." Painting classes, however, were another story; and Vachel turned to St. Peter to tell his story: "As to paint I am still in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity" (cf. Acts 8:23). Dr. Lindsay's son, of course, was not despairing: "But I have worked pretty steadily and hope to improve in time" (March 15).

He especially hoped that he could learn to use color in his oil painting. In the notebook on "gathered information on Art," he observed: "Color is the thing that makes the thing actual, real to us." Oils and other painting supplies, though, were expensive; and in nearly every extant letter from this term, Vachel asked his father for additional money. The "study of painting helps my drawing immensely," he explained at one point, "more than I really hoped It is certainly time well spent. Almost half of the commercial work is colored these days—so I ought to know it for practical reasons" (March 2). He also realized that color was important for aesthetic reasons, as several notebook entries make clear.

Vachel's goals changed very little when the departure of Lawton Parker brought a new instructor and new ideas into the Institute's credit course on life drawing. Fred Richardson, Parker's replacement, was a painter and an illustrator, as well as a composition teacher. He was a man who soon earned Vachel's respect: "There is one more person in the school I am very anxious to have as a personal friend—Fred Richardson, teacher of composition. When I get him I will be happy. I will really be living in an Art Atmosphere. I hope to know him well before June." At the same time, Vachel himself had no further illusions about joining the Institute as an instructor: "Do not imagine I have dreams of being an Institute teacher, however. I merely want you to understand what sort of folks I am friends with." Cryptically, he concluded: "I have other dreams now" (March 15). [Note 9]

3

"I hasten to apologize for displaying the pictures," Vachel's first letter after spring break begins: "It was rank stupidity on my part—criminal carelessness." When he returned to Springfield in early April, he brought home several sketches of nude female models; and obviously the Lindsay son at last had learned something about human anatomy. His parents were shocked, and Dr. Lindsay suggested that, both in creating and in displaying the sketches, his son had insulted his sister Olive and had betrayed Ruth Wheeler, his acknowledged "close friend." Vachel's impassioned nine-page response iterates two themes: (1) that the drawings were purely academic, and (2) that he preferred drawing heavily draped figures but that he needed to know anatomy as well. In his words:

They take Academic drawings in such a frigid scientific spirit in the Institute and I have been so long accustomed to them in that way that for any one I know to take them in any other way I had entirely forgotten about. I am very very sorry. . . . I have often explained that draperies were my speciality in my letters. I want just enough anatomy for Artists to say when they look on my heavily, elaborately draped figures—"He is not only good on draperies but he knows his anatomy." My friends congratulate me on my draperies now and roast me for my ignorance of the figure and call my work "fake" and quack in that respect. I am like a Medical Student who has

never dissected. Draperies are my special talent, but the figure never will be. I only hope to make it passably respectable.

Only advanced students, he maintained, were allowed in the life classes: "It takes two years of hard grinding ambitious work from white plaster casts to get into the life-class and the riff-raff, the nasty stupid ordinary triflers never get into the life class." He added that the boys never drew in the same room with the girls and that the models were fully clothed except when posing. Before and after sessions, the models did not interact with students: "Please do not deduce from my drawings made with so much prayerful earnest effort and resolution and loyalty to my lady anything less than these. I am not going to the bad. There is where you do your only son a great wrong. You force me to boast of myself. I never prayed more or thought harder or worked in a loftier spirit."

Besides, he continued somewhat ingenuously, "If drawing from Life did me harm, it was certainly before Christmas, for I have been painting only draperies ever since The critic is very exacting and works one very hard in life class, and I do not feel quite ready to return to such a strain till I have learned a few things about color and drapery and Composition. The drawings I showed you last week I did from September till Christmas. I do not expect to go back to life-work till Summer, if I do then. So you can rest easy for a while at least. Viewed theorectically I do not like the nude much better than you—but in the class-room it is a cold scholastic scientific matter on a very high plain of effort. Only the best students get into the classes and they bring their best efforts to bear while in there."

Finally, he closed on a happy, dutiful note: "I am very glad you wrote to me. I hope if my letter is disrespectful you will forgive me and that it will at least set your mind at rest. It may cheer you to know I received my first commendation from Richardson this afternoon on a Composition in which the figures were very heavily draped. That is my long suit and I will never depart from it. I shall keep your letter as a reminder that what is very earnest and clean in Art may not be too carefully hid from misunderstanding eyes. I will be more careful in the future. With love Vachel" (April 13).

Actually, Vachel's parents may have been further alarmed had they read an entry in their son's "gathered information on Art" notebook, an entry written on the same day as the above letter:

April 13, 1903.

Once more let me write down something to forget. It is tonight's theory of my work. It interests me tonight. Don't try to be an illustrator. Cast in your fortune with makers of single pieces of art—be they picture painters or sculptors or high class carvers. But let your work be the first of its kind since Rossetti, and differing from him in this that the picture shall be defiantly artistic in intention appealing if possible to the most artistic of the artists for the rarest lightest qualities, colored maybe—packed with an expert knowledge and facility in Composition if possible, draped distractingly, with a thorough knowledge of form, of expression, of the highest most varied intellectual qualities and the most heartburning experience shown in facial contour.

Obviously, the Lindsay son's unwavering aim of pursuing illustration as a profession was beginning to waver, apparently eclipsed by a renewed interest in pursuing the life of a traditional artist, a life historically racked with financial struggle. He revealed nothing concerning his defiantly artistic intentions to his parents, and their reaction to his nude drawings could only have reinforced his growing reluctance to share his ideas.

Vachel's new emphasis on the primacy of art is manifested in another important observation recorded in his "gathered information on Art" notebook. Art must precede poetry; art, indeed, is superior to poetry: "Let me add nothing literary in the drawing or think nothing literary, let me defiantly assert to the world that my drawing is unliterary. Let me feel myself utterly one of the artists and not on the borderland where literary art flourishes. And let me possibly assert this in my short verse which I place below my picture. Let me never fear to assert it too frequently if it can be done with any sort of variety. Let the verse always be written to fit the picture and after the picture is done. And let the philosophy be that since the Anglo-saxon^ demands a literary picture the literature will be added below and he can imagine it into the picture, if he is so determined. At any rate suit the public only in your verse—do not contaminate your picture by demagoguery or literaryism." Indeed, with this point of view, it is difficult to see how the author could pursue life as a Christian cartoonist, since message, if any at all, would have to be totally subservient to art. The Christian cartoonist, on the other hand, planned to use art as a subservient means of illustrating a moral or an idea.

In a follow-up comment to the above, Vachel noted the futility of trying to please others by attempting to be something other than oneself. He had sounded this theme before—at Hiram—when he found himself differing with his parents in regard to his preparations for the future:

It certainly does not pay to be anything but ones^ self—giving it the highest most complete artistic expression, regardless of comprimises^ with this or that class of mankind. Writhe as we will—there is only one set of people that an earnest soul can vitally move—those are souls that are forever akin—scattered through all classes of society a man can find thousands upon thousands who are his doubles in that mysterious thing called personality—doubles in one way or another. The way to strike home most thoroughly and permanently to the largest number is just to be thoroughly true to ones^ highest—never fearing it will be too exclusive to^ personal, too exceptional too aristocratic to be understood. One is slandering the race when he does anything but his best word^ [work]. Your true Democrat is Poe as much as Longfellow, Angelo as much as Raphael, Rossetti as much as Millias^, Whistler as much as [Charles Dana] Gibson.

Let me thoroughly identify myself with just that type of artistic work, and refuse to do any other. My name once established I will certainly have few rivals—it will be a field of my own.

Morris and Rossetti, he concluded, brought verse close to painting and drawing: "But let me do as much tward^ pushing the verse to the borderline and the pictures away from the borderline as possible."

Yet one additional notebook entry, written on the same day as the above, helps to explain Vachel's renewed interest in high art. He was reconsidering his future in the light

of new information concerning his father's financial capabilities: "Now that my father's prospects are brighter I feel the courage to travel the long way—and say—'this one thing I do.'" He no longer felt pressured to earn a living as soon as possible. Circumstances had changed, and he did not have to concentrate on art solely as a trade. He had the time and the potential financial backing to be an artist rather than a hack illustrator for newspapers and magazines.

Just days after learning of his father's optimistic prospects, Vachel pondered another new thought in this same notebook. He felt the need to experience traditional artistic inspiration, the need for seeking a message from the Muse:

April 22, 1903.

Another idea afflicts me. Concerning drawing a pen and ink picture. Let it always suggest itself—stroke upon stroke—till the picture makes itself. Start with about as blank a brain as the paper is—in that way as each new suggestion comes and the unknown godess^ emerges from the ink incense—why the suggestions will come hot, and fresh and to be acted upon at once if at all. Then each new stroke will be more in harmony with what has gone before on the paper—and one is not chained down to prefunctory^ work by an idea that was once warm, but has been turned over so many times it is cold, or at least not adapted to the special emergencies of the actual lines of the half-finished picture. On the same basis the inscription thought up and added the very last thing of all.

In something of an anomaly, he also stressed the value of art-school training:

Now this thing has its reverse side. The preperation. One should indeed be earnest in his hours of preparatory observation, discriminating and selective, so that in the hour of creation nothing but good stuff will pour out—though nobody knows exactly what it shall be. And this applies to method and training also. The academic training should be taken as earnestly and strenuously as possible—every question it brings up of technique or analysis decided upon in one way or another. Every possible point of view—

Light, composition, atmosphere—etc. should in one sense or another be "considered"—for when a thing has been considered it does not matter whether it be made to subtend to other things or entirely omitted—the fact that it has been considered will be plain enough in the resulting picture—whether we will or no—give it an atmosphere of self-control and completeness not otherwise hit upon.

Significantly, this is the final 1903 entry in the "gathered information on Art" notebook. The next entry reads: "New York. March 24, 1905." With Dr. Lindsay's improved financial situation, his son was increasingly determined to pursue the serious life of an artist. In Vachel's mind, almost certainly with intellectual reinforcement from Lawton Parker and Fred Richardson, a serious art life meant leaving Chicago for New York—and afterward on to Paris.

Vachel's changed perspective was also shaped by some modest success. On April 28, 1903, he boasted to his parents that his "best picture" was for sale in the University of Chicago bookstore—"where they only sell learned books and where only learned men come to buy of course I have some hope of selling it—at least I have made a step in advance in exhibiting my work—which I expect to do from this time forth. The picture

with three others seemed to pass muster with my friends at the institute^—so If^ any man is kind enough to buy it I will not feel I have bunkoed him."

Typically, when he had something to write home about, Vachel imagined further feats: "The next one I will put in the big Chicago Art Store O'Brien's, where they sell European masterpieces and only high priced stuff. I don't know whether my work is good enough for O'Brien or not—I am going to try to astonish him if I can. I do not want more than one of my pictures on exhibition at the same place—and there are several good places left in Chicago. I was quite elated over the interest of the book-store^ man in my picture and took it for a good omen." With his letter, he sent a drawing illustrating a passage from *Paradise Lost*: "it is a rather successful effort to—imagine action. I am trying to get the repose out of my figures as fast as possible" (April 28). And to that end, he asked to remain in Chicago for the summer: "I have to study and experiment a great deal out of school hours now and push my color and Composition especially hard, and the things I havn't^ time for now I could work out then. My work has made a very distinct advance since I came home last—and I am getting bigger visions of its probabilities every day." [Note 10]

Those "bigger visions" included the possibility of future mural painting ("by the addition of color and very little change of the line—only large and magnificent instead of small and delicate"). However, he was not ready yet to reveal that his "visions" had led him to eschew the life of a mundane illustrator: "I will be an illustrator first, however, and maybe after I am fifty they may let me fresco the State-House. And a good deal depends on whether I ever learn color" (April 28). Actually, the seemingly spontaneous thought on murals reflects the Institute's visiting celebrity this spring semester, mural painter John La Farge (1835-1910). Vachel stated his impression of La Farge in a later letter: "He is a fine old man, a most taking fellow" (May 25).

The "bigger visions," the late exhibiting success, and the acquaintance of Lawton Parker are the keys to understanding Vachel's imminent decision to quit the Chicago Art Institute in favor of the New York School of Art. Prior to coming to Chicago, Parker was president of the New York school (which had been founded in 1896 by William Chase and named the Chase School of Art). In 1898, in conjunction with Parker's presidency, the school was renamed the New York School of Art (though it was still referred to informally as the "Chase School"). Although Parker largely influenced the decision to enroll in New York, Vachel also was encouraged by the fact that his friend Fred Richardson had decided to leave Chicago in order to pursue high art and support himself as a free-lance, New York illustrator.

Before saying good-bye to Chicago, however, Vachel gave further evidence of his increasing interest in socializing with his peers. "I am awfully sleepy tonight," he wrote on May 25: "Saturday night Alice Cleaver and I were invited to some amature^ theatricals by some people I have wanted to know better— for sometime. The best people of the Institute were there, it was at Miss Baker's house. It was a very informal easy affair gotten up in one evening and they all seemed to enjoy it immensely. I was impressed with the ease with which they all enjoyed themselves, the spirit and yet the quietness. Miss Baker is a very refined little person, and there were several other delightful girls there and some unusually bright fellows." He also claimed to have studied an Institute exhibit of Japanese prints on several occasions during the preceding few

weeks, adding that the register book was full of his name, along with the names of two of his constant companions: Jessie Kalmbach and Bessie Crombach. But he also insisted that Ruth Wheeler remained his "lady." The other girls were only art friends.

4

In spite of his prediction of financial success by June 1903 (see Chapter 10), Vachel was still his father's dependent son when the foreseen month finally arrived. As a result, his desire to stay in Chicago lost out to his parents' need to have him return to Springfield. Dr. Lindsay's changed financial prospects reflected his increased rental property, as well as income from several boarders who were permanent residents in the family home. Although office girl Jennie Jones was in charge of details, the doctor-landlord clearly wanted a family member to monitor his business affairs and to attend to his house, while he and the other Lindsays, with their friends, enjoyed their annual Colorado vacation.

This year, it was Paul Wakefield's turn to travel to Colorado, likely at Vachel's request with Olive's approval, since the invitation evidences Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay's endorsement of Paul as a potential suitor for the hand of their eldest daughter. With the Lindsay son in Springfield and with Ruth Wheeler forced to spend the summer working at the Akron YWCA, Paul and Olive were essentially left to themselves, and their mutual attraction for one another developed predictably. At the same time, Vachel sent almost daily letters to Ruth, and this relationship too became increasingly close and confidential. On a less serious note, Vachel also exchanged letters with (and requested pictures of) his Chicago friends—Alice Cleaver, Jessie Kalmbach, and Bessie Crombach. On June 19, he reported to Kalmbach:

I will answer your answer more at length than this—but my Mama clamours^ for my help for this week. . . .

I will spend my summer in the house here, with all the rest gone West for health—from July 15th to Sept. 1. I expect to do a lot of Compositions. Maybe you have heard me say that however. I sat down at twelve last night to write to Bessie and filled the letter with mad ravings about two giddy young girls sixteen and fourteen that I have just discovered hereabouts. I hope to do better by Bessie next time and restrain the confidential note—at least in the matter of the ladies.

Everybody must get up at six in this househould, whether they are of any account or not, and be busy all day, so it is pretty hard to keep absolutely caught up in ones, "dootys" let alone the pleasures of correspondence. Write to me any time this summer to this town. They all know me here. (Princeton)

Two weeks later, Vachel advised Alice Cleaver that he "was very glad" to receive her letter: "There is something amazingly frank about you—and I hope in this letter to follow your praiseworthy example and write you just what I think of our friendship. . . . I hope I can express just what I want in a very few words." However, when writing to a young woman, Vachel was never a man of "very few words." His thoughts on their friendship led to a very long, typically rambling letter, beginning with a description of his ongoing relationship with Susan Wilcox, "my literary friend":

I want you to be just such a true friend to me in Art as she has been in Letters. She has read and criticised^ with patience for three years of High School and six since then—all I have written worth mentioning. And together we have in our talks and walks gone into the problems and the pleasures of the Literary world the deepest I have ever gone. She is to me the muse of Writing—of all that vast realm of life and thought that is in and about the world of letters. There is nothing cold in our friendship—it is perfectly confident and confidential—it is as warm and admiring as any friendship can be—and we know it to be such and know it will always remain so. There is no literary triumph and pleasure quite like bringing her some new thing which I have written or thought or felt—and have a pride or interest in, if it has any bending tward^ the real high literary life. Now Alice—I do not know whether we can manage it or not—but I want if the Fates so decree and Jehova is willing—I want to be a fellow Artist with you that way. Our kingdom shall be Art—and into it we shall go as deep as we can and still find pleasure and comradeship. And not in a cold way—I am willing to be a much more ardent friend than I have ever seemed.

He was apprehensive, he maintained, about the potential for "fugitive gusts of passion that may enter into the admiration of the sincerest and most discreet friends," unless they are resolved against them: "You know I am a man of honor, and you feel it so much that as our friendship becomes deeper and franker—you will be franker by far with me than with one you trusted less. But we must enter solemly^ and soberly into an agreement not to be sweethearts even for a careless moment—for though we might shake the feeling off the day after—I cannot bear the memory of having yielded to the thing I set myself against. I have been rude and cutting with you often—for which I do not feel proud—of myself—I am quite ashamed of myself— but the trouble is our friendship has been so vague and indefinite neither of us saw how safe or unsafe we were. With the firm resolve to be friends infinitely and sweethearts never—and remembering it as a grave danger—why I am perfectly willing to go ahead—and remember I have hundreds of things to lay on the altar of friendship that most men do not give. I am only waiting for such an agreement as this to show you what they are."

As with Adaline Mugrage earlier, Vachel insisted that he wanted to help mold Alice's future, manifesting yet again what I have chosen to refer to as the "uncle" side of his nature: "Alice, you are such a dear, brave strong and delicate woman, I am so interested in your future and your success—and I so feel the impulse to try to help you often—that I don't want to hold it back—just because you might not understand. . . . You are one of the three Fates of Art, the one that spins—and all things come as you decree them. My dear girl let me help you however I can. I want to be artist enough to feel myself your fellow-workman and say—'Cheer up—Comrade' in just the way you want to hear."

Uncle Boy then attempted to explain his attraction to Ruth Wheeler, the girl he had chosen for his sweetheart: "I know how you feel—you do not see how I can ardently be an artist and an honest friend—and on the other side of my nature a literary man and an honest friend, and in the middle of my life, in its main current be utterly devoted to the girl whose picture I showed you, to a woman who cares not the snap of her finger for Art and Letters—except in an indirect way—for my sake. The solution to the problem is in the rare personality of that little woman—the only kind of a woman I could be true to

always, in my complex life. If she were a literary woman—she would suppress the Artist in me—if an Artist—the man of letters. As she is—she shows to me Life and the Soul itself—stripped of all art and letters. I often talk of her to Miss Wilcox—but somehow I never could talk about her much to you, and that is the reason I feel there is something that needs adjusting in our friendship." Ruth Wheeler, ironically, is depicted as an ideal mate because she is "a woman who cares not the snap of her finger for Art and Letters—except in an indirect way." She would be a disciple, as well as a mate: a perfect companion for Uncle Boy.

The following morning Vachel brought his letter to Alice Cleaver to a close. Cleaver was considering the Philadelphia School of Art, where William Chase taught part time. (She did enroll in the fall, 1904, after she graduated from the Art Institute with highest honors in her class.) Meanwhile, Vachel had already made his decision to leave Chicago to enroll in Chase's New York School of Art: "If you are in Philadelphia—why cheer up—you will make friends fast enough. I am sure I couldn't help you there. The only social art I know is the Art of ignoring people. But I will write you any kind of a letter you want, and as often as you want—if that will do you any good. Anything you discover in that school I want to know it, and I will write you what I know of New York."

Finally, Uncle Boy gave further evidence of ambivalent feelings, the same ambivalent feelings that he would express many more times to many more women in the years to come. Like T.S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, Vachel feared the consequences involved in an emotional attraction to women, and his avuncular posturing may well have developed as a means of defense. He was interested only in a mature friendship, he often claimed, because a mature friendship would be safe, should a woman prove to be uninterested ("That is not what I meant, at all"). At the same time, Vachel was honest enough to recognize physical attraction; and he found discreet ways to suggest his susceptibility to "gusts of passion," but again with an avuncular tone. In this letter to Cleaver, he expressed his feelings in typical fashion:

And my dear child please write as long letters as the spirit moves you. Your letters are delightful—and certainly you should neither shorten them or lengthen them for any conventionality or supposed obligation. You and I follow the Gleam—and do as we please and be frank I hope. Such a comradeship has rare priviliges^. Well, goodby^—I hope you are nearly sunstruck, I am. (July 2-3, Hiram)

For her part, Cleaver took her friend at his word, as we can tell from a follow-up Vachel letter: "Let us consider that incident closed. Your last letter was just what I wanted, and I am willing to take the blame of all past blunders and let us not make the mistake of discussing such matters any further." He included a broad hint of something more than friendly emotion, however, and he expressed further defensiveness: "I write because I want to hear from you, and I will consider it the right kind of confidence if you sometimes write twice, if the spirit moves you. Very sincerely, N.V. Lindsay" (July 6, Hiram). [Note 11]

On a less emotional note, Vachel described his summer creativity for Cleaver's benefit: "You ought to see what I am doing—pen and inks on paper big as charcoal paper—for head life. I am sketching in any sort of figure and inventing tapestries and fabrics to cover them that would make a Jap roll over and die of sick envy. It is a pile of

fun, and each new one is fearful and wonderful." He had purchased an issue of the *Inland Printer* magazine, an issue that contains one of Cleaver's pictures, as well as a mutual friend's story (one "Steven's^"). Vachel praised Cleaver's work and then related his own dream of success: "the reproduction was so good I thought you ought to be proud. Next year you will do things sure, I am beginning to dream of making a hit with the New York publishers with my pen-and-inks" (July 6, Hiram).

A few days later, a letter from Vachel to his vacationing mother reveals that his summer activity was not entirely artistic: "I have watered the front yard in warm water every morning—and Fanny [the paid servant girl] has fed the cats each meal, and me and I have just fumigated both store-rooms[^] and mended the hose, and expect to put it on the back yard tonight and think of whatever else I havn't^ done. I put the rug up stairs^ to be fumigated, and hid the silver in the cradle, and the farmer came for the horse yesterday taking him first to Steamer's to have his shoes removed, and Willard Wheeler [Willard Wall Wheeler, no relation to Ruth] was here yesterday and says he will be on the New York Sun, probably, and seems to be of a mind to room with me—and I wrote Ruth yesterday, and there doesn't seem to be any special thing to worry about this morning" (July 10). Between chores, he was drawing—and writing poetry: "I wrote most all day vesterday on a not very successful poem but important because it is a new departure in thought and feeling and bears large promise of better things coming. . . . I feel mighty good this morning and expect to do some drawing that will put me one step forward before the sun sets very much. . . . It is very pleasant most of the day here in the Library [in the family home] where I work, and I work all morning, most of the afternoon and a little after supper. I shall do my pen and inks and poetry down here—maybe my charcoal up stairs, with an old piece of carpet under the easel" (July 10).

Nearly every evening, as he would for many years to come, Vachel set his work aside and went calling on some of his Springfield friends: Maud and Mary Humphrey, Mary B. Post, Hugh Morrison, Mary Coleman (later Mrs. Hugh Morrison), Scott Pickerell, Brit Scholes, Chester Ide, Willard Wall Wheeler, Margaret Tiffany (Mayme's young sister), and the Samuel Mendenhall family. On one evening, he sought special therapy at the home of other dear friends: Dr. Thomas Dale Logan, pastor of Springfield's First Presbyterian church, his wife Caroline B. (née Mahoney), and their daughters, Elizabeth Harrison, Marjorie Sybilla, and Elsie Caroline. Elsie, the youngest, was a Vachel favorite: "Last night being at work till half past eight I went over to Logans because I was cross and made Elsie laugh at me for about an hour and cheered up." The crossness, Vachel informed his vacationing parents, was chemical: "I found out the matter this morning—Fanny has been giving me Coffee in my postum!" (July 10).

Two weeks later, again writing to his vacationing parents, Vachel reported that he had spent a characteristic evening with another favorite confidante, Susan Wilcox. That the evening was characteristic, we know, because of published accounts by both parties: "I went to see Miss Wilcox and at my solicitation she gave my poetry a good earnest roast and I see the line of advance much more plainly for her help and am duly grateful. She wants me to make music a more primary consideration—since I have really never tried myself to the limit from the musical stand point^—and she insists on more condensation; and less preaching, and that the intellectual side of verse be rigidly excluded. (My grey matter has to go begging it seems. A passion of the body is noble—

but a passion of the brain—never! Well, I will take my medicine.) And she insists that I must no longer suppress my appitite^ for magic, but give it all the rein in the world. It is very good advice and I hope to remember it." Two other Springfield friends, Willard Wheeler and Chester Ide, had criticized Vachel's art: "Willard wants it more realistic at all hazards and Chester wants it more beautiful regardless, and I would be happy to satisfy both" (July 25). Indeed, surviving documents and letters from this summer of 1903 manifest Uncle Boy's dual nature very clearly: he was engrossed, both in giving and in receiving advice and consultation.

In addition to drawing and writing, Vachel read extensively this summer. At Hiram he had learned that a well-read person is a well-respected person, an avuncular person that others will turn to for guidance. On his reading list was George Eliot's *Romola*, Keats, Swinburne, and "Poe's poems through again." He was also reading Shelley, and although in later years he denied Shelley's influence, claiming "Shelley never quite got me" (Chénetier 69), he reported to his mother that this summer, anyway, he was "in love with Shelley most of all He is so bracing to ones^ spiritual side after Swinburne's heavy Hellenism" (July 10). In turn, Kate Lindsay suggested that her son should plan to study color in New York, and he answered that he found her advice "very glad to follow," although he continued to emphasize pen-and-ink drawing:

I have made a pretty good start in pen and Ink^—I made one small drawing—and four very large ones—twice as big as that Colonial toast [apparently another drawing], and elaborately embroidered—one I gave to Margaret Tiffany and three I sent to Ruth—I think they will surprise her, she has seen only my school work in all its dullness. The work was very artistic but along old lines elaborated—not exactly bran^ new. I hope to dig into new fields—more earnest severe figure work, crammed with anatomy— instead of rich embroideries on dummies. I have no end of draperies, embroideries and decorative designs at my command, I find. I have a good shell to put my figures into—I must learn them. To draw a figure in action from the imagination in any desired position is no easy thing—far different from drawing with the model before one— all the difference between an extemperaneous^ oration and reading from a well known book. (July 25)

Despite the fact that he made social calls on many Springfield girls this summer of 1903, Vachel's devotion to Ruth Wheeler became more and more serious. As he explained to his mother: "Ruth has written me some lovley\[^\] letters and wants me to write every day to which Mrs. Wheeler ceases to object, and Willard and Zelle [Ruth's brother and his wife] are getting very solicitous and say we are beating them in their palmiest days. Which is cheerful news for me and I tell you in the strictest confidence which I hope you won't betray. All I wish is I had my own money to spend on the girl—she is such a vain proud aristocrat in spite of everything that a little extravagance goes farther with her than the most sensible deeds or the most earnest accomplishment sometimes—and I hate to grudge her the little she enjoys it so whole heartedly\[^\], her beautiful vanity seems to be her only rest from her Y.W.C.A. and all her unselfish duties, and I hope without appearing absolutely foolish in your eyes to court the fair one not as you would like to be—courted—but in the way she loves."

Then Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay's son revealed that his appraisal of Ruth was prelude to a confession: "You see I am fereful\(^\) of being scolded for half a dozen American

Beauties [roses] I sent her, and I cant^ bear to be scolded on such a sensitive place. And if you had gotten the letter of thanks I received, you would understand. And she is going to spend her whole summer in a hot Y.W.C.A. office as a substitute for the regular secretary, and therefore I am going to live on Force^ and love letters and send her another half dozen just once more before the summer is over (or a dozen if I could)." He begged that his actions not be reported to his sister: "Now please don't let Olive know, she stings me so about these things, without intending to. She couldn't resist the opportunity when she is feeling bad—all honor to my sister, but her nerves make her too reckless with my sacred things, and lately I cant^ stand for scolding or roasts in such a matter, and I don't like to have to freeze up in self-protection." Why would Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay object if their 23-year-old son sent his girlfriend a half dozen roses, paid for with his parents' money?

Perhaps as an attempt at additional appeasement, the dutiful son elaborated on his "struggle tward" perfection this week First, all the houses are rented to tenants that are good pay. Next—I have fumigated twice around the two store-rooms" and your bedroom". And once in Olives" room and mine—just to fix the bugs that might be. The cats are fed with milk all day, and I water the flowers. The grass and weeds are pretty well started growing, but I hope to defeat them next week. I think that is the end of my virtues. I think you might write about what I am possibly neglecting—I will take it gracefully, being in extra good spirits." For good measure, he squeezed in another sentence above the line: "I feel something is being neglected." Finally, in reference to the decision to include Ruth on the family vacation during the previous summer, he concluded: "Most of all I am thankful for all last summer to you and Papa, and grow more so every day. Vachel" (July 25).

5

Toward the end of this eventful summer, Vachel wrote again to Alice Cleaver, this time detailing his plans: "I start for the East in ten days—if you write to me after that send the letter to the New York School of Art—57 west^ 57 street. I will make one weeks^ visit to my Grandma in Indiana and two to my lady in Ohio and be in New York about September the first—I mean October the first. I am stupid tonight" [he drew a line through "I mean," as well as through the wrong date]. He again assured Cleaver of his avuncular concerns for her future: "Do you know I am awfully ambitious for you Alice—and if you do not tell me every time you score a triumph you will do me an injustice. I want you to write to me especially in those times when you are hilariously successful. And I will make a note of it and say 'one more victory for Alice.' I have written to my lady about what you have done for me and she feels very kindly about you already, and I expect to tell her every time you do things to tell^ her what the wonderful Alice has done next. . . . Since my last letter to you my lady and I have lived about a thousand years and I feel awfully old!"

As for his own future, he added "I can hardly wait to get there [New York]—for the first time since I started to study art I am impatient to get to school, and when I think of the New York galleries I am going to see I just squirm with anticipation. . . . If I am not destined to be a great artist I am going to turn sour and be a slathering critic, and I'll bet I hit the nail on the head every time—and the artist's too. . . . Do you have fleas in

Nebraska? We have them here. But if I had my way we would have one less. . . . My but I am going to work hard this winter, Alice, if I only can. I have just a pile to do and this may be my last year my Papa sends me—after this I may toil on alone and send myself." He had worked hard all summer: "Let me tell you about my summer's work. I did just what I said I would do—cut loose and did a pile of highly wrot^ compositions jammed full of decorative detail. I feel ready to go back to school and be sensible now. I never worked so hard in my life, and made thirty big drawings—pen and inks—two feet by eighteen inches about. I would do one in a day and then lay off about a day or too^ and sleep away the tiredness and think up another and do that in a day. I have got a whole lot more self respect than I had in the beginning of Summer." These drawings, he claimed, were "distributed" among his Springfield friends (September 1, Hiram).

The same day Vachel wrote much the same information for Jessie Kalmbach, although he added: "To summarize the summers' work I would say I gave myself to the inventing of intricate and striking detail and the vivid contrast of novel textures—and in these things I was amazingly successful in my own eyes. I found I had such a mine of inventive schemes—a regular spouting oil well—that I did my best to pour them all out where I could see them—and no two schemes were a like'—and I got an amazing range of pen strokes and decorative textures, with never a bit of desire to repeat and perfect those that came yesterday, so many newer and better ones came today. But that was the extent of my triumph—and though in the future I shall rely upon my resourcefulness in those narrow particulars—no other advance was made this summer. Some of my general effects were successful—all of them marking some progress—but they were mighty slip shod'— considering how the detail might have been used to dazzle in masses and in large harmonies. At my next period of leisure I hope to go in for general effects entirely—and carry out some of the hints my work gives me as I look it over by masses."

He was surprised at the speed with which he had worked, he related to Kalmbach, having made 30 large pictures, one a day (a pen-and-ink sketch entitled "Adam in the forest" of Arden" was enclosed in the letter): "My pen flew like lightning sometimes and I was quite amazed at myself. But my dear friend I fully realize they were all nothing but tricks and cleverness—and the only comforting thing about them is their inexhaustibility,—and freshness." He went on to detail his plans: "Now this fall I am going in for figures. I am going to memorize the human figure or bust, not the human bust—I mean I will bust if I don't. I am going to Chase School—and do my little best to get interested and slap paint on the canvas. And they have a free class from 4:30 to 6:30—sketching for Action from the nude—that interests me the most—though I shall try to do my 'dooty' by paint in the class before. But just think of being able to draw the figure in action in half an hour or two hours—there is where I can shine and win first place in the Concour' [concours d'élégance] shure'. Miss Baker always said my starts were the best—and if I can only get a first place in something sometime I believe I will fight for it to keep it."

Finally, he offered Kalmbach an appraisal of Ruth Wheeler: "I have sent all my this' summer's work to my Lady—most of it—and snowed her under and she is now at last interested in my art for its own sake—and maybe I will work harder for Chase if she takes an interest in the work for its own sake. Its' all right to have one like your work for

your sake, but it doesn't flatter the work or stimulate progress. . . . But if my work becomes lovley^ enough to really interest my lady I may be an artist yet":

My lady is a dear. She is light of heart but full of prayers, she is proud as a bird of paradise, proud as Lucifer, and all those that do not know her think she is cold and rese[r]ved, but very gracious. But all those that know her find that for her friends she would die and for those she deeply loves she would die and suffer a living death and smile and pray and laugh and dress like a bird of Paradise^ and hide all her grief. (September 1, Princeton)

Vachel enclosed a copy of his poem "The Dream of King David in Heaven" (*Poetry* 18, 20). Dated "August 29, 1903," the manuscript includes an authorial note: "Copied for my fellow traveller in the land of prints and Jades^ and swords, Jessie Kalmback^."

By September 17, following a week's stay in Rushville, Indiana, Vachel was in Akron, at the home of "my lady." The day after arriving, he sent his mother a long letter, assuring her that her niece Helen Campbell (who had left the Lindsays in order to attend high school in Rushville—see Chapter Five) was doing well. The Indiana relatives, he assured his mother, were full of praise for Helen's behavior: "they all considered Helen a pronounced success, and you had made her not only a lady, but a very useful girl around the House." Aunt Fannie, he proclaimed, "is very sure that Helen is the most superior girl in character and training of her age she ever knew." Meanwhile, he averred, Ruth was "a little fatter and stronger than you ever saw her" (September 18).

On September 30, at the end of his stay in Akron, Vachel announced: "Ruth and I have had a fine visit and while we have not reached the time for public Congratulations—or the 'understanding' that you might like—still—as soon as I have a little money earned I expect to buy a little trifling jewelery^." He also reported that he had made a side trip to Hiram, for a four-day visit to see Paul and the other Wakefields. "Everyone in Hiram was glad to see me," he informed his mother, "and loved me like a brother" (September 30). Two days after this letter, he was onboard the train, headed for New York City to study art with William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), Robert Henri (1865-1929), and fellow teachers and students Rockwell Kent (1882-1971), George Luks (1867-1933), F[rancis] Luis Mora (1874-1940), and George [Wesley] Bellows (1882-1925).

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Vachel's first surviving letter from New York City, dated October 5, 1903, and addressed to his parents, reports his new landlady's name as "Mrs. Lucas." The address was 324 West 57th Street, although he expected to move when Willard Wheeler arrived from Springfield. Vachel asked his parents, therefore, to send letters to his school address—57 West 57th. In his eagerness, he had already made his first assessment of his new challenge and had paid his first year's tuition ("up to June 4")—with one of his father's \$50 checks: "I had a first rate impression of the Chase School this morning, in looking at the pictures on the walls by students. They strike a much higher grade of work than the Institute, though the school is much smaller. I saw a handfull^ of students this morning, and several of them looked promising. I start in this afternoon and will do some pen and ink work in my room till then" (October 5). [Note 12]

He also had walked through what would soon become one of his favorite New York City sites: "In the afternoon [Sunday, October 4] I went to the Metropolitan Museum of Art—about three miles north—in Central Park—that begins two blocks north. I did the whole thing in less than two hours—taking a general view of the collections and pictures. I find that two thirds of the men, and their styles are familiar to me, through smaller pictures studied in Chicago—the lesser efforts of these same men. There are about five times as many as in the Chicago collection and the Metropolitan Museum is about five times as large as the Chicago Art Institute." The preliminary visit led him to believe that the museum holdings would keep him busy for "many a day . . . there are two or three rooms full of Old Masters—and such a fine show among the Moderns that every minute I spend in the gallery would profit me. It is a nice walk and I shall begin to study it systematically every week at odd times till every room, every picture and every sculpture and decorative design is an old friend. I know I will enjoy the designs most of all—but I shall dutifully give a great deal of time to the pictures. I sized up the gallery pretty fast in an hour and know I will not get to the end of it in this year." He judged that the best picture on exhibit was Jules Bastien-LePage's (1848-84) "Joan of Arc listening to the Voices" (October 5).

A little more than a week later (October 14), Vachel expressed disappointment to his mother that Ruth Wheeler was unable to meet her, as planned, at a Detroit convention of Disciples. Ruth could not leave Akron, due to a law suit filed, in Vachel's words, "against the traction company responsible for her father's disaster. . . . If you and Ruth cannot be there together I would so like to have her with you in some of your convention visits, for that is the side of you she would understand best and you would get nearer to each other in a hurry than any other time—quickly I mean. That side of me she understands the least and if she can only see you in your element she will grasp me better in things she scarcely expects of me now— and therefore does not call them forth."

He urged his mother to accept an invitation to Akron: ". . . I know Ruth is very anxious to get close to you now and considers herself your daughter in law and the sooner you both get over the first awkwardness of the newness the better I would be pleased. I am very anxious for her to admire and understand you as a leader among women that holds their hearts. She has entirely too much respect and reverence and too little understanding of you to please me—I know she appeals to the serenest, most poetic and sensitive side of your Nature but she has never understood you there I can feel—. I want her to see you when you are resting and enjoying yourself, be a young girl with her. You always enjoy yourself more at a convention than anywhere else—so you must conspire to go to one with her. . . . There is no turning back with Ruth now," he continued, "she has put all doubts aside and if you have been hesitating so far there is no occasion to feel you are making too many advances. She considers herself engaged and is not the sort of person to turn on her course."

Next in this long letter addressed to his mother, Vachel requested assistance in preparing Ruth to be his wife. He wanted to live with a woman who had an outlook identical to his own. And his outlook, he proclaimed, was identical to that of his mother: "I know you will do great things for her in broadening her enthusiasm and widening her outlook from the very nature of your work in the world—things I might do in part—but as for me for a while I will be too absorbed in the technical details of my work to give my

best strength to the larger questions that preoccupy you, for a while, and any influence you can have over Ruth now in these questions I will feel deeply grateful for later when I can pause for a broader view and broader work. You entirely misunderstand me if because I have seemed to disagree with you on this detail and that of your ideas you think I do not agree in substance—I agree with you so thoroughly that it is a mere quibble over words to quarrel over anything—our spirit is identical in the matter of world-work and outlook—and the more Ruth shares your spirit the more she will share mine."

Typically, once he was on this familial theme, Vachel could not resist analyzing their mother-son relationship in detail: "If for six years we (you and I) have been forming our ideas in different environments—we personally are essentially the same behind the ideas and we ought to trust each other to work out our separate lives as conscientiously as we can for the glory and strength of the Church of the Disciples and the larger Church Universal. It is this spirit in you that you have given me so that it can never leave me, however it may change its form that I desire Ruth also to derive from you, as well as a thousand other things of intamacy^ and fondness." As for Ruth herself, he wished to have her life "so ordered that she sees and understands the hearts of all the great workers in the world of Art and Religon^—especially of the Disciple leaders. As a Y.W.C.A. woman I want her to enjoy the whole inner genius of that movement. She takes to rare spirits with intense pleasure—she loves refined and consecrated souls as a butterfly does flowers—and I want her to have a whole garden of them for her friends. I hope to deserve to know a great many in my time, and bring them to her."

Vachel was aware, however, that Ruth was subject to serious health problems and that she could not engage in strenuous activities: "It has always been the duty of everyone around Ruth to keep her from overdoing, and I hope to do my best to repress her industry and keep her for an ornament, for atmosphere. If there is any work to be done I want to do it and hope to keep impressed upon her her functions as a fountain of inspiration rather than a hustler of any sort. I know of course she will be busy, she can't be stopped, and I want all she does to count with her for pleasure just because she is near enough to the centers of great movements to feel their power, and not be a discouraged plodder in the dark. If I have my way she shall see as much and love as much as she can and help that way and not by her limited muscle and nerve. I want her to help the World I hope to come in contact with in the same way she has helped me—not by main strength but by her rare spirit and understanding."

He then offered one of his typical character analyses, this time of Ruth Wheeler: "I have come to Understand^ Ruth much better since I have studied Art. She is not as much a person of fashion and convention as I thought—in college. I have known other much more emphatic people in such things. She has a tendency that way—but is much more a person too fastidious to be really fashionable, entirely too sensitive to be called conventional. That is, in the mere matter of externals—and in her spirit there is much more pride than convention and a great deal more faithfulness to duty, and sensitiveness to what those around require of her, even absurdly so—it doesn't take more than a hint by some thoughtless body around her to make her work her head off in the most childlike faithfulness. They say young men get over all this finess^ of appreciation as they grow older—but I for one am going to enjoy it while it lasts and do my little best to hang on to it' (October 14).

A few days prior to this letter, Vachel had moved across the street, to 345 West 57th, likely at the urging of roommate Willard Wheeler. Vachel would leave and then return to this address in September 1906 and, in a letter to his father, give his landlady's name as "Mrs. Beakes." Wheeler almost certainly is the New York friend cited by biographer Trombly in the following quotation (although the year could not have been 1904, since Vachel was not in New York during the fall, 1904): "When I went to New York in the fall of 1904 [1903] . . . , I found Vachel sitting on a brass-bound, round-top trunk in a typical hall bedroom. It was a snappy cold day; there was no heat in the room; he had his overcoat on, the collar turned up, and was writing, writing, writing. I secured a new room for him in another boarding-house. As the Muse was with him, he was very tractable, and I led him around like a captive animal by an imaginary thong" (Trombly 31). Obviously, Vachel was in sound health. Indeed, he had just passed a physical examination at the New York West Side YMCA (he wanted to use the exercise facilities), and the vital statistics survive: weight, 122.7; height, 66.8; chest contracted, 30; chest expanded, 33.5; and waist, 26.7 (Virginia). He had reached full height—at just under 5 feet, 7 inches.

As for the School of Art, the new student seems to have been very satisfied. Writing to Hiram friend Cornelia Wakefield (Paul's sister), he praised the school's teaching methods and singled out instructor Kenneth Hayes Miller for special recognition. Miller evaluated his students' work twice a week—on Tuesdays and on Fridays; and Vachel looked forward to Miller's critical remarks: "We spend a week on a drawing here, instead of two weeks as in Chicago. And Monday morning you put it on the frame and Chase gives a criticism. So I get three good criticisms on one weeks^ work, and Miller said so many nice things I am anxious to hear what Chase will say. He said nice things last Monday. I am afraid I will really be enthusiastic about my school if I stay long enough" (October 16, Hiram). At the same time, Vachel commented to his parents: "He [Miller] is just the man I am after. I want to memorize the figure, and he takes rather that point of view" (October 14). [Note 13]

"I am having all the start I could desire in New York, except in business," Vachel advised Cornelia, "and I hope that will come." He also related that his friend and art teacher from Hiram, Allie Dean, was a fellow student at the school, although she attended the morning session rather than Vachel's afternoon session. He looked forward to guiding Dean through the Metropolitan Museum of Art: "It is about five times the size of the Chicago Art Institute. There are about the same set of painters represented here, only with more ambitious efforts and more famous masterpieces. I feel that I have a good start—I know the names and styles of most of the men and their place in the history of Art. So all is^ left is Art itself—I have got to learn that and then I will understand the pictures completely and can explain them to Allie. . . . New York city is mighty interesting," he concluded to Cornelia, "but I am here first of all for art and am able at present to resist the yearning for long rambles" (October 16, Hiram).

He had no intention, however, of resisting the art museums. With Allie Dean as his learned, albeit Platonic companion, he regularly toured both the Metropolitan Museum and the nearby Lenox Library, where four rooms were dedicated to painting and where the feature attraction was a large Whistler exhibition that opened October 12. Lindsay and Dean used these visits to demonstrate their extensive reading in art history.

He, as we have seen, had filled many notebook pages with observations and excerpts from Muther's *History of Modern Painting*. She was registered in the afternoon art history courses at Columbia University, as well as in the morning painting classes at the School of Art.

Vachel made little effort to resist another potential distraction—writing poetry—although increasingly his poetry was integrated with his art. "You ought to see the pictures I have just made," he boasted to Cornelia: "I will send you the poems for them instead" (October 16). And he enclosed manuscript copies of "Ghosts in Love" (*Poetry* 51-52) and a variation entitled "Fairies in Love." [Note 14] Two weeks later he mailed John Kenyon a shortened version of "The Queen of Bubbles" (dated "October 29, 1903"), with a side note: "For a picture of the Queen of Bubbles floating tward^ the Sun" (Hiram). A letter written to "Papa" (on November 3) further explains the origin of the picture: "I have a drawing in Pen and Ink—the best I have done of the Queen of Bubbles. It is the figure we had week before last. I have clothed her in an embroidered cloak and given her a chariot to ride in. I think you would consider her a decided success." Vachel may or may not have clothed his figure: the published version depicts a nude (see *Poetry* 38-39). He may simply have been telling Papa what he thought Papa wanted to hear, especially after experiencing the family storm concerning the Chicago drawings.

Meanwhile, an authorial note on the Kenyon manuscript suggests the origin of the "Queen of Bubbles" poem: "In gratitude for William Vaughn Moody." Kenyon had introduced Vachel to Moody's poetry, as we have seen, while Vachel occupied Kenyon's room at the University of Chicago. "The Queen of Bubbles" likely reflects one stanza from Moody's poem "The Moon-Moth":

Mountains and seas, cities and isles and capes,
All frail as dream and painted like a dream,
All swimming with the fairy light that drapes
A bubble, when the colors curl and stream
And meet and flee asunder. I could deem
This earth, this air, my dizzy soul, the sky,
Time, knowledge, and the gods
Were lapsing, curling, streaming lazily
Down a great bubble's rondure, dye on dye,
To swell the perilous clinging drop that nods,
Gathers, and nods, and clings, through all eternity.

Moody wrote of transience, the American West, prairies, democracy, ancestors, soul ships, the heart of God, the reward of wandering, fairies, knights, and dreams (including a portrait of the battle of love—see "Jetsam"). Vachel responded to these themes with enthusiasm, and we will observe Moody's influence on other Lindsay poems. [Note 15]

This fall, 1903, though, poetry remained a secondary interest for Vachel. The verses he did write were usually appended to one of his drawings. His primary energy was focused on art, and the chronic starter was in the midst of another exciting beginning. In early November, he bragged to Papa: "I am getting along swimmingly at school. My last drawing last week was marked to enter the concours which comes off next Friday. That is it will be put up in the monthly exhibit and ranked. I hope it will not get last

place. By next month I hope for a good place in the concours." He found the school's emphasis on drawing from memory a particularly stimulating challenge: "This morning I did yesterdays^ figure from memory on pen and ink paper with a pencil. I shall go over it with ink and make a costume on it and have it for the center for a design. I did one that way last week that I know you would like. Chase said yesterday morning some nice things about the drawing of a very lean muscular man where I had worked out all the anatomy. He said he would be sure an outsider would suppose I knew a great deal of anatomy. That same drawing Miller praised very much for getting the exact character of the model—so I have two separate compliments on it" (November 3).

The now eager art student was looking forward to the next stage of the school curriculum: "This week I am going to not only draw my figures at home from memory but draw the skeleton inside them. This evening begins a class in sketching from Life in Action—the class that decided me for the school. In that class the model every two minutes goes through some certain action for about fifteen minutes—a violent one generally—like striking at an imaginary ball with a base ball^ bat. In that half hour we are supposed to get down the total action of the figure, expressing its exact character and accenting the muscels[^] that are brought into special play. It is very fast work—and besides being splendid anatomical study it will supply me with some drawings of figures in action that I would like very much to use in my pen and ink designs—I want my people doing something, not in repose—and when you always draw from a real model that sits still or stands—how can you make the figure move right when you draw it in imagination?" The life class, he explained further, met two afternoons a week, from 4:30 to 6:30, with four poses in each class: "so that will supply me with eight drawings a week—enough to make a whole group at home and combine them into some stirring incident. To compose well drawn figures in groups I think would be a delight" (November 3).

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By mid-November, Vachel boasted to Papa that two of his drawings ("made about three weeks ago") were in the School's weekly exhibit: "There were some better ones on the line and some worse. You may have the satisfaction of considering me a part of the show henceforth. . . . Did I tell you that my drawing this week was marked @ 1—the nearest to official rank you get in the informality of the Chase School. Then once in two or three months they give a \$10 prize to somebody—but I havn't\^ won any yet. There are two big rooms full of paintings and one full of drawings in the exhibit" (November 14). And he had further reasons to celebrate success: "Miller and Chase both praise my work all they should. Miller last night congratulated me personally on my drawing—done in two hours yesterday afternoon. And Robert Henri came in by chance after sketch class and I collared him for a criticism of my sketches and he praised them a plenty. I feel as though I will really be somewhere before Christmas. I have made my two best life drawings these last two days—each one in an afternoon. I find that the more speed I get up the more thorough the work. Miller praised some of my half hour sketches quite enthusiastically last Wednesday. I feel like moving on. I think I told you about my memory Drawing. Chase said a great deal about one of mine last Monday—the first I handed in." However, he warned, "Don't imagine by all this I am the star of the school! But I feel I am holding my end up and have chances to star before I quit" (November 14).

Increasingly, William Chase's emphasis on drawing from memory met with Vachel's enthusiastic approval (and, as we shall see, had a profound effect on his later creativity as well). "I made a memory drawing last night of the days^ work," Vachel announced to his father, "and when I compared them today they were so much alike that I don't suppose you could tell which was which. . . . In some ways the memory drawing is the better of the two. Chase made me quite a little speech last Monday about the memory-drawing—telling me how much I would thank him for it some day. I am amazed how easy it is—lots easier than making the original drawing—taking lots less time and is lots more fun while you are doing it. I shall make it a large part of my plans for the future—and my work will be much more realistic than I planned to have it. I will first study out thoroughly my whole picture—figures and accessories in as hard and fast a way as I can—and then do the real picture from memory—adding little touches of idealism besides getting in all the facts." The "supper bell" interrupted him at this point, but he hastened to add another observation:

I hope it does not sound like I am a monomaniac on this subject of Art. I am getting really into it at last. Miller congratulated me on my last pen and ink design—and while the figure was realistic, the accessories were still fanciful. I hope soon to do away with fantastic accessories and put in real backgrounds in some real places—with many real people doing something real in the foreground. They teach that sort of Composition here—and I want to get hold of it. (November 14)

By mid-November, Vachel and Allie Dean had "a regular date for the Galleries Metropolitan and Lenox for Saturday mornings," as well as for most of the school lectures. "Allie is so very much in earnest," Vachel enthused: "it is a pleasure to have her along." He related that he was also spending time with "Anne Lu Russel"," perhaps a sister of his Hiram friend Charlie Russell. Anne was a music student, and, according to Vachel: "She and I met each other going to church. I called on her Tuesday evening. She lives only a block away. I shall go to see her occasionally. She lives in a big southern Boarding[^] house—with several Chase boys and girls in the crowd" (November 14). Although he was informally engaged to Ruth Wheeler, and writing to her nearly every day, the renewed social interest that had begun during the final months in Chicago continued unabated in New York, much of it centering around the School of Art and the various Disciples churches. In fact, only a few weeks after arriving in his new city, Vachel requested a letter from the Chicago Hyde Park church, so that he could transfer his membership to a New York church. He was beginning to feel at home, although he later admitted to his Chicago pastor and friend, Edward Scribner Ames, that "Nothing in New York has quite taken the place of the Hyde Park Church" (February 20, 1904, Chicago).

The new start was complete when Willard Wheeler (who had been out of town for several weeks) finally joined his Springfield friend late in November: "I Have^ moved in two days ago with Willard Wheeler in a room one story higher [at 345 West 57th]. It is a good room well lighted and big with two beds. Costs us \$7 a week apiece—including board." Wheeler had been hired as a reporter for the New York *Commercial Advertiser*, and Vachel was pleased with and proud of his roommate: "We enjoy each other very much and do all we can to spur one another on. Thanksgiving afternoon and all his leisure since, Willard has been writing on a story. He is dead in earnest and a fine man to

have around. I still have enough money to do me till the first of January," he assured his father, "—and hope to get work by that time" (November 28). To punctuate his serious intentions, Vachel claimed to have seen only two shows since coming to New York: David Belasco (1853-1931) and John L[uther] Long's *Darling of the Gods* (at the Belasco Theatre) and Stephen Phillips' (1864-1915) *Ulysses* (at the Garden Theater^).

In the meantime, the dedication to art continued to reap its rewards, and Vachel was able to relate additional successes and hopes: "Miller praised my painting quite a little yesterday—it was the first I have really done. I feel quite encouraged over my start and now that the preliminary throes are over want to learn all about painting in a week or so. It will not take many weeks to bring it to a level with my drawing" (November 28). It was Saturday morning, November 28, 1903. Vachel finished his letter to Papa and prepared to head for the Metropolitan Museum with Allie Dean. Like roommate Willard, he asserted, "Allie is a great help, she is so in earnest." As for himself, he concluded, "I am feeling pretty good over my start in paint. I will write you a long letter about the portrait show soon. . . . Give my love to everyone—with a special apportionment for yourself, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay."

Notes for Chapter Twelve

[Note 1] Beginning January 10, 1903, most of Vachel's letters home have survived. On January 15, he sent an apology to his mother: "I am very sorry to have caused you such deep anxiety. I shall try to do better in the future. I am sure I had the best Christmas at home I have ever had. . . . I know it is very selfish of me to talk art to people and hope to quit indefinitely. Whenever I do talk I hope you will call me down. Its^ an artists^ business to draw and keep still." At the same time, he explained the infrequency of his letters: "I am like a machine up here, going through the same routine at the Art Institute and the University [Chicago] and having recorded it once there is little else to say" (Ward). In his "January 19, 1903" notebook, he also recorded the checks that he received from his father from January 4 to May 28. The total was \$210.

[Note 2] Vachel attended Sudermann's *The Joy of Living* on the evening of January 14, 1903 (Ward—letter of January 15, 1903). The nights when he saw the other plays are not a matter of record. Mrs. Campbell (1865-1940, nee Beatrice Stella Tanner) was born in London. Famous for portraying characters who were both passionate and intelligent, she won fame as Paula Tanqueray in A.W. Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893). Subsequent roles included Juliet, Hedda Gabler, and Eliza Doolittle—in Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1914). She married Patrick Campbell in 1884. British playwright, Sir A[rthur] W[ing] Pinero (1855- 1934), authored many plays, among them *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895) and *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899).

[Note 3] Illinoisan Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) became a devoted follower of William Morris. His Roycroft Press at East Aurora (near Buffalo, New York) was a weak attempt to imitate Morris' Kelmscott Press. Hubbard also edited (and wrote many articles for) the *Philistine* (1895-1915), a magazine for artists. Later he published a similar magazine, *The Fra* (1908-17); the title reflects the sobriquet he chose for himself. *A Message to Garcia* is one of Hubbard's typical, inspirational essays. Ironically, Hubbard was one of the 128 Americans who lost their lives when a German submarine torpedoed the British liner "Lusitania" (May 7, 1915). Vachel's revered William Jennings Bryan resigned as

Secretary of State when President Woodrow Wilson insisted on sending Germany a strong protest note. The Lusitania incident, however, helped to change Vachel's mind concerning Wilson and the European war (see *Poetry* 863).

Gustav Stickley (1858-1942)—his parents changed the name from Stoeckel—was publisher of *The Craftsman: An Illustrated Monthly in the Interest of Better Art, Better Work, and a Better and More Reasonable Way of Living.* The magazine appeared from October 1901 to December 1916, when it merged into *Art World.* An ardent follower of Ruskin's ideas, Stickley founded the "Craftsman" furniture line and the Craftsman Publishing Company, which issued books such as *Craftsman Homes* (1909) and *Craftsman Houses* (1913).

[Note 4] Vachel knew that his parents' opinion of Charles Clayton Morrison was ambivalent at best. Nevertheless, on February 20, he wrote his father: "He [Morrison] tells me everything is fine down at Springfield. He has his mothers' capacity for seeing everything in a glow. But the more I see of him the more I am attracted by him. He is a man after my own heart—his aims are high and he is going for them with force and presistence' and if he does it his own way—he could not do it anybody else's. I predict for him the steadiest kind of success in the long run—I merely hope to keep his friendship till then—if I could only be as successful an artist it would be a fair exchange. He puts more ginger into me and resolution to do my best than any man I know else in Chicago. If he is not a good pastor anywhere else, he is certainly doing what he can for me here in Chicago. It is exactly the pastoral work I need. If he makes blunders in Springfield—take my solemn word he is doing a great deal for me as an artist—and forgive him a little. He is very very inspiring to me."

[Note 5] On Monday night, February 16, 1903, Vachel escaped the pressures of art by attending a labor meeting, featuring John H. Mitchell (1870-1919), Henry Demarest Lloyd (1847-1903), and Clarence S. Darrow (1857-1938). Vachel shared his reactions with his father: "Mitchell is head and shoulders over the others—in personality—though he is a short square man. He is a man who talks poorly—but very directly—with something of the resolution and invincibility of Napoleon in his air. He will do great things for labor in his time. He makes a very clean-cut impression on every listener—that of a very moderate very sure man in his immediate purpose—but one willing to take one step at a time till great stretches of progress are made. I could write of him at great length. Darrow spoke befor^ him—Darrow is a clean honest radical, worthy in honesty of purpose, brains and equipment to follow up the work of Altgeld—but he has neither the soothing invincibility of Mitchell—nor the direct practical ring in his thoughts and words. Mitchell is a new kind of a leader and the sort that has been needed for many a day. . . . Lloyd has more of a scholar's air—is a more familiar type" (February 20). For more on Vachel and Lloyd, see Massa, pp. 26-27.

[Note 6] In Chénetier (p. 1), Vachel refers to "The Soul of Lincoln" in a letter dated "January 4, 1903." But Vachel was writing to Susan Wilcox from New York, so that the letter was sent on January 4, 1904. (Vachel was in Springfield, about to return to Chicago, on January 4, 1903.) On the other hand, the "Soul of Lincoln" manuscript is dated "1903" (see *Poetry* 921), so that the earliest version of the poem may well have been finished in early 1903, about the time of "Sons of the Middle West."

[Note 7] In a manuscript sent to Mary Humphrey during the summer, 1903, Vachel dated yet another poem "March 18, 1903." Entitled "Concerning the Ghost of a General Called Truth," the verses depict individuals, including the narrator, who follow an old general named "Truth." On the manuscript, Vachel wrote: "This is rather poor stuff. The last three lines are pretty good." The close of the poem reads:

"Follow on" "follow on" was his word of command—
Some drove through the tide and were drowned for him then.—
On the shore the remaining horses and men
Are dying or desperately jaded—
Ended now is our glorious story,
This is our glory:
We followed him till he faded. (Lindsay Home)

[Note 8] Alice Eliza Cleaver (1870-1944) was born in Racine, Wisconsin, but moved to Falls City, Nebraska, at a very early age. She attended the University of Nebraska before enrolling at the Chicago Art Institute. In 1904, after four years of study, she graduated with highest honors in her class and won a traveling scholarship. She studied in Philadelphia with Cecilia Beaux and William Chase, while Vachel was studying with Chase in New York. Cleaver's painting, "The Cast Room," hung in the Falls City public library until 1936, when it was donated to Hiram College. It has since been lost. Cleaver also gave two of Vachel's pen-and-ink drawings to Hiram, and these survive. Both feature heavily-draped female figures; one includes a note in Vachel's hand: "Presented to Miss Alice Cleaver—March, 1903." Cleaver served as the model for Vachel's heroine in the early story, "The Lady Poverty," *The Outlook* (November 25, 1911): 734-742—available online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Also see Chapter 15, note 1.

Joni L. Kinsey alleges that Vachel attempted to visit Cleaver in Falls City, Nebraska in 1912, but he "was intercepted by her disapproving father." Falls City is in the extreme southeastern corner of Nebraska, just five miles north of the Kansas line. If Vachel attempted to visit his Art Institute friend during his 1912 tramp west, it would have been an extreme detour. The itinerary described in *Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty* is across the center of Kansas, more than 125 miles south of Falls City. As for visiting before the tramp began, there is no possibility. Vachel was so poor that he had to receive carfare from Hamlin Garland, so he could visit the Chicago Cliff Dwellers (see Ruggles 170-171). Kinsey believes Lindsay and Cleaver maintained their friendship until she returned to Falls City from Paris, where she lived in 1913-14. "After the last family member died in the 1970s," according to Kinsey, "a bundle of unopened correspondence from Lindsay was found in the attic of the house; Cleaver's parents had never informed her of the letters' arrival" (p. 247). See "Cultivating the Grasslands: Women Painters in the Great Plains," in *Independent Spirits: Women Painters of the American West*, 1890-1945. Ed. Patricia Trenton. Los Angeles: U of California P, 1995.

German-born Theodore Thomas (1835-1905) has been praised as America's first renowned orchestra conductor. He was a gifted violinist, and the founder and first music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

[Note 9] Edgar Lee Masters identifies Richardson (1862-1937) as "a magazine editor" (120). In her copy of the biography, Olive wrote: "Richardson was Chicago Art Institute head under whom Vachel worked" (120). Ruggles follows Olive's lead and refers to

Richardson as Vachel's "chief instructor" at the Institute (82, 160). Actually, Vachel studied under Richardson for only part of his final term at the Institute, although the two remained acquaintances while both lived in New York (1903-08) and for sometime afterwards.

[Note 10] Vachel's summer interests included fellow student, Jaren Hiller. "He is a fellow who has been knocking about the earth since he was ten years old—on his own hook. He has been in the Art Institute a little longer than I have and has commenced to do some great things with colored chalks—full of mystery, and color and charming design—and showing a very vivid imagination—there is no artist I know of, big or little with an imagination to excell^ him.

"Personally he seems to be a fairly decent citizen—though he is a veritable beggar in his appearance—very crude in everything but art. He has the confidence and admiration of several people I can pretty well trust—and I 'hope' on better acquaintaince^ to find him a really fine fellow—because—as an artist—he is the nearest to what I want. I want his atmosphere and the benefit of his imagination. I have a vague notion of spending the summer with him—if he is decent fellow enough" (March 19). However, Vachel did not mention Hiller again in any of his letters.

[Note 11] A typescript of this letter is in the Hiram library. Vachel's main theme is "the little girl [Margaret Tiffany] across the street—that has grown up since last Christmas. She had on a low neck dress tonight—and I discover at last what the young Greek Venus stood for. . . . The child is a local belle in the Smart Set of the younger sort. As such we could describe her as having beautiful golden hair, face neither 'Christy' nor 'Gibson' type, rather that of a young nymph from a fountain at the foot of Olympus—eyes in vivid contrast to the hair, a kindly dark brown, rich and luxurious. . . . The child of course is nothing too much to me personally, only a very kindly and gentle little neighbor, a petted and spoiled little belle, and rather soothing company for an empty evening, being a perfect lady and taking herself seriously from that point of view. . . . She has a brilliant older sister [Mary "Mayme" Tiffany], not so amazing without—but with a soul within much as notable as her sister's body, and as dear to me, and much dearer. She is not 'my lady' let me hasten to add. . . ." (July 6, 1903). Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944) and Howard Chandler Christy (1873-1952) were two of America's most popular magazine illustrators during the decade preceding and the decades immediately following the turn of the century.

[Note 12] Edgar Lee Masters (119-20) erroneously states that Vachel spent four years in Chicago (it was three) and that Vachel was "newly arrived in New York City" in January 1905 (Vachel arrived in October 1903). Vachel summarized his Chicago years for biographer Peter Clark Macfarlane as follows: "1900-1903—Studied in Chicago Art Institute. Made the life class and spent a year there drawing from the nude."

[Note 13] In later years, Vachel advised Nellie Vieira: "I remember the first time Chase Condescended[^] to remark on my work. I was all swelled up I tell you" (November 16, 1909, Fowler 286). Kenneth Hayes Miller (1876-1952) was an instructor at the New York School of Art from 1900 to 1911.

[Note 14] Copies of "Fairies in Love" are in the William Humphrey manuscripts and in Vachel's *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?* (Virginia). The former is entitled "Cold Sunbeams," the latter "Fairy Queens." The Humphrey poem reads:

Tell me where do fairy queens
Find their bridal veils?

If you were now a fairy queen
Then I, your graceless page, and bold,
Would win the realm
By winning you.
Your veil would be transparent gold
White magic spiders wove for you
At crystal dawn, from sunbeams cold
While robins sang, amid the dew. (Humphrey)

The version in *Where Is Aladdin's Lamp?* is identical, except for minor punctuation variants. Cockrell is clearly wrong when she attributes the drawing of "The Queen of Bubbles" to Vachel's Chicago years (127).

[Note 15] In "Harriet Monroe, A Symbol of the Future," an unpublished essay written in early 1927, Vachel asserts: "All the time I was a student at the Chicago Art Institute from 1900, on, the streets were reverberating for me with the rhythms and the doings of the High Poet, William Vaughan Moody—undisputedly a poet—singing above the lagoons of the lost World's Fair" (p. 11, Virginia). Moody's poetry likely led to a miscellaneous entry in Vachel's "January 19, 1903" notebook: "Let me make a note tonight of everything I meet that is akin to a bubble a butterfly a cobweb or a bird—that lends lightness and finess^ to the life of midnight."

