Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Fourteen

[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
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“The air was full of portent.”

After a stressful winter and spring, Olive C. Lindsay and (Arthur) Paul Wakefield were married at Springfield’s First Christian Church—on Tuesday evening, June 14, 1904, at 8:30. The groom’s father, Hiram Professor Edmund Burritt Wakefield, officiated at the ceremony. According to the Springfield newspapers (the same story appears in the Illinois State Journal and in the Illinois State Register, June 15, p. 6), “The wedding was perfect in all its appointments, the color scheme being pink and white, and the decorations consisted of palms, mock orange blossoms and sweet peas. . . . The bride’s gown was of hand embroidered crepe from Yokohomo^, Japan, trimmed with accordion plaitings of chiffon. She wore the full tulle veil with orange blossoms.” The newspapers also list the marriage license in the names of “Olive Catherine^ Lindsay” and “Arthur Paul Wakefield.” Olive Lindsay-Wakefield was attended by five bridesmaids: her sister, Joy; her cousin, Helen Campbell; her Hiram friend, Florence Hathaway; her Springfield friend, Elizabeth Logan; and her brother’s childhood sweetheart, Bessie Brinkerhoff. Ruth Wheeler served as maid of honor. Paul’s ushers included Vachel’s friend and Hiram roommate, Harry Harts. The best man was reported to be “Vachel Lindsay, of New York City,” and a reception was held in the Lindsay family home following the wedding. There was no time for a honeymoon. [Note 1]

The day after the ceremony, Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay, with Joy, left on a European vacation, with travel arrangements compliments of “Jack” Jones (see the previous chapter). Paul and Olive, with brother Vachel, stayed behind in the family home, at 603 South Fifth Street; and Dr. Paul Wakefield temporarily assumed the medical practice of vacationing Dr. Lindsay. Two days after the marriage ceremony, the newlyweds were left alone for a short time, as brother Vachel escorted Ruth Wheeler, Florence Hathaway, and her sister Ada on an abbreviated visit to the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition (which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the acquisition of the Louisiana territory from France). “We had such an enjoyable time together in St. Louis,” Ruth Wheeler wrote in a letter addressed to “Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay”: “Florence and Ada Hathaway were very agreeable traveling companions—and we four together saw all that could be seen in two days’ time” (July 19, 1904, Virginia). [Note 2]

What the four friends witnessed was billed as a world’s fair designed to emphasize “Life and Movement” as “its distinguishing marks. . . . It would be an exhibition of Man as well as his Works; it would be processes as well as products, in contrast to former fairs that had specialized mainly in finished articles” (Witherspoon 11). Planners made every attempt to demonstrate the technological progress that had
occurred during the decade following Chicago’s Columbian Exposition. The fan-shaped exposition grounds spread over 1240 acres on a natural, semi-circular hill in St. Louis’ Forest Park. The four previous expositions (the Centennial at Philadelphia, 1876; the Columbian at Chicago, 1893; the Trans-Mississippi at Omaha, 1898; and the Pan-American at Buffalo, 1901) covered only a total of 1319 acres. The domed Festival Hall occupied a prominent position at the top of the hill. The permanent Fine Arts building, known informally as the “Palace of Art,” stood behind the Hall. In front of the Hall, three giant cascades poured down the hill into the Grand Basin. Staircases lined the cascades, along with statuary and terraced gardens. Eight exhibition “palaces” surrounded the Grand Basin, each palace several acres in size. The largest, the Transportation Palace, enclosed 15 acres. [Note 3]

Most of the state buildings were situated in the southeast section of the fairgrounds—in an area called the “Plateau of States.” A few of these were reproductions of historic places, such as Virginia’s Monticello, Tennessee’s Hermitage, and Louisiana’s Cabildo (where the Louisiana Purchase documents were signed in 1803). The small Disciples of Christ exhibit was located next to the Oregon building, very near the “Palace of Art.” The exposition’s main thoroughfare, Louisiana Way, divided the primary exhibition palaces, with the United States Government building at one end and a replica of France’s Grand Trianon palace at Versailles at the other end (signifying the two parties of the Purchase). At the very center of the lower grounds, where Louisiana Way intersected the Plaza of St. Louis, the tall Louisiana Purchase Monument stood in its place of distinction. Its counterpart, “The Apotheosis of St. Louis,” at the other end of the Plaza, represented the host city’s welcome to its visitors. Along with its lagoons and sunken gardens, the entrance area was called, simply, “The Place” (Witherspoon 28-29).

Most of the international buildings were located in the northwest sector, including Japan’s Pavilion, fronted by the Imperial Garden; Germany’s exhibit, with its emphasis on new discoveries in chemistry; Great Britain’s reproduction of Queen Anne’s Orangery at Kensington Gardens; and China’s replica of the summer palace of Prince Pu Lun. The exposition was the first to include the Chinese; in fact, the official, fourteen-foot-high portrait of the “Dowager Empress” arrived only three days (on June 13) prior to the arrival of Vachel and his fellow visitors (New York Times, June 14, p. 2). The largest of the international exhibits was the two-million-dollar Philippine stockade, which was designed to introduce Americans to their recently acquired territory.

In order to emphasize the technological focus, officials arranged for President Theodore Roosevelt to activate the exposition machinery by pushing a “Golden Button” in Washington, D.C. On April 30, 1904, at precisely 1:14:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, according to the precise reporting of the New York Times (May 1, p. 1), Roosevelt set things in motion. After dark, thousands of light bulbs turned night into day, and the water in the cascades flowed like liquid fire—through what the Times writer described as “the necromancy of the master illuminator” (February 28, p. 15). Atop the octagonal Lewis Magazine Building, the world’s largest searchlight swept the grounds. George Ferris’s giant wheel (which had been moved from Chicago) turned above the Lincoln exhibit, and in the New York building visitors observed one of the latest fads: cooking with electricity. Each day news from the fair reached downtown St. Louis newspaper offices via the DeForest Wireless Telegraph Tower, a forerunner of the modern radio.
Indeed, before the exposition closed on December 1, news items were flashed all the way to Chicago, and Marchese Guglielmo Marconi himself was numbered among the 19,694,855 people in attendance. In the far northwest corner, the “Aeronautic Concourse” boasted hot-air balloons and machines that were said to fly, although the latter seldom fulfilled expectations. The highlight of the exposition’s technological emphasis, however, was the automobile, actually 122 automobiles, one of which was driven to St. Louis all the way from New York City, entirely, boasted the owners, “under its own power.” Indeed, the Louisiana Purchase Exposition featured the largest display of automobiles in the world to date.

Nearly all visitors, sooner or later, found their way to “The Pike,” the street bordering the north side of the grounds. Here one could climb in the Tyrolean Alps, walk through an Irish or French village, visit “Cairo” or “Mysterious Asia” or “Fair Japan,” relive ancient Rome or old St. Louis or an “ole Plantation,” experience “Creation” or “The Here After,” see “Moving Pictures,” or observe premature human infants being saved by the newly invented incubator. Everywhere along “The Pike,” visitors heard the informal exposition song, “Meet Me in St. Louie, Louie.” They ate hot dogs for lunch (the debate as to whether or not the hot dog was introduced here continues), while drinking iced tea (which was introduced here). After lunch, they could enjoy something else the world had not known before, the fair’s confectionery delight: the ice cream cone. (Some claim that the Pike’s other popular dessert, the “fruit icicle,” was a forerunner of the popsicle: see Witherspoon 44-45).

Vachel, as we may expect, expressed more interest in the Fine Arts building than in the technological displays or “The Pike” (although we may guess that someone who was fond of sweets tried at least one ice cream cone). “Vachel and I gave a much more exhaustive study to the Art Gallery than Florence did,” Ruth Wheeler related to Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay, “and I enjoyed every minute of it all. . . . The weather then was ideal and we could get about and see every thing with comfort as the crowd was not large at any one place. But I never got so tired ever in my life as I did there. I could hardly navigate the last hour or two we were on the grounds and finally Florence and Ada and I decided, that as long as we couldn’t see it all we might as well come home, which we did that very night. It was all very beautiful and the grounds are laid out on such an extensive scale that the only draw back^ to me was the distances between places was so great” (July 19, Virginia). Ruth’s disheartenment was likely shared by many others. The fair did attract nearly 20 million people, but admission was only 50 cents and the 31.5 million-dollar event ended as a dismal financial failure.

Following the St. Louis visit, Ruth Wheeler returned to Akron, where she again thanked the Lindsays for their hospitality and assured them: “I send each one of you a large share of my love, I love you every one and I want you to love me. I want you to feel that you can trust me and that I am worthy of that trust. I don’t in any way want to take Vachel from you any more than is absolutely necessary for us to do in living our own life and having our own place to make in the world. You are all very kind to me and I do most certainly appreciate it all” (July 19). Vachel himself resumed his creative work in his bedroom at 603 South Fifth. He wrote Ruth regularly throughout the summer, as she informed his parents: “I get a letter from Vachel quite often, and he seems to be enjoying his rest time and I hope he will go back to New York this fall with a great deal of stored
up energy and vitality. He seems to write as tho’ the three of them were having a good time together and I hope that Olive will be strong and well, before she goes into her own home this fall.” Apparently, Olive’s wedding troubles had affected her health, and Ruth expressed concern: “I was very sorry to find her so weak and frail when I went to Springfield” (July 19). [Note 4]

Vachel did not return to New York at the end of summer. Instead, as he related in later years (1909), he remained in Springfield and enjoyed “six wonderful months of eating of the flower of the Holy Ghost . . . In the summer of 1904 I began to have some noteworthy experiences. It is plausible, I think, that for one who had so long coordinated drawings and poems for drawings, his religious experiences should paint themselves before him in the air. Had I been an Arabian I might have drawn the sword on the authority of the visions that came in cataracts. Even yet I cannot disabuse my mind of the faith that they were sent” (Poetry 928). Although his eidetic experiences were impressive, Vachel was not overwhelmed. He insisted that he retained control over his “visitations”: “I believe they were inspired, but by no means infallible. They were metaphors of the day, consolations of the hour. I determined to make them the servants, not the masters of my religious life.” He even went so far as to offer a plausible, rational explanation as to causation: “Being taught by that admirable practical but unimaginative master William M. Chase never to draw a thing till I saw it on the blank paper before me, it was only the terrible power and blaze of the pictures that came that made them unusual” (Poetry 928). As evidence of control, Vachel assimilated his visions into an ongoing effort to integrate, that is, to “map” his religious concepts, his personal “universe.” His “Map of the Universe” did not originate in his “visitations” (Poetry 62). [Note 5]

The genesis of the “Map of the Universe” may be traced back to Vachel’s final months at the New York School of Art, a time when once again he found himself torn between two ideals, as he had been at Hiram (respect for the wishes of his parents versus desire to pursue his own purposes) and in Chicago (commercial art versus “true” art and poetry). In New York, on the one hand, he had not lost sight of his desire to be a democratic art leader, to be Vachel the Norman-Saxon conqueror; and he was impatient to begin his life’s task. On the other hand, a now-ingrained sense of duty did not allow him to neglect the necessity of thorough preparation before undertaking his chosen profession. His primary role model, Jesus of Nazareth, was 30 before he set out on his missionary journey. The first three decades of his life were spent in preparation. If the son of God needed 30 years to gird up his loins, Vachel’s historical awareness warned him that a mere mortal required at least 25. The mortal, moreover, was expected to earn a respectable living, not for himself alone, but for a woman helpmate as well.

In order to understand what led to Vachel’s summer and fall of 1904, then, we need to take a small step backward, to his final months as a student in the Chase school. It was a troubling, divisive time for Uncle Boy. He felt torn; and as we could predict, he turned to “Mama” for understanding and for advice:

It is my desire to speak to my age, to my nation, to my religious^ brotherhood, to the middle West. Yet I take it that preaching hours must come after working hours, that my first Divine call is as a worker, as a maker of beautiful things, and I will be
disrespectful to my Maker if I stop to preach before I have done my full apprentice ship as an artist. Then I will have a second call, to preach—and I will have at least a little message to my fellow workmen, growing out of my experience as a draughtsman and painter. And it may be granted me I will have a larger message growing out of any hard striving I may have had as a man. But the work comes first of all, and I must not allow any false sense of duty or possibility of censure keep me from it. (April 2, 1904)

Knowledge of what he must do, however, did not preclude disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the rigors of the present: “I am in a long strong dash till June. I dare not let any week slip by without the full quota of progress. At the end of the week the most I can hope for is the feeling I am a step nearer to independence as an artist. It is a great pain to realize in my own soul the hundred things I must deny myself in this great and learned city, pass all opportunities by and all duties for the sake of this one duty. Many weeks I have the feeling that I have made no progress, and have won nothing by my self denial. . . . Tonight, and last Saturday [March 26],” he admitted, “I felt happy. These two weeks I have made great strides.”

Satisfaction, though, is not the dominant tone in this confessional letter. This is a letter reflecting boyish pain, a letter that seeks Mama’s compassion: “You know these little successes come by sacrifices, not easy some of them. There is a vast amount of thinking I would like to do, about the Church, the State, and Art and Life and Poetry and Duty, but when I have done my best at school and sit here Saturday nights I realize how I have not been able to do a bit of thinking, and am now too tired to think. There are hours when I feel that I am a man with a message—that some day I will have one to deliver and will feel the divine call, yet the time to observe and think and find out just what my message is, has not come.”

One thing, though, he claimed to know for certain: the “message” must come from himself alone. It could not be given by others, not by Hiram professors, not by Chicago or New York art teachers, not even by preachers: “I could state it a hundred ways tonight, and have often in times past but not perfectly. No man can tell me, it must come out of my own soul, be the result of my own observation, my own bitter experience, my own thinking. No man can preach a doctrine with power because it has been given him in time past. He must know it of himself, if he is to set his age afire.”

Although he could not express his intended message “perfectly,” he at least tried to itemize his fundamental values. These, he knew, would be at the heart of any sermons he might preach, albeit the sermons themselves remained vague: “I have already in my own experience achieved a great faith in the Church Universal, in the benificence of Art and the holiness of beauty, and there are other things my life has taught me. But must these thoughts struggle out, half digested, brash and crude, all because I have had not had the time to observe, to think, to record to compare? It must be so for now. I will trust the Lord that in the future when I have my equipment as an artist and man, that the message will be prepared within me.”

Finally, in his intimate disclosures, Mama’s son hinted that the New York School of Art, as Hiram College before, had become an interruption in his preparation, at least in one important respect: “I am appalled tonight at the volumes and volumes of unsolved
problems in sociology, politics, etc. I have to let pass by me, though my brains itch for them. First of all I shall train my eye and hand, though George Elliot wrings her hands at me from the top shelf of the bookcase, and all the books in the world call me, and all the streets” (April 2). Indeed, one of Vachel’s reasons for remaining in Springfield for seven months, beginning early June 1904, was to respond to the siren call of the world’s books, the same reason he gave for his sojourn over the summer and fall, 1900. In 1904, he answered not only the summons of George Eliot but also the summons of Milton, Blake, Poe, and Swinburne. As for the siren call of “all the streets,” Vachel resisted this summons until he returned to New York City in early 1905, as we shall see.

Meanwhile, six weeks after his confessional letter to “Mama,” Vachel disclosed similar thoughts in a letter to his Chicago pastor and friend, Edward Scribner Ames: “I want a following, yet have done nothing yet to inspire one. Still I feel I shall have one in the end. I will win it by my work not by my conversation” (May 18, 1904, in Chénetier 25). When he tried to express his ideals in person, Vachel admitted, he often felt “stupid and confused. . . . I give my main strength to my cause, and you must forgive the poor appearance I make out of working hours. You may find me as unconvincing as of old, when we meet in conversation, more worthy of kindness than of disciples.” (In later years, as we shall see, Vachel remained convinced that he made a better impression in his correspondence than he made in his conversations, at times going so far as to name himself “Mr. Bashful.”) [Note 6]

Although Vachel did not relate his decision to his mother, he informed Ames that he had lowered his expectations for himself, at least in comparison with his goals at Hiram and in Chicago. The would-be democratic art leader announced that he was trying to reconcile himself to a lesser goal than the goal of conquering the entire human race: “I have discovered how little even the biggest can do, though I was of a different opinion on Hiram Hill. I also feel disposed to mark out a task more in harmony with my abilities than my ideals. The things I am most able to do, the things I will do, are not the highest, except in the eyes of a few, I would like to live such a life as Abraham Lincoln, as Burns or Wordsworth or some other friend of the people. Yet the more I push my education the more I develop those exclusive attenuated virtues in art that please the few. And in letters likewise I am more apt to please the specialists than my closest friends. An art like this and a verse like this will never do the task of Wordsworth, however I set my will and pray.”

At the same time, he manifested confusion and reluctance, as he seemingly reversed himself and proclaimed unwillingness to give up the grand goal, at least from the perspective of the distant future: “But I am not prepared to say my mission is to the few. I am prepared by now to set myself to the task of building up my special abilities, trusting that they are my best revelation and into whatever paths they shall lead me I shall follow them. If I merely win a triumph as an artist in verse and line, I shall accept the judgement of Jehovah and live in good conscience” (Chénetier 3).

Vachel left no doubt, though, that such a “judgement” would not come as a relief, especially when he considered it in the light of his ancestral blood. To “Brother Ames,” he professed his painful awareness of the discrepancies between himself and his Campbellite forebears, particularly his maternal grandfather, who claimed, as we have noted, “almost all [poets] had a screw loose somewhere” (Poetry 948). “My ancestors
were all men of action, statesmen, rulers of men,” Vachel insisted to Ames: “It is hard for me to respect my army, for it is an assembly of ornamental shadows and dreams, when I thought to have commanded men. And my sermons I must preach only to myself, to exhort myself to be true to my art and writing.” He also admitted what he felt to be his professional weaknesses: “Some of my second rate work is of a didactic kind of writing. And there is a certain remote touch with human character in my drawing, but if my work wins a high place I fear it will be the decorative qualities that are most potent in winning that place. I may go into the marketplace yet and sketch my impressions.” In point of fact, with his entries for the Ladies’ Home Journal cover contest, as well as with his weekly solicitations of various publishers, Vachel already had attempted to peddle his decorative work in the marketplace.

Effective “character drawing, and the depicting of throbbing human life,” the young art student continued (reflecting Robert Henri’s advice), “is probably the farthest thing I can reasonably hope for in drawing. . . . I had thought of making my designing into cartooning. But it becomes more designing and less cartooning every day. Be sure I shall follow out my abilities, along the line of best and readiest development, rather than torture them to fit any preconceived ideal, however precious. I hope to make the drawing the principal task of my life, rather than writing. I congratulate myself on every poem I can refrain from writing as heartily as I congratulate myself when I get a picture made. A house divided against itself cannot stand, and in my life, drawing shall be paramount over writing.”

When he did write (and he declared that he had not “written verses now for three months”), the work was “occasional, and irresistible. . . . I write only those things it is impossible to choke. . . . My ideal for my religious life is that of a religious tramp,” Vachel declared (perhaps surprising his rather conventional friend), “a wanderer from Church to Church, following the leading of ‘the Gleam,’ seeking new impressions and vivid insights into the religious life of all men. . . . I have had many of these in the past, yet have left few on record. The most I can hope for my verse is that it will some day become the record of my best impressions in these Churches. I shall not force it, I can scarcely promise. I merely hope. When you see signs of it in my writing, I ask your congratulations, though it may be a while before they are due” (Chénetier 4). Since he claimed that he had not written any poems for three months, Vachel likely finished his “Wandering” poem soon after sending this letter to Ames. Published as “I Want to Go Wandering” (Poetry 4-5), the poem must have been one of “those things” that the author found “impossible to choke.” In later years, he simply described the work as written in 1904, “while a student in the New York School of Art” (Poetry 927).

Finally, Vachel related to Ames, “I may draw character sketches with sympathy. I may write about the Church universal with insight.” However, by way of contrast to what he “may” do, he listed what he was “sure” to do: “The things I am sure to do are not so lofty, a certain delicate kind of designing, a certain decorative sort of verse—these I am sure to produce till I die. They shall occupy the main strength of my life. I can only hope I may be led into those higher hopes I have indicated. I may succeed in living for Humanity and the Church. I shall certainly be faithful to Art. . . . I have faith in your fight, and the task you have set yourself. In a sense you are my proxy, fighting battles I wish I had the strength to undertake. But I must humbly keep to my little task. I may be
somewhat of a wanderer, as I follow the leadings of the Art Spirit, the Comforter of Art. I trust you, and you will likewise trust me, though I seem to wander far among the churches. I hope to bring you back some good thing at last” (Chénetier 4-5).

During the summer, 1904, Vachel’s wanderings were extensive, although he seldom left his Springfield home. These imaginative journeys are a matter of record in the “Map of the Universe,” as well as in the many poems that the “Map” inspired. At the time of their creation, the author was convinced that his “Map” and his first “book,” Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp?, amounted to a realization of the hoped for “good thing at last.” He had completed nearly four years of formal art training, and he was blessed with majestic visions seemingly sent from heaven itself. Now it was time to make his insights and discoveries mean something for others. In his own allusive words: “Though I understood mysteries and knowledge, and had not charity, I was nothing” (Poetry 928). To be something, even a lesser art leader, he must preach, he must exercise charity, he must wander among the churches, like Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus.

That Uncle Boy had his own personal, religious-philosophical “system” in mind is evident as early as March 16, 1904, when he was in the midst of arguing with his mother about whether or not his presence was needed at his sister’s wedding: “You must remember . . . that the boy of 17 was an absolutely good humored pliable individual with no opinions except those you poured into him. No one in this wide world pours into me that way now. I listen carefully to the best masters of religon^, art, and life I can find, but I make no hasty steps. I scrutinize every doctrine, every thought before it enters into my system, then if I adopt it I give it an exhaustive test for a week, a month or a year before I consider it a part of me. I have no doubt this makes me a less pliable pupil. I am not responsive to but one new idea at a time. I can’t open out my thoughts for the old fashioned^ pouring process that was so good for the youth of seventeen.” Indeed, as he matured, Vachel seemed preoccupied with “but one new idea at a time,” often for a period of weeks. His many notebooks confirm “an exhaustive test” of one idea after another, each covering its own period of time, generally one to four weeks.

Output, not input, though, characterizes Vachel’s life during his Springfield summer sojourn. It was a time when thoughts and dreams and visions tumbled out in prose, in poetry, and in drawing. The initial manifestation was his first “book”: Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp? “I have just written a book full of magicians,” he advised his mother (who was on the annual family vacation trip to Colorado), “and the magicians keep asking the question ‘Where is Aladdin’s lamp?’ in many places, of many people, yet never finding it”:

The basis of [the book] is the Sangamon River and Chicago and the Mississippi valley. I play on the sharp contrast between the search for Aladdin’s lamp by the magicians, and the harsh City of Chicago and the muddy Sangamon River. The book is all written and only needs polishing. I have carefully omitted anything that will unnecessarily^ antagonize the religious^, the political or the literary world. I have made a special effort in my stories and prefaces to attract the sort of people who do
not read poetry, the sort who rather despise it. I tell them they are just the kind of people I like, they are the very sort poems are written about. (August 20, 1904)

At least twice in later years (1909, 1925), Vachel claimed to “have destroyed” his book *Poetry* 927), as “it seemed to provoke such amazing wrath” (*Poetry* 970), especially wrath from his mother. Indeed, someone has ravaged the book, as numerous pages, especially in volumes one and two, have been torn out. (Vachel returned to New York City in early 1905 with the intent of publishing his book, so that the mutilation occurred sometime after spring-summer, 1905.) Substantial fragments of *Aladdin’s Lamp* do survive, however, and are collected in the Barrett Library at the University of Virginia. These remnants reveal that the work was divided into three volumes. What remains is a one-page introductory essay; several title and epigraph pages; three drawings; nineteen poems, most of which were written during the preceding four years; three stories, one of which includes the poem, “The Queen of Bubbles” (*Poetry* 37); and the first and the last page of two additional stories.

For his epigraph in “Volume the first,” Vachel copied (somewhat loosely) lines from James Russell Lowell’s “Aladdin”:

> When I was a beggarly boy  
> And lived in a cellar damp  
> I had not a friend nor a toy  
> But I had Aladdin’s Lamp.  
> When I could not sleep for cold  
> I had fire enough in my brain  
> And builded with roofs of gold  
> My beautiful Castles in Spain.

All that is left of this first volume, though, is a single poem, “The Song of the Temple Sparrows after the Temple Fell” (*Poetry* 792-793), along with a one-page preface that the author intended as an introduction to the entire work: “A Confidential word to the kind inspector of the Manuscript to be paraphrased in the advertisement.” Two authorial comments follow the “Temple Sparrows” poem, each comment typical of other endnotes in the book: “Written by the Painter, vexed by flabby, practical, cheap-minded, pious co-workers,” and “Vexed also by the inert conventional commercialists who have enough religon to make them hypocrites.”

In his prefatory remarks, Vachel boasts: “This book was written, Invented, illustrated, designed, decorated and bound by me.” More modestly, he continues: “All I can say for my pictures and poems is that some people like them and some do not. . . . My prose is my weakest point. It is burly and hulking. I admit this that I may show your reward for enduring it. You will find I have built a rough strong bridge from Hell to the Millenium. Space, Time and Color are my only faithful actors. Godfrey Price the Counselor and Luke Homer the Painter are mechanical in action as the heroes of the six best selling [novels?]. But I maintain they have natural insides, for their stomachs are my own. I have assigned to the Painter all the dreams I have eaten in my religious moods, in cronological order, in the very situations in which they became a part of me. This is a secret that must not be advertised.” Although not mentioned in the preface, other personae appear in the fragments: the “Evangelist” or “Evangel”; the “Magician”; the
“Witch of Lake Michigan”; various angels and archangels, including “Michael” and “Uriel”; a band of prophets, including “Isaiah”; and an “Indian Girl,” who is sometimes human, sometimes divine.

The pivotal figure in Uncle Boy’s book is Godfrey Price, the Counselor, whose “natural insides” are indeed the author’s own. Godfrey Price is avuncular Vachel, an artistic representation of the college boy who made appointments in order to counsel and exhort his troubled friends. He is an imaginative portrayal of the would-be democratic art leader who wanted to unite the human race in love and in pursuit of the beautiful. According to the prefatory essay, the Counselor is responsible for “three illustrated stories, one in each volume. . . . He stands for arrangement and whim. . . . And the Counselor is responsible for the poems of pure fancy. Thus the book is an organic thing in the arrangement of its pictures and the mass of its whims, all of which are produced by the Counselor, indirectly or by design.” One of the Counselor’s three stories survives: “The Beautiful Sorrow of the Angels,” along with three drawings. Two illustrations are merely decorative; the third depicts Aladdin’s lamp (the drawing is signed “Nicholas Vachel Lindsay” and dated “1904”). Quite simply, the Counselor characterizes Vachel’s desire to preach to his fellow human beings, his desire to counsel them in accord with his “great faith in the Church Universal, in the benificence of Art and the holiness of beauty. . . .” [Note 7]

“The Beautiful Sorrow of the Angels” is in “Volume the Third,” and we shall delay discussion in order to take a brief look at the fragments of “Volume the Second,” which opens with the epigraph: “The master whispered ‘Follow the Gleam.’” Six poems remain in the manuscript copy: “The Dance of Unskilled Labor” (Poetry 735), “The Witch of Lake Michigan” (56-57), “Babylon! My Babylon!” (33-34), “The Cup of Paint” (25), “We Who Are Playing Tonight” [published as “Sweet Briars of the Stairways”] (25-26), and “To the Sweet Singer of Israel” (34-35). There are also fragments of two stories, including the opening page of “The Purple Mist of the Wine” and the last page of another, now unknown story. In the former, a cloud of “purple mist” leads the Counselor, the Painter, and an unnamed narrator through various areas of Chicago: “first into the very heart of the Skyscrapers on State, then West on Van Buren to Halstead, and South on Halstead to twelfth. . . . By its light we saw glory and dirt as never before. Amid the silences that midnight has, even in a great city a trace of the madness of the Ironsides entered into us, we wanted to set the whole world right in an hour.” Continuing on “Twelfth Street,” the three personae come to the viaduct that spans “a wilderness of Railroad switches” and the “gleaming, stinking” Chicago River, where the fragment abruptly ends.

A second story fragment in “Volume the Second” describes the buildings of Chicago, in the process of being constructed with materials derived from dead souls that the “Witch of Lake Michigan” unsuccessfully tried to save. (In volume three, we learn that the “Witch” is one of many manifestations of the “Indian Girl,” who recalls everything when she is a goddess but cannot remember even the previous day when she is a mere mortal.) The story fragment illustrates Vachel’s belief that Chicago’s materialism is the product of human sacrifice: “The Celestial workmen were moulding the stones with their hands mightily, as a potter moulds mere clay. They were moulding them from dead souls she herself [the Witch] had wrestled with in Chicago. And some
they crumbled into sand, and some they wrought into cornices, and gilded them: some into balustrades and pillars. Some were left whole and put in the deeper foundation like the rough stone under a street. All the souls she labored for, like the princes of Babylon, sleep a perpetual sleep and shall not awaken!” As a mortal, blessedly, the Witch forgets past failures. And, in her explanation of lost memory, Vachel’s Witch echoes the wisdom of Father Zossima, as expressed in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*. One of the great laws of the universe is that humans forget, because lasting memories would drive empathetic souls to inertia and despair. Having no recollection of past failure and past grief, the witch eagerly “begins anew, a girl of fifteen,” in company with missionary people that Vachel dearly admired from childhood days: “She sings with her tamborine^ with the handfull^ of the Salvation Army that meets nearest the Palmer House, on State.”

The narrator observes that the Witch “has been endowed with a new sense, to guide her second life.” He warns that her response to a person is an index to virtue: “Let her look into your eyes if you dare! If you win that holy smile of hers, pass on assured you shall not lie amid the heaps of dead beneath the rainbow carpet.” This “carpet” is Vachel’s emblematic rendering of Chicago’s skyline, with the “rainbow” image a likely suggestion of the city’s new, colorful electric signs. Before the “Celestial workmen” commenced building, the story relates, “the rainbow carpet was not yet put down.” Thus, “Volume the Second” of *Aladdin’s Lamp* appears to have focused on what Vachel described to his mother as “the sharp contrast between the search for Aladdin’s lamp by the magicians, and the harsh City of Chicago. . .” (August 20). Perhaps “the sharp contrast” included “the muddy Sangamon River” as well, but any evidence of this latter has been removed from the book.

4

Before continuing to volume three of *Aladdin’s Lamp*, I will pause a moment and summarize what we may have learned, what we may expect in the third volume, and what we may suspect has been lost in the pages the author eliminated. Also, since *Aladdin’s Lamp* is intimately related to “The Map of the Universe,” a copy of the 1904 version of the “Map” is reproduced below. It should help considerably in that it pictures Vachel’s main themes, and we all remember what a picture is worth in relation to words.

In the broadest sense, the book and the map portray an artist’s struggle in a materialistic society. The two works illustrate the soul of a butterfly versus the soul of a spider. In the flesh, butterflies stand little chance against spiders; in the soul or spirit world, butterflies are the stronger, but their strength is often not manifest until centuries have passed. The artist is David, the author of Psalms; the material world is Goliath, the author of brick buildings. The artist is Jesus of Nazareth; the material world is Rome. Mercenary Rome crucified Jesus, but Christianity long ago left the Roman Empire in the dust. The artist is Lucifer, the angel of light and poetry and music. In the present, Lucifer is buried in a tomb, which in turn is buried beneath “The River Called Hate.” He is interred because his songs threaten the status quo of the material world. Souls who respond to Lucifer and to his artistic creations do not make good employees for contractors who build skyscrapers. Souls that are unaware of Lucifer and his creations, on the other hand, may make good laborers; but they do not realize that their very lives are poured into the buildings, molded into walls and cornices, along with the cement and
the bricks. To hide this tragedy from the mind of the common laborer, “The harp of Lucifer” is condemned to “The Gulfs of Silence.”

Vachel’s “Map of the Universe,” drawn in the summer, 1904; published in The Tramp’s Excuse and Other Poems (1909).
What cannot be silenced is the MEMORY of the last song of Lucifer, and the MEMORY of the effect of his last song. It is this MEMORY that is pictured in the “Map” as “a leaping flame,” extending from Lucifer’s harp across the universe, from hell to heaven. Any being who remembers and respects this song cannot sit still: thus the three throne mountains stand empty and uninviting, and the rest of heaven is a jungle. All who are worthy of heaven are sailing in the boats of the prophets, attempting to redeem the other souls in the universe, the souls who are unfamiliar with Lucifer’s light and power, or the souls who are familiar but hate the implications. These latter are the lost souls who prepare the mortar to construct modern buildings, unknowingly pouring their lives into the mixture, as every skyscraper and every highway is made not only of construction materials but also of the life substance of its myriad builders. If these builder-mixers were to experience the beauty and power of Lucifer’s song, they would not waste their life substance laboring with stone and steel. Hence the material world’s hatred for the artist: artist-Lucifers threaten to interrupt, if not to end, the manner in which the material world cannibalizes its willing but ignorant serfs.

The “Witch of Lake Michigan” comprehends the overall picture when she is a goddess, and she does everything in her power to save souls from hurling themselves into material things. She is seldom successful, but fortunately, as a mortal, she forgets failure, thus preparing herself to pursue salvation all over again. The Witch’s renewal is critical: new souls join the work force every day, new souls that need to be given a chance for salvation. Lucifer-Vachel views Chicago as an archetypal modern world. On the one hand, the human soul is surrounded by the cement and steel and noise and siren lights of the material world; on the other hand, the soul could turn 180 degrees and contemplate the vast, quiet, spiritual waters of Lake Michigan.

Meanwhile, the material world’s hatred for the artist evokes another Lindsay theme: like Jesus of Nazareth, the successful artist-creator is persecuted, even crucified by the “River of Hate.” However, just as Jesus’ blood is thought to bring salvation, so the artists’ blood, their creative work, offers at least the potential of salvation for the human race. The artist’s life substance endures as a “purple mist,” and this is the saving mist transported in the boats of the missionary prophets. Artists sacrifice their lives in order to offer deliverance to others; and no matter how bleak the present, the artist, like Jesus of Nazareth, will ultimately defeat the Rome-like world of materialism, though the artist-Jesus figure himself may not be alive in the flesh to witness the ultimate victory. The battle appears hopeless, because the artist’s arsenal seems very fragile: the purple mist, the still small voice, the soul of a butterfly, the distant gleam, the cloud of glory, a book, a drawing, a poem. The material world, on the other hand, boasts steel and cement and bricks and barrels of money. The battle is a maker of Psalms pitted against an armed and armored giant—but now we have the key to understanding Vachel’s book. We know who is destined to win, although the victory will not be sudden, like David’s victory over Goliath. The victory will take centuries, like Christ’s victory over Rome; and, sadly, the victorious artist will likely not be alive in the flesh to witness the triumph.

A corollary theme reflects how personal Vachel’s ideas are. The artist is depicted in male terms only. The artist takes on his difficult task because he is inspired by a woman, an inhabitant of the Palace of Eve, the woman who was (in Vachel’s mind)
Milton’s inspiration. She is a woman not tainted by materialism, a pure Edenic Eve or an Indian maiden or a “Witch of Lake Michigan.” The artist is inspired to save the human race, but he is also inspired to seek the hand and the approval of his Muse, his Egeria, who may even reflect the values of “Mama,” at least “Mama” when she was a young and beautiful girl. The inspiration girl inhabits the Palace of Eve, on the east side of “The Map of the Universe.” She it is that provides the artist with his life quest. She sets him on his journey to his goal, namely, to “The Star of Laughing Bells,” on the west side of the “Map.” Here grows the threatening “Tree of Laughing Bells” (“The boughs of the tree were white and gray, / Shaped like Scythes of Death,” ll. 99-100), because the fruits of the tree—blood red bells that symbolize works of art—are fatal to the man of art. Grasping one of these bells, he discovers that his heart itself is a blood red bell, a bell that will bring laughter at first but death at last, although it will be a victorious death, like the “deaths” of Christ and Lucifer.

A second corollary theme is an offshoot of Vachel’s Campbellite upbringing and his extensive reading in the literature of the Western and Eastern worlds. The “purple mist” that brings salvation is not from one individual, such as Christianity’s belief in the blood of Jesus. Vachel’s “purple mist” is an ecumenical mist: it is the blending of the life blood of all prophet-artists from all over this earth and the myriad other “earths” that Vachel believed existed in his universe. Jesus’ saving crucifixion was an archetypal crucifixion, not an only crucifixion. The mist is from:

Brothers of Christ, all crucified
In the stars, and made divine. (“Outward Bound,” ll. 16-17, Poetry 65)

The “Brothers of Christ” are, quite simply, all the artists that have been, are, and will be crucified by the material world, that is, will be crucified until they win the final victory and Alexander Campbell’s prophesied Millennium triumphantly bursts on the scene.

In sum, Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp? is a first book that we could expect from Uncle Boy: it is a book designed to save the modern world from material decadence. To answer the question posed by the title: Aladdin’s Lamp is the book in the hands of the reader. That book is a blood-red bell, the creation of a suffering artist, a man inspired by a woman to seek salvation for the human race, but at the expense of his personal comfort, perhaps even at the expense of his life. When we keep the author’s purpose in mind, we may understand Vachel’s frustrations when the material world refused to put his ideas into print. Ironically, if we pursue the author’s purpose to its ultimate conclusion, we realize that he was asking publishing houses to produce a book that, if fully understood and accepted by its readers, would end the material world of publishing houses—once and for all time. [Note 8]

The surviving contents of “Volume the Third” of Aladdin’s Lamp, with its epigraph—“After it, follow it—Follow the Gleam!”—are relatively extensive, at least in comparison with the contents of the two preceding volumes. The final volume collects three complete stories and thirteen poems: “The Tree of Laughing Bells” (Poetry 159-163), “Star of My Heart” (3-4), “The Idol and the Ghosts” (791-792), “A Strike” [published as “Crickets on a Strike”] (54), “A Parvenu” [“Parvenu”] (52), “Fairy Queens”
(see Chapter 12), “Ghosts in Love” (51-52), “To the Archangel Michael” (54, 56), “Wandering” [“I Want to Go Wandering”] (4-5), “To One Who Was almost Forgotten” [“To Matthew Arnold”] (24), “Sons of the Middle West” (794), and “The Little Yellow Bird [of Weariness]” (51). “The Queen of Bubbles” (37) is included in one of the stories.

The first tale, Godfrey Price’s “The Beautiful Sorrow of the Angels,” is the only surviving story in which the “Counselor” plays a significant role. The tale also incorporates aspects of Vachel’s peculiar cosmology and offers, therefore, a suggestive and meaningful look at some of the thoughts and dreams that led to his book. The setting is Chicago’s Jackson Park, where an unnamed narrator (he is finally revealed to be the “Magician”) and the “Counselor” are led by a star to “the long pier that shoots into the lake there. . . . The air was full of portent. The Star burned in the midst of the cloud, a white flame with wings.” When they walk out on the pier, they discover the wounded “Evangelist,” who also is “looking up at the star”:

Blood was pouring from that sacred old head. Now he was on his knees staunching the wound with his bare hands. Then the star drew near, grew larger. There it was at the pier, a delicate, silvery transparent ship with silver wings and purple ropes and spars. From it came a man almost seven feet high, with eyes of power and love, so erect, so venerable, he made the Counselor and Evangel seem like Children. He was dressed in hair cloth.

The seven-foot giant is the prophet Isaiah, whose silvery ship carries a jar of purple wine that he uses to bathe and heal the wounds of the Evangelist. Isaiah then dresses the rejuvenated Evangelist in a hair-cloth robe and prepares to carry him away, but—

Suddenly an Angel appeared upon the pier, challenging with a voice of love and power:

“Where do you go with this soul, Oh Prophet Isaiah?”
“To Heaven, to eat the food of the Prophets.”

The Angel answered “I hold you dearest of all the company of the Prophets. And this soul has a right to his choice. But has he chosen this path, knowing also that the Company of the Angels desire him in the Stars?”

(Toward the end of the story, we learn that the Angel is the wounded Archangel Michael.)

Isaiah agrees that the Evangelist may choose his fate, but he also declares that “a great Communion shall be held upon this pier tonight. The host is at hand—“and he points to a sky filled with boats of the prophets.” Like “hundreds of giant feathers, the whole Milky way^ was as a cloud floating nearer; empty boats in long waveriong lines crowded from the pier to the horizon and to the heights.” Each boat carries many jars “half full of purple wine,” and when the prophets disembark, they set about intermixing the wine:

Each jar had graven upon it the name of the Prophet that bore it: Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel . . . . [Vachel’s ellipses] and many of the Apostles and early fathers of the Church, and some of the Popes, and the names of many of the heathen, and the names
of heretics not known as Prophets to us, and in unknown writing were strange names from the stars.

The prophets are “feeble old men, for all they were so tall and straight, and they had need to cry ‘Courage, Courage’ to one another as they went about their tasks with their black robes splashed with purple.” They “pour and re-pour the wine till every jar contained a drop of every other,” and then stagger back to their ships, “falling down half dead upon their lonely decks.” (Vachel’s concept of a universal, all-encompassing ecumenism seems evident here: Campbellite-Disciples preached that all religions must mix, just as the wine of the prophets is mixed. Ordinary Campbellite-Disciples, though, were nowhere near as ‘universal’ in their views as Vachel was in his, even to the point of imagining myriad worlds beyond our earth.)

After a short time, all the prophets except Isaiah depart. He is “still choking with weariness, speechless,” when the Angel “in beautiful pity” addresses the Counselor: “Godfrey Price, seeker for the lamp, tell the man your brother, the story of the Labor of the Prophets.” Counselor Price obliges; and in his response, he alludes to Vachel’s conviction (perhaps borrowed from Thoreau) that the universe contains many worlds. Each prophet carries jars of wine from his particular world, and these jars must be commingled to formulate “the Communion Wine of the Universe.” When this wine is perfectly mixed, Christ will “enter into it in the fullness of his power,” and “the perfect day” (the Millennium) will arrive. The perfect day, however, is far in the future, so that “It is the task of the Prophets above all to be patient—to be patient with the just who cannot see the mist, and love them still. The Prophets have human hearts and bend over the sides of the ships watching the deeds of the Universe, like gardeners watching little flowers. It is the task of the Prophets to be patient, to hold their peace when they are endowed with despair, and wait till they are endowed with power from on high; it is the task of the Prophets then to give patience to the Angels who despair amid the stars crying aloud that they are forsaken. It is the temptation of the Prophets to impatiently pour pure wine into the cups of men, instead of mist. When they yield to temptation, though, men go mad to set the world right and ride off into the darkness.” Finally, the Counselor concludes his story of the “Prophets” with an image of the “jungles of heaven. . . . Above all the Prophets are the appointed sentinels of Ancient and deserted Heaven, of which I cannot speak, knowing nothing except that there they eat the secret food which gives them hope, that bears a name I do not know.” (Other Lindsay works reveal that the name is “amaranth,” the flower of the vine growing in the jungles of heaven.)

When Godfrey Price finishes his “story of the Labor of the Prophets,” the tearfully repentant Evangelist extends both hands to the Counselor and to Isaiah and laments: “And I turned my back upon the star! Blind, blind, blind!” The Angel, meanwhile, asks for a second story: “Godfrey Price, seeker for Aladdin’s lamp, tell this man your brother, seeker of holiness, the story of the Angels in the Stars”:

The Counselor answered steadily “The communion wine of the planets is the blood of the Crucified angels, who pass from star to star every thirty years, seeking to redeem the Universe, rising from the dead, sending forth Apostles, and ascending again into new stars. Yet solar systems are born from the waves of Chaos so infinitely fast that the Angels are as nothing in the face of the planets unredeemed, and who
shall stem the tide saying “Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?”

The angels’ efforts to bring salvation, in other words, seem hopeless and never-ending.

Again, the tearful Evangelist feels “a bitter loss.” But he still does not understand why heaven is a jungle and asks: “Why is the Heavenly Jerusalem deserted? Why should the Angels leave her? There at least, is holiness.” The Angel turns to the Prophet for answers, and in “the fury of inspiration,” Isaiah recites from his own book: “The voice of him that crieth in the Wilderness, Prepare ye the Way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (40:3); followed by: “for Behold I create new Heavens and a new Earth and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind” (65:17). In other words, heaven is deserted because all deserving angels are pursuing missionary activities throughout the universe: there is no time to revel in a “Heavenly Jerusalem.” Heaven is not a holy city but an unattended wilderness, a jungle.

More calmly, Isaiah then relates the story of Lucifer, the story that Vachel imagined during his final year at Hiram College, the story that lies behind the poem, “The Last Song of Lucifer.” The story is an excellent example of the integrative thinking that led to Aladdin’s Lamp and to its counterpart, “The Map of the Universe.” In Isaiah’s words:

When the foundations of the Heavens were laid, when the Dayspring knew his place, when the morning Stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for Joy, it was Lucifer who led the Choirs of Heaven. It was Lucifer who composed the Battle Hymn of God that God’s Warriors sang when Satan was overthrown. Satan was the Rebel warrior. Lucifer was still the loyal singer who lived in Heaven happily till a thousand years ago, when the rebel singer fell last of all. . . . Then from the depths of Hell he sang a song whose sorrow bound Heaven and Hell together in its compass, and the boughs of the trees of Heaven bent down and wept, and our hearts were carried away captive. But we resisted the captivity, and hurled down upon Lucifer the curse of Eternal Silence. And we rejoiced upon the walls of Heaven saying of Lucifer—as once I said of the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar: . . . .

And Isaiah repeats his biblical prophecy, emphasizing “How art thou fallen from Heaven, Oh Lucifer” and “Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols” (Isaiah 14: 6-20).

Afterward, Isaiah continues the story of “the Angels in the Stars.” One “bold angel” inquires of the Archangel Uriel how an ordinary angel can learn the song of Lucifer. In answer, Uriel summons the heavenly host to “the walls of Heaven” and, in a loud voice, proclaims: “Every star beneath us is begirt with lost and ruined planets. It is only the little Earth that Christ has died for. But in the hour of his passion he cried aloud without Sin—'My god, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.' He who would listen to the song of the Forsaken that echoes in his memory let him go forth to the Planets and ascend a sinless cross. And in that Hour Lucifer will be his brother in suffering, yet without sin, and the unappeasable thirst, the captivity of your hearts, will be redeemed, and the Little^ Earth will be the Bethlehem of the Universe. The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few.” Christ’s sacrifice, in other words, has set an example for all savior
artists: Christ’s crucifixion is the first step toward the Millennium but certainly not the last. There are infinitely more sacrifices to come.

When Isaiah finishes the story of Lucifer’s fall, the Archangel Michael asks the Evangelist to choose between “the task of the Prophets in Heaven, which is Patience, or the task of Angels in the stars, which is Death and Despair.” The Evangelist’s initial response favors the Prophets, as, he explains, “I have never been forsaken of God. How could I bear it?” Isaiah then smugly holds his peace, because he sees “the signs of victory.” . . . “But the Angel had a touch of the Rebel in him, sanctified by half a hundred crucifixions. He stretched wild hands into the night and called aloud—‘Who will give me this soul, and save a thousand stars?’”

As it turns out, the Counselor has a powerful and magical seashell that, once dipped in the purple wine, transfigures the Angel’s face into a face of glory, while the faces of the Evangelist and the Prophet Isaiah look “worn with pain.” Suddenly, “dark crystal winged censers” hover overhead, “pouring pungent sweet incense. . . . The Angel whispers to the Evangel: ‘These are the unborn souls. They come floating in from Chaos, seeking habitation. Part enter into the breasts of new born children. The other part choose when and where they shall be the second souls of the newly dead who are worthy to be angels.’” The Counselor, whose shell is responsible for the vision, has “a terrible glint” in his eyes. He experiences the strength of all counselors, “the will of unfeeling mastery”:

He shook like a leaf, yet held the shell to his breast and the silence, deepened, till it was as deep as Hell, till it was farther down in the deep of pain than is Hell from the Pain of men. And the winged censers, the unborn souls, fled into the night affrighted. And now we heard the sound of crying, and the tears of love choking in the throats of the Demons in the waves, in the trees, in the air. The Prophet covered his face.

Isaiah covers his face because he knows the struggle for the soul of the Evangelist is over. The Evangelist rejects the patient waiting of the prophets and clasps “the feet of the Angel saying ‘Let me be crucified!’”:

And hurling down through the sky came a mighty winged censer, such as we had not seen. It smote upon the breast of the Evangel, and consumed him with black smoke and purple flame. There was a smothering of incense. When we looked again, the Evangel stood by the Angel, like him in all things but in the character of the countenance. No, they were not alike, for I perceived for the first time that Michael was wounded in his side, that his hands and feet were pierced with old wounds, unhealed. But in all other things they were alike. Their countenances were like lightning; their raiment white as snow, with borders and girdles of purple; and purple wings they had.

Isaiah is a good loser: he feels no sorrow. He can only cry out: “How art thou fallen from Heaven, Oh Lucifer, Son of the Morning!” The Counselor, meanwhile, throws down his shell: “The spell ceased. The cast of his countenance was altered from grim power to unutterable pleading and he cast himself at the feet of the triumphant Michael, and the bitterest cry of all the night was the cry of the Magician—‘Tell me, who has given you this soul? And saved a thousand stars? Is it not I? Where is my recompense? Where is the Lamp of Aladdin Son of Mustapha?’ . . . But the Evangel, and the Angel and the Prophet were gone.”
Thus “The Beautiful Sorrow of the Angels” ends. It is the story of Vachel’s resignation from the patient life of prophetic preparation and his eager acceptance of a life of service to others, even though the life of service leads to the extreme suffering characterized by the angelic lives of the wounded Michael and his peers. These are the artist-angels who wander among innumerable stars and planets, bringing the message and the example of the rejected Lucifer to the souls of all created beings. The fate of such angels, as Vachel makes clear in his “Explanation of The Map of the Universe,” is suffering and crucifixion:

The Angels are the Missionaries of the Universe. They have gone forth to the stars to be crucified, and to be forsaken of God. Their shed blood, by transubstantiation enters the Wine jars carried by the boats of the prophets. This wine is poured as a purple mist in the paths of men. It becomes the light that never shone on sea or land, the gleam, the still small voice, the cloud of glory. (Poetry 928) [Note 9]

In other words, prophets like Isaiah bring the means of salvation to the human race. The means, though, are nothing less than the outpourings of angel-artists, their very life blood. The angel-artists’ “reward” is agony, alienation, “the curse of Eternal Silence.” If everyone, after all, believed and followed the message of the angel-artists, the materialistic values of the social establishment would be destroyed. In fact, when the message is poured like wine, it has a devastating, maddening effect. As a mist, it is “the still small voice” that is normally and conveniently ignored by the many. The chosen few, however, will respond and, in turn, carry the message to others, with similar, painful consequences to themselves and to those others. Their courage, though, will finally redeem the universe, including Hell itself. In Vachel’s words: “Some day Hell shall be redeemed by a storm of this wine poured down. This is just; because it was by a leaping flame from the Harp of the great Singer Lucifer, that the angels fell in love with suffering, and went forth to the stars to be forsaken of God. Thus was Lucifer King of the Universe the moment before he was cursed with eternal silence and sealed in his tomb” (Poetry 928). On that distant redemption day, when the cup of suffering is filled, all souls will unite in thought and in feeling; and Vachel’s envisioned, democratic, art-spirit Millennium will begin.

In his summer letter addressed to “Mama” (August 20), Vachel indicated that the religious emphasis in Aladdin’s Lamp was subsequent to a number of fanciful works, many of which he later destroyed, sometime after summer, 1905. In his words, “since the magicians are of no avail [in finding Aladdin’s lamp], the Prophets are put on the fruitless errand for my sake.” The change in focus was prompted by several extraordinary experiences: “In a certain corner of this room [his bedroom], one night, I saw the Prophets go by in gorgeous apparel. . . . At another time, in the day by the elm in the front yard, they went by in the same robes” (Poetry 928). Extraordinary though these visions were, Vachel maintained that he did not allow his visionary experiences to dictate his religious thinking. In his vision, the prophets were dressed in magnificent robes. “Yet when I wrote a story about them,” he declared, “I clothed them in rough penetential\textsuperscript{a} raiment. All through the summer I took similar liberties in the face of Hell and Heaven, determined not to be conquered by pictures in the air; I built a universe, half my own,
half revealed, and put it all in a book I have destroyed, entitled ‘Where is Aladdin’s lamp?’” (Poetry 928). [Note 10]

Vachel claimed to have written his poem, “A Prayer in the Jungles of Heaven” (published as “Heart of God,” Poetry 65), after witnessing the prophets parade through his room. And a copy of the poem, along with a few words of explanation, was enclosed in his August 20 letter to “Mama”:

The best I can say for the poem I send is that it represents a genuine sincere experience, and I am absolutely unable to write it in any other way and express the mood it represents. The mood might be criticised, but it could not be altered. It was an inevitable one for the moment it came, and as long as it lasted. It is a rare one. I have never had it before nor since. It may be too complex to interest you at all. I could not help what it was. I could only make an honest effort to record it. I think I have succeeded in this. A mood is not a permanent thing, it is not the result of long thought, it is not conviction, it is merely a complex torrent of emotion. I think the mistake is often made by readers of poetry in imagining a man is expressing his creed when he is only expressing a vision that enters his heart he knows not how and goes he knows not where. If you ask me why I write about the procession of Sages and Prophets—all I can say is I saw that procession passing before me all day and all evening, and the why and the wherefore of it I cannot say. I saw it, that is all. I knew they were going on some great and fruitless errand, for my sake, and I finally decided it must be Aladdin’s lamp [that] I desired. [Note 11]

Generally, when he referred to his visionary experiences, Vachel’s tone was aggressive, as in his brief essay, “An Exhortation,” where the avuncular role of the “Counselor” is unmistakable:

Having had an invisible world made visible to me, I cannot but counsel others to seek for the like. Some such experience awaits you, reader, as is related in the story of “The Boats and” of the Prophets.” The meaning, the actors, the scenery will differ, will contradict mine, but the splendor awaits. Brother, for your own soul’s sake, open your eyes and rebuild for yourself a kingdom of God on earth, a house not made with hands. Do not consider the raw pictures fresh from the sky infallible guides for yourself or others. Do not get drunk upon them, the consolations of an hour, parables of a day, but rigidly test them by experience, by the traditions of the church Universal and the dreams of all the reformers who are bringing down the angels to men. (“An Exhortation,” War Bulletin Number Three, August 30, 1909, reprinted with minor revisions in The Village Magazine, 3rd, 4th eds. See Prose 109-110).

Writing to “Papa and Mama,” Vachel was less aggressive, even apologetic, carefully describing his vision as “Of course . . . only a mood.” On the other hand, he maintained that his defensive attitude was an attempt to please his “pious friends” (including his pious parents); it did not reflect his true conviction: “It is my creed, if I have any, that Aladdin’s lamp is worth hunting for, even if it cannot be found. It is only in rare moments I can honestly rise above such a conviction. I might pretend to scorn the lamp just to please my pious friends, but it is the honest search of it that makes up my every day life as an artist. A mood such as this poem—is rare.” For his mother’s benefit, then, he ended the discussion of the new poem on a hopeful note: “I rather think it will be
the most satisfactory one to you in the book [*Aladdin’s Lamp*], and I am glad I am able to give it as my final word, for the book is artistic not pious. The book is a book of necromancy and magicians, and an avalanche of color and costume” (August 20).

“A Prayer in the Jungles of Heaven” is not part of the surviving copy of *Aladdin’s Lamp*, likely because the “amazing wrath” (*Poetry* 970) that caused Vachel to destroy much of his work was none other than his parents’ wrath, especially his mother’s. Although he stated in late August that the book was “not pious,” he continued to experience his so-called moods or visions and finally incorporated much of his “creed” in a rush of new poems, drawings, and stories. In the end, he decided to highlight his religious ideals in the prefatory essay, “A Confidential word to the kind inspector of the Manuscripts”: “The Religious half of the pagentry clings close to two ethical principles—the Brotherhood of Suffering, and the Evolution of suffering. The Higher life is higher suffering with higher power to endure, whether it be in Hell, Heaven or the Stars. The Demons suffer by Music, the Prophets by Hope, the Angels by Despair. And all endure gloriously.”

For orthodox readers, such as his parents, Vachel added a demurral: “But I am not a Philosopher. I have organized my dreams into a theatrical trust and spent all my gold for spectacular success in the large. The Universe is my stage. That gives unity of place. . . . Within these limits I have been an orderly stage manager, however uninspired, rough spoken or profane. I maintain that any swearing is accidental, and apologize. I have given due room for Orthodox hope in the prophecy of New Heaven; for Orthodox Jehovah in the grand words of Isaiah that give Him no throne but the Universe; the orthodox missionary idea in the crucified angels in the stars.” If the apology were for his parents’ sake, however, it was unsuccessful. Along with “A Prayer in the Jungles of Heaven,” other poems and stories were finally deleted from *Aladdin’s Lamp* (although many of the poems were published in *The Tramp’s Excuse* [1909] and adaptations of at least two of the stories were included in *War Bulletin Number Three* [1909].)

Despite the fact that Uncle Boy emasculated his first book, there is ample evidence he did not abandon his thoughts and beliefs. In 1909, after rereading Newman’s *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Vachel restated his religious creed, again in the context of the “Map of the Universe”: “I looked over my religion and decided that I had arbitrarily chosen the doctrine of Transubstantiation, and the doctrine of the Union of Christians. The first binds me in a deep sympathy with the Mass. The second holds me in my hereditary brotherhood, with which I have a deeper sympathy—the Disciples of Christ; and as long as there are two dogmas in me, I have no right to censure the man with a hundred.”

Although he associated the ecumenical idea with the Disciples of Christ, the continuation of his essay discloses that Vachel’s “doctrine” or “dogma” was far broader than anything proposed by his family church: “The Union of Christians—a tremendous doctrine. How are we going to have it in that future day when all Asia does lip service either to Peter or Paul? There will be a Christ with an elephant’s head carved in India that the West will abhor, which true disciples should not shrink from. There will be a Christ guarded by gilded dragons in China that the West will revile, but the true disciple should not scorn. In Japan there will be a Christ meditating upon a terrace in Heaven, done in bronze and set on a high mountain, and thinking thoughts that seem foolishness to
Glasgow or Rome or Chicago. But they will not seem foolishness to the true Disciple. Oh far flung battle line of Christian missions, you fight better than you understand, you build better than you know! The missionaries dying on the field are like angels crucified in the stars that the whole sky may be redeemed. But the new earth they are bringing will hold much they have not planned.” And he repeated one of his favorite convictions, the conviction that served as the foundation for his ecumenical fervor: “For God is an august and whimsical Creator, maker of all religions, dweller in all clean shrines” (“The Flower of the Amaranth,” War Bulletin Number Three, see Prose 109). This ecumenical tenet blazes forth in the War Bulletin, but it was largely excised from Aladdin’s Lamp, because it roused the wrath of the pious.

At the same time, the tenet reflects the thinking of James Russell Lowell, whose poem “Aladdin” provides both the title and an epigraph for Vachel’s book. Lowell shared Vachel’s enthusiasm for the world’s religions, as is evident in the prefatory lines in the poem “Rhoecus”:

God sends his teachers unto every age,
To every clime, and every race of men,
With revelations fitted to their growth
And shape of mind, nor gives the realm of Truth
Into the selfish rule of one sole race:
Therefore each form of worship that hath swayed
The life of man, and given it to grasp
The master-key of knowledge, reverence,
Infolds some germs of goodness and of right;
Else never had the eager soul, which loathes
The slothful down of pampered ignorance,
Found in it even a moment’s fitful rest. (1-12)

As we might expect, Susan Wilcox, the teacher who introduced Lowell’s work to Vachel, assisted her former pupil in writing and in organizing Aladdin’s Lamp. “Whenever I look at my book,” Vachel advised Wilcox, “I remember our evenings together, and my debt to you. Whatever the fate of the volume as it stands, the whole experience was of tremendous value, it was inevitable, it had to be done, whatever came later” (May 1, 1905, in Chénetier 6). Actually, much “came later,” as Vachel continued to develop his creed well after the summer of 1904. For years, he stressed that the real Vachel (as compared to the platform Vachel) was the artist of Aladdin’s Lamp; “The Map of the Universe”; and the many related poems, drawings, and stories. In fact, what he heralded as his most important work, the idealistic Golden Book of Springfield (1920), was nothing else, he claimed, than Aladdin’s Lamp “reborn” (Poetry 970).

Back in 1904, following the stories of the magicians, the prophets, and the angels, Vachel devoted himself to a new theme before his productive summer came to a close. “Now,” he advised his mother on August 20, “I am writing another book—called the Indian Girl.” Since two complete stories concerning “the Indian Girl” are included in “Volume the Third” of the surviving fragments of Aladdin’s Lamp, we may assume that
Vachel finally decided to merge his two books. Indeed, most of the characters already in *Aladdin’s Lamp* play important roles in the Indian-girl tales.

The first of the tales, “The Wooing of the Indian Girl,” narrates the love of Luke Homer, the “Painter,” for an Indian maiden who is at times a goddess, at times a mere mortal. As a human being, she has only a quotidian memory: “Every yesterday was a blank to her. . . . You know, to be a woman,” she explains, “one must be able to forget a great deal.” As a goddess, though, she exemplifies the archetypal “inspiration girl,” having experienced many transformations through the course of history, all in relation to the “Counselor.” In her own words:

I was Princess of the Mound Builders in this land, ages ago, when he was an old master-builder, whose love I scorned. That was the woman. The Goddess was daughter of Quetzal, Sun God. That was the beginning. Since then we have loved and hated round the world. When he was a poor Japanese fisherman, I was the Goddess Kwanon, the merciful, but I did not hear his prayer. As a woman I was the youngest grand daughter of Jimmu Tenno, first king of Japan. In Egypt the people called me Isis. They called him Osiris. In Palestine they called him King Saul. They called me the Witch of Endor. Afterward, in the days of King Solomon, I was reborn, the Shulamite, and he was one of the watchmen from the walls of Jerusalem whom I saw only in my dreams, who beat me and took away my veil from me. Once I was called Princess Balrubador—Once I was Cinderella. Then he was a poor woodcutters boy who kissed me amid the cinders, before the Prince took me away, before ever the fairy Godmother appeared. And when I came to this land again I was an Indian Witch, living in Lake Michigan. I loved him, but he loved me not. [Note 12]

When she finishes her abbreviated autobiography, her male listeners respond with courtesy; and the Indian girl, in her role as goddess, promises to reward them with “the Truth.” She relates that the “Magician” will usher in the Millennium when he finally acquires Aladdin’s lamp. She also reveals “how” the Millennium will begin: “He [the Magician] will send a host of the Genii to the farthest star in the West in inconceivable rapidity, that will make all the wonders of astronomers, alchemists or astrologers seem foolish fancies. When men have grown jaded by thinking familiarly of the inconceivable speed of lightning, or of sunlight, they will be roused to wonder once more by the speed of the Genii to the farthest star, and the return. And when men have learned to wonder again, the Millenium will be half accomplished. And the Genii shall bring from across the black skies the Tree of Laughing bells and plant it on this little Earth and—” At this point, she loses her divine stature; and, as “the brown Indian again,” she forgets the rest of her story.

After a short pause, the Indian girl again blazes with “savage Necromancy” and announces that, as a temporary measure, she will send the Painter to the star of laughing bells: “You cannot bring the whole great tree, like the Genii. But you can capture one bell, and one bell is good as the Millenium—for us.’ And so,” the narrator comments, “came about the adventure of the Wings of the Morning, as the Painter afterward put it into rhyme. Oh the Glory, the wonder, the laughter, when he returned in one short hour!” In fact, as we know from Vachel’s poem, the Painter brings back, not one bell but two, one of which he gives to the Indian girl. In the story, she is said to be “wild with delight,” as she fastens the bell to her wrist and proclaims: “‘This means that not you [the Painter],
but some one, shall find Aladdin’s lamp. It has been foretold in the caves of Thule that when two bells reach the Earth, Aladdins’ lamp shall be found!” The Painter (who expresses Vachel’s pessimistic moods) is singularly indifferent. He shakes the remaining bell in the face of the narrator and concludes the story with: “What does it matter? What does anything matter?”

At this point, we should recall Vachel’s frustrations in his effort to learn painting. In “The Wooing of the Indian Girl,” the pessimistic Painter turns poet, effecting a change in perspective that Vachel himself was in the process of making. His dream of God’s democratic, art kingdom on earth (his own particular definition of the Millennium) had to change because he had abandoned the study of painting in favor of composing poetry. To seek the Millennium, that is, to search for “Aladdin’s lamp,” was no longer possible for the frustrated Painter. The means for the search now focused on other art forms, on poetry and on narrative prose and on pen-and-ink drawing, the art forms that Vachel used in creating his book. In other words, Aladdin’s Lamp reflects Vachel’s revised thoughts concerning art, that is to say, his changed perspective on the means for seeking the Millennium. Wherever Aladdin’s lamp may be, the Painter is no longer a viable guide. Now the focus turns to the written word, especially to poetry.

In keeping with this changed perspective, the final tale in Aladdin’s Lamp, as the book now exists, is based on Vachel’s poem, “To the Archangel Michael” (Poetry 54, 56). Entitled “The Pride and Ashes of Passion,” the tale recounts Michael’s courtship of “the Indian Girl” and, of course, stands in contrast to the Painter’s courtship in “The Wooing of the Indian Girl.” In this second story, the Painter’s insouciance is a continuing theme. He is neither jealous nor upset that the girl responds to his rival’s attention (just as Vachel himself was unruffled at Hiram, when he and his male friends perched with the same girls). “She loves him,” the Painter exclaims “gaily,” in response to a question about the girl and the archangel. I saw him bending over her forehead yesterday morning. And there was a look in her eyes that showed her heart yearned for a vaster heart than mine. . . .” The Painter expresses his unconcern with his characteristic shrug: “But what does anything matter?” And he laughed with the laughing bell.”

When the girl is transformed into a golden goddess, however, her kiss reduces Michael to “a patch of purple embers.” She, in turn, rises into the sky amidst “great bubbles,” while Michael’s purple embers change into springtime violets: “And from the heart of each violet blew out a little purple butter fly^, whose wings were like violet-petals. They scattered into the woods. The queen was rising higher into the air, and the violets sent up a chorus of little voices that called. The story becomes a poem, and the “chorus of little voices” recites Vachel’s “The Queen of Bubbles.” Indeed, in the margin, the proud author has written: “Accepted by the Critic.”

When the narrative resumes, the Painter once again turns poet. In a notebook, he reflects on Michael’s aspirations in what the Painter himself calls a “poem of rememberance^”; the title is “I Want to Go Wandering” (Poetry 4-5). Afterward, the Painter and the narrator, who is likely the Magician, start for home. On the way, they meet the Counselor and tell him about their experience with Michael and the Indian girl. “Did you think to ask her where is Aladdin’s lamp?” the Counselor inquires. The answer to his question is an implied “No,” and the narrator admits: “The Counselor found us a trial sometimes.” When the three finally arrive at their art-studio home, they find a
message waiting for them, “the last message we ever had from the Mound Builder’s Daughter, Princess Balrubador, the Shulamite, the Queen of Bubbles—”:

“Tell me, is Aladdin’s lamp
Hidden anywhere?
It sleeps beneath the Amaranth
Beyond the Golden Stair.”

In the margin, Vachel muses: “This proves the lamp can be found?”; and the story (and likely the original book itself) ends.

The final tale in Aladdin’s Lamp suggests that the purple archangel’s passion for the golden inspiration girl of art is fatal for the angel. The consolation lies in the fact that springtime beauty emanates from the “ashes of passion,” the springtime beauty of flowers and the beauty of art, especially poetic art. “The Pride and the Ashes of Passion” is a story that reflects Vachel’s belief that love for artistic beauty is inspired by woman and that love causes suffering and death (usually in the form of crucifixion) for the angel-artist. Since beauty is the result, however, the noble artist responds to the siren call of inspiration, even though he knows that his aspirations will lead to his personal suffering and ultimate demise. The passion of Lucifer and the Passion of Jesus Christ reflect the fate of all angel-artists. But their deaths are not in vain. Their awesome sacrifice introduces beauty and reverence and wonder to the nightmare world of materialism. The living memory of their revolutionary ways, as well as the beauty of the songs they sang, will redeem the universe at last. The angel-artists move us ever closer toward Aladdin’s wonder-bringing lamp, the key to the art-spirit Millennium. To accomplish their purpose, however, the artists must shed their blood, which is collected by the patient prophets, merged with the blood of all the other martyrs, and finally poured as a purple mist of memory that inspires still other martyrs. In the end, when the “Communion Wine of the Universe” is fully commingled, the universe will be saved; and God’s art-spirit Millennium, the kingdom of heaven on earth, will come.

Where is Aladdin’s lamp? It is hidden beneath the throne of the Holy Ghost, the place where the amaranth grows. How is the lamp to be found? To that end, Vachel the cartographer-artist drew a pen-and-ink “Map of the Universe.” Actually, he drew several maps, as his thoughts evolved over the course of 20 or more years. The 1904 map was finally published in The Tramp’s Excuse and Other Poems (1909—see above and Poetry 62). The rugged “Throne Mountains” of the Trinity tower at the top of a circular universe. Two “Throne Mountains” are black, one is white. Surrounded by halo lines, the latter throne symbolizes the goal: here was once the seat of the Holy Ghost. At its base, the amaranth grows and beneath the amaranth, according to the Indian girl, “sleeps” Aladdin’s lamp. (That the “Immortal Amaranth” grows in heaven, Vachel knew from Paradise Lost, III, 353-357).

In summary, Vachel’s “Explanation of The Map of the Universe” (Poetry 928-929) expresses the artist’s perspective as follows: “The Throne Mountains were once the dwelling place of the Trinity; but they are desolate. Only the vine of the Amaranth, the flower of the Holy Ghost, grows about his mountain throne, bearing luminous inflaming honey-flowers.” The ancient prophets, who serve as the messengers of the universe, gather around this mountain throne in their boats and “eat this flower only. It makes them
hope against hope. They prophecy a New Universe.” Otherwise, as we have seen, heaven is deserted: “On the plateau below are the Jungles of Heaven, empty of souls, a region of fallen palaces, rotted harps, broken crowns, swords of rusted gold.” The thrones and heaven itself are deserted, because all spirits worthy of heaven are wandering among the sinful stars and planets, seeking to redeem all living souls and, in the process, being crucified. As Vachel explains in his story, “The Beautiful Sorrow of the Angels,” the angels are missionaries whose shed blood, through transubstantiation, enters the wine jars of the prophets and is then poured “as a purple mist in the paths of men,” where it becomes true inspiration or, in Vachel’s words, “the light that never shone on sea or land, the gleam, the still small voice” (Poetry 928). The purple mist represents Vachel’s intimations of immortality. It is his “cloud of glory,” his “splendour in the grass” (see Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”).

Meanwhile, the memory of Lucifer’s “last song” is the angels’ inspiration, and the song itself is symbolized by the great flame that sweeps across the center of the universe, rising above “Heaven” itself. The angels’ blood is shed because they are moved to action by memory of the song; and, as we have noted, Vachel believed “Hell” itself would some day “be redeemed by a storm of this wine poured down” (Poetry 928). In Hell, at the bottom of Vachel’s map, Lucifer’s tomb lies beneath “The River Called Hate.” Both tomb and river symbolize the alienation, that is, the crucifixion, of the angel-artist, whose sweet singing threatens the status quo and therefore provokes the wrath of the conservative social establishment.

“Beneath the walls of Heaven,” Vachel continues in his “Explanation of The Map of the Universe,” “is the soul of the Butterfly, which is the soul of the Earth redeemed, and on the edge of Hell is the soul of the Giant Spider, who is Mammon.” Actually, in the 1904 “Map,” the butterfly (which also is the symbol of beauty) resembles a child’s drawing of a real butterfly. The picture of “the soul of the Butterfly” (with no date—see Poetry 48) was perhaps created just after the first version of the “Map” was finished. The “soul” is included in Vachel’s later version of the “Map” (Poetry 496), and the drawing certainly existed by late 1904 or early 1905 (see Chénetier 7). The “soul of the Giant Spider,” on the other hand, is included in the 1904 “Map”; and the magnified version (see Poetry 49) is dated “1904.” The rest of Vachel’s “Explanation” then completes the thematic perspectives that were developed in Aladdin’s Lamp: [Note 13]

East of the Universe is the Palace of Eve, whence come the perfect Brides; west of the Universe is the Star of Laughing Bells, only to be reached by the Wings of the Morning. One bell will quench all memory, all hope, all borrowed sorrow. You will have no thirst for yesterday or for the future. Wizards and witches and fairies say that by finding Aladdin’s Lamp, which sleeps somewhere in the myriad treasure-pits of the jungles of Heaven, the new Universe can be built, and all the cities of the Wise. The Genii of the lamp can be commanded to carry the Laughing Bells to every soul in the Universe, and thus redeem them all. The angels and prophets say that the New Universe comes by the power of the Wine of God, the blood of the crucified Angels.

In the far northwest of the “Map” lies Ultima Thule, appropriately (according to the Greeks) the northernmost inhabitable area of the world and (according to Vachel) the ultimate source of all created things. Each offspring of the Creator is then represented as a bubble—to symbolize its fragile and finite nature—and the bubbles spill across the
northeast corner of Vachel’s universe, ending above the Palace of Eve, where all inspiration girls, such as the Queen of Bubbles, reside. Further Vachel variations on and developments of the map’s themes, including his conviction that Jesus, in the Millennium, will prove to be the consummate angel-artist, will be discussed in future chapters. For now, it is time to return to earth.

The “last Sunday” that Vachel was home this year (likely Christmas day, 1904), he recited several new poems in a parlor performance for an audience of friends, including his former teacher, Susan Wilcox, and his Springfield pastor, Hugh Tucker Morrison. The enthusiastic response was something Vachel long remembered, and the impromptu recital played an important role in determining his goals over the next decade of his life. “It is a great satisfaction to move men, real men, leaders of men,” he related to his parents: “All I need is the time and opportunity to meet many of them and read my stuff one at at^ time at opportune moments” (April 11, 1905).

It was an occasion of farewell, as several in attendance, as well as Vachel himself, had plans to leave Springfield. The Lindsay son had persuaded his parents that he needed to travel, not out among the heavenly stars but to the star of the American publishing world, New York City. He wanted to submit the manuscript of Aladdin’s Lamp to the nation’s great publishing houses, and he was convinced beyond all doubt that publication was simply a matter of time. In his optimistic manner, he anticipated that his first book would serve both to earn his daily bread and to deliver his message to the world. The prophetic time for preparation had ended; the angelic time for wandering among the stars had begun. He would not be crucified, as we shall see; in fact, he was warmly received by countless editors in countless publishing houses. No blood was shed, no life was lost. All were encouraging, all advised him to take his goods elsewhere, all said that publication by someone was absolutely certain.

Pastor Morrison, on the other hand, had discovered “that his voice was not equal to the strain of pulpit preaching, and [he had] decided to prepare himself for the practice of medicine” (McElroy 175). He was about to leave Springfield for Drake Medical College in Des Moines, Iowa. Dr. Lindsay, as we noted (Chapter 4), assured his pastor that “he was going one step higher.” Morrison did not live in Springfield again until 1908, the same year that Vachel himself quit New York City and once again took up residence in his family home. Dr. Morrison returned in order to attend to Springfield bodies; art student Vachel Lindsay returned with a message for Springfield souls.

Meanwhile, Dr. Paul Wakefield and his wife Olive had angelic traveling plans of their own. At the end of 1904, Dr. Wakefield was still assisting in Dr. Lindsay’s Springfield practice. The young Wakefields, however, had asked the Christian Church to support them as medical missionaries to China. They would not be crucified, as their brother’s “Map of the Universe” suggests; but their dedication to others, as we shall see, nearly cost Olive her life. It did lead to the death of one of her children.
Notes for Chapter Fourteen

[Note 1] The Springfield newspapers also report that Elsie Logan sponsored a dinner for the bridal party on Monday night, June 13, and the bride celebrated traditional “at home” receptions on July 11 and October 10 (her birthday), 1904. Both receptions were at 603 South Fifth and are duly reported in the July 12 and October 11 newspapers.

[Note 2] Ruth Wheeler was responding to a birthday letter that the Lindsays sent to her from Dublin, Ireland, on June 30, 1904. Ruth thanked the Lindsays for their hospitality and then commented: “I was happy to think that you remembered me even tho’ you were away in a strange land with everything to interest you and so much to see.” In 1947, Olive advised her Springfield friend Willis Spaulding that, during the years before and after her wedding, Ruth was “my dearest friend” (October 27, Ward).

[Note 3] Four of the eight main buildings were wedge-shaped, and the design likely reminded Vachel of the Columbian Exposition. The eight were: Mines and Metallurgy, Liberal Arts, Education and Social Economy, Electricity, Manufactures, Varied Industries, Machinery, and Transportation. “Although the buildings were ornate and appeared to be very substantial, they were made of temporary materials, not to last more than a few years. The material employed was ‘staff,’ first used at the Paris Exposition of 1878 and again at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. This firm but temporary substance was a mixture of fibres soaked in simple plaster-of-paris. The resulting hardened material was very adaptable. It could be sawed, hammered, nailed, and whittled like wood. Originally burlap was used as the binder at twelve cents a pound; but later, discovery of the use of manila fibres at four cents a pound allowed architectural imaginations to run wild. By pouring ‘staff’ into glue molds, many repeated ornamental effects could be achieved in a very short time.

“The basic structure under the ‘staff’ could be wood or steel. For the St. Louis Fair, the long-leafed yellow pine (ninety-million feet of it) was given preference over steel for several reasons, the most important being the impossibility of obtaining sufficient steel in time” (Witherspoon 19). The permanent Fine Arts building is now the City Art Museum of St. Louis. Maps of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition may be seen in the New York Times (February 28, 1904, p. 15) and in Witherspoon 88-89. See also Putzel, “At the Fair,” Man in the Mirror, pp. 104-113.

[Note 4] Olive’s difficulties with her husband’s family are reflected in Vachel’s August 20, 1904, letter to his vacationing mother. Professor Wakefield had returned to Springfield to visit the newlyweds for “four days”; and, according to Vachel, “The Professor stayed at the office mostly and talked to Paul. Olive was courteous but not effusive. . . . She told the Professor when he left that any friend of Paul’s was welcome. But she positively declined to visit Hiram. She will visit Grandmas^ folks in the fall while Paul is in Hiram. She assured the Professor very calmly that she never expected to visit him. I expect it is just as well. She objects to acting the role of repentant and prodigal daughter, which they have assigned to her. They are effusively anxious to forgive her for sticking to her own plans. . . . Olive lets them make her angry. I try to counsel her to dignity, and on the whole she did well during the Professors^ visit. The Professor is a noble man, but he forgives himself too easily. If it was worth his while to object to the offensive marriage several months, Olive ought to have been sufficiently
distasteful for him to let her alone in her honeymoon. If her wedding was ‘premature’ so also was his visit.”

A picture of Professor Edmund B. Wakefield may be seen at http://library.hiram.edu/Archives/history.htm

In this same letter of August 20, 1904, Vachel disclosed that his entire summer was not spent in visions and art: “Paul is doing well in the office and keeping well. Olive is pretty well, and taking it easy. . . . The cat has several new lively kittens full of fleas. About a week ago I pitched seventy five^ bushels of coal into the cellar. I could not find Emmet [the black paid servant], and enjoyed it very much.”

[Note 5] On March 29, 1904, while still a student at the New York School of Art, Vachel commented to his parents: “I find I have an extraordinary^ memorizing faculty when I am in good trim, and I must cultivate^ it all I can.” In 1909, he included two of his early visionary stories in War Bulletin Number Three (August 30): “The Flower of the Amaranth” and “The Boats of the Prophets” (reprinted with minor revisions in The Village Magazine, 3rd and 4th editions). In “The Flower of the Amaranth,” Vachel writes: “For good or ill I have eaten of the flower of the Holy Spirit, the most dangerous bloom in the Universe. There are days when visions come in cataracts. With these pictures burning heart and conscience away, I would compass Heaven and Earth to make one proselyte. I would go through smoke and flame to prove that these my visitations came to me. The martyr’s crown would be sweeter than honey. . . .” (Prose 107).

[Note 6] Chénetier (464) reports that Vachel’s letter is in the Clifton Waller Barrett Library at the University of Virginia’s Alderman Library. In fact, Vachel’s letter is in the Edward Scribner Ames collection at the University of Chicago’s Joseph Regenstein Library.

[Note 7] In his prefatory essay to Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp?, Vachel obliquely describes the Counselor’s stories: “Volume one holds the millennial^ pageant^ whose pen and ink drawings were inspired by his voice. Volume two the little story of the Goosefeather whose pictures were created by his voice, and the third has a kindred story.”

[Note 8] Vachel’s ex post facto summary of Aladdin’s Lamp is part of his “PREFACE to The Tramp’s Excuse and Other Poems” (1909): “In the summer of that year [1904] I produced a foolish, three volume mystery-tale ‘Where is Aladdin’s Lamp?’ since consigned to the flames. It was an illustrated story of three tramp-magicians who searched through the Universe for that Wizard’s plaything, Aladdin’s lamp. I mention these things to show how I gradually became a tramp by conviction” (Poetry 927). This summation, however, reflects Vachel’s bitterness, following several years of attempts to find a publisher for the work, as well as experiencing parental disapproval, especially from “Mama.”

[Note 9] “The Boats of the Prophets” in War Bulletin Number Three (see note 5 above) is an adaptation of this story. On September 26, 1909, upon sending a copy of Bulletin Three to his friend and former pastor, Edward Scribner Ames, Vachel reported: “The Story of the Boats of the Prophets was written long ago. It represents a self that is only asleep, not dead” (Chénetier 37-38). On May 19, 1905, Vachel wrote in his notebook
that at lunch he told G.W. Reynolds, Ames’s New York friend, “the story of the Boats of
the Prophets, which seemed to clinch our Friendship” (“gathered information on Art”).

[Note 10] In War Bulletin Number Three, for example, Vachel asserts: “I have never
seen Heaven or Hell except in visions. Visions are not infallible. They are parables of the
day, consolations of the hour. I think man should use Faith only when he must. Vision is
better than Faith, but Experience is better than Vision. I do not believe in the infallibility
of any Book, Teacher or Church” (“It May Be, Brother,” Prose 104).

[Note 11] The effect of Vachel’s vision is evident in two stanzas that were finally deleted
from his “Heart of God” poem:

The Prophets march to nowhere-land—
Past treasure-heaps that shine.
They seek Aladdin’s foolish lamp—
To answer prayers of mine.

And will they find the lamp
Who search because I pray?
Oh had I known: oh had I prayed
For Lamps of God, today! (Poetry 840)

intellectuals, Vachel shared the theory that the Mound Builders were not prehistoric
Indians but a superior race of people who were finally annihilated or driven away by the
portrays a sophisticated young woman who is dressed in an elaborate gown. It currently
is collected in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and is signed “Nicholas Vachel
Lindsay,” with the date “July 29, 1903.” Vachel’s friend, Stephen Graham, alludes to the
Mound Builders myth in Tramping with a Poet in the Rockies, p. 274.

[Note 13] In later years, Vachel suggested several sources for his imagery in “The Map
of the Universe.” In a letter to Burris A. Jenkins (April 24, 1928), for example, he
compared his work with “those diagrams which preface Dante, showing his elaborate
hells and heavens, and those diagrams which indicate Milton’s compromise between the
system of Copernicus and the system of Ptolemy.” Vachel also related his drawings of
the souls of the butterfly and the spider to William Blake: “Blake drew the ghost of a flea
long ago and I reserve the same privilege.” Finally, he added: “You will find in my map
of heaven that most of it is woods. Hamlet said the earth was an unweeded garden [I, ii,
135-136]. I feel sure the best part of heaven is an unweeded garden and an unweeded
woods. I fail to see why the park gardeners and neat little city men should rule the skies. I
think that the heaven described in the Book of Revelation is a fine thing for those who
like city life, but it is all streets, armies, men in uniform, not a private citizen in it. It all
happens in a gigantic basilica, probably an idealized basilica of the catacombs with high
mass going on at the high altar. Anyhow this city-built Book of Revelation does not give
the woods of heaven a chance. I put them in my map” (Chénetier 428-429).

Vachel’s drawing of the “Palace of Eve” bears a resemblance to William Blake’s
depictions of the Druid trilithons in Milton 6 and Jerusalem 70 (and passim). (Blake like
Vachel, attributed his work to an eidetic imagination.) Massa also notes Vachel’s
attraction to Blake, “with whom as an artist, a poet, some species of mystic, and a
Swedenborgian, Lindsay had so much in common. They were also both epileptics, a condition to which visions—or hallucinations—are often attributed” (56). For Vachel and Blake and Swedenborg, see also Poetry, pp. 949 and 959-961.

Vachel’s “jungles of Heaven” echo Swinburne’s “The Forsaken Garden,” and the rapid flight to the “Tree of Laughing Bells” suggests John Donne’s “Meditation IV”: “our creatures are our thoughts, creatures that are born giants, that reach from east to west, from earth to heaven, that do not only bestride all the sea and land but span the sun and firmament at once; my thoughts reach all, comprehend all. Inexplicable mystery! I their creator am in a close prison, in a sick-bed, anywhere, and any one of my creatures, my thoughts, is with the sun and beyond the sun, overtakes the sun and overgoes the sun in one pace, one step, everywhere.”

Photographs for Chapter Fourteen

Vachel’s High School Teacher
Susan E. Wilcox, in later years.
Photo is property of the Vachel Lindsay Association.
Olive C. Lindsay Wakefield on her wedding day, June 14, 1904. Photo is property of the Vachel Lindsay Association.