Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Nineteen

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

by

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[This ongoing biography may be read online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Choose “Biography” and then “Uncle Boy: A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” The biography and the website are sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association.]
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“Oh, to have fire, fire, perpetually in my heart that I may give it freely to all who come.”

1

Soon after the S.S. Hanover docked in Philadelphia (on September 9, 1906), Vachel left his family and returned to New York City. He moved his belongings to his former boarding house at 345 West 57th Street, where his friend, Mrs. [Alberta?] Beakes, was landlady. He shared a two-room studio on the top floor with George Mather Richards and ate his meals with a bevy of friends at the Crown restaurant, George Becker, proprietor, 355 West 58th Street. Publicly, Vachel returned to a life style that changed very little during the next year and a half: he read long hours and recorded the results in his notebooks, he adapted his study to his own values and delivered his insights in several lecture series, he discussed and debated ideas over meals at the Crown (later renamed “The Pig and the Goose”) with fellow artists and writers, he authored poems and drew pictures, and he rejoined the Rutgers Club, that is, Frank Ferris’s Sunday school class at the Rutgers Presbyterian Church (located at 73rd and Broadway).

Privately, Vachel began where he left off in March of this same year: recording his visionary experiences in his “Evidences of magic” notebook. The following, for example, is dated “September 27, 1906”:

Why should we dream of the spiritual body as a thing that weighs nothing, because invisible? Why should we think of it as having no substance, because our substance cannot perceive^ it? In the Jungles of Heaven the rocks of Mt Zion under the soil go down to the foundations of the uttermost deep, and the earth is a dust-mote for lightness, in the presence of this towering mountain. Great are the wings of the boats of the prophets, for the communion jars are as heavy as adamant, and the bones of the prophets are granite and their flesh is as a stained and flexible marble. And in the weight of their thoughts, and the life they live, our thoughts are as the thoughts of earth violets in comparison with the thoughts of the trees of iron in the Jungles of heaven. They bend before the wind, as the violet does in our life, but the winds of heaven are hurricanes. The Prophets can be gentle with us, as we can be gentle with children, so they never learn the hardness of our hands.

But with the Demons it is not so—they reach in strong spiritual hands and crush the soul with one motion—they whisper and we are listening to temptations louder than the bells of doom, they breathe on us, and we are in a tornado of destruction. Dream not that the dead are wraiths—it was the hand of one dead Chinaman that overturned San Francisco—it was—to go back to the beginning—the dexterous hand of one of the earliest sons of Adam, dead and forgotten who painted the first rainbow across the heavens as a sign to Noah, by the command of the veiled Jehovah. [Note 1]
And yesterday, at noon, walking by the Times Building on Broadway there was the invisible hand of a granite-boned prophet upon my shoulder, and the great one fancied within himself he was gentle with me, but he carried me forward with a power that made my body ache and left me half dead in my room. The great can be gentle though—let us speak to them when we may, and ask them to be always gentle with their little children on the frail earth.

He could be rebellious with his parents, declaring his maturity and insisting on his vast experience. He could scheme about developing his mental and artistic abilities in order to save the human race with wisdom and with art. Inside, however, in private, Uncle Boy knew the feeling of the “granite-boned” hand on the shoulder, the stony hand of conscience and authority, the hand that shatters self-confident exteriors and subjects sensitive interiors to the fear and trembling of a scared child.

With determination, and despite fear of failure and inadequacy, Vachel continued to arrange for his most ambitious lecture series to date. Sponsored by New York’s West Side YMCA, the series was designed as a sweeping survey of art history, starting with the pyramid and ending with the skyscraper. The speaker was paid; but his purpose, he claimed, was love, not money. Indeed, in a new notebook for the occasion (dated “New York, September 28, 1906”), he professed his feelings for his fellow humans, while he also acknowledged the essential dichotomy of his own being. And he left little doubt as to which side of his nature he preferred:

There are days when my heart awakes with love, and only then I know it has been dead. Though I am an old man, a wandering Jew of the Universe, though I am for the most part coldly selfish, and my desires those of the artist or the student or the egotistical teacher, yet there are hours when my old age goes, and the smiles of a half grown awkward child are the very dearness of life to me. If one could always live as one lives then—but: why should I begin when I know I will wake up tomorrow an old man again, and may so remain many weeks?  [Note 2]

The “awkward child,” ironically, emerged again and again as Uncle Boy grew older. In his New York City years, the “old man” or avuncular side of his nature was regularly preoccupied in preparing classes and lectures, preparing, that is, to save Americans from their mechanistic, materialistic lives by teaching art appreciation. In fact, Vachel’s educational philosophy, as expressed in his own words, equated the good teacher with the good missionary: “The pupil is essentially the host, and if the teacher does not give himself, his heart, his friendship with his teaching, he is but lazily dwelling in the house of his pupil, and giving him nothing but words. Yet one has to be a fountain of strength, a great heart to be true in this. The glad hand, the jolly, the prefunctory good wish become habits as wicked as the mendicant habit” (“September 28, 1906”). In the same notebook context, the missionary-teacher also alluded to the Christ-like martyrdom awaiting all who, like himself, were intent on helping others: “Poem—concerning one who took his life, for love of wandering. What he hoped to find between the stars.”

In autumn, 1906, however, Vachel’s hoped-for angelic life is marked more by mundane matters than by spiritual odysseys “between the stars.” In an effort to gain an audience for his lectures, he designed and produced an advertising brochure, a copy of which is included with the materials presented to Peter Clark Macfarlane. “The folder
below covers my first systematic and thoroughly prepared lecture-course,” Macfarlane was advised: “the fall of 1906 and winter of 1907 after returning from Europe.” Entitled “A Course in Art Development,” the folder reads, in part:

This includes Architecture, Painting, Sculpture and the Social Arts, covering the History of Civilization from the day of the Pyramid to the day of the Skyscraper. . . .

The purpose of the class is to show plainly that no man can be a good citizen unless he understands the principles which underlie the building of a great city. The matter of professional art training is left to other classes. It is the intention that this shall be a center for new ideas, a rallying point for students and laymen who believe in art, and its bearing on American civilization.

The class will take about four weeks for each topic, including Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Romanesque, Renaissance and Modern Art; beginning Wednesday evening at eight-thirty, October twenty-fourth, 1906, and closing Monday evening, March eighteenth, 1907. (Virginia)

The brochure also explains that, on Monday evenings, the class will meet at the Metropolitan Museum, where the instructor will discuss the materials that he covered in his Wednesday night “chalk talks.” The class is said to be free for the student; the teacher, as we know from his notebook, was paid six dollars a week. [N.B. Uncle Boy would re-teach this class in summer and fall, 1909, in letters to girlfriend Nellie Vieira. The lectures will be discussed in detail, with illustrations, in Chapter 22.]

This time, advertising seems to have paid off handsomely. “My class now numbers fifty,” the lecturer advised “Dear Papa and Mama” on November 1, “and the men have begun to discuss this mundane existence from the Art Standpoint, and get acquainted with one another.” Still, the Lindsay son remained a curious mixture of optimism and despair: “Of nights I am completely discouraged, and if I did not feel that you were still loyal I do not know what I would have to hang to. At the worst though this is temporary—my class is scheduled till March 18. Then if neccessary I can go back to the gas tubing factory, with the feeling that I have done two years of lecturing in the same place, with chances to do it the third year on better terms, and with real usefulness. I am perfectly willing to work six months, in the good old-fashioned perspiration style if I can only quit here feeling I have made good in some fashion. It is making good to hold the interest of fifty such men as I have. I hope to enlarge the class by March, and finish in style.”

He had just finished his second Wednesday night class (October 31), and although his brochure advertises “about four weeks for each topic,” he was ready to leave the Egyptians and move on to the Greeks: “Tuesday [October 30] I spent all day in the Museum in the Greek Section—in the afternoon Minor Lee Bates was with me, helping me study for all he was worth, and this afternoon he goes with me again. We have become very friendly and I think the world of him. We are going to study out Monday's [November 5] lesson on the relation of Greek Architecture to Sculpture. I think I will make it the History of the Acropolis. Then Wednesday I will make as thorough a talk as I can on the Age of Pericles. The Monday after, at the Museum, on the Age of Augustus as illustrated by Pompeii. There is a room of Pompeian bronzes. Then the Wednesday after, Augustus historically, Monday and Wednesday after—Constantine.” [Note 3]
In beginning his class with Egyptian architecture, Vachel was able to use many observations he recorded firsthand when he studied in the Egyptian rooms at the British Museum. His overall theme emerged early—and continued with him in his thinking for many years to come. It is a theme worthy of someone who revered Alexander Campbell, as the lecturer advocated an ecumenical or eclectic approach to art. “I have become so inveterate an interpreter in styles of architecture and painting and sculpture,” he later disclosed to Richard Watson Gilder, “that I am still less conscious of preferences there and feel a discomfort over the omission of any of the leading spectacles along the corridors of time, from Edfu to Madison Square” (November 6, 1908, Chénetier 29).

What he admired in ancient Egyptian architecture, he summarized for his friend and fellow Campbell follower, Edward Scribner Ames: “The Egyptian Priesthood for thousands of years struck this one note, for thousands of years their pylons, Pyramids, Mummies and obelisks overwhelmed the people by their vast suggestion of Magic. It is as though one vast man had designed it all. So not only Rembrandt the Supreme but Egypt the Eternal found room in this point of view for supreme attainment” (Chénetier 40).

The “Evidences of magic” in Egyptian art, to borrow the title of one of Vachel’s earlier notebooks, became the lecturer’s first salvo in his war against the modern American way of life. Magicians, such as the ancient Egyptian artists and “magical” Rembrandt, offer a meaningful and desirable alternative to mechanical materialism—for those who have eyes to see and ears to understand. And lecturer Lindsay, as Romantic idealists before him, was intent on giving his audience new eyes and new ears. “Let the artist climb upon the soap-box,” he reiterated in 1912, “and maintain that this nation was conceived in originality, and that it was dedicated to the proposition that all men are born unique in power to create beauty, that now we are engaged in a great civil war, an epic struggle for the abolition of the slavery of ugliness, and the giving of eyes to a nation of ninety million blind, and the putting of creative power into ninety million hands” (“The New Localism” 18).  [Note 4]

Magic, Vachel informed Ames, was the key to creative power; and he discussed the ancient Egyptian artists as pioneers in what he believed to be the foundations of his own artistic power: “As for my ideas of art form in poetry—and pen and ink drawing—they are formed definitely by four men: Poe, Coleridge (in his two or three magical poems) Blake and Beardsley. Then again—Poe, Coleridge, Blake and Beardsley. Then again—Poe, Coleridge, Blake and Beardsley. These are the necromancers, the Wizards, the Magi in English—and Beardsley as the solitary magician in pen and ink” (Chénetier 40). Cold mechanical philosophy, that is, science, “will clip an Angel’s wings,” John Keats laments in Lamia. For his part, Vachel believed that renewed appreciation of artistic magicians, such as those who designed and built the splendid temple of Horus at Edfu, could rescue Americans from the materialistic ruts that they naively referred to as their “lives.”

“I want you to look at the picture of the temple of Edfou [French spelling of Edfu],” Vachel wrote to Nellie Vieira on October 22, 1909, “till you can see it in your sleep.” Uncle Boy was summarizing his New York YMCA lectures in an attempt, albeit a vain attempt, to educate Vieira to be a model woman and, as such, his future wife:
It [Edfu] is of the general plan of all the great Egyptian temples from the beginning to the end. I am not going to impose any architectural terms upon you, but learn to visualize this so that whenever anyone says Egypt it springs up before you. Every bit of the structure serves one end—to create an atmosphere of Mystery, and Magic, which is perfectly natural since the rulers of Egypt were the priestly caste, and dominated never by law or arms but always by the unseen power they were supposed to possess. Egypt is wonderful for the vast dignity and long endurance of her magic. In modern English literature it does not seem possible for any one who deals exclusively and intensely in magic to do anything big, though I hope to alter that. Egypt proves to me that Wizardry is not necessarily a limited field. Coleridge was the first wizard in English literature, and with him it appears in three poems only—the Ancient Mariner, Christabel, and above all the divine incantation Kubla Khan. The Ancient Mariner is big and haunting, yet not so much so as any Egyptian row of Hieroglyphics or Scrap of the book of the Dead. Even the clear eyed and intellectual Greeks felt that final wisdom and Supreme magic power was hid behind these giant pylons, and in the inner recesses of these temples where whole forests of pillars make a mystic gloom.

He promised Vieira “seven or eight other pictures,” each representative of a different phase of art history. Then he concluded: “The Egyptian Religion must have been utterly unlike any other, the Architecture that records it being so different. End of first lesson” (Fowler 204-205).

The primary source, as Vieira’s suitor revealed, was A. D. F. Hamlin’s A Text-Book of the History of Architecture (New York, 1896), an early section of which is entitled, “The Temple Scheme.” Hamlin argues that “the temple at Edfou . . . conforms most closely to the typical plan” (22). This teacher, however, was not a slavish copier; and his many notebook entries evidence the personal touch that he added to his sources, and almost certainly included in his lectures: “Let then your heart see this stream of Beauty that winds through the deserts of Time—In your waking dreams—drink of the dark mystery of Egypt” (Virginia, cf. Fowler 207). [Note 5]

In contrast to the “dark mystery of Egypt,” Vachel turned next to the clear-eyed daylight of the age of Pericles. Here is his focus, as he expressed it to Vieira: “I send you the print of the Parthenon. The dates covered by the architecture of Egypt are 4500 B. C. to two or three hundred A. D. when mummies were no more made. But the Parthenon stands one might say for one brilliant lifetime—the Age of Pericles, about 450 B. C. See what a different mood—the Egyptian Temple is turned inside out, to make the Greek, the pillars are outside and catch the light, instead of making a mysterious darkness as in Egypt. (I take it for granted you will imagine the Parthenon Restored.) Everything is clear eyed, serene and open as the Day. The Greeks were Intellectual beautiful temperate boys, that never grew up. Yet everything in the Age of Pericles was completely rounded and ripe. The Parthenon was full of subtle curves, even where the lines seemed the straightest, there was not a straight line in it. But most of all,” the lecturer concluded, “I want you to visualize this building, till you can see it in the dark, the second in the procession of great buildings. Compare it back and forth with the temple of Edfou till you have the two moods absolutely contrasted. Then imagine the history that march past each one, how different each one from the other, in costume, complexion, social order, etc.”
(Fowler 217-218). There are echoes of Hamlin’s *Text-Book* here, as Fowler points out; but Vachel’s personal approach reflects his desire to be the ideal teacher, the teacher who gives “himself, his heart, his friendship with his teaching.”

Additional letters to Vieira summarize other “Art Development” lectures. On October 27, 1909, she was asked to view a print of Hadrian’s Pantheon and remember that “Roman architecture was the first that was secular and Governmental” (Fowler 219). Three days later, she received a long discussion of Byzantine architecture, featuring the Hagia Sophia and “its decorative mosaics. The Eastern or Greek church did not allow pictures, but made magnificent inlaid marble and bits of gleaming stone” (Fowler 235). Subsequent discussions focused on the Taj Mahal (Mohammedan/Saracenic), the Leaning Tower of Pisa (Romanesque), and the Notre Dame de Paris (Gothic), along with a summary conclusion:

Your lessons in Architecture are now over. . . . I want you to see these pictures in the dark, in their regular order, just like the letters in the alphabet.

People who do not think I am a systematic or logical thinker do not give me the credit of having this row of buildings in my mind, and the row of great Characters in the Heroes of Time. I can establish my whole creed, to my own satisfaction out of these buildings and that list of Great Men. I want you to feel that there is something logical consistent and consecutive in my make up, however appearances may sometimes be against it. (Fowler 270-271)

The “Heroes of Time,” first entitled “God Help Us All to Be Brave” and finally “Litany of the Heroes” (*Poetry* 435-441), is the work that Vachel refers to as “that list of Great Men.” It is the poem he began during the winter, 1906-07, in conjunction with his lectures. And like the letters to Nellie Vieira cited above, the poem summarizes and expands on the ideas that went into the “Course in Art Development.”

2

Along with the scheduled lecture series, the West Side YMCA asked Vachel to give “three extra talks” during November, one “for the social department and two for the religious,” for which, “he proudly informed his patient and supportive parents, “I will be paid a little.” The YMCA’s regular lecturer, Alexander F. Irvine, had left New York “on a temporary exploration of child labor conditions in the South”; and Vachel hinted that Irvine’s absence might lead to the independence that both he and his parents desired: “If Irvine stays away for good, it may be my opening.” His friends also were trying to help, but so far to no avail: “The woman Harold [Salisbury] had in mind to back me up did not encourage him much, so I have a new plan.” He would wait for permanent employment at the YMCA, and then ask Frank Ferris for financial support to teach a course in St. Luke and St. Paul at the Rutgers church: “But I want a case beyond all doubt. I have seen so many fellows make demonstrations in his direction that I am quite sure his leg is sore from being pulled” (November 1). Indeed, Vachel would teach his course, as we shall see, but neither his permanent YMCA position nor his hope for remuneration would materialize. (Ferris did request a Rutgers Club lecture on “The Roman Government in the Time of Christ, at Home and in Palestine,” a lecture that Vachel finally delivered, gratis, on Sunday morning, February 17, 1907.) [Note 6]
In spare moments during the fall, 1906, when he was not struggling for what he called his “opening,” Vachel turned again to writing poetry. His “Evidences of magic” notebook includes an early draft of “The Storm-Flower” (Poetry 94-95), along with an explanatory note: “November 1, 1906—Verse written for a picture entitled The Storm-flower blooms^, drawn especially for Clifford White and Pearl McCreary, bride and groom.” Nine days later, Vachel added the first draft of “I Heard Immanuel Singing” (Poetry 66-68), the poem based on his S.S. Haverford vision. The notebook draft is entitled “The Day after the Millenium^” and is prefaced by the proud author’s comment: “Finished November 10, 1906—my birthday.” Marginal remarks indicate that, as usual, the author asked friends to critique his work: “Achsa[h] [Barlow] dont^ like,” “bad metre^,” etc. Many lines are crossed out, most having to do with the varieties of flowers that the visionary writer associated with the Millennium: the rose, the lotus, and the lily, as in the published poem, but also the violet, the acanthus, the goldenrod, the poppy, and the chrysanthemum, all finally eliminated. In the end, the flower catalog was abbreviated to eight lines (49-56), the concluding verse paragraph (57-76) rewritten, and the work essentially completed, according to another authorial note, on “Christmas 1906.” [Note 7]

With “Immanuel” finished and with a new year about to begin, the father of a new God was ready for another chronic start. He had exited the museums of Europe with renewed determination to teach others about art and art history’s relevance to life. The task of lecturing itself, however, immersed him in the heady atmosphere of the podium. He was soon enamored with the fact that his audiences, like his Hiram College friends in earlier days, were impressed with his extraordinary knowledge and insights. Ironically, the very act of discussing art in an intellectual forum lured the teacher away from the world of imagination and into the world of thought. Once again, he found himself wavering between art and letters; and, once again, he made a decision, a seemingly-long-range-but-actually-temporary decision, to forego art in favor of the pursuit of letters. His new God and his new religion had developed (ripened, in his mind) to the point where he felt he could arrest the search for beauty and resume the search for truth.

Characteristically, to mark the new beginning, Vachel recorded his decision in a new notebook, this one dated “January 11, 1907”:

Last Spring I think I first recorded my resolution to learn to think, to discover the truth. And tward^ Summer I made my final good-by to Art as a single aim, and beauty as a single desire, though I knew it not then. All my Art desires took final ripening in the visions of the Singing Immanuel, and for the first time my restless aestheticism had rest, and I began unconsciously to live the new life, the new search. Now I can worship Immanuel, till I discover the truth.

The Poem of Immanuel, finished this December, and my soul growing, because of teaching my art class, and the few visable^ results upon the work of a few students, or at least in their acts, has given me a desire to learn to strike deeper into men. If men of this earnestness will do this well, tward^ shaping their Art—what will they do, to shape the inner fires of their life? I see the marks of this teacher and that, in their work. . . .

I know what is beautiful. I can speak confidently on Beauty.

But I cannot speak confidently on Truth and Life. I hope to search as presistently^, as fanatically, in these matters as ever I have searched for Beauty. And if I have found
Beauty in ten years—why cannot I have a sense of Truth in ten years, and a power of exchange and influence in matters of Truth? . . .

Beauty is not Truth, for I know Beauty already. It is Truth for a certain all-esthetic type of nature, I have no doubt. But I have a profound ethical nature, that has grown wild these ten years, neglected in the Beauty search.

On the title page of his new book, the profoundly ethical author boasted: “A note Book based on the first serious effort, conscious effort, to find out what is true, what is right, and how to move the innermost souls of men, in matters of the whole of life, rather than art alone.”

The desire “to move the innermost souls of men,” along with the desire for financial independence and the simple joy of teaching others, inevitably led Uncle Boy to seek additional missionary opportunities. On Thursday evening, January 3, 1907, he initiated a series of weekly YMCA fireside talks on Sidney Lanier. “I am happy tonight as an ant in a sugar bowl,” he bragged to his parents: “The first of my Thursday evening talks on Sidney Lanier tonight was the best I have yet made anywhere. I paraphrased, then recited the Stirrup-cup, and the Ballad of Trees and the master. It was as usual, by the wood-fire place, with blazing logs, the lights turned out. There was as usual a violinist before and after, the whole lasting from quarter of ten to quarter after. The object of these talks is to catch the men who come pouring down from the night-classes, just dismissed. They hear the violin and come into the room and look into the firelight. There are from fifty to one hundred in the audience, according to the night. The purpose is to send the men home with sweet flavored thoughts, so they will not be tempted before they get to their little hall bed-rooms. Preaching is debarred, but they want inspirational poetry, and talk that will bring high thoughts. In a life so distinctly religious as Lanier’s however—I have the privilege of discussing and amplifying the religion of his poetry as much as I please.” The Lanier talks, Vachel promised, “are my biggest opening, and I devoutly hope to put an increasing power into them. As a matter of fact they are not talks at all, but real speeches, if they go. I have to holler so that the crowd from the big lobby will come in and listen. I shall prepare this Lanier series with all possible care” (January 3, 1907—misdated “1906”). [Note 8]

The Lanier lectures were sanctioned on a trial basis, however, so that the “real speeches” brought no remuneration, and neither did several other voluntary efforts. “This has been a successful week and a happy one for me, on the whole,” Vachel reported to his parents: “I have had many extra engagements without breaking down on any” (January 3). He had assisted at a YMCA reception and had addressed “the [YMCA] Boys Department on Merlin and the Gleam [Tennyson],” a speech that, he admitted, “was only a fair success. That was from 9-9:30. P.M. Then I stepped over to the church and gave them two recitations—one Kiplings Hymn before Battle [“Hymn before Action”], and the other Yeats’ ‘I went out to the Hazel Wood’ [“The Song of Wandering Aengus”]. They made a hit. . . .” What they did not make was money, and Dr. Lindsay’s son went on to apologize for his continuing dependence:

I feel that I am imposing on you very much in the matter of room—but I don’t want to impose indefinitely. Yet I would like to hang on a little longer anyhow, in the hope of getting wages to pay for it [his room], it is just what George [Richards] and I want and there is little chance of us doing so well for the money anywhere else. George’s
company is worth an infinite [amount] to me, but if I got him into uncomfortable or shabby quarters I know [we] would [not] be roommates. The only other man he would room with is [Earl] Brewster, and Brewster is too poor to afford this room.

So on purely selfish grounds, I ask you to be patient with the price of this room a little while, seeing I can give five dollars a week on it now. I can put up with any fare myself, and thrive and enjoy it, and work, and if the time comes when I must I can. But I can’t ask it of George. His health and his disposition are both against it.

In a postscript to his letter, a postscript that was actually written several hours before the body of the letter, Vachel related that he had led a Metropolitan Museum class “through the Greek and Roman Sculpture section of the Museum” that afternoon (January 3): “It wasn’t my best work, I was saving myself for this evening [the first Lanier talk], but I think it was satisfactory. It was all learning, not much inspiration, but the condensed information of all my December’s work. And tonight is my last engagement for this week, successfully filled, I feel that this speech and the one at the Church Tuesday were unusually successful, and the rest were creditable”—but without monetary reward. “The trial about moving,” Vachel concluded, “is that it means moving George out, for no less room would suit him. We took it, not as a room, but a studio, and a real studio no larger costs three or four times as much. I had some substitutes promised, but they have not arrived.”

About three weeks later, on Tuesday night, January 22, the search for truth led Uncle Boy to initiate yet another weekly lecture series, the third this winter, as he continued to deliver his YMCA art history course, as well as his fireside Lanier talks. The new lectures were part of a bible-study course in St. Luke and St. Paul, a course that was finally offered without remuneration, since Ferris either declined or was unable to solicit funds. The audience consisted of members of the Rutgers church, many of them Vachel’s Rutgers Club friends. The textbooks were Richard G. Moulton’s two-volume edition entitled St. Luke and St. Paul (The Modern Reader’s Bible, 1898), but the classes focused on using one’s own experience as an index for evaluating and interpreting religious literature. In July 1909, Vachel gave his personal copies of the texts (filled with his notes) to Nellie Vieira, with an advisory letter that reads, in part: “Two years ago, excellent Miss Vierra^, I used these volumes as my text book^ in a reading-class in the gospel. We were to examine the text from a purely asthetic^ standpoint, few of us taking stock in miracles, the resurrection and the like, and for the matter of that we were little changed when we were through, on those scores.”

Miss Vieira was further admonished to read the texts and, in matters of interpretation, to rely on her own judgment: “Now no two human souls have ever read this book of St. Luke, and received the same impression. It makes ten thousand claims upon poor weak human nature, and we can only respond to those demands which we are equipped to respond to. . . . It behooves you then, as one purpose in your reading course to read this gospel, and let it build such a strange church as it may, in your soul, different from all other churches, colored with the colors of your soul, with your own peculiar prayers for incense, your own peculiar conscience for evangelist, your own especial happiness for Choir, your own especial sorrow for Gethsemane, and your own especial capacity for opening the door of the unseen to furnish you with that brooding faith that is behind every religion^” (Fowler 53-54).
“Most of my class confessed it was the teachings, not the passion and resurrection of Christ that meant most to them,” Vachel affirmed in his notebook (“January 11, 1907”): “Others confessed they were willing to be dead when they were dead.” One wonders, though, whether the confession came from the students or from the teacher, as two years later Vachel proclaimed, rather surprisingly: “I have never seen a miracle. I have never seen anyone raised from the dead. I do not want to be raised from the dead. Heaven is no goal for me. The kingdom of God on earth is vastly more significant. Let me do a little for the success of the race, a great deal for myself, and then sleep forever” (War Bulletin Number Three, in Prose 104).

About the same time as this Bulletin, Uncle Boy indicated to Miss Vieira that one of the “teachings” held special significance for him, namely, Luke 9:3-5, where Jesus sends out the twelve disciples, admonishing them: “Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet, nor bread, nor money; neither have two coats. And into whatsoever house ye enter, there abide, and thence depart. And as many as receive you not, when ye depart from that city, shake off the dust from your feet for a testimony against them” [Moulton translation]. In the margin, Vachel stressed “climax” and “The open road,” indicating that he believed the passage explained and justified his missionary tramp-journeys through the South and the East. A few days later, again to Vieira, he added to this annotation: “I have marked a passage . . . which has been the warrant for two such different movements as that of St. Francis and that of Mrs. [Mary Baker] Eddy: I feel that they both have equal rights before God, in the history of the Church Universal” (Fowler 54, 59-60).

3

Without question, the Luke-Paul course became the primary focal point in the teacher’s search for truth. Pilate’s classic question—“What is truth?”—was tantamount, Vachel believed, to the question—who was the historical Christ? And as many young people before and after him, he centered his attention on the humanity, not the divinity, of Christ. For a personal motto, he wrote inside the front cover of his Luke: “‘The Son of Man came eating and drinking.’ It would be well to search diligently for passages in this work where Christ might well have laughed, or smiled” (Fowler 52). The results of the “search” appear in several notebooks, particularly in the “January 11, 1907” book, the source, for the most part, of the following quotations. The searcher’s perspective, in accord with what he advised Nellie Vieira, is highly personal, such as the following attempt to humanize Christ by interpreting the Resurrection as little more than a continuing, collective memory:

But the idea of Christ’s resurrection being like the presence and influence of Lincoln in our nation is new tonight. (It is possibly the first real idea I have had.) It is not possible for Lincoln to be living except with the people where his force and his personality survive. But there he survives and he is perpetuated wherever his story is told or his institutions—those he has influenced—go. This resurrection law is indicated by the fact that Christ appeared only to his disciples—.

Since it was not “true” to human experience, Vachel also rejected the idea that St. Paul’s conversion experience was a divine miracle: “No matter how genuine to Paul we have no notion of the absolute truth or falsehood of it. I would prefer to have it accepted
as an hallucination, and so described. How can a great truth be based on an impossible experience? I would prefer that Paul’s conversion be the result of thinking, observation, natural experience, and struggle, such as we all must have who take life seriously.”

Christ’s purported divinity, the skeptical teacher added (and presumably raised for discussion in his Rutgers class), must face the same tests of “thinking, observation, natural experience, and struggle”:

The next step is to discover the real state of mind of the historical Christ toward his Father. The historical Christ means little to me, it is the Immanuel of the millenium that means more. Nevertheless he is a makeshift of the soul, and the relation of the historical Christ to this curious God I know must in some manner be made out immediately. The Immanuel Christ of the millenium was a thoroughly convincing deity according to the old art life that accepted everything truly beautiful, and in beauty moods he reigns. But in the search for truth I am alone with this curious nature-God-experience of mine. Was Christ’s experience based on real facing of the facts of his life, the God he actually knew, or the God he dreamed he knew? Was it a spiritual short-circuit in the head, the flash of a fuse, like Paul’s vision; or was it a true hand to hand contact? Was it a series of abstract statements, or the passion of fanaticism?

Vachel was rereading Byron, perhaps The Prisoner of Chillon, for he echoes the narrator’s comment on the human inability to know historical truth because “So much a long communion tends / To make us what we are” (ll. 390-391). The historical Christ is difficult, if not impossible, to know, because we are imprisoned in our own experience. In Vachel’s words: “How shall one know he has a piece of truth? He cannot go after all beyond his own experience, he can never apprehend what he has not known, he can merely rearrange the material. The best he can do is to put himself in the path of experience, what appears to be the truth, as rigidly as he may. It is a question of keeping the mind physically clean, of accepting that as true which appears so at one’s calmest, most physically healthful moment.”

Both the Bible lectures and the art lectures encouraged the teacher, if not his students, to search for truth via historical example, not via philosophical or theological theory. The focus continued to be on the human and the personal: “The Historical point of view for both Literature and Art grows plainer to me as the means of reaching the truth. It delivers one from abstractions, it requires no philosophic system, no final conclusion as yet, it gives the imagination play and does not over-tax the feeble reason of me. If History is Philosophy, teaching by example, let us accumulate examples. He who knows his history, vitally, need not generalize, need not depend upon another man’s generalizations.” And in keeping with his focus, he attempted to personalize historical examples by bringing his imagination into play: “It requires much history to make one stroke of art. . . . I must know the Thebes of Rameses as though I lived there, and the Athens of Pericles as though I lived under his helmet and was buried with him; and the Rome of Augustus as though I had cut the sarcophagus of his time.”

When Vachel tried the imaginative approach in his effort to understand the historical Christ, he thought he had discovered a remarkable eclecticism: “Christ anticipates all his critics in most everything, yet he is inexplicable. The substance of
Christian Science might account for his healing, and be the law of resurrection. But the substance of Catholicism is suggested by his assertion of authority, and his transference of authority to the apostles. The substance of Greek fatalism, fatalism anyhow, by his persistent prophecy of his crucifixion, of the persecution of the apostles, of the fall of Jerusalem. The substance of pantheism is suggested by his desert prayers, his attitude toward the fig tree, his nature parables, his roadside Bohemianism, his Epicureanism by his interest in publicans and sinners, a gluttonous man and a wine bibber; his asceticism by his single life and pure teaching. His socialism by his Sermon on the Mount, his tolerance by his joke about the tribute money.”

It seems not to have occurred to the searcher that his discovery exemplifies the truth of his own dictum, namely, the human inability to “go after all beyond [our] own experience.” What he thought he had found, after all, confirms his own principles and seems little more than a projection of his particular brand of Campbellite ecumenism. Several other observations are much the same in kind: “There was a certain roadside Socialism about Christ, that made him akin to artists indirectly. . . . And there was music in his words. And he was a carpenter, which is a craftsman.” How like an artist to see an artist; how like a budding roadside socialist to see roadside socialism.

Vachel’s thoughts (or projections) concerning the historical Christ and his imaginative depictions of the future “Singing Immanuel” are interspersed in his notebooks with a variety of conjectures on the role of Christ in present culture. And, once again, personal experience is adopted as an index to truth:

I have sufficiently adequate experience of God in my own life to make a beginning, not as a theological formula, but as a force, a creative paradoxical quantity, a force very close to identity with protoplasm and the sap of nature, and the presence of the sun, yet a personality, a whimsical personality, mostly pagan, yet forgetting his vast inconsistencies and accidents and blind blood storms in the veins of nature and animals, forgetting there to be a still small voice to men who aspire, a Gleam to men who dream; a religious presence to the Hebrew, a mystery presence of infinite wickedness and darkness and power to the Egyptian and the Hindu, a vast sky and an army of devils to the Chinaman, and to the Greek beauty; and to me in my own soul the desire to create, the reverence for the Creator, the companionship with those who are artists, and at last the hunger to stir men so that their lives may be set in sure paths and ordered and built in beauty.

The entry is the seed for Vachel’s poem, “Hymn to the Sun” (Poetry 10-11), a draft of which may be found in his 1907 notebook:

Christ the dew in the clod,  
Christ the sap of the trees,  
Christ the light in the waterfall,  
Christ the soul of the sun. . . . (ll. 1-4)

And, predictably, the narrator’s personal identification with historical example is a major aspect of the poem:

Take me unto yourself.  
My flesh is a sacrifice,
If only my soul may go
As a flame to the edge of the sky
Where the sin-born stars come forth
From the black strong chaos-sea,
From the infinite widths of night.
Grant I may die in a star
As the chosen of God all die
Rising again in the dreams
Of sinning, star-born men,
Destroying their sins forever. (ll. 19-30)

“Oh, to have fire, fire, perpetually in my heart,” Vachel enthused in his notebook, “that I may give it freely to all who come.” What was most believable about the Christ was that, quite simply, his life could be our life and that, quite dramatically, his death could be our death: “If Christ was a great structural character consistently built up from temptation to Gethsemane, always consistent with his teachings in every act of his life, which I doubt, Gethsemane was the last act in the great character building, the final stone. But if it was merely the seer’s agony of loneliness, the gathering of resolution to make good at the trial, the faith that a man must die to make good his doctrines and hold out the little inconsistencies of his life, and make it consistent in a large way, it is much more believable, like the consistency of Socrates.”

On the other hand, humanizing the Christ did not preclude worshipping the Christ. In fact, the search for truth, Vachel maintained, increased his devotion: “I feel like getting on my knees and adoring forever something I can adore forever, that has no waning light, that perpetually shines, if it be the sun or the moon to kneel, feeling my soul go up eternally without pause in a perpetual cold ever smouldering incense to a deity that can never change. How the dreams go! How the world of the spirit shifts and changes, and how change wearies! I would like to kneel till my hair is gray!”

The “spirit of our analysis” in the Luke-Paul class, Vachel asserted to Nellie Vieira in 1909, “soon became deeply devout, however purely aesthetic our starting-point. We were always alert for the purely literary quality of the text, but it became soon like the lilies of Easter or the censer at the mass—all vessels and symbols of prayer and praise and the fire and heart break and beauty of this human-divine life of ours.” The end result, according to the teacher, was that “we found in the text a powerful and sufficient warrant for the whole history of the diversified Christian Church, and we found enough divinity in those paradoxical sayings which we had already tried in life and not found wanting, to consider ourselves members of the Church Universal” (Fowler 53).

The personal approach to teaching seems finally to have paid emotional dividends for Uncle Boy. “Now it is the first symptom of real interchange,” he wrote in his notebook with obvious satisfaction, “when people lend me books [and] urge me to read them. It is one of the surprises to me. It is the desire for intellectual interchange. I would keep very busy indeed if I read all I was asked, this season.” And as he was one who believed that a teacher must “give himself, his heart, his friendship with his teaching,” he
must have been pleased to witness the response that he received from some in his audiences:

This also is true, that all these men who learn from me live over certain portions of my past life that I would otherwise have almost lost. One of them has acquired my last year’s enthusiasms for Swinburne, another acquires my enthusiasm for Tennyson that I myself had long outworn; another acquires a zeal for Henley that was mine beforetime; and now forgotten. Thus these men listening to my interpretations of these past enthusiasms bring them back to me in a sense. I remember in their company a past I lose altogether when alone. I am in a hall of mirrors, yet each one so colored and curved that though I am reflected, yet with sudden and interesting additions.

“I feel a certain exchange between them [his students] and me in the matter of art in the Development, and in the Fire-side talks,” he wrote on another occasion. The responsiveness inspired his former resolution to integrate religion and art and, perforce, undermined his newer resolution to abandon the search for beauty in favor of the search for truth. “Let us seize these three ideals,” he enthused: “Beauty, Freedom, Holiness; let us stamp them upon the innermost spirit of the land; let us write them into such perpetual phrases that further generations shall find new life in them. We must have them all.” He even went so far as to speculate on writing an art constitution for the nation: “Now, though I be unworthy, it is an eager desire of mine to so learn the age of Pericles, the age of Augustus, the Renaissance, as art producers, that I may be able to establish some fixed national doctrine of art, an art ambition for the nation that shall have perpetually as much as she has a Constitution.” But he was too honest to think of an art constitution as perpetual. Like all aspects of life, the author of “The Queen of Bubbles” surmised, as an afterthought, that all constitutions would have their day: “To avoid all the errors of past republics, and to inherit their virtues has our Constitution been constructed, and though an imperfect instrument, promises to outlast and excel all that have gone before; though it contains germs of its inevitable decay, and like the Roman system of law will break down at last.”

The search for truth, then, finally led Vachel back to the search for beauty, and renewed his determination to integrate art and religion. “Art has been my religion,” he announced in his notebook, “—now religion is my Art, to it I give that reverence and that endless purposeful searching which once belonged to Beauty.” This time the “endless purposeful searching” led the teacher right back to his students, to what he himself called “the religion of humanity.” Christ and the “Church Universal” could be found only when one searched within:

One thing I have been seeking is a Christ I can fervently and unfalteringly worship, and it is hard to find. The historical Christ is a doubtful figure, the Christ that actually was has to be reconstructed and destroyed piecemeal; he is in the end a battered historical relic, and we must submit to what scholarship has to say concerning him, and our own reason and speculation and honest study of comparative religion leaves him an insufficient deity. “What hast thou done that all the world is blood?” [Cf. Genesis 4:10]

But now that I have friends with whom I interchange my life there is a Christ that is not a figment of my fancy, nor a poetic phrase, nor an illusion of mine. It is the
Christ that is in them. Now a real worship can be given to this Christ. At least for today I can build a chapel in my heart to the Christ that is in other men. In dreaming of a religious^ revival that will stir all hearts deeply, yet stir up no dogmatism, it is possible I have found it here. It is the religion^ of humanity, and varies with humanity. It can be as great as the human race, at least in the West. I must give myself up entirely to my fellow men, to the society and machinery of society about me, the multitudinous chances to teach and work for a long time; and then when my selfish self takes time to rest and dream again the disciple of contact will show in the fibre^ of the writing. [emphasis added]

The father of a new God, in short, had evolved further: he was now the father of a new religion, the religion of humanity, a world view that Christ lives within human beings, “at least in the West.”

Although Uncle Boy admitted that he found the ascetic aspects of art and beauty still attractive (“All ascetic^ ideals fascinate me”), his focus now was on Christ within human beings, “the religion^ of humanity.” And, typically, he poured his considerable energy into the pursuit of his new creation. By early spring, he was attempting to transplant missionary messages originally produced for the YMCA, the church, and the museum into the uncultivated world of New York City’s settlement houses. “One purpose of the extension work,” he observed in his notebook, “is to show that Christians are as good social settlement workers as anyone else.” By the end of April, he reported that he was “making speeches once a week” at the West Side Neighborhood House, the College Settlement, the Jacob A. Riis Settlement, the Union Settlement, and the Christodora House. The speeches covered artists (Praxiteles, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Van Dyck, Rembrandt, Murillo, Burne-Jones), architecture (classical, baroque, Gothic), and poets (Tennyson, Lanier, Kipling). Indeed, one favorite speech seems to have been: “Great Poems as Life Teachers.” [Note 9]

Random notebook entries comment on attendance: March 27—20 men; April 3—“nothing doing”; April 13—25 men; April 17—15 men; etc. Other entries record promises. For example, at the Union Settlement (237 East 104th Street—Harlem), Vachel was told there would be “A minimum of twenty men in the audience—workingmen from 30 to 35 years. . . . Piano factory men etc. Germans & Jews and some Englishmen.” At the Christodora House (147 Avenue B), he was advised that he could “hold [the audience] an hour. Jews largely—men and women 19 to 22 years of age, students of music. Art is Preferred here as a topic. An audience of 75 to 100 promised.” In mid-April, the now-enthusiastic settlement worker boasted to his parents that his “course in the Social Settlements is quite successful. I am making friends everywhere. I am making people listen with interest to talk about Art and Poetry that never listened before—working-men’s clubs, where they are about thirty years old, and boys^ literary clubs where they are twenty years of age. My audiences are from twenty to fifty in number” (April 16).

The early months of 1907, however, were not all work and no play for the father of a new God—and now the father of a new religion. One of his friends, likely George Richards, Earl Brewster, or Harold Salisbury, had a story for biographer Albert Trombly: “Vachel was always ready for fun when he wasn’t in the writing mood. He tried hard to be a good mixer, but often not successfully. At one time a considerable crowd of us lived
together in a West Fifty-Sixth [-Seventh?] Street boarding-house. About eleven o’clock every night we would go down, six or eight strong, to a cafe and have our beer and pretzels. We generally had the same waiter. As he took our order he would solemnly ask Vachel, “What will you have?” And Vachel, with equal solemnity, would ask if he had sarsaparilla. The waiter was a foreigner, and I doubt if he ever had any idea of that famous sarsaparilla drink of fresh-water towns. Vachel would finally take ginger ale, which, I believe, he didn’t care for at all; but it was less disagreeable to him than beer apparently” (33-34). “In New York,” Vachel confirmed to Richard Gilder, “—though I always drink soft drinks, I buy poison liquor for my friends, and we have many noble conversations in beer-gardens” (Chénetier 27).

Trombly also quotes a New York City friend who emphasized the serious side of Vachel’s nature, a side that appears to have inhibited socializing: “[Vachel] was, as an art-student, a victim of his intense individuality, being constitutionally incapable of enjoying the life of the average student, or running with the ‘bunch.’ Very few, if any, of his art-student companions had any inkling of his value or purpose, although everyone liked him personally, in spite of his essential aloofness and puritanical standards. I do not mean by ‘puritanical’ anything more than his innate decency and distaste for vulgarity in any form” (35). “His friends,” Trombly adds, “are unanimous in declaring that in matters of conduct he was entirely tolerant of the seeming lapses of others, however rigid he might be with himself. He did not set himself above others or his conduct above theirs; nor did it require any special virtue on his part to refrain from what he had been taught to look upon as licentious pleasures. There was no restraint, for these pleasures did not appeal to him, did not seem to him to be pleasurable” (35).

Concerning “poison liquor,” Trombly’s informant is certainly correct, but the references to “puritanical” need to be qualified as regards Uncle Boy’s attitude toward women. If anything, Vachel found feminine appeal too pleasurable, too tempting. Arguments against “love,” that is, physical love, he observed in his notebook, are like arguments against religion: they “deepened its strength.” In fact, this notebook (“January 11, 1907”) includes entries that broadly suggest the author’s new interest in the divinity of man went hand in hand with his continuing enthusiasm for the beauty of woman. There was usually, he claimed on several occasions, an Eve in his garden. Indeed, biographer Trombly likely interviewed one Eve, although his account is prefaced only by the comment, “this from a girl friend of those days”: “He knew the greater part of Milton, Poe, and Swinburne, and he would recite them in his chanting voice gloriously. It is one of my greatest joys to have heard him thus, often.

“A quixotic knight-errant, he continually delighted me with his dear foolishness and unworldliness. Coming on a visit with his shoes through on the ground in snowy weather, he gently put the money for the new shoes in the charity-box of a Catholic church—though he was a Protestant—as a little tribute of gratitude for the happy time we had had.

“He would bring his one lone orange, the only dessert his boarding-house supplied, or a peppermint stick such as a child buys.” (36-37)

Edgar Lee Masters alludes to Trombly’s story of the shoes and the charity box as an example of Vachel’s “improvidence”; and in the margin of her copy Olive wrote—
“Typical”—perhaps as much in reference to Masters’ sneer as in reference to her brother’s generosity (181). On the next page, where Masters asserts that Vachel “had no heart interests” at this time, Olive disagreed: “Not true” (182). And Masters himself cites notebook passages in which Vachel offers hints about his present-day Eve:

If you were a pebble I could crush you and drink you.
If you were a fire I would burn like dead leaves.
If we were two lion cubs I would devour you.
If you were a gleaner, my bones were your sheaves.

“Our life and desire would destroy one another,” Vachel went on to announce in the privacy of his diary kingdom. And two days later, he added further evidence of a troubled conscience: “This poem written day before yesterday while I was writing other notes in this book gives me much to reflect upon the two sides of man, the three sides: the beast, the father, the worshipper. Let me rein the beast, let us prepare to be the worthy father. Let us worship.”

That he thought about biological, as well as theological fatherhood, punctuates Vachel’s feelings, although his thoughts of love were always associated with thoughts of matrimony. “I desire to fill a strong and normal man’s place in this world—on primitive lines—to multiply my kind, to defend them and provide for them, to be a real shelter for some faithful woman,” he mused on another occasion. Reality, though, was inescapable: “—but I am still dependent, even for myself, and I will never love a woman enough to hold her heart constant toward me.” With characteristic defensiveness, he then turned to bravado and patent untruth: “The people I like best are the heartless, because then I have no fear of wounding them, and there is peace and friendship between us, and we can part without regret” (“January 11, 1907”).

Masters may be correct when he avers: “Who this woman was remains a mystery. She passed out leaving not a wrack behind” (188). In the Barrett Library at the University of Virginia, however, there is a brief note to “Vachel” from Marjorie Hood. Dated October 10, 1910, Hood asks her correspondent if he recalls “that winter in New York” when she attended his museum lectures and they “took long walks together.” Twice Vachel himself lists (in his inimitable way with names) “Margery Torrey Hood, now Torrey Bevans” and “Marjorie Torre Hood (now Torre Bevans)” among the friends that he interacted with during his New York City days (Poetry 940, 967). Marjorie Torre Bevans may well have been the woman who compelled puritanical Uncle Boy to feel that he needed to “rein the beast” and “prepare to be the worthy father.” [Note 10]

Before leaving New York City this spring, 1907, Vachel suffered what appears to have been a severe cold: “My eyes are well, for which I am devoutly thankful,” he advised his parents: “Your anxious letters received. I can reassure you I am all right except a little dryness in my throat, which will make the tablets useful.” He also seems to have gained some financial health, as he thanked Papa for sending “the check so promptly” but added: “I am earning my board a week at a time now, am not running behind, and winning prestige.” Also Powlison is talking about making up some of the money I have lost on the Association, so I will not cash the check for awhile yet. I hope to be able to come home without further help” (April 16).
Meanwhile, emboldened by his success as a lecturer, Vachel had written Hiram College officials to ask if he could earn a degree by substituting independent study for course work. The response, he reported to his parents, was “a frosty little reply from Hiram which leaves me as much in the dark as ever. The faculty passed a resolution that I could not have a degree ‘without resident work in Hiram.’ Not a word as to the amount of substitutions to be allowed, which is the whole question. I have sent detailed reports of all study done since I left, which have been absolutely ignored. Now I must write to each professor asking him just how many credits he will allow on work done, if I come back, all of which I asked last fall. I have twenty credits on the books, and twenty more are required, which could be wiped out at one swoop on work done in Chicago alone, but which will require two years’ residence in Hiram. And I am in no state of mind to spend two years in Hiram.” He did exonerate his former professors, attributing the rebuff to “the policy of the present administration”; but he could not resist at least one wry comment: “Well, I have the privilege of teaching one hundred and sixty people each week, and my classes average twenty, and I earn ten dollars a week, which is more than any Hiram professor can boast at present” (April 16).

The day after this letter, Vachel revealed another scheme, this time to his Aunt Fannie: “As soon after May the first as possible I will be with you, probably the second and third I will be arriving in detachments. But between you and me and the gatepost I am trying hard these few remaining days to land some magazine to let me take a walking expedition for them, which I have not told my Ma, just because it is so little likely to be a go. I will be doing it sooner or later, though it may not be this Spring. If I do not get an offer, I start West May the second anyway, by rail. This is so near a certainty you can almost bet on me. The World’s Work has been flirting with me, but a flirtation is not an engagement” (April 17, 1907, Blair). [Note 11]

Indeed, a year or so after his first tramp, Fannie’s nephew filled the end pages of his 1906 notebook, “From Ashville, North Carolina,” with schemes for a second, including a reference to the April 1907 issue of The World’s Work, which contained articles he thought were in his “line.” He went so far as to calculate that the average article in the magazine was “4 and 3/4 pages,” with “848 words on a full page,” meaning, he figured with accuracy, he would have to average 4028 words per article. He planned to walk from New York City to Chicago, via Philadelphia, perhaps Washington, then Pittsburg, Cleveland, and Indianapolis. “A three-months’ trip,” he judged, “can be completed allowing 16 miles a day for twenty-four days each month and six or seven days at the end of each month to prepare letters in. That is, a proportion of four days of walking to one of writing.” On the other hand, he liked the idea of yet another month: “In a four-months’ trip I can write eight letters, each letter covering 125 or 130 miles, walking and writing alternate periods of seven or eight days. That is a proportion of one day of walking to one of writing—two days of walking, two of writing—etc.”

The would-be tramp-journalist then filled several more pages with ideas on what to carry with him: letters from friends, his YMCA card, a souvenir book, etc. From a personal perspective, he added: “Clothes wanted—on route—3 pairs of shoes—2 pairs of trousers—1 bandanna handkerchief, 1 piece of soap, 1 toothbrush, 1 comb, 1 razor. Pocket for books. Pocket for camera. Rubber collar. Cravenette tie—Cravenette coat and hat.” He would then be prepared for “the necessity of being suddenly respectable. . . .”
As for support, this time he was not planning to go empty handed: “I should ask twenty-five dollars a week for time spent, and a price for letters besides—to be paid in part by the printing of my poems as a souvenir book to be used on the trip. Money to arrive at General Delivery—definite towns at definite dates. I can fight it out on the road with little money, but I must have money waiting at each point where I am to write a letter, or at certain stated intervals” (Virginia).  [Note 12]

Typically, Vachel planned letters around contrasts, with the overall theme entitled “The World behind the Skyscraper and the World within the Cottage”: “Let the Nation between here and Chicago be a creature at work, that I shall ask questions, whose answers I shall compile in great masses in my note books^, and summarize and typify by written pictures and photographs. Each type of man, each class of society must be interviewed for his opinion of his own work, his neighbor’s work, and his own and his neighbor’s motives discerned. There must be several contrasting parts to each letter, and the letters must contrast with one another. The territories must be worked into an organic whole, for all that; each point must seem a radiating center so long as I am in it. I must feel Chicago to the West, New York to the East, the Great Lakes to the North, and the pulse of the Ohio to the South, all the time. One must feel the moving of the various levels of society upon one another, and the humankindness^ of them all. And one must have a unified map of the country like Ruskin’s map of Europe.” He then continued with a number of afterthoughts, including the observation: “There should be two note-books—one on beauty, freedom and holiness—and the other the regular diary, constructed for the task.”

On May 2, 1907, however, Uncle Boy departed New York City, headed for Indiana’s Rush County by train, not by foot. He was on his way to Aunt Fannie’s home (near Orange, Indiana), in response to her invitation to address the local woman’s club. He agreed to distribute copies of The Tree of Laughing Bells booklet, “with blinks, with proper droopings of the eyelids, no more.” And he suggested that the lecture focus on “the Poetry of Kipling or the Poetry of Sidney Lanier, Lanier preferred” (April 17, Blair). Publication of the booklet, we should remember, was paid for by Grandmother Frazee, who certainly would be in attendance.

A few days after the lecture, which seems to have been successful, although we have few details, Vachel was back on the train, this time headed for Springfield. He had been asked to spend the summer house sitting, while his sister Joy and their parents vacationed in Colorado. He was far from discouraged, as he planned to pass the time drawing, writing, and memorizing poems—as well as preparing for his fall West Side YMCA lecture series. “This summer,” he promised himself on the opening page of his “January 11, 1907” notebook, “I must learn a raft of new poems, draw four good pictures & write lectures.” The lectures, along with some of the poems and the drawings, would be the basis for both the 1907-08 New York City art course and the poem, “The Heroes of Time,” later revised and published as “Litany of the Heroes” (see Poetry 435-441).

Mid-summer Dr. Lindsay’s house sitter wrote to Olive and Paul, his missionary sister and brother-in-law in China, and apologized for his lack of correspondence: “I have been sticking to my own selfish designs day and night when I have been good, and when I have been bad I have just loafed. Thats^ all. I have been looking out for number one and there has been no number two and no number three. I am every number in the
arithmetic myself.” He was alone in the house, “trying to prepare my Southern trip for publication, preparing lectures and letting the weeds grow in the pansy bed.” He was also “calling on” Elsie and Marjorie Logan “oftener than I should,” and finding both of them “too charming” to consider marrying either one. He had been reading Paul Sabatier’s *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* (1896; EBook #18787, Project Gutenberg), and he had finished the biography on the day of his letter: “It is a most readable work, and gives a contrite heart to one for awhile” (July 21, 1907, Ward). In his puritanical way, Olive’s brother may have felt the need for some contrition, because he was truly bursting with pride. The June 1, 1907 issue of *The Outlook* features “The Man under the Yoke: An Episode in the Life of a Literary Tramp” (pp. 243-245), the story that would finally introduce *A Handy Guide for Beggars* (see Prose 2).

A week prior to the letter addressed to Olive and Paul, Vachel had spent an afternoon explaining “I Heard Immanuel Singing” for the benefit of Mary Humphrey, another favorite “inspiration girl.” The discussion provoked a typescript copy of the poem and a detailed explication, both of which survive in the Lindsay Home collection. A prefatory note reads: “Presented to my good friend Mary Humphrey—July 13, 1907—Springfield Illinois.” The subtitle is “(The day after the Millenium),” and the flower stanza that was deleted in the notebook draft is here restored. It follows line forty-eight of the published poem:

And the fertile, fertile goldenrod:
The gay, unbraided head
Of the sterile Indian Poppy
Long numbered with the dead.
The dreaming proud chrysanthemum:
The Easter-lily Pale—
The Rainbow-throng forever dim
Behind the Burning Veil—

The explication, meanwhile, discusses the significance of the flowers and also alludes to what the author believed to be the significant discoveries in his recent search for truth:

The Interpretation of the Dream

The Day after the Millenium shall be the Perfect Sabbath. The Master shall leave us resting in our city. He shall walk among the green hills, far outside the walls, completely alone. He who beforetime wandered in the deserts to pray in the agony of loneliness shall walk now in the beauty of loneliness.

Before he sings with a full voice, he shall sit upon a green knoll on the edge of a high hill whose foot is encircled with trees, and improvise a little flower song of memories, a farewell to the art that has been, a prelude to all that shall be, every careless flower an infinite symbol of past things. The lotus shall stand for Buddhism, and for Egypt, and much else. The violet shall mean violet crowned Athens, and all that Athens meant. The acanthus shall mean the glory of Rome and all Western Decorative Magnificence till now. Among the multitude of Roses of Worship are the Rose-Windows of Gothic and the Rose of Dante’s Paradise. Omar has spoken of the roses of love, Shakespeare of the Wars of the Roses.
The splendor of America, for which we toil is typed in the Golden Rod. The beautiful future of the East is hidden in the Indian Poppy and the Chrysanthemum. And the Beauty of Holiness, from the beginning to the end is typed by the Rose of Sharon beginning the Song, and the Easter lily closing it.

After the flower prelude, the Immanuel shall sing his own strange unknown song of Prophecy. Looking forward to this wonder, we give our hearts to art to-day.

Let us speak in mysteries: The Kingdom of God is within every man, and the Day of Judgement is now. To-morrow is every man’s Millenium, if he will have it so. And day after to-morrow, when Immanuel shall have redeemed the whole brotherhood of man, we shall each hear him singing, in the lonliest place of the heaven of each heart, the song all his own.

What will it be? (Lindsay Home)

The discussions with Mary Humphrey, and the visionary’s excitement with his creation, led to a private printing of “Immanuel,” funded in some unknown way. The broadside was distributed mainly to Springfield friends, usually with an explanation of the work’s significance in the author’s creative life. When a copy was later sent to Sara Teasdale, Vachel reiterated his primary thought: “After years of struggle between the Hebrew and the Greek in my soul when I was almost torn to shreds with it—I found peace and sudden solution—and permanent rest in this vision of Christ—in the Song enclosed: Immanuel . . . it is a blazing milestone in the history of my innermost heart. Though the record is so poor, and the verse so defective—it represents everything to me, and I would be much obliged to you if you will sing it very softly to yourself till you understand the real heart of my religion—the vision of the Christ-Apollo. It was on the boat coming home from Europe—and about two o’clock in the morning—and this vision woke me with terrible power—it shook me from head to foot—and I was in a daze for two or three days—and with the feeling of the completest triumph I have ever known. It was the turning point of my life. ‘The Building of Springfield’ and all of my Art Sermons in Rhyme grew out of it. . . . This poem is the most precious lame child of all my lame children, so be good to it, dear beautiful Sara” (December 18, 1913, Yale 13). [Note 13]

Finally, this 1907 summer, Vachel came face to face, he claimed for the first time, with the tragedy of unexpected and unseasonable death. “MISS MARGARET MCRBOBERTS DEAD,” the headline in Springfield’s Illinois State Register reads: “Popular Young Lady of Springfield Succumbs to Attack of Typhoid Fever Last Night” (July 19, 1907). McRoberts’ picture is published above the obituary, and the unknown writer reports that she was eighteen years old, that she died at 9:00 p.m., and that she had been ill “only since the first of the month. . . . She was a graduate of the Springfield high school, in the class of 1906. As a student of the school she ranked among the first in her class. She was one of the most popular girls of the large class, having a pleasing disposition” (5). One of Joy Lindsay’s close friends, “Pet” or “Petski” McRoberts was a very pretty young girl who deeply impressed Joy Lindsay’s brother. “I really feel Pet’s departure quite strongly,” he confessed to Olive and Paul, “tho I can’t say I’m sad about it. I took the greatest pleasure in the world in cutting all the daisies for her and tying them up in a big ribbon of white silk and putting my card on it, and taking it to her just before Church today.” He described Pet’s blue dress “that made her quite lovely, and she was always pretty and amiable as a daisy. I would really like to change places with the lady. She was a little ray of sunshine while she lasted. She probably wanted to live, I’m
not particular, and I’m not doing much good. We should have changed places.” He had just returned from the funeral, and he indicated that he was thinking about going to other funerals in the near future, in order to “find out what I think about Death as a general proposition . . . The little Pet is all gone away from here, and I do wonder and wonder about it” (July 21, 1907).

The following winter, when he was back lecturing in New York City, this time on the death of Socrates, the YMCA teacher was far less philosophical. In fact, in a section of his 1907-08 notebook, this one entitled “Sermons from Fairyland,” Vachel included a separate section on death. With the subtitle, “On the Immortality of the Soul,” he reflected on death as a personal event:

The first death I ever faced was the death of Pet McRoberts. The night of her funeral I was as frightened as a Savage in a forest storm, in this dark house. The light through the keyhole made gleaming eyes of same and crawling toward me on the carpet, a miserable idiot Ghost . . . And on the other hand there was a lovely apparition, suggested by her Bridal, Silk-veiled flower bowered coffin, a dim angel. She had been almost an angel among those roses, yet a closer second glance showed her lips swelled and her face distorted from fever. These two aspects came in: the Ghost and the angel.

These impressions were nothing, but the sense that I was on the borderland of great incomprehensibilities was a great deal. It came fresh as the newest romance, fearful as a storm in the Rockies, that Death was a tremendous mystery, and I little man knew nothing about it. For the first time I felt that something human and beautiful was gone away from here. (“Sermons from Fairyland,” Virginia)

In Europe, Vachel had pondered death in the abstract: “Concerning death sometimes we desire it: from desperation, exasperation, or from world weariness, from mere numbness of soul. Then on the other hand we fear it, lest it should check us before our work is accomplished. Your true philosopher stands between desire and fear, if he has already done enough work to subside into a philosopher. He should be prepared to meet it any time upon the road. He should have nothing to lose, he should have his face serene for disaster.” Then, back in New York City, Uncle Boy and his students had exchanged thoughts concerning death and the resurrection of Christ. In Springfield, Illinois, however, during this 1907 summer, death made a close personal visit, a visit that dwarfed speculation and philosophy. The letter to Olive and Paul is an example of Vachel’s bravado when he was forced to deal with fear and the unknown. The notebook entry in New York, on the other hand, is an example of his innate candor, his willingness and desire to confront experience and express his feelings as honestly as he knew how.

6

Some of Uncle Boy’s success as a teacher may be attributed to his ability to present history and art to his students in an up-close-and-personal manner. The death of Socrates could be understood if the student were willing to imagine the tragic death of a personal friend, just as the teacher was able to recreate and, in a sense, relive the death of Pet McRoberts. In turn, the teacher enjoyed the responsiveness of his students and tried more and more to earn their respect. He returned to New York City in the fall, 1907, to deliver what he believed to be, both before he spoke and long after he spoke, the most
important series of YMCA lectures to date: “my third—best and last lecturing winter in New York,” he related to Peter Clark Macfarlane. “The Course was called the Dominating Personalities of History—but it had a strong art background” (Macfarlane). And when the proud speaker sent a descriptive newspaper clipping on the course to his former teacher, Robert Henri, along with an invitation to attend, Henri replied that he was too busy: “But just now know that I am glad to hear from you for you are one whose doings are always interesting to me—one of the searchers—It does not matter that I do not always agree nor sympathise with what you say or do—as was manifest regarding the Metropolitan lectures—. You are working away like a pioneer, sometimes maybe with the brush in your eyes, sometimes wonderfully clear sighted, but working away making your own life instead of dropping into one of the ready made moulds as most people do” (October 30, 1907, Virginia).

Pioneer Vachel’s extensive research efforts for the “Personalities” course are recorded in his “Sermons from Fairyland” notebook. He planned twenty lectures, each one focusing on three historical figures. He quipped that his main source was a “long neglected rare work”: the Encyclopaedia Britannica. His stated purpose was “true fellowship”; and the “unifying idea” of his self-described “nonscholarship” was “the beauty standpoint.” He also continued to work on a poem that had been evolving for the past several years: “1906-7-8” (Poetry 940). As an “Outline of History,” the poem’s relevant stanzas were recited at each lecture; and the original title, dating back to Hiram days, served as the motto of the course: “God Help Us All to Be Brave,” a title later changed to “The Heroes of Time” and, finally, to “Litany of the Heroes” (Poetry 435-441). In addition, the teacher-poet-illustrator drew a large clock (see the next page), with the sixty names of his lecture personalities recorded in rough chronological order, just outside the numerals. (The size of the lettering punctuates the relative importance of each personality.) The final five minutes, between XI and XII, were devoted to the key question of the course: “WHO WILL BE THE NEXT BRAVE DREAMER?”

“Sermons from Fairyland” opens with a detailed outline of Egyptian history prepared for the opening of lecture one: “Rameses II, Moses and Homer,” the first three names on the clock. Several pages into the notebook, the lecturer highlights the stance he intends to take: “I have tried to show the inspiration I have had from the lives of these men viewed romantically, not philosophically or critically. As long as I put the result into rhyme and decoration I am in my own province and have emphasized what I desire to make plain, that any conclusions I have are the result of the art standpoint.” A few days later, in a section dated “Nov. 12, 1907,” and in the aftermath of delivering his initial lecture, Uncle Boy summarized his personal satisfaction: “These are with full measure brought to me in remembering the first session of the class: Faith in the aspiration of men, pleasure in the personalities of men intamately felt; the pleasure of being young together; gratitude for the working of men’s brains and the pleasure therof; pleasure that comes with the consciousness of a room full of brains. . . . And much more than this, comes after such a session. There is no poison left in the heart, there is a happiness like ambrosia. There is faith in an infinity of noble things, that stand out glowing, though once they were lead. . . . It is the mood next door to Nirvana, the reward of many days of waiting. This is the happiness of life, the New Jerusalem which one might pray to establish in his fellows, if he have any ideals for mankind at all. Whatever comes, I can say I have been happy.”
A few days thereafter, the delighted teacher listed in his notebook the “Advantages of a visualized Study of History”:

1. It is the simplest. Once learning the Panorama, history always goes by in that order, we have a hieroglyphic alphabet of History.
2. A great part of thinking should be done in pictures, not words, and our notions of history enter into all our thinking.

The same ideas, with much the same language, would be used a year and a half later (summer and fall, 1909), when Uncle Boy was attempting to educate youthful Nellie Vieira (see Chapter 22).

Even in 1907, the lecturer’s avuncular purposes are apparent. In another notebook entry, this one with the title “Final Spirit of Delivery,” Vachel rehearses the moral and didactic focus of his course: “In the study of these sixty Historical Characters we must consider how world characters can be made of those who listen. Unless we dare all we are nothing. I desire to produce world-force in my hearers. Otherwise nothing is done . . .
Do you consider it presumptuous to attempt great things under the noses of your neighbors? Look at the infinite stars, then be ashamed to be anything than the half successful half forgotten mate we call the greatest man. . . . You must be one of the strong among the strong. If a sentence of white hot words could do it, I would give my life to speak that sentence, for he who makes great men is their master. . . . I want to make my listeners as arrogant as these characters have been at their worst, as daring as they have been at their best, as large minded as they have been at their noblest, as self renouncing as they have been at their humblest. I shall appeal to no mediocrity and no foolishness that I can avoid.”

Meanwhile, anyone can follow the subjects of the twenty lectures, simply by viewing Vachel’s clock and taking the figures three at a time. Most of the teacher’s notes are summaries of Britannica articles, although he also used Francois Guizot’s The History of Civilization (1846), George Fisher’s History of the Christian Church (1887), and Philip Myers’ General History for Colleges and High Schools (revised, 1906). The interesting aspects of the lectures are the personal comments, such as the following from lecture three on the Buddha: “I am not sure I know much about Christianity—I do not know the last thing certainly—yet it would take me fifty years of travel to know Buddhism even approximately so well, or any other religion. Therefore any conclusions I offer are conclusions of this hour, stated with energy because I cannot help feel them, however wrong they be.” And the opening line of lecture four—on Pericles, Phidias, and Socrates—reminded students of the course’s primary purpose: “One use of Historical models is to prompt men to do a like work.”

In lecture eleven—covering Savonarola, Michelangelo, and Titian—Vachel opened with his personal credo: “There are some things to be said on Religion that may as well be said here as anywhere. We who are religious cannot help it. Without religion we might lead more normal lives, without it. Some of my dearest friends are irreligious and will get to Heaven sooner than I. I feel that the rounded man swears as fervently as he prays and prays as often and unashamedly as he blasphemes. Else how can he live out his whole nature? . . . Man can be a great sinner, yet very religious. No matter what my sins of yesterday, my cruelty or coldness or narrowness, still these dreams burn in me, deep down, they rise again in splendid flames. They have little effect upon my conduct, they possibly divide me more from men, they make me narrower, withdrawn, yet they are mine, mine, and I pray to live them out. . . . Man is great as his dreams. We can worship man, because he has Dreamed of Christ and Buddha. God is great as his dreams. We can worship God because he has Dreamed of Nature, Light and Life. It is a good rule of worship to step from the creature to the creator, to bow before the highest power that one can glimpse.”

As the course wound down, the choice of “Personalities” became increasingly whimsical, although few would disagree on the inclusion of Edison and Pasteur. Interestingly, the final figure in this early version of the “Clock” is someone Vachel had met in person; in fact, he had tried to serve as docent in his tour of the Chicago Art Institute (see Chapter 10, p. 11). The 1908 notebook discussion of Roosevelt, though, is actually an extended comparison of Theodore Roosevelt and John Peter Altgeld, another of the speaker’s heroes. Vachel hints that Roosevelt and like reformers owe a great debt
to the Illinois governor: “Altgeld and all the wild haired Populists made possible the radicalism of today, which is vastly more intelligent, better organized.”

With Roosevelt, the YMCA course came to an end, and Vachel’s concluding remarks offer an apt moral summary:

(For the final message read the fifty third [chapter] of Isaiah and whosoever will receive it—let him receive it.)

We can make no apology for the multitude of our moods. God help us to be honest with ourselves and our neighbors and live an open life. We can be whimsical selfish vain nine tenths of the time. But we refuse to be cheated out of our graver selves—and that has said to us—that the final ideal is the suffering servant.

He promised himself that he would expound the suffering servant concept “from the most radical modern theological standpoint” and follow with “what Christ read in the synagogue at Nazareth.” What Christ read, of course, was in keeping with Uncle Boy’s desire to deliver new vision to his audience:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.


Vachel then proclaimed his grand pedagogical purpose: “Every man must have his own view of History. It must be so. . . . To the ambitious man to the egotist, to the creator it is inevitably a succession of personalities. To the writer of verse it is a series of songsters and to the artist a series of painters. All men should have available^ the same general body of facts and dates. All men should differ in their conclusions and every man should be and is to himself the latest character in history.”

The word “character” was delivered in a matter-of-fact manner, but Uncle Boy’s original audience seems to have sensed a deeper meaning. On April 8, 1908, presumably the final night of the class, twenty grateful students signed and presented an autograph book to their brave lecturer-dreamer “as a token of their appreciation of his ability as a teacher and,” they added with emphasis on character, “his sterling worth as a man” (Virginia).

Vachel’s personal life during the winter of 1907-08 is not well documented, but he seems to have continued the patterns of the previous year. He lived in Mrs. Beakes’ boarding house and enjoyed meals and late-night discussions at the soon-to-be-rechristened Crown restaurant. Several new names were added to his circle of friends: Paul Burlin, Pierre Laird, Leighton Haring Smith, Gertrude Lundborg (about to be Mrs. George Mather Richards), Frederick R. Shaler, and an Australian named only as “Lewis” (see Poetry 940, 967). Many old friends were also part of the circle: Willard Wall Wheeler, George Mather Richards, Earl H. Brewster, Achsah Barlow, Marjorie Hood (soon to be Marjorie Torre Bevans), and John Collier, who had left Atlanta in favor of New York City. In fact, Collier and his wife of two years, Lucy Wood, surprised Vachel
when they enrolled as members of his YMCA “Dominating Personalities of History” class (Fowler 191).

“Lindsay in Bohemia” is the title of Richards’ memoir (1932), and few New York City friends were closer to Vachel than George Mather Richards, a fellow member of “the little club of young fellows who were planning their assaults on the towers of Manhattan and betting on who would be the first to ‘push over the Flatiron Building’”:

. . . At that time none of us knew, least of all himself [Vachel], whether the art that was struggling to find expression within him would develop at the easel and drawing board or in the sphere of letters.

All of us, however, were agreed that “Vach” couldn’t possibly carry a tune. Apparently he was tone-deaf, but only rigorous measures could persuade him of it. Rhythm was in him and must come out, so that it was he who made us poetry-conscious then as he made America in later life. Even the most hardened Philistine of the club would listen to him in fascination as he chanted Swinburne in that inimitable manner of his.

What Swinburne had to say mattered little—the cadence and music of the verse mattered much. . . . Certainly no poet was ever more himself alone than Lindsay.

But none of us can forget the vision of strange worlds that followed as we used to walk with him down Broadway. Vachel striding along hatless, pale tousled hair flying in the breeze, chanting those singing classical odes at the top of his lungs with entire indifference to the astonishment of the passers-by and the acute embarrassment of his more conventionally minded chums.

This, of course, smacks of the consciously eccentric pose of the hardened publicity seeker. Nothing was farther from Lindsay’s intention. He chanted Swinburne on Broadway because walking down Broadway made him feel like singing, and since he was not allowed to sing, Swinburne was the best substitute.

(Richards 130)  [Note 14]

Richards concludes his memoir with an account of one of the club’s shenanigans, a plot to have Vachel contrive to “throw a fit” in the lobby of the newly opened Colonial Music Hall (1887 Broadway). “The only stumbling-block to the execution of this extremely intelligent scheme,” Richards comments (manifesting adult respect and admiration), “was Lindsay himself, who absolutely refused to throw a fit for any one at any time.”

We do know that club members Lindsay, Richards, Brewster, Shaler, and Lewis spent Thanksgiving evening, 1907, in an Italian bar on New York City’s East side. On November 8, 1909, Vachel advised Nellie Vieira: “Thanksgiving day [November 25] there will be a new War Bulletin [Number Five] ‘How the Ice Man Danced.’ Just a little story of a Bar Room Riot, with nothing mysterious about it. I think it is a pretty good story myself. It is a true narrative of Thanksgiving Evening two years ago when Richards my old Chum in New York—and Brewster his old chum, and Shaler, Brewsters’ old chum and an Australian named Lewis, a friend of Shaler’s, took supper in an Italian Bar Room on the East Side, with me trailing along” (Fowler 265-266). In the published story, the friends are not identified by name, but the names are easy to provide: “We were five young artists, an Australian [Lewis], a ‘Pennsylvania Dutchman’ [Shaler], two New Englanders [Richards and Brewster] and your servant, who tells the tale—exiles from the peculiar beauties of life that money can buy” (Prose 116).
These same “exiles,” sometime during the winter, 1907-08, persuaded George Becker to change the name of his restaurant from the “Crown” to “The Pig and The Goose”: “I hope some day to write the delectable story of our Pig and Goose Restaurant,” Vachel declared some fifteen years after the fact. And he observed with amusement (and inaccuracy) that the restaurant “was half-way between history and tradition, being on Fifty-ninth [it was 58th] Street, between Columbus Circle and the beautiful Paulist Fathers’ Church” (Poetry 940). The Crown’s decorations changed, along with its name; and Vachel’s poem, “God Help Us to Be Brave,” printed with the help of eight dollars from Becker, was given to patrons as a souvenir. Hand bound, with covers in various designs and colors of wallpaper, the souvenir booklet contains a paid advertisement: “THE PIG AND THE GOOSE, George Becker, Proprietor, 355 West 58th Street, Between 8th and 9th Avenues.” A subtitle reads, “A Rendezvous of Wit and Humor”: “The Pig and The Goose is a dairy lunch-room where you are permitted to remain indefinitely, discussing the topics of the hour, and the best victuals the market affords.”

Many years afterward, Vachel recalled that “the topics of the hour” often focused on the dominating personalities of history; and his poem “God Help Us to Be Brave,” finally entitled “Litany of the Heroes,” evolved as a “litany . . . projected with the active aid and choice of heroes, and other accompanying discussions by a group of fellow-students of art. We decorated a restaurant together, and the restaurant used this song for a souvenir. We gloriéd in that place. It was there we held some of our midnight arguments. We were grander than Greenwich Village, long before there ever was such a thing on the art map” (Poetry 940). Indeed, at the end of the poem, as printed in the souvenir booklet, the author proclaims: “Written for the young men I know best,” followed by, “PRINTED FOR THE PUBLIC BY GEORGE BECKER AT THE SIGN OF THE PIG AND THE GOOSE.” [Note 15]

Curiously, the restaurant’s new decorations had nothing to do with Vachel’s poem, as we know from Becker’s advertisement: “The scheme of decoration was an inspiration of Mr. Earl H. Brewster, who painted the mantel-panels of the rabbit, rooster and goose. He enlisted the Australian, Mr. Lewis, who enthusiastically added the frieze from which the place was renamed. It had been the Crown restaurant till that border went up. Mr. G. M. Richards donated the genial canvas where the goose with the halo smiles on the pig with the diamond ring. Mr. N. V. Lindsay gave the picture of the Owl-cat-fish and the Flowers of Heaven. Mr. Leighton Smith added the mottoes and the magic mirror. Whosoever looks into the mirror will behold a wonder—a devil and an angel in one.” The advertisement then cites the anonymous verses that inspired the new scheme:

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This is not a Mermaid Tavern,
(Though a catfish may be seen)
Nay, ’tis where a wealthy Porker
Holds high converse on the green—
Courts the widow Goose with lovely
Fluffy feathers on her gown,
(She admires his diamond nose-ring
And his velvet coat so brown.)
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She's a saint, with burnished halo.  
Now her sermon has begun.  
Speaking humbly, she exhorts him  
To acquire a brighter one—  
“In the endless goose-pig hustle,  
In the pious goose-pig chase  
Be not merely fat, be muscle.  
Be the pig that wins the race!”

Later, in July 1908, when Vachel asked Richard Watson Gilder (influential editor of The Century Magazine) to consider publishing a book of drawings and poems, he suggested that Gilder “send a trusty deputy” to look over The Pig and the Goose restaurant: “If you are at all interested in my progress as a decorator, and an influence among other decorators.” He also sent a copy of “God Help Us to Be Brave” and asked Gilder to read the booklet: “If you are interested in my ability to condense the Encyclopaedia Britannica into twenty-eight stanzas, for the benefit of my Y.M.C.A. class in History. The poem was very much used in the Religious^ Department of the West Side Y.M.C.A. this spring,” Vachel added, “and by telephoning Mr. Hills, Mr. Fisher or Mr. Powlinson^, they will give you the details. Also they will tell you what use has been made of my decorative designs in connection with the History Class”:

I propose that you assist me to publish a volume of poems, with my own decorations and embellishments, leading off with the historical poem I send, and using it for the title poem. The Heroes of Time might be a better title for it. I have already a design for every stanza. The Y.M.C.A. will certify to the popular quality of the designs.

Successes at the YMCA and at the Pig and the Goose, however, were not the only New York City happenings that Dr. Lindsay’s son could boast about this 1908 spring. On the evening of April 2, Vachel and his artist friends staged a one-night exhibit that attracted a surprisingly large audience: “We could probably have continued it a week with success, but did not know so when we planned it. We occupied two big rooms on the second floor at the head of the grand stairway [West Side YMCA] and we had fully two hundred people in, in the evening, representing many different groups of young artists, our personal friends and Y.M.C.A. men. . . . Everybody is happy over it, and I especially since it was the wind-up of my work for the season” (letter to “Papa and Mama,” dated “April 3, 1908,” Virginia).

In the same letter, Vachel reports that the final lecture in his historical figures course, a lecture on Theodore Roosevelt, was delivered to a full house: “thirty men—the room was full—the maximum attendance. . . . The fellows never talked better. . . . You should have heard the arguments pro and con.” The lecturer also experienced some welcome serendipity: “I have printed God Help us to Be Brave, and made a considerable hit with it, with my friends. Another is that the last Song of Lucifer is in my printer’s hands now, and I will be able to pay for that completely, owing to a fee given me by the students of the Union Theological Seminary for taking them through the [Metropolitan] museum. I did it for free, and expected nothing, but this eight dollars came in so pat I could not refuse it. I was just eight dollars short on the bill. Another good fortune is that
I am to speak to the Orange, New Jersey Christian Association on [Tennyson’s] Merlin and the Gleam next Sunday afternoon. That means five dollars. The next is that S.S. McClure of McClure’s magazine wrote me a four page autograph letter on my verses, which he declined, but hoped I would send them again in four months when they were not so crowded, and he would be glad to reconsider them since one member of the staff was much interested” (April 3).

The next “news,” though, “is to me the most delightful of all,” Vachel advised his parents: “Dr. [Robert] McKenzie, pastor of the Rutgers Church asked me why I did not enter the ministry. I told him I had never yet refused a pulpit offered me. He took me up at once and said that he would see to it that I addressed his Sunday night audience sometime soon, also that he would see to my Theological education, that it be made easy for me, and that I be regularly ordained to the ministry as soon as possible. All of which amused me a little, but does not interfere with my preaching for him Sunday night. . . . My sermon will be the Necessity of Reverence, which pleased the doctor much” (April 3).

The night of Vachel’s sermon was April 12, and he gave Peter Clark Macfarlane letters from Rutgers’ assistant pastor Allen McCurdy and an anonymous parishioner confirming both the date and the sermon title, which had changed temporarily to: “The Holiness of Beauty.” “These letters,” Vachel boasted, “indicate that I left New York with my credit good.” He also related to Macfarlane that, on April 27, the night before leaving, he addressed the Gargoyle Club, a club for “young architects,” on “The Skyscraper in the History of Beauty.’ Henceforth I was a Springfield citizen and the New Localism began at once, in the fall of 1908. Almost everything following is New Localism material in one way or another” (Macfarlane). Vachel’s return to Springfield, however, was accomplished in his own inimitable way, and that will be the focus at the beginning of the next chapter in Uncle Boy’s life story. [Note 16]

Notes for Chapter Nineteen

[Note 1] New York City newspapers, like The Sun, reported on the struggles of San Francisco’s Chinese community, the oldest and largest in the United States in 1906. Called “Little Shanghai” or “Little Canton,” San Francisco’s Chinatown evolved around Portsmouth Plaza, the city’s first public square, located near the docks and the so-called business center. In time, politicians realized that the twelve or so square blocks of “Tangrenbu,” the segregated section of Chinatown, occupied some of the most valuable real estate in the city. Predictably, local politicians made any number of attempts to raze Chinatown, for “legitimate” reasons, such as “sanitation” and “immorality.” Also predictably, political hostility led to personal attacks; and Tangrenbu residents suffered numerous acts of persecution and discrimination.

On the night of April 18, 1906, the San Francisco earthquake destroyed some four square miles of the city, including all of Chinatown. Nature had accomplished in seconds what city fathers had been unable to do for years. As residents of all nationalities fled to the Plaza for protection, fights broke out; and at least two Chinese reportedly died of knife wounds, whereas hundreds, perhaps thousands, were killed by the quake. Vachel is echoing a minority religious opinion of his time, namely, that San Francisco was punished for its inhuman treatment of the Chinese community.
In the aftermath of the quake, Chinese elders were able to convince politicians that rebuilding Chinatown, but with an emphasis on Chinese architecture, would create a tourist mecca, and thus bring much-needed revenue into the city. When Vachel visited San Francisco in October 1912, the Chinese community had largely been rebuilt and the city was preparing for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915), the spectacular world’s fair celebrating the opening of the Panama Canal. At least three of Uncle Boy’s poems are related to these later events and will be discussed at the appropriate place in his life story.

[Note 2] On October 28, 1909, Vachel advised Nellie Vieira that he had just returned home from seeing a stage production of Graustark, George D. Baker’s stage adaptation of George Barr McCutcheon’s (1866-1928) romantic novel Graustark: The Story of a Love Behind a Throne (1901)—produced at Springfield’s Majestic Theatre on October 28 and 29, 1909: “In the second act something in the music or the situation on the stage—and the laughter and attention of the crowd around me, brought down the purple mist from the sky—to speak in parables. Oh it has been a long long time since my heart has been so full of love for my fellow humans—the whole theatre seemed one dear family. My life is so hard and cold and dry, and I do not know it till these hours when I really love my fellow human. And I remembered back dear rare hours in New York when the multitude was really dear, and seemed to flow into me like a splendid ocean. And somehow a phrase of that old squint eyed Altgeld came back to me, his farewell to the Illinois Politicians— ‘Respond to the Cry of Humanity and you will write your name upon the skies in letters of glory, and win the blessings of all generations to come! Again—Let us build for the Centuries!’” (quoted from Altgeld’s speech delivered to the Democratic State Convention in Springfield, July 12, 1878; published in Altgeld’s Live Questions, part 2 [1899]—see Fowler, pp. 229-231).

[Note 3] Michigan native Reverend Miner Lee Bates had just accepted the position as pastor of New York City’s First Church of the Disciples, located on West 56th Street. He would resign after ten months to accept the presidency of Hiram College, serving from 1907 to 1930. A graduate of Hiram with a B.A. (1895) and an M.A. (1896), Bates had served as pastor of churches in Ohio and New Jersey, before accepting the New York pastorate. He arranged for Vachel’s honorary doctorate at Hiram (October 10, 1930), before he retired as president. His picture and a brief account of his presidency may be viewed at the Hiram College Library website:

http://library.hiram.edu/archives/history.htm

From a letter to “My Dear Papa and Mama,” written March 22, 1908, we know that Bates had left New York City: “My classes continue in interest and attendance. Bates is in Hiram now. I suppose the young folks are there too. When does Joy arrive? I think Bates is in a state of mind to be quite kind to her and the rest of the family. He really overestimates my stand in New York.” (Vachel’s younger sister Joy, with Springfield friends, likely made an orientation journey to Hiram in spring, 1908.)

To this day, researchers are attempting to decode the “magic” of Rembrandt’s paintings, even resorting to computer analyses:


[Note 5] For a variety of images of Edfu or Edfou, see:

http://www.picturechoice.org/egypt/edfu_temple.html


The eleven architectural prints that Vachel mailed to Nellie Vieira in 1909 were selections from Eugene Ashton Perry’s company “Perry Prints.” Widely advertised in educational periodicals in the 1890s and early 1900s, the prints were popular in American schools everywhere. Each print cost one penny. For a list of the prints sent to Vieira, see Fowler, p. 133.


[Note 7] Vachel’s poem “At Mass” (Poetry 64) was also completed at this time. A manuscript copy sent to Springfield friend Mary Humphrey is dated “January 1907” and signed “Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, Paulist Fathers’ Church, New York City.” Famous for performances of the Gregorian chant, the church was one of Vachel’s favorite meditation venues.

[Note 8] Sidney Lanier’s “The Stirrup-Cup” and “A Ballad of the Trees and the Master” may be read at: www.poemhunter.com/sidney-lanier/poems/ Rudyard Kipling’s “Hymn before Action” and William Butler Yeats’s “The Song of Wandering Aengus,” both alluded to in the next paragraph, are also available at the PoemHunter.com website.

[Note 9] The idea of settlement houses emerged in mid-19th century England, when thinkers like Arnold Toynbee and Lindsay favorite John Ruskin encouraged college students to “settle” in underprivileged neighborhoods, so that they could witness the deplorable social conditions largely caused by immigration and industrialization. The pioneer house was Toynbee Hall, founded in London in 1884, but the movement soon made its way to the United States. Generally, the settlement idea focused on community life as a whole, so that arts and culture, education, health care, the English language, etc. were as important as basic social services. Hence, an artist-poet-lecturer like Vachel would be a welcome volunteer.

The West Side YMCA’s Neighborhood House (West 57th Street) first opened its doors to poor, mostly immigrant, families in 1896.

New York City’s College Settlement house (Rivington Street), founded in 1889 by Jane E. Robbins and Jean Fine, relied on a network of women’s colleges to provide volunteers for social services to the poor. Perhaps the most famous of these volunteers was Anna Eleanor Roosevelt, who began teaching immigrant children how to dance and stretch about 1903. Witnessing first-hand the extreme poverty in which most of her students lived (Eleanor was from a very wealthy family), she persuaded her boyfriend,
Franklin Delano Roosevelt (her fifth cousin once removed), to join her in viewing the plight of the immigrant poor. He was as appalled as she was, and Eleanor claimed in later years that it was settlement work that provided FDR the stimulus to address poverty and social ills, leading the United States into the New Deal era. Franklin and Eleanor married March 17, 1905, the bride not having to change her surname.

In 1888, wealthy journalist-photographer Jacob A. Riis joined with the King’s Daughters, an Episcopal Church women’s group, to establish the Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement House. In 1897, the House moved into its first permanent quarters at 48 Henry Street.

The Union Settlement House was founded in 1895 by members of the Union Theological Seminary’s Alumni Club, in order to serve the immigrant and low-income families of East Harlem. Its service centers were located at several places throughout the area, roughly from East 96th and 110th Streets on the south and north, and by the East River and Central Park on the east and west. Arguably, the most famous “graduate” of Union Settlement was actor Burt Lancaster, who played sports, acted in theater, and learned circus arts as a boy in the late 1920s. Lancaster credited Union Settlement for “saving him from the streets,” and he supported the organization all his adult life.

“A pioneering nonsectarian settlement house, Christodora first opened its doors to impoverished immigrant families living on New York’s Lower East Side in 1898. Since its modest beginnings in an Avenue B basement where its founders sponsored social and cultural activities, Christodora has grown, Christodora’s historical legacy is established. It launched the career of social reformer Harry L. Hopkins, adviser to Franklin D. Roosevelt and architect of the New Deal programs. It hosted George Gershwin’s first public concert in 1914. It helped countless new Americans secure their footing in their new home. And it gave hope and direction to thousands of low income New Yorkers by empowering them to help themselves and their neighbors.” Quoted from the website:

http://companydatabase.org/c/settlement-houses/new-york/social-service/christodora.html

[Note 10] For one famous example of Art-Deco artist Marjorie Torre Bevans’ work, see:


[Note 13] Copies of the “Immanuel” broadside may be seen in Frances Hamilton’s 1914 scrapbook (see “Works Cited” and photograph below) and in the Melcher collection at the University of Indiana’s Lilly Library (Byrd 68), although the suggested date “1908” is
likely in error. Years after publication, Vachel continued to comment on his work. Sara Teasdale was advised that “the setting of [the poem] to the Tune of the Holy City” was an afterthought and “only for the laity.” Experienced poets, like Sara Teasdale, “will find a subtler tune with a little different set of accents. But by suggesting ‘The Holy City’ the ‘Poetry-Hater’ who is abroad in the land, may be seduced into experimenting with it, and in the end to grasping the outside meaning. . . . That Holy City tune implies something devout, it implies The New Jerusalem, it implies triumph, it implies The Presence of Christ, and is utterly familiar to the very hand-organ man. Therefore it should be an aid to the hasty reader. And if softly sung it does not too much distort the cadences. . . . Still—I say—there is a different whisper there for you” (December 18, 1913, Yale 13).

A few days before (on December 4, 1913), Vachel had mailed a copy of the poem to editor Wilbur L. Cross, for possible publication in The Yale Review. The author maintained that he “only discovered the other day it would fit the first eight lines of The Holy City”; and he advised Cross that the “musical scheme” could be omitted if the editor found it not “in good taste.” The poem is “in many ways the most intense and personal experience of my writing life,” the Vachel continued: “While the Jerusalem tune may detract from its dignity in academic circles—that tune so strikes the mood for the populace that what might be called the obvious meaning of the poem is reinforced by the atmosphere and memory of that song. . . . And the obvious meaning is, of course, what we want most readers to get at once” (Chénetier 84-85).

Finally, the central ideas in “Immanuel” are repeated in War Bulletin Number Three, “The Creed of a Beggar”: “I believe in Christ the Socialist, the Beautiful, the personal savior from sin, the Singing Immanuel” (Prose 103). When a copy of this Bulletin was sent to Chicago friend, Edward Scribner Ames, Vachel stressed: “Some phrases, such as ‘Christ the Singing Immanuel’ condense years of search and discovery, which you will realize if you read the last poem ['Immanuel'] in my book [The Tramp's Excuse (1909)] and the lines of Explanation in the preface [see Poetry 927]” (Chénetier 37).

[Note 14] The transition from Poe to Swinburne is described in detail for Richard Watson Gilder (November 6, 1908): “From 1900 till I began to lecture,” Vachel professes, Swinburne “was an obsession. . . . Poe at the beginning and Swinburne at the end of what I might call the Hot House period of my life, are my two great passions. I do not remember any passions in my private life to compare with them, and in a public way nothing so vast has entered my blood, except the hunger for praise” (Chénetier 30).

[Note 15] In a letter to “My Dear Papa and Mama,” dated “March 22, 1908,” Vachel explained his finances: “I am having printed with my extra money, since I may never have money again—the Last Song of Lucifer and God Help us to be brave. Becker, proprietor of The Pig and the Goose Restaurant, gave me eight dollars for putting his advertisement^ on the back of the latter. This helped out a considerable. With these two poems printed I will feel bigger than the Statue of Liberty. Poor old Lucifer has waited so long to make his appearance. The pleasant thing is I have enough people hereabout genuinely interested in my poetry to keep the verses—and read them from time to time. The posters with the Historical Characters’ stanzas on them were all hung, for a week after the [YMCA] class by the door of the religious^ department office in the middle of a long corridor where thousands pass by weekly. A great many of my friends who did not attend the classes read and talked of the verses. They are the same set who eat at the Pig
and Goose Restaurant, which our bunch also decorated with pictures. The whole thing works together nicely. I am beginning to have a tiny public who think it worth while^ to watch my work” (Virginia).

[Note 16] To establish further credibility, Vachel asked Richard Watson Gilder to phone “Allen McCurdy, assistant pastor of the Rutgers Presbyterian Church or Dr. Robert McKenzie, pastor,” both of whom would inform Gilder that Vachel had “preached a sermon the Sunday evening a week before Easter [1908], on the Holiness of Beauty, in their pulpit” (Chénetier 24). The same sermon was repeated in Springfield during the winter of 1908-09, with the original title, “The Necessity of Reverence.” An unidentified newspaper published the sermon verbatim; and a copy was sent to Frances Hamilton, who duly pasted it in the first of her scrapbooks [see “Works Cited”]:

THE NECESSITY OF REVERENCE

AN ABLE DISCOURSE BY
NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY.

Delivered to the Congregation of the First Christian Church at Regular Sunday Morning Services Yesterday.

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay, son of Dr. and Mrs. V. T. Lindsay of South Fifth street, delivered an address to the congregation of the First Christian church yesterday morning, his able discourse bearing upon the necessity of reverence. His texts are the first chapter of Genesis, the first chapter of Revelation and Peter’s confession in Matthew 16.

The Address.

Mr. Lindsay’s address follows:

“I must speak as an artist. Art is not the most necessary thing in the world. It is never useful, in the American sense. It is often dangerous to the soul, like any other pleasure. But the time has come when we must understand it in a religious way. We must know how much and how little it has to do with worship.

“Art has been defined as the expression of one’s pleasure in labor [William Morris, “The Art of the People,” Hopes and Fears for Art (1882), p. 58: online at Google Books]. No great work of art was ever produced without an exquisite pleasure on the part of the artist. No matter how desperate, hungry, envious, conscience-stricken or persecuted, his work was his consolation. A skilled critic can tell at once where the artist ceased to enjoy, and that part of the work is condemned.

Reverence for Beauty.

“It is natural to take pleasure in making or seeing beauty. This pleasure has destroyed many nations, because they did not mingle reverence with their pleasure. The necessity for reverence is paramount.
“In Genesis we read how God made the heavens and the earth, and man. We have evidence of His pleasure in His work wherever we see beauty. We must revere this beauty. We must revere the God behind it more.

“Men and animals have a great unending pleasure in the sun, without seeing the finger-mark of God upon it. But he who does not give thanks for the sun is in peril.

“It is right to enjoy the blue sky by day and the evening stars. But many crimes have been done under the stars by those that love them. If we revere the August Presence behind them we may be more constrained from evil.

A Modern Passion.

“All men love the grass and the trees. It is a modern passion, they say, this hunger for landscape. Yet it is most real. The youngest child loves the woods, the oldest man looks out with an uplifting heart upon field and highway. Yet with all this we may be quarrelsome, cold-hearted, revengeful, unkind, bitter of tongue, while our eyes luxuriantly rejoice. An impressionist may be able to paint blazing sunlight, yet be a thief. He does not of necessity fear God. But we can find God in the landscape if we will. Sidney Lanier found God revealed in the marshes of Glynn:

“As the marsh hen secretly builds on the watery sod  
Behold I will build me a nest on the greatness of God.  
I will fly in the greatness of God as the marsh hen flies  
In the freedom that fills all the space twixt the marsh and the skies.  
By so many roots as the marsh grass sends to the sod  
I will heartily lay me ahold of the greatness of God.  
Oh, like to the greatness of God is the Greatness within  
The range of the marshes, the liberal marshes of Glynn.”

Man a Secondary Creator.

“Man is a secondary creator. The most savage man makes his pottery splendid with decorative designs. Great architectures, great parks, great rituals testify to man’s passion for design. The wisest capitols of the world, the most august cathedrals are eye-filling glories. But to feast the eye on these, as one would on meat or fruit, or flowers, without a proper grace before meat, without a contrite heart, is to be destroyed. We are dead already.

History of Art.

“In the history of art man begins with decorative design and continues with it. But some special modern arts are far from magnificent. They are devoted to the artist’s autograph, the record of human enthusiasm for human ‘things as they are in plain daylight.’ We have the Dutch masters with their portraits and domestic interiors, and all who have followed in the great modern schools of realism. Portrait men like Robert Henri gave an electrifying sense of human life and strength. They hate all the decorative side of life as heartily as an Arab hates idols.

“There are artists devoted to the ragged or humble side of life, as our Horatio Walker or Winslow Homer. And there was great French Millet. We have poets like Burns and Wordsworth. The charm of all these is a different pleasure from that of nature,
or classic art. We like them for the same reason that we prefer the newspapers to the epic poets. We have in literature Thackeray, Zola, Balzac, Howells and Hardy. The finger of Man, creator, writing of God, Creator. The practiced eye can tell by the way the thing is done how white-hot the artist was in his devotion, and share that devotion. The life that goes into such art is the real life we are living in and about this city, and our form of Christianity is closest to this kind of art. It saves us from the brittle barren literalness of science, or the cynicism of money-hunger. We find spectacles worth our looking, in the grimmest workingman, the most commonplace child, in giving the cup of cold water, in the widow giving her mite, in the sower going forth to sow, in the prayer of the publican, in the simple bread and wine of the memorial feast.

“With all this in mind think again of Peter’s confession, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’ Christ is the son of the God of Splendor, and of Nature, yet he is most the son of the living God, the God of this life within us. He is the Christ who was without form or comeliness, the carpenter’s son, the fisherman’s master, the roadside friend who had nowhere to lay his head. He shows us how to make the most squalid spectacles of human life worthy of reverence. And he shows us how to revere that humanity we all love so well, so that our love for it shall not destroy us.

“When we have reverence for God within plain humanity, the God behind the great splendors of the world, and the God behind nature, we have revered Him through all things that the human eye may see, we have grasped the message of this discourse that the presence of beauty is the presence of God.

Plastic Art Not Essential.

“Plastic art is not the most necessary thing in the world. England’s great history was entirely without it. We have done without it. But every sign indicates that the day of American unmitigated ugliness has passed. We are destined to enjoy ourselves through our eyes. American business methods and business structures will be accentuated, but out of business hours we will be a luxurious, pleasure-loving, beauty-seeking people. Most artists think that time is far away, but the signs of the day are against them.

“More people every day give interest earnestly to architecture, parks, good interiors, literature, music, the drama, poetry. Schools are turning out students by the thousand that will change the fibre of the nation in the end.

“The Christ of the first chapter of Revelation is the Christ that should be the king at that time, the infinite glorious Christ with the countenance that is as the sun that shineth in his strength. He only can save us from an irreverent orgy of the eyes that shall destroy us. We would crown Him King in His beauty, and would consecrate to Him our palaces and our treasuries. We should see behind the flame the eyes of the craftsman of Nazareth. Who knows but that in the new earth there shall be a clearing away of all splendors, and the only beauty left be the world that God saw was good in the beginning, and simple homes holding contrite, reverent humanity?”
The final two pages of “The Pig and the Goose” Souvenir Program (1908), featuring Vachel’s poem “God Help Us to Be Brave.” This copy is owned by the Vachel Lindsay Association. Proprietor Becker paid eight dollars for the advertisement, while Vachel himself paid the rest of the bill from his few lecture fees (letter to “Papa and Mama,” March 22, 1908, Virginia).
Inspiration girl Mary Humphrey (see p. 21 above), daughter of United States Federal Judge J. Otis Humphrey (1850-1918). Photograph property of the Vachel Lindsay Association.

(Continued on next page.)
Vachel’s “Immanuel” broadside pasted in Frances Hamilton’s 1914 scrapbook. See Note 13 above.