Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Twenty-Two

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

by

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

[This ongoing biography may be read online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Choose “Biography” and then “Uncle Boy: A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” The biography and the website are sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association. Please report any errors to VachelLindsay, our account name at Gmail.]
22. Springfield (1909)

“Let the emblem of our town be the peacock, rather than the hog . . .”

The day before Uncle Boy tackled the “negro question” in Springfield, he received a warning shot across the bow, to speak in parables. November 10, 1908, marked his 29th year on the planet—and the beginning of his final year for “preparation,” the final year of his “vital decade” (see Chapter 9, pp. 7-8). Traditional Christianity affirmed that Jesus launched his ministry at age 30, with the assumption that the preceding years had been spent in study and “preparation.” With this view in mind, as we have seen, Vachel felt the need to escape Hiram, because college was interfering with his commitment to education. In fact, he spent his final semester pursuing culture on his own, studying the writers and artists who would influence the next decade of his life: Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, Shelley, Carlyle, Emerson, and Ruskin. In the winter, 1908-1909, fellow Scotsman Thomas Carlyle called for an encore, as it were, a second and even third reading of Sartor Resartus (1833-34). Along with Shelley’s Defence of Poetry and the writings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (and their apologist, John Ruskin), Carlyle’s work helped to create a transcendental Christian socialist, one who was more than ready to advocate several core values (at least for the time being): [Note 1]

1. The physical world is not the “real world”: the physical world is “clothing.” As clothes both hide the body and reveal the taste of the wearer, so the body itself is the clothing of the spirit, the “genius” of a person. To lynch a man because he has dark skin is to manifest a total lack of understanding as to what is “real” versus what is merely shadow. To reduce a man to selling fruit when his genius is painting amounts to yet another form of lynching, this one the more insidious because the victim is duped into thinking what he is doing is “good” for himself (“I getta reech to-morrow”: see Chapter 20, p. 9). The commercial success of Charles Dana Gibson and Henry Hutt (see Chapter 21, note 4) illustrates a society immersed in and dedicated to shadow, a society enchained in Plato’s cave of illusions. Thus, Uncle Boy’s contempt for the captains of industry and the material world they have produced. The ugly Pennsylvania mining areas reflect the shallow, ugly values of King Coal.

2. As the body is the clothing of the soul, so language is the clothing of thought and art is the clothing of the spirit, the imagination, the genius. Ugly shadows reflect misguided souls, so it is imperative that religious and civic leaders understand real—that is, spiritual—beauty. For example, consider the several banners depicted in “The Village Improvement Parade,” one of Uncle Boy’s efforts currently underway in his creative life:

Fair streets are better than silver, green parks are better than gold.
Bad public taste is mob-law, good public taste is democracy.
A crude administration is damned already.
A bad designer is, to that extent, a bad citizen.
Our best pictures should be good painting, our best monuments should be real sculpture, our best buildings should be real architecture.

Ugliness is a kind of misgovernment. (See Poetry 258-264, 974)

All creations—streets, parks, music, poetry—reflect spirit, enlightened or otherwise. For civic well-being, therefore, it is essential to have moral, imaginative leaders—at all levels of life and government.

3. To see the “real,” that is to see beneath and beyond all clothing, humans need to employ imagination, the means of perception most evident in the best work of the best artists, especially the poets. Whereas the physical eye perceives differences and antipathy—Thomas Carlyle’s “Everlasting Nay”—the imagination perceives harmony—Carlyle’s “Everlasting Yea.” Best of all, no person has to travel to Chicago or New York or Europe to perceive harmony. “The hour of Spiritual Enfranchisement,” Carlyle declares, is when the struggling person discovers, “with amazement enough,” that “America [the ideal] is here or nowhere. . . . The Situation that has not its Duty, its Ideal, was never yet occupied by man. Yes here, in this poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual, wherein thou even now standest, here or nowhere is thy Ideal: work it out therefrom; and working, believe, live, be free.” No need to return to New York City, no need to study one year in Europe: the ideal, the real, the spiritual exists everywhere locally—even in Springfield, Illinois—for those who have “eyes” to see.

4. With this emphasis on the local, what Uncle Boy would soon preach as “The New Localism,” a premium is placed on craftsmanship: home-made artifacts are the expressions (the clothing) of an artist’s spirit. In this respect, William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood played an important role in Vachel’s ongoing convictions (see Chapter 9, p. 18; Chapter 10, p. 6). It should come as no surprise that whatever money Dr. Lindsay’s son earned or borrowed from 1908 to 1912 was spent in publishing private creations, such as the War Bulletins (1909), The Tramp’s Excuse and Other Poems (1909), The Village Magazine (1910), The Spring Harbinger (1910), and Rhymes to Be Traded for Bread (1912). (And, thanks to the internet, this biography that you are reading also is being published in William Morris fashion: independent of commercial publishers, independent of academic formalities.)

5. Finally, and perhaps subconsciously, the above values led Uncle Boy to a world view that can be visualized as a U. The present is the nadir, whereas the past to the left and the future to the right represent high points or genuine ideals, the one remembered, the other anticipated in time to come. From experiences on his 1908 tramp, Vachel was convinced that present generation adults were/are hopelessly mired in materialism, in the world of shadows, especially immigrant newcomers. The 1908 race-riot lectures highlighted the achievements of each immigrant nationality in the past, and then contrasted those high points with the lowliness of present occupations: from sublime painters to grubbing fruit vendors, from enlighteners of Europe to subterranean coal miners. The hope for any return to ideal heights lies with the younger generations, those present and those yet to come. To that end, during the winter, 1908-09, and for several years after, Uncle Boy was teaching a class of superior high school students at his home: no charge, no remuneration, just the hope for an improved future—and, like Wordsworth (see Chapter 21, p. 24), the personal desire for youthful disciples. [Note 2]

In addition to teaching his “boys” at home, Vachel continued to lecture at the YMCA and at the Lavinia Beach Mission, an interdenominational mission located in Ridgely, a small community north of Springfield, very near the present-day state fairgrounds. Mrs. Lavinia Beach
had given her home and grounds (on the northeast corner of Sangamon Avenue and 15th Street) as a library and meeting place; and the Lavinia Beach Union Chapel and Reading Rooms served as a central location for what came to be known locally as the “Ridgely Mission.” Here concerned Springfield citizens could devote time to assisting adults and children of the area mining community, many of whom spoke little English. In fall-winter, 1908, Vachel repeated several of the YMCA lectures at Ridgely. And in February 1909, the evening before Springfield’s white-collar elite gathered to celebrate Abraham Lincoln’s 100th birthday in the downtown Armory, Vachel traveled to Ridgely and spoke on “The Lincoln of Tomorrow.” In later years, his sister Olive discovered a copy of the speech and typed the important passages for posterity.

Since English was a second language for most in the audience, this speech likely represents Vachel’s most straightforward reaction to the August 1908 race riots. His free use of the accused rioters’ names demonstrates that many in Springfield, apart from the grand juries, believed the accused were guilty as charged, although none, as we saw in the last chapter, was ever convicted. This speech was delivered on the night of February 11, 1909:

In celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of Abraham Lincoln, we must take high ground. His biography is put on pasteboards and hung in every shop window. His story fills the newspapers and magazines. We see in him the back woodsman, the prairie lawyer who became president, the statesman who saved the union. But do we, the citizens of Springfield, shrink from Lincoln as the Great Emancipator? Are we Abolitionists or not?

Last night I read till two o’clock in the morning, a dusty old book from my grandfather’s library. Its title was, “My Bondage and My Freedom.” It was written by the Black Orator, the fugitive slave, the first great Negro in the United States, Frederick Douglass. Read it and understand what we in Springfield, sons of Abolitionists, have sometimes forgotten, that a black man also has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and that he can value every hairs-breadth of the right, and vindicate it by the highest talents as a reformer, an editor and an orator. . . . His was one of those great voices which made Lincoln possible. Reading those periods, eloquent yet, let us declare in our hearts, we too are Abolitionists. . . . Let us believe once more in the Rights of Man. If Abraham Raymer has been our hero rather than Abraham Lincoln, let us abhor him and his works forever. Let him be to us the John Wilkes Booth of our city, if we remember him at all. If we remember the mob of last August, let us remember that the blood it shed is upon our hands till we have made amends to the race of William Donnegan and Scott Burton, martyrs of their race. Until we have completely set the Negro free, until we have given them equal rights to a fair and rigid trial before the law, to equal chance in both the Labor world and the world of Capital, until we have done our best to encourage their leaders to make them clean voters and decent citizens, we are disloyal to Lincoln and worse.

Any citizen of Springfield who allows the innocent man to be wronged—whatever that man’s color—is a silent partner of Slim Humphrey, Mrs. [Kate] Howard, Abraham Raymer, John Wilkes Booth and Judas Iscariot. Our social responsibility grows. The war for the liberation of humanity was not settled when Lee surrendered at Appomattox . . . . the war for humanity has scarcely begun. . . . The field of moral reform is not the only place where the Abolitionist has work to do. No working man is free till he has all the knowledge that any man can have, till he has all the leisure that any man can have, till he
uses that leisure to exercise and develop his highest faculties, surrounded by all the health-giving comforts that any man can have. Not till he is a completely ripened man in justice, benevolence, breadth of view, depth of knowledge is he wholly free. The workmen of the world are beginning to know this. A struggle between Capital and Labor is coming that will shake the very constitution of the United States. ... There are going to be capitalists as greedy as the extreme slave-holders of the south, who would rather wreck their government than surrender their property. There are going to be extreme Labor leaders who will curse the constitution as a covenant with death and an agreement with hell. Then there are going to be men like Abraham Lincoln who will say to both Capital and labor, “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect that it will cease to be divided.” [Note 3: the ellipses are in the manuscript]

Ironically, on or about the same day as Uncle Boy’s mission lecture, the mailman delivered a manuscript, rejection slip enclosed, to Dr. Lindsay’s South Fifth Street home (see Fowler 41). We can only guess as to which periodical refused to print “The Golden-Faced People: A Story of the Chinese Conquest of America”; but the rejection slip may have been one too many. The recipient was more determined than ever to have his voice heard, especially during the spring-summer, 1909, and then continuing well into 1912. From the lectern, from the pulpit, and from the privately printed page, Springfield and surrounding communities (and beyond) were besieged by the ideas and insights of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. “The Golden-Faced People” is an early example. The intent is to stimulate white imaginations, so that white people could “see,” could understand, what servitude feels like (see Prose 85-93).

The narrator, for convenience let’s call him “Vachel,” stops at his local Chinese laundry (so we know that “clothing” will be a significant theme). He needs to pick up his dress suit, because he is headed for an important banquet, the Abraham Lincoln centennial banquet of February 1909. When he cannot produce his half of the red claims ticket, he is denied his goods, even though he points out “the name on the linen.” Desperate, “Vachel” pushes his money toward the Chinaman, grabs his laundry, and bolts for the exit. But the Chinaman is too quick, darting after his wayward customer and hitting him aside the head with the handle of a broom. The blow knocks “Vachel” into the next millennium, specifically to the early evening of February 12, 2909, and the centennial celebration of the great “Lin Kon, ... the emancipator of the white man.” A distinguished crowd of golden-faced people has gathered to dedicate a ceremonial tablet commemorating the one hundredth anniversary of the great Lin Kon’s birth. To one side of the platform, a figure very like the Chinese laundryman is majestically seated—alone in a pew.

“Vachel” is led toward the memorial tablet and introduced to the audience as “one who had studied the Chinese conquest with zeal.” The laundry bundle mysteriously turns into a manuscript, and “Vachel” explains at length to the cheering audience how the Golden Man overcame and subjugated the White Man, by implementing a “thorough-going compulsory education” and by constructing universities “from Canton to Lhasa.” Then, at a pivotal moment, Chinese educators adopted the religion of science in lieu of the religion of learning. In particular, the doctrines of the “scientific conspirator Dah Win” came to the fore: “Science and Heaven are one” and, more terribly, “None but superior men are fit to live.” With the adoption of Dah Winism, weak races were doomed: “how brash seem the unclothed inventions of this whey-faced
democracy where the weakling or diseased are tolerated for their votes and praised for their perverseness, where forever and forever the fairest things are tarnished with stupidity.” In time, revolution and counter revolution led to reversal, and the White Man found himself subservient to the Yellow Man: “Gradually the strength of the Golden-faced became an ingenious tyranny. They protested they meant us well, and individually many of them did; but, collectively, we were the weaker, because our social system was more impure, and so we had to go down through caste and serfdom to slavery. Only when it was too late did we know of the system of engines in the Chinese laboratories especially constructed to insure our obedience.”

In the midst of the worst years of slavery and servitude, “Vachel” continues, the “great Lin Kon” was “born on the hardy plains of Central China where people had a rough sort of equality . . . he swore by the justice of heaven he would sometime hit the curse of slavery and hit it hard.” He traveled the world “with his group of students, like Confucius, seeking that magistrate who would allow him to set up his ideal government.” His message, we soon learn, is a refutation of Dah Win-ism: “The superior man shows malice toward none and Charity for all.”

In brief, his message is a restatement of “sweet Christianity.”

So far, “Vachel” has been a resounding success: “The audience seemed in sympathy with me whatever I said. The name of Lin Kon set burning every drop of white blood still there. The proudest with the humblest stamped and shouted. But the cheering increased when I counseled patience with present vexations.” Indeed, he is so successful that, when he takes a seat next to the Chinaman (who “shrank from me as from a leper”), he receives an invitation: “Servant, can you come with me?” The Chinaman is headed for “the other banquet,” the imperial celebration of Lin Kon’s birth, the celebration where white people are not welcome, in spite of the fact that Lin Kon’s great achievement was bringing equality to the white man. “It was like playing Hamlet without the melancholy Dane,” “Vachel” comments sardonically. The Chinaman wants to use “Vachel’s” manuscript to enlighten the banquet audience, but the author is apprehensive. He fears that the Chinaman will make a fool of himself, citing a white man: “You cannot make me a hero in your assembly. Whatever you and I may say in public, we know a white criminal is made more famous in a day, by the golden newspapers, than a white sage can become by endless talk of sweet Christianity. Whatever linen he wears he is hated still.” [Note 4]

The Chinaman, however, is determined “to be just.” At the door of the banquet hall, “Vachel” hands over the manuscript. As a white man, he is not allowed inside. Horrified, though, he watches at a distance as the manuscript once more becomes “my bundle of laundry, now burst open. . . . A handkerchief fell on the floor, then some socks. . . .” In a panic, he calls out to the Chinaman: “Master! Master!” But to no avail, so he attempts to force his way inside, also to no avail. A lackey at the door, ironically a white man, thwarts his effort; and suddenly everything goes wrong. He is taunted as a “Proud puppy!” by a gathering of white servants, and a Chinese boy calls him “chalk nose.” The golden newspapers are already out and the headlines declare: “MAKES A SPEECH ON ABSOLUTE SOCIAL EQUALITY. Later Tries to Break into the Celestial Banquet to Lin Kon.” Soon he is running for his life, seemingly chased by “the whole Yellow Race.” As the atrocities mount, he is forced to wonder: “Would our people never resist? what unspeakable fear paralyzed them?” He also finds himself “broken hearted like a child who finds his father suddenly cruel.”

And then, he finds himself awake, “back in the twentieth century, in the laundry shop,” back in the nightmarish Springfield of 1909. A mob is howling outside; across the street three dead men hang by the neck. One is the Chinaman, lynched because the report was that he had
killed a white man. The second is a Greek, lynched because he was a foreigner who did not know enough “to keep out of the way.” The third is “just a nigger.” When “Vachel” asks why the black man, the response is: “I dunno. I guess he was too free with his lip. Damn a nigger anyway. They are all alike. There was a negro in Indiana the other day—,” and he told the usual story.” A “southerner” enters the conversation, claiming that blacks are not lynched “in our country unless we know they’re guilty. . . . We don’t leave the dirty work to the poor white trash.”

The conversation ends, and “Vachel” washes the blood off his head; grabs his laundry bundle; and, accompanied by the southerner, goes home to make a quick change. They enter the centennial banquet “only fifty minutes late,” and the southerner “saved the day by his opening speech on Lincoln as an example of the survival of the fittest, accompanied by a eulogy of Darwin. The other speakers were able to follow the pace, especially since a good part of the audience were fired with champagne. I managed to spill wine all over my shirt bosom. The southerner said it served me right. He is one of these Local Option orators.” And thus “The Golden-Faced People” ends, with the champagne making it obvious to anyone who misses the irony of Lincoln as a Darwinian that the “Vachel” of the story is not a mirror image of Vachel the author. (For Vachel the author’s basic instructions to Hamlin Garland on how to read “The Golden-Faced People,” see Chapter 24).

Although one or more publishers did not accept “The Golden-Faced People,” another Lindsay manuscript did find favor this spring. When Vachel was lecturing in New York City, he became increasingly disturbed that Christian ministers, especially ministers of the Disciples’ faith, seemed to know little—and care even less—about art and beauty. That concern found expression in one of his last efforts in New York, namely, the Rutgers Presbyterian Church sermon on “The Holiness of Beauty” (see Chapter 19, p. 30). In late winter, 1908-09, the lay preacher continued his crusade in a series of short essays sent to The Christian-Evangelist, the Chicago-based periodical of the Disciples of Christ. The “Prologue” and first two parts were published in May 1909, under the title “Art and the Church.” Two additional parts followed—in July and in September. Since the work is difficult to access, an annotated edition is attached at the end of this chapter. What follows here is a brief summary emphasizing Uncle Boy’s ongoing ideas, ideas that reflect his decade of “preparation,” as well as ideas that lay the groundwork for several efforts to come.

The “Prologue” and “I.—The Immigrant in the Small Town” (May 13) are introduced by Miner Lee Bates: Hiram graduate, Disciples minister, and newly installed President of Hiram College. Bates was an acquaintance, as well as a participant in one of Vachel’s New York City art classes (see Chapter 19, p. 4). Bates praises his friend’s art lectures, “before a large and enthusiastic class of students from the various schools and institutes of art. The secret of [Vachel’s] power quickly revealed itself. He is an untiring student who dares always to think his own thoughts. To him every bit of form or color which human hands have shaped or painted tells of human aspiration and struggle. From wide observation in both America and Europe, he has learned to read the history of men’s hearts into works of their hands.” Works of art, in other words, are the “clothing” of the spirit: artists choose subjects and details like ordinary citizens choose dresses, suits, and pairs of shoes. The physical world is an expression of the mental, spiritual world: art and beauty are the reflections of spirit. Unfortunately, and another insight
central to Vachel’s primary focus in these “Art and the Church” essays, the ostentatious, the cheap, and the downright ugly are also reflections of spirit.

“These articles are unlike the writing of any other man,” Bates concludes, apparently unaware of similarities to the writings of Plato, Shelley, Carlyle, and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (the PRB). “Some people will find them meaningless: others will ponder and find truth, neglected truth, needed truth, well spoken.” One “truth” readers of “Art and the Church” will encounter immediately is the vital connection between art and beauty, on the one hand, and Christian morality, on the other. “I feel that a proper understanding of the claim of art upon the soul will enlighten many a man in the dark on social questions,” Vachel announces. There will be no art for art’s sake in these essays. “I feel especially called upon to champion the issue of Beauty in this Land, just because most of my effort for years has been to discover its proper place in life. Ten years ago I was willing to claim the supreme place for it as an all embracing element in the salvation of man, but I am now willing to concede that the desire for beauty is one of the many noble passions which go to make up men’s souls, and that great careers have often been without it.” For example, the author cites the career of Abraham Lincoln, “who confessed to a general callousness along aesthetic lines.”

But speaking of Abraham Lincoln, Vachel qualifies what he means by “beauty”: he seeks a “reversion” to Lincoln’s times, to “the primal elements of America,” to the “apostolic simplicity” of our grandfathers. He seeks to contrast the left leg of the “U,” an ideal past, with the nadir of the “U,” the misguided present: “it is by loyalty to the primitive simplicity in which [Lincoln] stood that we can become true lovers of the beautiful. At present, our chief danger is in being overwhelmed with cheap and ill-considered luxuries.” Indeed, “Apostolic Simplicity and the Simplicity of Art” is the subject of “Part II” of this series: both stand in ideal contrast to the “cheap luxuries” and mechanical monstrosities of the contemporary world, all of which serve to erect social barriers (the haves versus the have-nots). However, “while luxury makes social barriers the true love of beauty breaks down social barriers and works the will of Christ. It embodies that simplicity for which our fathers contended, that other simplicity which is in the very heart of the working man, and that further simplicity which is the very secret of art.” Thus, Vachel calls for a return to the craftsmanship of our “great grandfathers,” the hand-made, hand-built efforts espoused by William Morris and fellow members of the PRB.

In fact, Vachel bravely attacks the mega-magnificence of many a modern church: “It is a monster. Every window is a blatant outrage. Every spot of color on the wall blasphemes. The architecture is no architecture at all. Yet our brethren are proud of their church. The farmers come in from adjoining regions and bring their families just to see that building. There is not an individual in that whole county who could be convinced that the old church, with its unpretending simplicity and its associations, praised God, and, that as far as the look of this one is concerned, it serves the devil with all its might.” At least this author gives fair warning at the beginning of his effort: “As is the habit of a specialist, I will be dogmatic in the course of these articles, heated, sometimes censorious, but if in the end I have further advanced my cause in its broad issues, I will not ask agreement with special views.”

As for the broad issues, several additional ones come to the fore, especially Vachel’s ideas for vacating the nadir of the present, the “pits,” in order to ascend the right leg of the U to some future ideal. First, we need to concentrate on our small Western towns and endeavor to make them centers of culture. “Be convinced, O village preacher, that there is enough talent in your corner of the world to make a brilliant little town if that talent is brought to bear upon your
community life, and not concealed in tiny cliques or circles of snobs.” Great cultural centers have always been small: Athens, Florence, Nuremberg, Oxford, and Cambridge: “These towns were not monsters of wealth or arrogance. Why should your village try to make itself a little imitation Chicago?” Spirit is everywhere, and more apparent in natural settings than in macadamized monstrosities.

Second, we need to nurture and welcome incoming foreigners. “Any photograph of the old villages of England or France hints at the sort of a thing whose foundations we should endeavor to lay.” Unfortunately, the immigrant is the person most often victimized by the industrial system. He begins at the very bottom, in the coal mines, as it were, and once he climbs up the social ladder “he is just as rude as when he was a working man”: “Our captains of industry in the next generation, I say, are the Poles, the Italians, the Greeks, the Lithuanians now trickling into the Western villages. In their own countries some of these people have achieved the greatest civilization the world ever saw. Here in America the immigrant is taught to love money and nothing else. When he becomes a power through this money he is disloyal even to old Europe which he left and its sense of beauty. The American social system is responsible for this.” The immigrant loses his sense of beauty and becomes a part of mechanized society: “Inside he is a little America, his soul is an office building, his brain is like a telephone switchboard, his nerves and veins are as the telegraph and the railroad. . . . Art is one of the forces which will help to civilize our cold and brilliant industrial machine.” Thus, our “best American culture should be brought to bear upon [the immigrant], for his son will be the leader of [our] town.” Which brings us to Vachel’s next broad issue:

Third, the hope for the future lies with the younger generations, the next leaders of our towns. “Bad men” are chastised, not because of their actions in themselves but because of the influence they have on the young: “you know, O Bad Men, that this little town is full of children who have a right to inherit wholesome institutions of pleasure, noble customs of revelry rather than the debased, holy public splendor rather than poisoned splendor behind closed doors. They have a right to unspotted bodies and white minds, not overtempted, not cynically disillusioned. They have a right to grow up in a place for whose customs they have a thrilling reverence. By allowing crude shows in the theaters and failing to praise the good ones, by allowing hasty carnival decorations instead of those well thought out, by allowing outrageously poor pictures to be hung on the walls of your private houses, by allowing ordinary music in our streets, when good music can be had by prayer and fasting, by taking our pleasures like blind, hungry beasts, instead of men of judgment and culture, we are ruining the next generation, and shaming our town.” We need to build towns children will delight in returning to in adulthood, not “barren, nerve-rasping” places. “There is no reason for this vulgarity except the outside reason, the particular type of civilization under which we live. These people would have fine souls and a desire for beauty, if they had lived in lovely villages from their infancy.” In brief, Uncle Boy suggests to church leaders and their flocks: “Civic Beauty, like Civic Cleanliness, stands next to Civic Godliness.”

“Let the emblem of our town be the peacock, rather than the hog,” the poet advises civic leaders and Disciples ministers: “The peacock is not a very lofty animal; vanity is the only thing that saves him;—by the right sort of vanity he gets along. He knows the value of the right sort of feathers, he succeeds in being harmless, in being a delight to the eye, in pleasing little children, making every park lovelier for his presence. Consider what the hog does under the same circumstances. He is a very useful animal, but must keep his place. He must not be hoisted to the
chief seat in the City Hall, to the chief place in the Chamber of Commerce, to the chief place in the factory. We all know this; but further, he must not be hoisted to a place where his soul dictates our private pleasures, our public taste. As long as we govern the standard of public advertising, the standard of public parks, the standard of public architecture, by the hasty judgments of the greedy market place, we forget there is a hidden desire for loveliness in the most profane citizen. There is a hope for outer and inner beauty in the heart of the most un-Christian man. If you can’t be unselfish or philanthropic or prayerful or a good church member, you can at least be vain. You can at least see that your town is lovely as a peacock. It will be the business of the church to give the peacock a soul. From vanity we can move on to pride, and from pride to wisdom, from wisdom to humility. Let us not be greedy and vulgar any more.”

Anyone, even a civic leader, should be able to visualize the inappropriateness of a hog in “the chief seat in the City Hall.” At the same time, we may wonder if a Disciples minister could envision giving a soul to a peacock. As for the “hope of outer and inner beauty in the heart,” Vachel was about to experience the power of this beauty firsthand.

“If in youth,” Thomas Carlyle’s narrator reflects in Sartor Resartus, “the Universe is majestically unveiling, and everywhere Heaven revealing itself on Earth, nowhere to the Young Man does this Heaven on Earth so immediately reveal itself as in the Young Maiden.” For Vachel Lindsay, “Heaven on Earth” was revealed vividly on April 30, 1909, the day he was reintroduced to a curly-haired brunette, all of eighteen years old and the salutatorian of her Springfield High School class. Nellie Tracy Vieira (a Portuguese surname that Vachel never did learn to spell correctly) and her mother Sarah had been acquaintances of the Lindsay family for at least ten years (Fowler 34-35). In fact, Vachel had met Nellie as early as 1898, on her eighth birthday (October 25). But in the ten years since, Miss Nellie Vieira had positively blossomed, and her dear but older friend saw “Heaven” more clearly than perhaps he ever had.

“As for our young Forlorn,” Carlyle’s speaker continues, “in his secluded way of life, and with his glowing Fantasy, the more fiery that it burnt under cover, as in a reverberating furnace, his feeling towards the Queens of this Earth was, and indeed is, altogether unspeakable. A visible Divinity dwelt in them; to our young Friend all women were holy, were heavenly. . . . That he, our poor Friend, should ever win for himself one of these Gracefuls, . . . how could he hope it. . . .? There was a certain delirious vertigo in the thought.” Three days after their reunion, an already interested if not delirious Vachel Lindsay sent Nellie Vieira a new printing of his God Help Us to Be Brave booklet, now entitled The Heroes of Time, and the related drawing of the clock (see Chapter 19, pp. 23-27). The new booklet had been sponsored by the Springfield YMCA, and was published “In Commemoration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln.” [Note 5]

A little more than a month later, on June 18, Miss Vieira delivered her salutatory address, “Progressive Democracy” (and also recited Charlotte Perkins Stetson Gilman’s satiric poem “Similar Cases”), at her high school graduation, then held at Chatterton’s Opera House in downtown Springfield. Nellie’s picture was published in the Illinois State Register (June 19, p. 7), and at least one member of her audience was smitten. Four days after the speech, Vachel enthused: “Your voice is still in my ears, your face is still before me” (Fowler 36). And he enclosed a new poem: “Written for a Musician”: “Hungry for music with a desperate hunger / I walked abroad, I threaded through the town.” At last this hungry searcher discovered the music, but “in some unexpected place / With quivering lips, and gleaming moonlit face” (see Poetry
Thomas Carlyle also reflects on the subject of music and a young man in love: “Thus did soft melodies flow through his heart; tones of an infinite gratitude; sweetest intimations that he also was a man, that for him also unutterable joys had been provided. . . . As from Aeolian Harps in the breath of dawn, as from Memnon’s Statue struck by the rosy finger of Aurora, unearthly music was around him, and lapped him into untried balmy rest. . . . His whole heart and soul and life were hers” (“Romance,” Sartor Resartus, Book II, v). Suddenly, then, this 1909 summer, music and harmony commanded new importance in Uncle Boy’s imaginative life.

At Hiram, and directly before and after, Vachel’s “inspiration girls” had been about his own age (Bessie Brinkerhoff, Adaline Mugrage, and Ruth Wheeler, for examples). Once back in Springfield, in summer, 1908, the mature Rachel Hiller attracted his attentiveness. With Nellie Vieira, Vachel fell head over heels for a much younger girl, eleven years younger, to be exact. Nellie would not be the last young girl to command Vachel’s heart, but she was the first; and the romance clearly manifests the paradoxical nature of Uncle Boy. He began the courtship not only with a poem (“Written for a Musician”) but also with the gift of books, and not just any books. The two volumes entitled St. Luke and St. Paul from The Modern Reader’s Bible (New York, 1906) are the books Nellie’s suitor used in teaching his New York City Bible class (see Chapter 19, p. 10). Along with the Bible volumes, paradoxically, Nellie received Edward FitzGerald’s translation of The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam, in part so that she could realize “The Bird of Time has but a little way / To flutter— and the Bird is on the Wing.”

“Say your prayers, young girl,” Uncle Boy admonished, “say them often and find much joy in them, for the effectual fervent prayer of the righteous maiden availeth much [Cf. James 5:16]. Look at the stars in the evening, and be solemn; look at the roses by day, and thank God for them, and always be good to your family, and thus may your day pass by till we meet again and discuss the paradoxes of the universe.” As for the roses, Nellie likely was supposed to consider with poet Omar: “Each Morn a thousand Roses brings, you say; / Yes, but where leaves the Rose of Yesterday?” Vachel was writing late at night, Tuesday, June 22. He had an engagement the next Wednesday evening, likely a talk at the Ridgely Mission, but he was intent on seeing Miss Nellie Vieira as soon as possible: “I have no engagement Thursday afternoon, 4:30, and unless you say no twice I shall come.” He even goes so far as to suggest the “clothing” she needs to have on: “. . . wear any dress you please, but be sure to have your watch, and large bows on your slippers. Still more indispensable to me are your black wig, your shadowy smile and your excellent and sensible eyes. Do not omit to wear these, and I will entertain you with my best discourse . . .” (Fowler 36).

Two days later (June 24), Nellie received a drawing, on which was written: “This is, to my mind, the best piece of pen and ink work I have ever done.” An attached note attempts to explain that ultimate truth, for the artist, exists primarily in his work. Unfortunately, this particular artist chose to express his thought with hyperbole: “This picture is hard to give up. Others can give you kindness and devotion. I can only give you art. Whenever you look at this picture resolve to be a good girl, mind your parents, keep your face washed, comb your hair, say your prayers, peel the potatoes and avoid the society of artists and such. Believe none of us. There is no truth in any of us, except when we speak of pictures. Be sure this picture was hard to give up, but heartily given at last” (Fowler 39-40). Uncle Boy could not know this June, but these words would be taken literally—and would come back to cause great distress the following January, when Nellie decided to end her artist-lover’s courtship (see Fowler 323-324).
Distress for Vachel, however, did not have to wait until January 1910. Nellie had agreed to visit cousins in Jacksonville, Illinois, thirty-five miles to the west of Springfield; and she left her newly ardent admirer behind. In accord with Carlyle’s narrative, Vachel had risen “into the highest regions of the Empyrean, by a natural parabolic track”; but with Nellie’s absence he rapidly “returned thence in a quick perpendicular one.” To be plain, Nellie’s suitor was depressed for much of July and early August: “I was only going to say if you come back by next Friday I shall not hunt up any other young lady between whiles, though starving for good company. Last night before the Sermon I wished I was dead, dead as a dead man in his coffin under the graveyard mud, but the speech warmed me up and I was decently happy till this morning, and I have been wishing I was dead again all day. . . . I haven’t even straightened up my room for three months. Here on the table in a pile of junk are twenty undeveloped memorandums, unanswered letters, and all over the floor, Lord what a clutter. I wish I was dead again. Don’t suppose its because you are in Jacksonville. Lay not that flattering unction to your soul [cf. Hamlet, III, iv, 144-145]. . . . Gosh this is a cheerful letter.” [Note 6]

The “cheerful letter” then continues in its morbid way, with a despondent Uncle Boy introducing a “threat” he would use for the rest of his life—whatever he felt depressed. Nellie’s summer absence, after all, foreshadowed September, when she planned to leave home for college. “I feel today more as though I would leave town next fall than ever before,” her sad admirer muses: “They must really clamor for me here if they want me to stay. The road makes one lame, and a fellow gets rained on, and dirty, but he is happy at least two thirds of the day and all the time he is asleep. In the town one is always haunted by a sense of one’s own laziness and the out-of-joinness of things [cf. Hamlet, I, v, 189-190], or else the unappeasable hunger for woman, night and day, which never troubles one on the road, thank the Lord. . . . This old world wants none of my best art, my best poetry, my best thinking, it only wants third rate routine chores which I have not the manhood to perform and the road is the only solace. Then one walks away from the world, and walks into Paradise. Every morning is a brilliant surprise. Every child is a cherub” (“July 19,” Fowler 42-43). Mature Vachel Lindsay may have behaved avuncular at times, but he was seldom far removed from boyish whimsy. Most children, at some point in their youthful lives, threaten to run away from home.

The one pleasure Nellie’s disconsolate suitor did experience during June and July was an occasional sermon or lecture, not only for the Anti-Saloon League but also for the Lavinia Beach Mission. As during the previous winter, several 1908 YMCA lectures were repeated, this time during outdoor lemonade “socials.” On July 16, 1909, the Illinois State Register headlined: “LINDSAY HAS BIG AUDIENCE. Two Hundred Foreigners Hear Address on ‘The Irish’ at Ridgely Mission—Free Lemonade.” Speaking the night before (Thursday, July 15), Vachel was “in the main, complimentary to the people of that nationality,” according to the reporter, who announced that the next lecture (July 22) would be on “the Germans” (p. 11). Indeed, Uncle Boy wrote to Nellie directly after this second lecture: “I talked most an hour on the Germans, while Miss McKay and company passed lemonade. I enjoyed hearing myself holler tonight,” and he was doubly pleased that several church friends had stayed behind to listen to his talk. In his words: “I was flattered” (Fowler 63).

The final event in the mission series (July 29) was a repeat of the lecture on the Ghetto Jews, and the Register reporter has left us an interesting picture of what Vachel’s June-July Thursday nights entailed:
LAST LEMONADE TREAT IN RIDGELY
N. V. Lindsay Addresses Large Audience at Lavinia Beach Mission Last Night—Compliments the Jews in His Talk

Under the able management of Miss Catharine McKay these out-of-door affairs around neat little tables have been the novelty of the summer for that section of the city which lies near the fair grounds. Last evening Miss Esther Skoog gave a rousing piano concert that sounded through the open windows and drew Slav and Lithuanian families from all the regions round till the tables in the yard were filled, and Miss McKay’s able waiters served them lemonade till they were cool and reconciled to the one hour speech with posters by N. V. Lindsay on the Jews. Mr. Lindsay took occasion to touch upon the vitality of the Jews under the hard conditions of the Ghetto, which was the result of the well-regulated family life brought about by the law of Moses and the temperance and moderation of that people in the matter of strong drink. The lecturer quoted much from Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the prophets on the woes and sins of intemperance, then brought the matter directly to bear upon what he declared was the economic waste of the many saloons in Ridgely, when the community needed the money, the energy and the buildings for better purposes. (p. 5)  [Note 7]

Sermons and talks at Ridgely, at the YMCA, and at local churches, however, were not Uncle Boy’s only expressive outlets this summer, 1909. In mid-July Springfield awoke one morning to discover an alternative newspaper.

The preface to War Bulletin Number One (see p. 39 below), “Why a War Bulletin?,” was written directly after a defiant Uncle Boy had read Carlyle’s “Everlasting Nay” aloud with Nellie Vieira, sometime before she left Springfield for her Jacksonville visit (see Fowler 41, and Prose 83-122). The title alludes to the magazine of the Salvation Army, The War Cry, first published in December 1879 by General William Booth. The first article on the first page of The War Cry begins: “Why a weekly War Cry? Because the Salvation Army means more war.” Vachel’s elaboration reads: “The things that go into the War Bulletin please me only. To the Devil with you, average reader. To Gehenna with your stupidity, your bigotry, your conservatism, your cheapness and your impatience! In each new bulletin the war shall go faster and further. War! War! War!” The price of the Salvation Army publication, in 1909, was five cents a copy, just what Vachel attempted to charge for his “war cry.” (The daily Springfield newspapers, the Register and the Journal, charged three cents per copy, thirteen cents per week.) Defiantly, War Bulletin One includes the rejected story, “The Golden-Faced People”; but at five cents a copy, sales were not brisk. Consequently, beginning with Number Two (August 4, 1909), the author announced that the Bulletins were complimentary handouts: “PRICE – Henceforth the Bulletins are as free as bread and butter in a hospitable house. He who helps to pass the fire of the Bulletins from mind to mind, has done the greatest Favor possible to do for the publisher hereof. Writers and speakers, please steal my ideas.”

War Bulletin Number Two, as we can see below, opens with an explanation of the preface to Number One, omitting any reference to Nellie Vieira but citing the passage in Sartor Resartus that inspired Uncle Boy’s rebellion. Meanwhile, the body of the Bulletin is the story of the
overnight debacle in Morristown, New Jersey (see Chapter 20, pp. 2-4), the story designed to expose the hypocrisies of organized Christianity. Both bulletins One and Two were freely distributed in Springfield, especially at the Lavinia Beach Mission (see Fowler 60). And one close friend, music teacher Chester Ide, was not afraid to express his displeasure, as Vachel related to Nellie: “Chester Ide had been clamoring for me to come to see him over the telephone, he being especially happy since his sick wife and boy are better, so I arrived there at 9:45 and
stayed an hour and Chester gave me some poetry of his to rewrite so he could set it to music—
(which was the occasion of his sending for me at that uncanny hour,) and he sat around there in
his night drawers and fed me on crackers, deviled eggs and milk and criticized my story of the
Golden-faced people.” Was Uncle Boy annoyed? Hardly, as his words to Nellie reveal: “I want
you to criticize it too and see how your roast compares with his” (July 22, 1909, Fowler 63).

At last, in late July, Nellie returned to Springfield and to her impassioned suitor. The
informative letters stop for a short time, and there can be no doubt that Nellie Tracy Vieira saw a
great deal of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. One night, while the two were walking home from
Springfield’s Washington Park, Uncle Boy screwed his “courage to the sticking-place” and
planted an uninvited kiss on the lips of his beloved (Fowler 301, 307). It may have been his
temporary undoing, as August 9, an obviously annoyed girl received, as it were, a dear Nellie
letter, almost certainly written by a rejected, dejected suitor: “Excellent and honorable lady, as I
said over the telephone, I am not coming to see you again, if I can stay away. It may be for years,
it may be forever, it may be for a day. But this is a Goodby—long or short. . . . Be a good girl,
find wisdom, of which you know nothing as yet, find supreme beauty, of which you know
nothing as yet, and say your prayers like the good Christian that you are, and so farewell, good
kind and honest maiden. . . . Very sincerely, Nicholas Vachel Lindsay” (Fowler 69-70).

Three weeks afterward, Springfield’s alternative newspaper reappeared; and this third
edition reveals how Dr. Lindsay’s unconventional son REALLY felt when he declared war on
stupidity, bigotry, conservatism, cheapness, and impatience. War Bulletin Number Three opens
boldly with “The Creed of a Beggar,” and includes (on page two) the even bolder “Sermon for
Strangers”: “Be warned, one dollar in your pocket makes you a rich man, and it is God’s truth,
and no mild saying, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich
man to enter the kingdom of God” (see Prose 103-113). Number Three also manifests Vachel’s
all-embracing ecumenism, as it includes praise not only for evangelical Christians but also for
Unitarians, Christian Scientists, Franciscans, and Buddhists (“It May Be Brother”). And
although the author admits condescension toward “people of wealth, especially if they have used
their leisure to acquire culture, or sweet religious merit,” he also urges young people not to waste
their “precious youth in industry. . . . America is too rich already.” Indeed, for all the “Sons of
the Giant Spider Mammon,” Vachel gives fair warning: “You are subscribers to the business
axioms that make this a Land of Death. If any man has a dollar in his pocket let him throw it
away, lest it transform him into spiritual garbage” (Prose 106).

Arguably, though, the most rebellious feature of War Bulletin Number Three is manifest
in “The Flower of the Amaranth” and “The Boats of the Prophets,” two stories which hearken
back to Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp?—the self-made book of prose, poetry, and drawings that
Uncle Boy attempted to peddle unsuccessfully to New York City publishers (see Chapter 14). The
“Boats of the Prophets” especially manifests the author’s belief that the Millennium—the
ultimate, future ideal illustrated by the right-hand leg of the U—lies before us. When the “young
man” in the story asks the old man about the “purple mist,” the explanation guides all eyes from
present misery to future bliss: “‘It is the Blood of the Archangels, who have gone into all the
universe to preach the gospel to every star. At this moment they hang upon crosses in the
uttermost planets of the uttermost suns for the sins of the Universe. They are forsaken of God as
was Christ their elder brother. By the winds of mystery, by trans-substantiation, their blood
enters the wine jars of the Prophets, who are their proclaimers. We who see the mist should
understand that by this redeeming blood shall come the New Earth, the New Heaven, the New Universe” (Prose 113, emphasis added).

As prelude to “The Boats of the Prophets,” Vachel includes “An Exhortation,” an admission and a warning concerning the visions that he has experienced. To understand his point of view, so to speak, we need to perceive the physical world as the shadow or clothing of the spiritual world. The one without the other, the physical world without the spiritual world, is
like a corpse on display in a funeral parlor. The corpse resembles the person we once knew, but something has changed, something vital: the REAL person has left the scene, the spirit/soul has departed. All that is left is the physical body, the cadaver. “Having had an invisible world made visible to me,” Vachel advises, “I cannot but counsel others to seek for the like. Some such experience awaits you, reader, as is related in the story of ‘The Boats and the Prophets.’ The meaning, the actors, the scenery will differ, will contradict mine, but the splendor awaits. Brother, for your own soul’s sake, open your eyes and rebuild for yourself a kingdom of God on earth, a house not made with hands” (Prose 109: emphasis added).

And although Vachel has no doubt that his visions are meaningful, he warns that we should not be slaves to eidetic perceptions: “Do not consider the raw pictures fresh from the sky infallible guides for yourself or others. Do not get drunk upon them, the consolations of an hour, parables of a day, but rigidly test them by experience, by the traditions of the church Universal and the dreams of all the reformers who are bringing down the angels to men” (Prose 110). On a less literary note, Uncle Boy would beg Nellie Vieira (who would soon make peace with her suitor, as we shall see) to accept him as a normal man, in spite of his visions: “I fear that you will take my claims to ‘seeing visions’ either too religiously, or else shrink from them. Now, they are important as a good line of poetry ringing through my head, when they come; they are just as inspired and no more so, good raw material for art, to be trimmed and pruned in my colder, more critical moments. I do not want you to think I am either a fanatic or yet just a cold blooded artizan” (Fowler 129). In the “Explanation of the Map of the Universe” (written about this time), we have already observed that Vachel admitted to having visions but that he considered them “metaphors of the day, consolations of the hour”; and he was “determined to make them the servants, not the masters of [his] religious life” (see Chapter 14, p. 5).

Curiously, life presented another kind of vision to Vachel Lindsay in mid-August, 1909. One stormy Sunday evening, likely the 15th (less than one week after the “Dear Nellie” letter), Uncle Boy had had enough separation. He could “stay away” from winsome Miss Vieira no longer. The afternoon had been spent with an interesting visitor from Indianapolis: George Bicknell, the adventuresome editor of The Bridgemen’s Magazine, published monthly by the International Association of Bridge and Structural Iron Workers. Uncle Boy had been sending out privately printed materials since the winter, 1908-1909, seeking to find recognition from “the elect,” “the saving remnant,” the few intellectuals across the country whose work and opinions REALLY mattered. One of these broadsides, perhaps “I Heard Immanuel Singing,” had found its way to Bicknell, who was enthused enough to make a pilgrimage to Springfield, Illinois. Here is what happened in his own words:

A few summers ago I went as a guest one beautiful Sabbath day in August to the home of my friend Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. Lindsay’s home is next door to the Governor’s mansion in Springfield, Illinois. When we sat down to the dinner table Lindsay with a wave of the hand, drew our attention to the beautiful flower garden at the rear of this Governor’s mansion, and said: “Behold this feast that has been prepared for my eyes. Governors come and Governors go—but I stay on forever.”

That was a great day for me, for I came to know one better whom I predicted at the time was destined to exert a vast influence on the art, letters, and philosophy of his own time; and I find that in less than five year since that day that my predictions are well on the way to prophecy, for the voice of Lindsay is in many respects a new voice—a voice that is beginning to be heard. I found Lindsay possessed a vast ego—not egotism—for he
is as democratic and unpretentious in his thinking and habits and mode of living as the humblest—a thorough democrat, thoroughly alive to the ideals of a true democracy. This ego is the ego of one who feels that he has a true mission to perform, and is thoroughly convinced that he is going to perform this mission—not in a day nor a year—for said he: “If in the span of my existence I begin only to see some of these ideals take root in the hearts of the people, then I will be satisfied.” (Bicknell 800-801)

The topic of conversation, according to Bicknell, was “The New Localism,” and he cites extensively from Vachel’s essay (which was published in April 1912: see “Works Cited”).

In any event, the beautiful August day turned stormy, as sometimes happens in August in Springfield, Illinois; and the dramatic outer weather matched the dramatic inner weather consuming Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. After enjoying an afternoon of adulation, Uncle Boy had to share his bliss with an admirer, preferably a woman, preferably a young attractive woman; and he knew where to find her. Fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be, Nellie Tracy Vieira was an accepting and appreciative audience, at least for the time being. The Lindsay-Vieira courtship resumed; and before Nellie departed for college in Evanston, her suitor found somehow, somewhere, enough damnable dollars to purchase a small gold locket—with space for two pictures inside. On the cover, he paid to have engraved: “Gloria a Deus Nos Alturas,” the words above the choir recess of Nellie’s Fourth Presbyterian Church, once known as the Portuguese Presbyterian. The words are the Portuguese version of “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14). Anyway, in mid-September 1909, Nellie departed Springfield for Northwestern University’s Cumnock School of Oratory; and the United States Postal Service was inundated with a barrage of letters, all addressed to “Miss Nellie Tracy Vierra^, 2006 Sherman Ave., Evanston, Illinois.” Uncle Boy had work to do: he felt compelled to educate a young girl, a “child” (whose name he could not spell correctly), so that she would be transformed into a useful, worthy helpmate, perhaps even a wife. The concept of a new heaven on earth, an exciting new Utopia, would dominate his thinking for the next six months (see Fowler 101, 153).

5

Actually, the nurturing of youthful Miss Vieira had begun in late July 1909, when Uncle Boy presented her with his St. Luke and St. Paul volumes. On blank pages in both volumes, he transcribed what he termed a “secular reading-course,” although the initial section is entitled “For Religious^ Reading.” The first item in this de facto syllabus is Charles Rann Kennedy’s drama, The Servant in the House (1908), in which the character Manson (the butler) is thinly disguised as the humble but wise Jesus of Nazareth. (In the published version of the work, online at Google Books, Manson [played by Walter Hampton onstage] is depicted in accord with the popular concept of a young, bearded Jesus.) Kennedy’s work is followed in the list by Paul Sabatier’s Life of St. Francis of Assisi, Tolstoy’s Resurrection and My Religion, Chesterton’s Heretics and Orthodoxy, Newman’s Apologia Pro Vita Sua, Matthew Arnold’s “Sweetness and Light” and “Hebraism and Hellenism,” Edwin Arnold’s The Light of Asia, Allan Menzies’ History of Religion, and finally, in the teacher’s own words, the “Sacred Books of the East—(Follow Menzies^ Suggestions).”

After her religious reading, Nellie is to continue with treatises “For Good Citizenship,” a lengthy inventory of writings from the pens of H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, Hermann Sudermann, Arthur Wing Pinero, John Ruskin, and Alexander Irvine. For “Artistic Joy,” she is to consult several periodicals (The Craftsman Magazine and The International
Studio), William J. Locke’s *The Beloved Vagabond*, William Morris’s *Hopes and Fears for Art*, Whistler’s *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*, A. D. F. Hamlin’s *A Text-Book of the History of Architecture* (one of the sources Vachel used for his New York City art lectures), Marquand and Frothingham’s *A Text-Book of the History of Sculpture*, and John Charles Van Dyke’s *A Text-Book of the History of Painting and Art for Art’s Sake*. “For that Happiness Called Poetry,” Nellie is advised to read the popular works of Christina and Dante Rossetti, Robert and Elizabeth Browning, Coleridge, Keats, Whitman, Byron, Swinburne, Tennyson, and Poe. “For that Happiness Called Novel-Reading,” Uncle Boy advises Dickens, George Ade, O. Henry, Thackeray, Howells, Twain, Meredith, Hardy, Anthony Hope [Hawkins], and several stories of Poe. “If you follow your heart through this garden of books I have tried to plant for you, no doubt you will find some uncomfortable thorn-bushes, but if you read these, you will be reading what has interested me and my serious friends the most, the last few years,” cultivator Vachel concludes. “If you like none of the rest, I know you will like the fiction…” (Fowler 54-59).

When Nellie at last arrived in Evanston, Uncle Boy’s educational crusade commenced in earnest. On October 22, he opened an architectural series with a short lecture on the Temple of Horus at Edfou [Edfu], Egypt, the same way he opened his art lectures in New York City. “I want you to look at the picture of the temple of Edfou till you can see it in your sleep. It 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 anyone 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” (Fowler 204-205).

Vachel does give credit to Coleridge, “the first wizard in English literature,” especially “that divine incantation Kublai Kahn”; but Coleridge’s work pales when compared to the Egyptian *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. I shall send you about seven or eight other pictures, each one representing one whole vast phase of history, and if you learn to picture them in order, even if you forget all dates, you will have a picture of History forevermore, on which you can hang everything you have ever studied. You will be surprised how by comparing picture and picture, they will take on life, they are so little alike, so intensely individual. The Egyptian Religion must

---

A.D.F. Hamlin, Edfou. Front of Hypostyle Hall. Figure 14.
have been utterly unlike any other, the Architecture that records it being so different. End of first lesson.” In sum, Nellie’s teacher emphasized the visual nature of history and architecture, especially how religious buildings are the “clothing” of a religion and a culture. His suggestion that the student “learn to picture” significant cultural buildings in temporal, sequential order even hints at his future interest in the value and art of moving pictures.

A few days after the Egypt lecture, Nellie received a second lesson, this one on the Parthenon (October 25). “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. . . . 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” (Fowler 217: emphasis added). Moreover, to conclude the Greek architectural lecture, Uncle Boy returned to his imagination theme: “But most of all 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).

Visualizing the beauty and the openness of the Parthenon, however, is not the only Greek quality that Uncle Boy attempted to teach. The Vieira letters help us to understand that, when Vachel commenced preaching his “Gospel of Beauty,” the esthetic theme stemmed largely from his understanding of the Greeks. On September 27, for example, his Evanston disciple was warned: “Now my good Nellie—you shall have a sermon. I am writing a good many letters—yet I am afraid they repeat themselves a deal. . . . Open your heart to the Beauty of the world. Study every passing face till a beautiful one goes by, and cherish that one in your memory. Whenever your teachers give you any principle that leads to the highest beauty, the old Greek Soul, lay hold upon it, cherish it, it is the communion-bread of all nations. There is in the Chicago Art Institute, I suppose—a battered cast of the Venus of Milo—certainly there is the Winged Victory of Samothrace. Let her spread her wings in your heaven.”

A.D.F. Hamlin, Athens. Ruins of the Parthenon, Figure 34.
To envision “the old Greek Soul,” the preacher-teacher continues, we need more than physical eyes: we need imaginative vision, we need to view the world as a transcendentalist: “Morning, and Evening and Noon, by the Lake at Evanston there is a lesser Beauty and a Greater Beauty to be seen. Remember the good is the enemy of the best, and for your soul I want the best. To every Evanston student the lake is a beautiful and uplifting scene—but I want you to look upon it with divine eyes, I want you to be so delicately attuned that a certain spiritual glimmering and glowing cannot escape your eyes. That you will see in the leaves and the waves the wrists and the hands of the angels—as it were, an overwhelming wilderness of divinity.” Nellie is to use her imaginative eyes in order to discern something more than blue, white-capped waves; she is to see the mystical “Witch of Lake Michigan” (*Poetry* 56-57). The present time, moreover, is the propitious time for this student. It is the time of her youth: “Now you are sheltered, now your soul can be laid bare without rude winds driving upon it, you can brood, and become in attune with the infinite God, with a spiritual luxury of which you have never dreamed. Remember now thy Creator, in the days of thy youth [Ecclesiastes 12:1]. Glory to God in the Highest” (Fowler 87-88).

The next day Nellie received a follow-up letter (dated September 28), another letter prompting her to expand perception beyond the physical eyes (and ears): “Diligently search till you discover the most advanced musicians among the girls who not only play music, but talk music, and train your ears if you cannot your hands. I think it is a hundred times better to be a good appreciator than a good performer—for the average girl, with normal ideals. One art is enough to keep one busy, as I know, but one should be able to reach the highest point of appreciation in several others. I have known a few girls of that sort, who equally understood the supreme beauty in Music, Sculpture, Poetry, Decorative Design, Architecture, General Literature and the Drama. And one was a trained decorative designer, the other a painter. To the one art they practiced, they added all these others they appreciated, merely by finding out those of their friends who understood, and absorbing through them. Striving for supreme beauty in your own art, you will understand by analogy and a thousand parallels the things they hope for in their own. . . . And do search for the creative people, if you can find them, people who compose music, who do not merely execute.”

In the end, though, Uncle Boy the artist focuses on the visionary. Student Nellie is urged to visit the Chicago Art Institute on a “regular” basis: “I am so anxious that your dream of that Supreme Beauty, the Creative God, who dwells in man, shall be fully rounded and noble. You must know how the Greek felt in his highest hour, and brood long upon your favorite statue. The plaster cast requires a great deal of imagination to restore it to marble, your eye must be a flame of fire, to get past the chalkiness and the coldness, to the original Greek form.” And should she need a guide, Uncle Boy has one in mind: “. . . in Chicago I laid a foundation of familiarity with good pictures and sculpture and decoration that I merely expanded in New York, and Europe. Some of my folks found me a pretty good guide in the Lourve^ the first morning I was there. Its^ all in living in the levels of supreme beauty. It isn’t knowing this man’s name, and that school. . . . My dear child, you must give yourself time, you must luxuriate, you must dwell long upon things, going over and over them with love, or you can never understand them” (Fowler 91-92).

Greek beauty, however, is not visible merely in casts and statues. Less than one month after the above letters (October 20), Nellie is urged to contemplate one of the great dancers of the age: “After you have seen Isadora Duncan you will get your soul into that glorious drunkenness and inspired fever in which the Greek casts of the Art Institute can be enjoyed. One
must get under the plaster and see them all as Isadora Duncans as it were, folks from a civilization where Beauty was the only fashion, where Beauty reigned as machinery reigns today. I hope you get something supremely spiritual from Isadora, that perfectly harmonized Body and Soul, which the world has not seen except in rare personalities like hers, since Pericles died. Since [his] time our bodies have been cruder and more animal, our souls more restlessly aspiring, and body has been like a chain on the Ankel^ of the Soul. She brings the soul back again and pours it into a crystal vessel level full—and so the Greek always appears. The soul is greater than any body on earth now, but we so seldom see it, that even a perfect body and a perfect dancer help us to understand it. . . . After you have seen Isadora you will better understand Keats^ Ode to a Grecian Urn and his Ode to Psyche, and his sonnet of Homer. . . . [Isadora] is a Greek—as solitary a phenomenon^ as Keats.”

For further guidance, Uncle Boy asks his chosen student to look at three poems newly published in War Bulletin Number Four, his first collection of poems and drawings, privately printed under the title The Tramp’s Excuse and Other Poems (September 1909). “I tried to write out my notion of Greek form in the poems Revelry, In Heaven and The Beggars^ Vigil [Poetry 12-14, 16-17]. I say to myself—in these three poems the words did not come in jerks, they were not restless, the sounds are all round and noble, one could read them to a German who does not understand English and he would say the metre^ and syllables are simple and serene. And I think I have something of the same temperateness in the thought as well—though the subject of the first two is intense friendship, and the last intense passion. After you have seen Isadora, I will count it a great favor if you will look at my three poems, and see if she does not seem to dance again. Or if you have time, read them before—and maybe it will help me in your eyes. I am so glad she comes your way. Tell me if she is an agreeable subject for lectures” (Fowler 192-193: emphasis added).

Meanwhile, before we consider War Bulletin Number Four, we need to note that Uncle Boy’s architecture “course” did not end with the Greeks. On October 26, Nellie would read about the Pantheon and Roman architecture in general: “There was something practical and everyday in all the Roman Structures, and such sense of beauty as they had was a dilution of Greek feeling.” After outlining the main features of the Romans, Nellie’s avuncular guide admonishes: “Let the Pantheon then, stand in your imagination of all these things. See if the stones do not to your fancy, breathe a different spirit. Let it stand third, in the corridors^ of time, and compare and compare and compare, with the culture of the Parthenon or the Mystery of Edfou.” He also indicates how architectural concepts lie behind several stanzas of The Heroes of Time (which was finally published in Collected Poems as “Litany of the Heroes”):

When I wrote

Would that the Brave Rameses, King of Time
Were Throned\(^\dagger\) in your souls, to raise for you
Vast immemorial dreams dark Egypt knew
Filling these barren days with mystery, etc. [Cf. Poetry 436, ll. 9-12]

I had in mind such structures as Karnak and Edfou, and what they stood for. When I wrote

Would that the Joy of Living came today
Even as sculptured on Athena’s Shrine
In Sunny conclave of Serene design
Maidens and men, procession, flute and feast, etc. [Cf. ll. 41-44]

I was trying to rebuild the Parthenon in words, especially the frieze, which you have so often seen in reproduction. You will find all the Parthenon Sculptures reproduced in the Art Institute.

When I wrote in my verse on Caesar, as the typical Roman:

God help us build the world, like Master-men [Cf. l. 63]

I had many things in mind, among them the Spirit of Roman architecture, as illustrated in the Pantheon for instance.

So you begin to see why I hold this list of buildings so dear. It is the panorama\(^\dagger\) behind my longest History-poem, and it is the origin in a great measure of the ideas of that poem. (Fowler 221-222)

Byzantine architecture, according to Vachel, stands fourth “in the corridors of time”; and Nellie’s Byzantine lecture reached Evanston in a letter dated “October 30” (Fowler 234-236). The featured structure is the Hagia Sophia with “its decorative mosaics”: “The interior of the Chicago Public Library is a modern phase of this sort of a thing. And the front of St. Marks\(^\dagger\) Venice is a magnificent exterior, of Byzantine influence. Indeed the quality of Splendor that Venice posessed\(^\dagger\) and her supreme sense of color was developed by trading with the Eastern civilizations through the dark ages.”

Two days later (November 1), Uncle Boy mailed a lecture on “Mohammedanism,” with an important introduction: “With one or two exceptions the History of Architecture is the History of Religion\(^\dagger\). Practically every new temple I send you records a new kind of devotion.” In brief, architecture is the physical manifestation, the expression, the “clothing” of a religion. And the grandest garment of Mohammedanism, the Taj Mahal, is the subject of Nellie’s new lecture. Scottish-English Uncle Boy expends extra effort in this lecture because, as he explains to his Portuguese girlfriend, “You may look upon the Koran and the Alhambra and the Taj Mahal and the Arabian Nights as in a fashion representing your ancestors, just as the Nibelungenleid and Beowulf and Romanesque (coming tomorrow) represent mine.” As for Nellie’s ancestors, “the Arabs excelled in design, abstract decoration, hence the word arabesque. The proportions of the Taj Mahal are exquisite, yet on the general plan of all mosques, with four minarets, and the pointed doors enclosed in parallelograms. Compared with all other architectures before or after, it is as distinctive as the Arab himself, or the Koran. It is the record of Semetic\(^\dagger\) nerves trembling with the special Arabic type of religious\(^\dagger\) ecstasy\(^\dagger\). I think you now have seen enough religious\(^\dagger\) buildings to understand the second article in my creed. It comes mainly from studying the Roman versus the Byzantine, the Byzantine versus the Mohammedan, etc. ‘I am convinced that the great Religions\(^\dagger\): Christianity, Judaism, Mohammedanism, Confucianism are absolutely
24 different from one another in core and essence though God made them all’ [see page 16 above]. To change it to the examples we have studied: I am convinced that the Religions of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Greek Christianity, and Mohammedanism are absolutely different from one another in core and essence, though God made them all‖ (Fowler 240-241).

The conclusion of the Taj Mahal lecture is the vital part of the discourse. It helps to explain Uncle Boy’s point of view, not only in these architectural lessons but also in the 1908 YMCA lectures delivered in the aftermath of the race riot: “We can trace everything in the mosque to Something in the Koran, and Everything in the Koran to the natural physical Arab unspoiled, riding his camel across the desert. Whatever in that Arab is absolutely different from any other nationality is the valuable part of him, the essence, the thing that is his excuse for being, the thing in which the Great Creator took special pleasure saying ‘now I have made a new kind of a man.’ And of course a new Kind of a man would have a new kind of religion, a new way of reaching into the dark to find the unseen. This would be complicated with all the little human weaknesses of the Arab, the whims and appetites which seem to divert our whimsical Creator as much as the aspirations with which he endows us. He takes as much pains to make the Arab fanatical and intolerant as to make him hospitable, to make him love stories as to make him love algebra, to make him sensual as to make him aspiring. Hence the Scimitar, the Arabian Nights, the Arabesque design, Polygamy, Monotheism, and the Taj Mahal. Renan has aptly said ‘The desert is monotheistic’” (Fowler 241). [Note 8]
The closing lectures in Nellie’s architecture course continue with the Romanesque, where
the model structures are the famed leaning tower of Pisa and its associated buildings. “The thing
essentially Romanesque is the church—a development of the Roman Basilica—with one story
at the sides and two stories at the center. . . . It furnishes the models for many protestant
Churches today, because great effects were secured by limited means. Stone could not be carried
far, work was interrupted by warfare, and the whole savage story is carved in the grotesque
animals that squirm from under the pillars, and crawl through the decorations. . . . Its greatest
significance is as a beginning. The Gothic, coming next, grew out of it,” as did “the Norman
Conquest, and such like things. It means Gregory the Seventh—the greatest Pope of History—
1015-1085, whose disciplined Spiritual Army was the one permanent, unifying and civilized
force. It was his army of the Soul, moving across Europe that reared the Romanesque, and
established the Papacy in its definitive form and organization. Read him up some time. He is
the Pope worth while” (“November 3,” Fowler 247-250).

The next day (the letter is dated “November 4”) Uncle Boy focused on the Gothic and
relevant cathedrals, such as Notre Dame de Paris: “Every large town of Christendom had one and
broke its back for generations building it—till the Rennsance swept in. Then the term Gothic
was invented as a term of abuse. Men forgot cathedrals were beautiful, and ceased working on
them (till lately).” As for the meaning of the Gothic, the teacher defers to John Ruskin’s “The
Nature of Gothic” from the second volume of The Stones of Venice (1853), an essay he hopes to
read aloud with his student alongside. However, since Ruskin does not deal extensively with
structural principles, Vachel expends some energy on the architectural details of his subject.
Gothic “is the most elaborate use of stone that ever went into building—I mean the most
elaborate skeleton-use, structural use. The pointed arch is the unit,” along with “flying
buttresses.” The principle for understanding the cathedral, though, is the same principle
necessary for understanding the significance of any religious building: “The [Gothic] system was
capable of infinite variety, and singularly adapted to the expression of Christian Ideals.” Once
again, the student-disciple is urged to see the spirit which inspired the architecture, the soul
behind the physical expression, the genius behind the “clothing.”

Finally, on November 8, Uncle Boy indicated that he was near the end of his formative
lectures: “My next letter I will send you an example of Rennsance Architecture, and our
lessons will be done. It does not occur to me now that there is anything else I want you to
acquire outside of what you will naturally absorb in Evanston. I doubt if I will write to you so
often after Christmas. I may be busier of evenings. And you sort of know my mind in a way
now. I have surrounded you with little reminders, and now the whole question is how deep they
will go in.” Perhaps, though, at Nellie’s request (she was a very busy student), the Renaissance
lecture did not follow. In fact, the next letter (November 9) announces: “Your lessons in
Architecture are now over till we meet again. I have copied out of my lecture-note book the
items I never precisely remember, and therefore have to have in the note-book, and presume you
will be glad to have noted down. 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).
War Bulletin Number Four, as already noted, is very unlike numbers One, Two, Three, and Five, at least in appearance. The likeness—and the belligerency—is echoed in the fact that many included poems had been rejected by commercial publishers. Even the one exception, “The Queen of Bubbles,” had been published without the related drawing (see Chapter 13). Hand-tied, the booklet is about the size of a stenographer’s notepad and contains more than seventy poems and drawings, along with a prose “Preface” and “Explanation of the Map of the Universe” (see Poetry 1-68, 927-929). Predictably, many of the works relate to tramping, with the “excuse” delineated in the title poem. Sticking to one’s home, surrounded by one’s family and friends, breeds comfort and ease; but the stickiness is reminiscent of a spider’s web: “The framework is the Town, / The web, a coil of friends. . . .” The road, in contrast, at least as far as the narrator is concerned, “will set me free: / Strangers with magic bread / Will make a man of
me.” Related poems are “I Want to Go Wandering,” “Star of My Heart,” and “By the Spring at Sunset,” along with a generous selection of “beggar” poems.

The booklet’s “Other Poems” reflect Uncle Boy’s thoughts from his high school years (“How a Little Girl Sang,” “The Battle,” “March Is a Young Witch”), from his Hiram years (“The Song of the Garden Toad,” “Crickets on a Strike”), and from Chicago and New York (“The Earth-Hunger,” “To Matthew Arnold,” “The Cup of Paint,” “Sweet Briars of the Stairways,” “The Witch of Lake Michigan”). Several works reflect a variety of perspectives on women: from outright worship (“The Faces That Pass”) to outright enmity (“The Spider and the Ghost of the Fly”). A few poems echo the “palace of Eve” perspective of woman as an Egeria (“The Sorceress,” “The Queen of Bubbles,” and “Caught in a Net”: see Poetry 929). Along with the “palace of Eve,” several other “Map of the Universe” ideas (all of which are selected from the spurned Where Is Aladdin’s Lamp?) find expression: “To the Archangel Michael,” “The Angel Frozen-Wings,” “Heart of God,” and “Outward Bound,” as well as publication of the “Map” itself. Still other poems point to the future: moon poems (“What Grandpa Mouse Said,” “What the Hyena Said,” etc.), poem games (“The Mysterious Cat,” “The Potatoes Dance”), liberal politics (“Why I Voted the Socialist Ticket,” “To the Young Men of Illinois,” “The Soul of a Spider”), and anti-saloon work (“Drink for Sale,” “The Drunkards in the Street”). The climax of The Tramp’s Excuse, though, is the concept of Christ as a singing Immanuel, a Jewish Apollo, a God whose primary values are beauty and art, a God who lives within nature and within each human being (“I Heard Immanuel Singing,” “The Soul of a Butterfly,” “Hymn to the Sun”). When viewed without this God, the world is a rotting cadaver; and the artist’s job, like the job of the “beauteous Irish lady” in “The Potatoes’ Dance,” is to give us “eyes,” that is, to give us imaginative vision (see especially the “Sermon for Strangers” and “The Flower of the Amaranth,” War Bulletin Number Three, in Prose 106-108). [Note 9]

Meanwhile, beginning in the spring, 1909, Dr. Lindsay’s singular son finally landed a paying job, albeit a part-time paying job. He was hired as lecturer for the Illinois branch of the Anti-Saloon League, at $10 per week plus expenses. The beneficiary of any money earned was not Dr. Lindsay, however; the beneficiary was printer-engraver Ed Hartman, publisher of the War Bulletins and several other Vachel Lindsay broadsides. “I have just five dollars left from my excursion to Quincy and Camp Point [both one hundred or so miles west of Springfield] on behalf of the Anti Saloon League,” Uncle Boy advised Nellie Vieira in September. “I shall take it to Ed Hartman this morning. I hate to pay off a big debt in such little chips at a time, but its^ something” (Fowler 72). [Note 10]

He was also painting versions of “The Shield of Lucifer” for select customers (at five dollars apiece), customers who may or may not have known that the “Shield” represents protection for the artist, protection from the barbs and arrows of the illiterate hoi polloi (see the advice to Nellie Vieira cited in Note 9 below, and Fowler 71-84). Slowly, but not without setbacks, Uncle Boy’s reputation was appreciating. On September 21, 1909, the Illinois State Register announced: “The emancipation celebration will be held at Mildred Park tomorrow.” [Abraham Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862; Mildred Park, now named “Bunn Park,” is on the southeast side of Springfield.] “The entire colored population of the city and nearby towns,” the newspaper reported, would listen to a distinguished panel of speakers: Illinois Governor Charles Deneen, Springfield Mayor John S. Schnepf, State Representative Charles E. Selby, and Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (see Fowler 72-73). At the same time, speaker Lindsay was preparing a series of lectures on Robert Browning for Springfield’s
Avonian Club, a woman’s literary club with a single male member: Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. [Note 11]

One month after the Mildred Park celebration, Vachel informed Miss Nellie that he had spoken for the Anti-Saloon League in Kilbourne, Illinois, about thirty miles northwest of Springfield. “They had told me just yesterday there was nothing doing Sunday. So I will not have been absolutely idle all week, though near so. Well—my motto is ‘Once in a while we can finish in style’ [Rudyard Kipling, ‘Soldier an’ Sailor Too’], once in a while I do something. Otherwise I would long ago have perished from sheer self-contempt” (October 17, 1909, Fowler 167-168).

About a week later, again to Nellie, Vachel revealed that he was gaining ever more respect for himself: “I do not know the date, but it is four o’clock Sunday afternoon [October 24] in my room in the Hotel in Shelbyville [some sixty miles southeast of Springfield]. I made an address this morning in the Methodist church and took up a good collection and tonight I go to the Presbyterians. I have been reading the American Magazine and in the land of Nod the rest of the time this afternoon” (Fowler 208). And this time he was ready to offer an opinion on his work:

I like the Anti-Saloon League work more than ever these days. I am beginning to have my own ideas about the work, and am no longer dependent on stock arguments and statistics. I hope to become reasonably sure of my position, so I can put some deep study into the work. I am learning a whole lot about the real American communities, the farmer stock that makes our villages and country churches. It is as far from the business college civilization of the cities as the East is from the West. The dry communities are made so by the farm and village vote—the issue is the country against the town, the half assimilated slave and German against rock-ribbed Protestant Americanism of the Civil War sort. The fact that all the popular magazines are out for the Anti-Saloon League, champions of its cause, means that they think that all the educated and reading public is on that side of the fence, and so it is the America that reads against the underworld that does not read, brain against appetite, religion against stupidity and sin. Well, well, I did not intend to make you an address this afternoon. So I will merely make the observation—touch not the wine cup, but read Omar Kyaam. (Fowler 209)

The very next day Nellie’s suitor had additional reason for celebration:

Guess what I raised at Shelbyville, in two speeches, morning and evening--$98.60. Almost one hundred dollars and about one third of it in paid pledges. I guess I am solid with the Anti Saloon League all right. The last time [John W.] Perry and [Ernest A.] Scrogin [League administrators] went to Shelbyville they were frosted. I beat them all to pieces, so I am happy. I didn’t try to raise money a bit, and local conditions must have had something to do with the liberality. Nevertheless I get the glory, and feel that I am earning my salary of $10. a week and expenses. I am happy because it probably means I am more certain of permanent work in this field, and I can talk according to my convictions, and my ideas on the unity of all churches can have vent. I can rejoice with a whole heart in the cooperation of the Catholic Total Abstinence Union with the League workers, and can discuss also the immigration question and the question of the absorption of foreigners, and the Saloon being their half-way house. Also I can study the old civilization of the small towns and the rawness of the cities. Oh there is a lot in the question, if only I am permitted to hang on till I get to the bottom of it. I have feared I would be dropped, just as I was getting interested. (Fowler 215)
The following week, Vachel spoke at three small churches between twelve and fifty miles south of Springfield. “I had a bully good time,” he advised Nellie: “Raised $25, and met some awfully nice country folks. I just thank the Good Good Lord for such wholesome happy sunburned earnest people. There is nothing like a middle aged farmer’s Bible class. It is great, simply great. It makes one feel like a king, after such a day” (Fowler 242). Meanwhile, at home, Vachel was working on War Bulletin Number Five, which would embody another attack on “poison liquor.” “How the Ice Man Danced” is a story illustrating the sad effects of drink, all hidden beneath an exterior jollity. The drunken ice man provides entertainment for the bar set, but his embarrassed wife, “tears on her quivering face,” attempts to end the spectacle. At the same time, Vachel and his friends leave because, as one of them comments, “by all the rules, there will be a fight back there, in a few minutes, and a scalded ice man” (Prose 116-121). The final image, in its vivid contrasts, is the point of the story: what appears to be humorous is, in reality, downright tragic.

As 1909 moved inexorably toward the close of Uncle Boy’s self-designated “vital decade,” Nellie Vieira’s suitor experienced a dramatic metamorphosis. Since the end of September, he had been working on a new story. “I woke up this morning with a story in my head called ‘The Walled City’ or the Lady on the Wall or something like that—a prophecy, by no means Utopian, yet describing a more advanced Civilization, that shall come when Springfield builds the wall, and keeps out all the bad influences of the age, and banishes all the degenerate people within. You know in the poem ‘On the Building of Springfield’ the phrase ‘an unseen, skillful, Medieval Wall’ [Poetry 168-169]. All that goes into that poem I hope to work out in a story, with the wall not only invisible, reaching up to keep out bad ideas, but actually physical, to keep out the mechanical and industrial contraptions of an over-inventive civilization” (“September 28, 1909,” Fowler 95-96).

A little more than a week later, Miss Nellie received a draft copy of “Springfield Magical,” with the working title “In Springfield Town” [Poetry 71]. The poem is related, according to the author, to the new story, which is temporarily entitled “Saint Ezera” [Ezra]: “In prose, I have planned the story of a Christmas Saint, as I have told you. But visualization is quite easy to me, as to many artists, in a general way, and this is a poetic way of saying that my story is taking a tremendous hold on me. I know the various scenes in the tale will be as plain as if I drew them, while I write them down. In the final scene I can this minute see the Pope’s bent head, and look out the window on an ocean of flying machines” (October 7, 1909, Fowler 128-129).

One week later, Vachel’s story underwent an interesting editorial revision: “Saint Ezera is creeping along of mornings—I got about ten ideas about him this morning that will keep me sweating many a morning to work out. He will please me immensely when I am through with him, but I have forty thousand fidgets every morning settling down to work. Then two or three ideas bob up, and I get them down in a sort of short-hand, then no more work for the day.” On this particular day, however, one of the “fidgets” inspired the author to review his sources, and he was in for a surprise: “I have just looked Ezera and Nehamiah up in the Bible, and Ezera rebuilt the temple and Nehamiah rebuilt the Wall. So it’s Nehamiah I want. Saint Nehamiah it will be hereafter. It isn’t as musical or convenient to say as Ezera but I want a little Scriptural Analogy in mine. After I get my story all told, I will print a verse or so, going through
Nehamiah to find the ones most pat. ‘Saint Nehamiah the Architect’ that does not sound bad, does it?” (October 14, 1909, Fowler 159-160).

“Saint Nehamiah the Architect” helped to stimulate Uncle Boy’s formative lectures on architecture (reviewed above), and also inspired at least one Springfield poem: “. . . I wrote a most serviceable poem for my story of St. Nehamiah—‘Some Day our Town will Grow Old’ [‘The Springfield of the Far Future,” Poetry 75-76]. It pleases me because I want to write a great many Springfield poems. There is much here that is Romantic, if I can put it into verse. I would like to write as many Springfield poems as I have Road Poems. There is here a little scrap of most everything in the World, especially this country. It is a miniature United States” (November 3, 1909, Fowler 252).

Some two weeks later, “St. Nehamiah the Architect” was finished—after a fashion: “I havn’t done a lick of work since you [Nellie] have been gone except the half-finished story of St. Nehemiah [!]. It was half-written day before yesterday, and the other half notes I had taken up and laid down day after day—too inert to read them over. But yesterday I worked about half an hour, tearing up the notes that clogged the action, and today I have actually written the rest out, and the first draft of the story is really done. It is something after the manner of the Boats of the Prophets [Prose 110-113]—which is my own particular peculiar style of a short story. For years I never attempted one of that sort though hundreds went through my head, all because of the cold reception I knew they would get, and my inability to interest even my artistic friends in them. But one reason of the War Bulletin is to give just such stories a chance to live—things in which I put my best art sense, whether the world sees it or not. It is a new type of prose narrative based, in form upon Edgar Poe’s best fantasies, where tone and color are the dominant accomplishments, and the Poe horror is merely the intellectual part. For horror I substitute Religious Mystery and Aspiration, but am just as much interested in my tone and color as ends in themselves as was ever Edgar Poe. I can improve on his message, but not his manner.”

As for improving the message, Uncle Boy continues his explanation and reveals his general approach to the creative process. In fact, he describes the basic methods he would use over the next decade or more of his authorial life: “Well—now that the agonizing birth of the story is over, I can proceed merrily to dress and decorate it, which is the real luxury of such work. Each new re-copying now will be as much pleasure as playing with Mary Churchill [his infant niece], and on something of the same principle. Since St. Nehemiah is a Christmas story it is to be highly decorated, jeweled and polished, with good humor, and whims, and blazing aspiration toward higher things. My house is built, I shall now hang the curtains, put down the carpets and light the Christmas candles” (November 19, 1909, Fowler 297-298). Quite suddenly, though, the pleasurable decorating ends, perhaps even before Miss Vieira had a chance to read the above words.

“Tonight I tore up the story of St. Nehemiah, as the first step toward turning over a new leaf. It stands between me and too much other work I ought to do, and after all is but the expression of an artist’s vanity. I am going to quit hunting publicity awhile, if the Lord gives me grace, and try to go in for some every-day service. It is a long story, but if my piety holds out, I will tell it to you when we meet, including the story of the Lady with the Lamp—the blow-out—lamp” (November 21, 1909, Fowler 300). Uncle Boy’s poems, “The Lamp in the Window” and “The Hearth Eternal” (Poetry 123-124: cf. Luke 11: 33-36), were not published until 1912. The concept of a guiding light, however, a help not only to wanderers but also to lamp owners themselves, dates back to the poet’s earlier tramping days. Indeed, with “The
Hearth Eternal,” the helping hand is associated with his primary inspiration girl, his mother. Uncle Boy had just passed his critical birthday, his thirtieth year to heaven. Now it was time for “some every-day service” to begin.

One of the early entries in a new notebook, a birthday gift from his father, echoes the above thoughts. In fact, it was written on the same day as Nellie’s letter, “Sunday, November 21”: “Rules of boys and Ridgley work, and all work henceforth. Avoid publicity and personal prestige and attempt only social service. Two books of poems are a repetition. More pictures a repetition. Henceforth let pictures and verse have a social use, or nothing. There are too many generals and not enough privates in the army of social service. Let me attempt a little handwork. My creed will last me a life time if I am only willing to surrender the chase for publicity and artistic outlet. It is this thwarted desire that is eating me up and nothing else. If I had been willing to have been a servant, I would have been happy long ago. Then every day would have had little bits of happiness in it, and gentle consolations.” [Note 12]

On a new page, he continued: “The sermons in Ridgley should heartily commend every other true religionist, and not reflect on any individual leaders. They should advocate a meeting place for men as vivid, as human, as brotherly and gossipy as the saloon, yet which should put the fire of Brotherhood into men instead of the fire of liquor, and the deep joy of Socialism. Institutions will come of themselves when the spirit of man is changed, and Brotherhood and High Social Purpose must be made as mystic and absorbing as the Mass, and its expression will come. Ridgley ought to have temples of Labor, it ought to have amature theatricals and singing societies and dancing clubs of the better sort. It ought to have talented boys and girls given to the best music, art and all such. . . . As long as men drink there I ought to preach there, since preaching is my calling, every night but Wednesday when I should go to Prayer-meeting and Sunday and Saturday when I go to Anti-saloon meetings. For better or worse, I am a preacher, and I ought to preach till I drop. Vanity and ambition and self-service are the sources of all my misery. Let me abate them if I can. My steadiest principle, the hatred of money, is negative. I need a positive unselfish principle” (Virginia: also see Fowler 306).

And, as if to punctuate the positive, Uncle Boy concluded his war on Springfield, at least for the moment. The Sangamon County Peace Advocate [Poetry 69-76] was published at Christmas; and like the angels in the lead poem, “Springfield Magical,” the author presented it to his fellow citizens with Christmas in his heart. The Peace Advocate depicts the all-inclusive “Sweethearts of the Year” and the positive vision of “The Springfield of the Far Future,” rather than the negative, constraining wall of St. Nehemiah.

One negative, however,
would not be overcome. Student Nellie Tracy Vieira was home in Springfield for Christmas vacation, 1909. When she returned to Evanston in January, though, she left her ardent suitor behind—emotionally as well as physically. This distressing story, though, will have to wait until the next chapter.

Notes for Chapter 22

[Note 1] Uncle Boy is a biography, a life story, not a novel. As all human beings, Vachel went through many thoughtful stages, some developmental, some contradictory to one another. He was especially responsive to works he was reading, such as Carlyle’s Sartor Resartus in spring-summer, 1909. In early November 1908, Richard Watson Gilder was advised of passions for Poe, then Swinburne, then Milton, and then Byron. “At one time or another I have read most of the poets with enthusiasm,” Gilder’s correspondent professes, as well as historians and writers on comparative religion, not to mention philosophers and biographers (see Chénetier 29-31). In 1925, when republishing works written in 1909, Vachel warns: “These Tracts are reprinted as a matter of record. They were my opinions in and about 1909. They are not my opinions in 1925. For my 1925 opinions, read my 1925 poems” (Village Magazine, 4th ed., 133). Awareness of these metamorphoses is especially important at the present point in Vachel’s life, because in fall, 1909, he made another significant change, an about-face that will be covered toward the end of the present chapter.

[Note 2] Vachel’s notebooks and datebooks from the years 1908 to 1914 contain several entries related to his “boys,” both the classes he was teaching at the Springfield YMCA and the informal classes that met at his home. In the Virginia notebook numbered “26” (“Springfield February 7, 1909” is inscribed inside the front cover), we read a typical example:

Boy’s Club Ideas: The Live Questions
Brotherhood
Friendship of intellectual boys
Intellectual pride
The search for other boys of their kind
Their common cause against darkness
The common cause against Bookishness
Common cause against partisanship
Common cause against average opinion and gossip
I want to think and continue to think, yet am tired of thinking out of books, and grown men are too busy.
I will think with the boys just as seriously as they are willing.

The entry continues with the teacher considering talks about “the Sacred Books of the East . . . without identifying my teaching directly with those teachers.” Or, he speculates, he could discuss the ideas of Henry George or Gregor Mendel or Plato. “That’s a great idea—a genuine Platonic Dialogue.” In January and February, 1909, for example, Vachel was teaching four nights at the YMCA and two nights at the Ridgely Mission. The YMCA classes were basic drawing classes aimed at ward school boys, high school boys, and local businessmen. See below: “ART CLASSES BEING FORMED.”

[Note 3] Vachel was likely reading Frederick Douglass’s My Bondage and My Freedom (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), an edition which is available online at Google Books. Eleanor Ruggles also had access to this Lincoln-centennial manuscript, likely
through her friendship with Olive Lindsay Wakefield (see Ruggles 141-142, 437). A gift from the Vachel Lindsay Association, the manuscript is collected in Springfield’s Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. For Vachel’s concurrent sketches in The Outlook, see Chapter 17, Note 3.

[Note 4] Vachel’s reference to newspaper coverage is not an exaggeration. Anyone who reads the Springfield newspapers before and after the 1908 riot will have a difficult time finding any positive article concerning African-Americans. At the same time, few crimes, no matter how small, no matter how far away, if committed by an African-American, escape mention. Race riots in other towns and cities seem especially important, as if the establishment were intent on showing that Springfield was not unique.

Like many others, Vachel was aware of the irony of celebrating the Lincoln centennial banquet in Springfield’s Armory, where six months before many African-Americans fled to escape the rioters. No African-Americans (or Jews) were invited to the banquet, and women were forced to sit in the balconies. For the record, Robert Lincoln, the only surviving son of Abraham, was in attendance. See Charles Lachman, The Last Lincolns: The Rise and Fall of a Great American Family (New York: Union Square Press, 2008), pp. 344-346.

[Note 5] For a full description of The Heroes of Time, see Byrd, p. 70. One of the interesting ironies of Vachel’s life is that, while he was reading aloud the famous chapters of Sartor Resartus with Nellie Vieira at his side, he was reliving the emotional heights and depths of a young man falling in love, at least a young man of Vachel’s generation (and mine). Thomas Carlyle captures the essence of this experience in “Romance” (Book II, Chapter V), while the famous chapters—“The Everlasting No,” “Centre of Indifference,” and “The Everlasting Yea”—follow as numbers VII, VIII, and IX. Sartor Resartus may be read online at Google Books.

[Note 6] The Illinois State Register (July 18, 1909), under the subtitle “LAVINIA BEACH MISSION,” reports: “The service at 7:45 o’clock will be held out of doors. Nicholas Vachel Lindsay will speak this evening. He will use as his subject: ‘The Church Universal and the Brotherhood of Man.’” The reporter then adds: “The War Bulletin, which is being published by Mr. Lindsay, was issued for the first time yesterday. This paper contains some very original material and is well worth one’s attention” (p. 15). The rival Illinois State Journal does not mention any War Bulletin; but in both the Saturday (p. 17) and Sunday (Part 3, p. 2) editions, the Journal reports that at the Lavinia Beach Mission, Sunday evening, July 18, “V. N. Lindsay” will speak on “The Church Universal.”

[Note 7] Vachel’s datebook for summer, 1909, records one very courageous speaking engagement: “Tuesday—7:30 P.M. Sermon at William Botwinis—saloon, (Botwinis)—” In the 1902 Springfield City Directory, the “Botwinis Saloon” is listed at “11th Street sw [southwest] corner Sangamon Avenue,” a location which would place it four blocks directly south of the Lavinia Beach Mission. Indeed, Vachel’s brother-in-law, Paul Wakefield, commented several times on the uncommon bravery of his relative and long-time friend.

[Note 8] Vachel is likely quoting from M. Ernest Renan, “The Religions of Antiquity,” Studies of Religious History and Criticism, trans. O. B. Frothingham (New York: Carleton, 1864), p. 103: “There are monotheistic as there are polytheistic races; and this difference is due to an original diversity in their way of looking on nature. In the Arabian or Semitic conception, nature is not alive. The desert is monotheistic.” This work is available online at Google Books.

In his essay “AN EDITORIAL ON THE TAJ MAHAL, FOR THE LOCAL BUILDING CONTRACTOR,” published in The Village Magazine (1910), Vachel pleads: “Friend, let us toil
that this our raw and rasping western nation may be redeemed, and wear such white robes of marvel, such minarets of quiet snow. Through our great missionaries we send the East the gospel of brotherhood. Let us not be too full of spiritual self-sufficiency. Let us receive in return from them the silent gospel of beauty. It is not that we are to imitate these special forms, or carry on the Arabesque tradition. We are rather to interpret our own land in that rare hour when it is serene. Let it remain the free young West, yet become a land where sacred rivers have place.

“Build for that day the cross-roads church, the lone farm house, the wooden bridge. Seemingly perishable materials, if wrought with rejoicing and love, can make indeed a deathless land. The place whose tiny town hall is a gem, will be prepared against making its first skyscraper a Tower of Babel and a blasphemy” (Prose 146-147, emphasis added). The thought is central to Vachel’s thinking for the rest of his creative life: the West must send missionaries to other nations and cultures, but the West must also be ready to learn from other nations and cultures, especially from their artistic expressions, and more especially from the artistic expressions of the East. Westerners, however, must not imitate these expressions: each religion needs to have its own clothing, its own Taj Mahal. Meanwhile, we can begin to understand Vachel’s excitement and anticipation as the Panama Canal neared completion. Although the canal was intended for trade and commerce (the spider soul of Mammon), it would expedite the poet’s hoped for “Wedding of the Rose and the Lotus” (Poetry 153-156).

[Note 9] In the same summer datebook as the Botwinis Saloon citation (see Note 7 above), Vachel listed three divisions for The Tramp’s Excuse booklet: (1) “Poems of the Road”; (2) “Poems of Magic”; and (3) “Poems of the Millenium.” As examples of “Poems of Magic,” the poet lists six “moon poems” (see Poetry 40-47); and an October 1909 letter to Nellie Vieira reveals why such poems were popular with the author (he wrote over fifty “moon poems”). A sorrowful Nellie had written that she was the victim of “snubs and staring” at her school and boarding house. A sympathetic Uncle Boy used the occasion to explain why he has sent so many letters her way: “... you and I are both Isolated, as you are beginning to discover, and weep. You belong in Portugal and I belong in the moon. Inasmuch as we have undertaken to live in this alien land, let us make common cause and fight the Philistine, the Bromide, the Middle Class; be ourselves, and seek for the elect, who do not object to folks being queer, and coming from the moon, or Portugal. ... I am not caring, for my own sake, but for the sake of your own pride, and because you are a marked person, whether you want to be or not, you must be a talented marked person, with an elephant’s hide for snubs and stares, but an Aeolian harp in the presence of beautiful things or talented people. You and I both, in order to have friends, must seek out the exceptional people. It is harder for you than me, because naturally you are a most conventional little body, prone to suppose that success in this world and decent treatment will come if you do the proper thing. You will henceforth have to do more than the proper thing, be an extremely modern woman in the best sense, not necessarily a revolutionary, but such a person as flourishes in the best sections of the Chicago Woman’s club, or in the best circles of Artists or Musicians. You will find yourself subject to the Boarding House Stare all your life, so might as well steel your soul, remembering that you gauge your standing by the verdict of God’s elect, the Artists and the Singers, and not the folks with the Business College Manners. ... You are going to tread the winepress alone, as I have done, from the day I was born” (October 19, 1909, Fowler 176-177).

This isolation theme would continue off and on for the rest of Uncle Boy’s life: see especially “Adventures While Preaching Hieroglyphic Sermons” (Poetry 969-970). As for
steeling one’s soul to adversity, what Nellie needs is “The Shield of Lucifer,” the protection for the artist, the concept that Uncle Boy is depicting in water colors this summer of 1909 (see p. 27 and the picture below).

[Note 10] Vachel’s lack of employment, along with the fact that he was thirty years old and still living at home, gave the town gossips something to talk about. There is no doubt that he himself was concerned, but not so concerned that he lost his sense of humor. Writing to Nellie Vieira at the end of October, 1909, Uncle Boy relates that he has been talking to her mother, who “wants me to understand that maybe you will work in Springfield while you are home. Now I think that that is Romantic. Nellie the Beautiful Cloak Model—and Dare Devil Lindsay the Revolutionist. Or the title of our affair might be ‘Ribbons and Romance—or the Cash Girls’ Secret.’ Another possible title ‘The Milliner and the Tramp.’ Another ‘Algernon Montmorency Lindsay and the Mysterious Waitress.’ Or ‘The Book Store Brunett and the Bookworm.’ Or ‘The Queen of the Toy Shop,’ or ‘Nellie the Sewing Machine Girl and the Heart she Stitched.’ ‘Or The Locket in the Soup, A Restaurant Romance.’ Or ‘The Curl in the Candy, or Nellie’s Love-Token.’ Or ‘The Cash Register Queen, and the Cashless Poet.’ Or ‘Everybody works but Vachel.’ That last one especially would be a good realistic tale” (October 27, Fowler 224-225).

Ironically, the opening of this letter reveals that insouciant Vachel has even lost his volunteer position at the Lavinia Beach Mission: “... I went to Ridgley to see Miss Mc.Cay [Catharine McKay]. It seems, she was told by the board to give me the grand bounce. She did it sweetly, and gave me a book by Drummond beside.” [Henry Drummond’s The Greatest Thing in the World, 4th ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1890) is an orthodox explication of I Corinthians 13, and likely the board’s “message” to their unorthodox volunteer in response to his War Bulletin Number Three.] At the time, anyway, Uncle Boy was not distressed, as he related to friend Nellie: “Then I merrily went to see your Ma at the other end of the car line” (Fowler 224).

Finally, the reference to “Algernon Montmorency” reveals Vachel’s familiarity with George V. Hobart, “Mr. Dinkelspiel Tries to Name His Son,” in the humorous D. Dinkelspiel: His Gonversationings (New York: New Amsterdam Book Company, 1900). Both Drummond and Hobart are available online at Google Books.

[Note 11] In a notebook begun in 1906, but containing entries from 1906 to 1910, Vachel references a “Class in Browning” for Clara Trotter’s “girls,” beginning October 1, 1909, and continuing on the first Friday of the month through January 7, 1910. He plans to use the text and critical notes from Select Poems of Robert Browning, eds. William J. Rolfe and Heloise E. Hersey (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895), an edition available online at Google Books. On October 1, the class began with “the shorter poems”; November 5, the focus was “Pippa Passes”; and December 3 and January 7 (1910), were devoted to The Ring and the Book (edition unknown). In the privacy of his notebook, Vachel commented on what Robert Browning meant to him: “Browning interests me as an artist, in words, as a student of pictorial art and historical periods, as a poet pure and simple, as a dramatist of human psychology. He is not quite the oracle and the Consoler to me, that some people find him. He ministers best to me when from full-heart still unsatisfied I sigh—that is he offers the consolations of Art rather than of Religion. To a great many of this class however, he will offer most inspiring religious teaching.

“Browning as a consoler. The comfortlessness of the scolded cat, of the poisoned rat. Browning is fat and abundant and comfortable physically, and his biographers have few sorrows to record. He is not pitted against fate, he is not the man with his back to the wall, as was Byron, who in sheer fighting and consoling qualities is more to my style. He makes fewer pretentions,
yet one remembers the eulogy of Byron offered by Matthew Arnold [“Preface,” Poetry of Byron: Chosen and Arranged by Matthew Arnold (London: Macmillan and Co., 1881), available online at Google Books].

Writing to Nellie Vieira after his first Browning class (October 1), Uncle Boy shares additional insights. He is writing late at night and addresses his beloved as “Ophelia”: “I am not ill at these numbers [Cf. Hamlet, II, ii, 120], but I was ill all day. I had a grouch like a barrel of vinegar. I walked in the sun most of the morning, and he cheered me only half. I read Browning in the park and he didn’t help. The absurdity of my preaching him as a tonic, a consoler, etc. to other people, when he couldn’t console me! I wished I was dead. In the afternoon I thanked God I was sleepy and hoped I would sleep forever, but woke up about four o’clock. Thank heaven for three hours of oblivion, anyway, I thought. My troubles are not all within me although they are mainly within me. . . . But tonight oh—I read to the Avonian Club—the first lesson in Browning, almost all the shorter poems in Rolfe’s beginning book . . . . And they made me young again. And how the girl’s faces glowed before we were through. Poor things they looked so tired when we began. Most of them are school teachers—Mary Howard, and Clara Trotter, and Bertha Parker, and Miss [Mabel] Kimber, and the like. One or two looked really beautiful at the end. How interest in a book can change a woman. And how Browning stood out—every word a glorious fire. He is something of a consoler anyhow. I wish I could teach him every night. He is great to read aloud. It is all so vivid then. I am converted tonight, I am almost a Browningite” (Fowler 104-105). One of the class members, Anna Louise Tittman, was a nurse, not a teacher. From her oral history memoir (pp. 83-84), we learn that Vachel was the only male in the class:

http://www.uis.edu/archives/memoirs/TITTMAN.pdf

[Note 12] On October 8, 1909, the Chicago Evening Post Friday Literary Review published “The Candle-Moon” (Poetry 42), as an example of the poems included in The Tramp’s Excuse. Vachel’s effort to court the literary elect in America was beginning to pay dividends. “The Editorial page of the Chicago Evening Post for Friday started out with one of my poems—The moon is but a candle-flame^, etc.,” Uncle Boy boasted to Nellie Vieira: “it is right where they generally put the quotation from Emerson—ahem. And so the Post is standing by me after all. I am just like a baby over publicity. I cry for it like candy, and that is one reason I have been glum of late. I lacked publicity. I have been happy all day, just over this little bit of space in the Post. I wish a few other newspapers would follow suit” (October 9, 1909, Fowler 140-141).

In just three weeks, Nellie’s suitor would enjoy a full box of candy, so to speak: a Friday Literary Review editorial concerning The Tramp’s Excuse itself. “I have just come in from lunch with War Bulletin Number Three read through from cover to cover,” Post editorial writer Charles T. Hallinan advised Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: “My whole drift is scientific and I thought I had long ago sealed up all the avenues by which a mystical appeal could reach me, but I am not so sure now. I think you have somehow got inside. Certainly you have a quite unusual faculty for impressing upon one your own scheme of values. Mr. Floyd Dell, one of my associates, has been perusing ‘The Tramp’s Excuse’ with great enthusiasm. You have some warm friends in this office. We shall not hesitate to say as much in printer’s ink” (personal letter, “September 4, 1909,” collected in the “Incoming Correspondence” folder, Barrett Library, University of Virginia). Indeed, the “printer’s ink” reads:

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay is one of those who, whether wisely or foolishly, are called “cranks.” He is a Y.M.C.A. worker who at present publishes in Springfield, Ill., a diminutive “War Bulletin,” of which this book is a special number; and copies of this
periodical, including the present volume, are given free to anyone who will, as he says, “write to me and confess that he reads poetry, who will try to read it through twice, who will send me a brief letter when he is done.” He is something of an artist; after a fashion, a socialist; more certainly, a religious mystic: and for present purposes it must be added that he is indubitably a poet.

He has a cosmic scheme of his own, a key to some apparent absurdities in his verse. This, like all mystical systems, is too complex and elaborate for immediate explanation. But it may be said that, rejecting the fabric of civilization, he turns to a sacred poverty. “Let a few of us go,” he says, “carrying neither purse nor scrip. Let us be healing the sick imaginations, cleansing the leprous minds, raising dead aspirations, casting out the devils of money lust in those we meet by the way.”

It is the joys and sorrows of this mission which he celebrates in most of the poems of the volume. Most impressive are those which tell of the ancient conflict between the love of the ideal purpose and the love of women. To them the wanderer says:

Though I draw toward you weeping, soul to soul,
I have a lonely goal beyond the moon,
Aye, beyond heaven and hell, I have a goal.

[“Beyond the Moon,” Poetry 9-10]

And in “The Faces That Pass”:

I turn another way, that has neither tomorrow nor yesterday,
renouncing you all . . .
Because in my honorable and peculiar journey to a place far
From this place, maybe I shall find the truth.
I know I must travel alone. [Poetry 6-7]

In his verse there is also an amount of social idealism and democratic aspiration. Much of this is expressed through the medium of metaphor, as in “The Moon-Worms” and “The Soul of a Spider.” But in another poem it comes out, free from obscurity and expressed with fine vigor and beauty. This poem is “The Building of Springfield.” Three stanzas may perhaps give some idea of the throbbing, glowing idealism of the whole: [quotes lines 21-32, see Poetry 168-169]. The volume is embellished with some very curious designs, which are indeed more curious than artistic; and the book itself resembles in appearance a stenographer’s note book: altogether a fascinating, unusual, but, it is to be hoped, not altogether a baffling product. (Post, October 29, 1909)

With pride, Uncle Boy included a copy of this review (almost certainly by Dell) in his November third letter to Nellie Vieira, adding: “This has been a happy happy day” (Fowler 252, 254; see also Ruggles 156; and Tanselle, “Vachel Lindsay Writes to Floyd Dell” in Works Cited.)

Finally, as indicated in Note 1 above, Vachel Lindsay changed his mind on numerous occasions. At the end of 1909, as we have seen, he tore up “St. Nehemiah the Architect” and renounced his passion for publicity and constraining walls. The passion for walls, however, actually continued for the rest of his life. He was attracted to Spokane in the 1920s, for example, because it is a city surrounded by the natural “wall” of the rim rock. And like most human beings, Uncle Boy relished sweet publicity, the recognition and adulation of others, particularly those others that he considered “the elect,” “the chosen few,” “the saving remnant.”
Illustrations for Chapter 22

“The Shield of Lucifer”: see pages 27, 34. Once on display at the Vachel Lindsay Home State Historic Site, the original of this “Lucifer” is currently collected in the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.
Why a War Bulletin?

I have spent a great part of my few years fighting a soul battle for absolute liberty, for freedom from obligation, ease of conscience; independence from commercialism. I think I am farther from slavery than most men. But I have not complete freedom of speech. In my daily round of work I find myself taking counsel to please the stupid, the bigoted, the conservative, the impatient, the cheap. A good part of the time I can please these people, having a great deal in common with all of them—but—

The things that go into the War Bulletin please me only. To the Devil with you, average reader. To Gehenna with your stupidity, your bigotry, your conservatism, your cheapness and your impatience!

In each new Bulletin the war shall go faster and further. War! War! War!

The Golden-Faced People

A Story of the Chinese Conquest of America

I found myself in a long iron-floored passage, thick with yellow fog. Just as suddenly I was in a packed assembly room where the walls blazed with dragon-embroidered lanterns. I turned around. The door of iron behind me was closed. My pursuer was not in sight.

The place looked like a sort of Heathen Temple. But no—the next thing that caught my eye was the Phrase “In the year of Christ.” It appeared that this fantastic gathering was about to dedicate with speeches and ceremonies, a tablet inscribed, “In the year of Christ two thousand eight hundred and nine Lin Kon was born. This memorial is set up on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, in honor of his meritorious and superior career. He was the emancipator of the white man.”

The shirt washer had hit me pretty hard. He had knocked me through that iron door into the next Millennium. A person quite like him sat in the pew at one side of the platform. Despite the crowd, the rest of his bench was empty. He blinked there, in surprising majesty.

I was being escorted toward the tablet. I was being introduced to half a score of speakers of the evening; there grouped. Then I was proclaimed to the audience as one who had studied the Chinese conquest.
Art and the Church

Nicholas Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931)

[Published in *The Christian-Evangelist* as follows: “Prologue” and Part I (May 13, 1909): 597; Part II (May 27, 1909): 662; Part III (July 15, 1909): 889; Part IV (September 9, 1909): 1148, 1152. Vachel’s Hiram College friend, Miner Lee Bates, introduces the series in a letter to the *Evangelist* editor, “Brother [James Harvey] Garrison” (1842-1931). In summary, Bates concludes: “These articles are unlike the writing of any other man. Some people will find them meaningless: others will ponder and find truth, neglected truth, needed truth, well spoken.” A graduate of Hiram (1895), Bates was elected college president in 1907 and served until 1930. On October 10, 1930, at the Inauguration of Bates’s successor, Harvard graduate Kenneth I. Brown, Vachel was awarded an honorary Hiram College Doctor of Letters degree (Litt. D.). I have corrected several typographical errors. Dennis Camp, Ed.]

Prologue

Brother Garrison has been kind enough to open his columns for me in an experimental way, though he does not vouch either for the importance or the soundness of my special views. I myself realize that the question of Art in the Church is not the most important one before the brotherhood. Yet it is a side partner in many an important issue. I feel that a proper understanding of the claim of art upon the soul will enlighten many a man in the dark on social questions. As is the habit of a specialist, I will be dogmatic in the course of these articles, heated, sometimes censorious, but if in the end I have further advanced my cause in its broad issues, I will not ask agreement with special views. I feel especially called upon to champion the issue of Beauty in this Land, just because most of my effort for years has been to discover its proper place in life. Ten years ago I was willing to claim the supreme place for it as an all embracing element in the salvation of man, but I am now willing to concede that the desire for beauty is one of the many noble passions which go to make up men’s souls, and that great careers have often been without it. For example, though the typical hero of the Middle West, Abraham Lincoln achieved an aesthetic triumph and a permanent place as a creator of art forms in his Gettysburg Address, and in the more important State papers, he himself confessed to a general callousness along aesthetic lines. It is by reversion to his times, however, and a consideration of what the primal elements of America are, that we find the best subjects for Middle West art and letters, and it is by loyalty to the primitive simplicity in which he stood that we can become true lovers of the beautiful. At present, our chief danger is in being overwhelmed with cheap and ill-considered luxuries. The art which I would advocate for our Churches, for instance, would be a return to the apostolic simplicity which our grandfathers preached so strenuously along the log cabin frontiers.

I.—The Immigrant in the Small Town.

Brethren of the disciple brotherhood, it is my ambition to have the ideal that our Western towns shall become centers of culture, fixed firmly in the minds of the devout. Let us stir the zeal of those who have been groping in this direction. Be convinced, O village preacher, that there is enough talent in your corner of the world to make a brilliant little town if that talent is brought to bear upon your community life, and not concealed in tiny cliques or circles of snobs.
The incoming foreigner, who has generally spent several years in Eastern cities, in Pennsylvania coal mines, or the like, is still un-Americanized, though he desires to be an American. Your best American culture should be brought to bear upon him, for his son will be the leader of your town. In that day his son must have in his soul some admiration for music, painting, sculpture, which will prompt him to beautify the town rather than rob it in the spirit of the average politician. Many a man, not specially honest, is capable of an enthusiasm for civic beauty. He can be brought to make the city lovely, even when he can not be persuaded to make it directly good. And Civic Beauty, like Civic Cleanliness, stands next to Civic Godliness. Our captains of industry in the next generation, I say, are the Poles, the Italians, the Greeks, the Lithuanians now trickling into the Western villages. In their own countries some of these people have achieved the greatest civilization the world ever saw. Here in America the immigrant is taught to love money and nothing else. When he becomes a power through this money he is disloyal even to old Europe which he left and its sense of beauty. The American social system is responsible for this. We all realize that while there are a thousand forces for righteousness the industrial system, with the workman at the bottom and the captain of industry at the top, cuts deepest into our lives, and, as a general rule, the immigrant feels the force of it more keenly because he has abandoned the gentler Old World ideals. Therefore, when he climbs to the top, he is just as rude as when he was a working man, except that he speaks excellent English, looks altogether like an American, wears good clothes, pays a little more for what he eats, and, because of his business training, minds his manners. Inside he is a little America, his soul is an office building, his brain is like a telephone switchboard, his nerves and veins are as the telegraph and the railroad. Now, this is remarkable, commendable in many ways, but it crowds the sense of beauty to the wall. The finer feelings have to wait for the second table, as it were. Art is one of the forces which will help to civilize our cold and brilliant industrial machine.

II.—Apostolic Simplicity and the Simplicity of Art.

There are many arts for the eye. There is Painting. There is Sculpture. There is Architecture. There is Printing, illustrated by William Morris; Landscape Gardening, illustrated by Repton; pen and ink drawing illustrated by Beardsley’s grotesques, and Abbey’s Shakespeare drawings. There is the glorious array of work by potters, carvers, designers of furniture and fabrics from Rookwood to all the Crafts of Japan. [Note 1]

When a man is called Bachelor of Arts, it means he is profoundly ignorant of these things. He has ceased to use his eyes and hands. When a magazine is called “A Monthly, devoted to Art and Letters,” it means no articles on Art will appear. Why then should the average congregation of disciples trouble themselves about Beauty and the simplicities thereof?

Our great grandfathers, worshiping in strictly Apostolic austerity, in log churches on the frontier, were rude Craftsmen. If we had continued in their ways, collecting all the material for the church by hand, rearing it in simple fashion, making the few adornments so, we would have evolved a new architecture, even as the early Italians evolved the Romanesque from the Roman Basilica. But our American mechanical ingenuity supplanted that hand built world. Our cheap luxuries have spoiled the doctrine of Apostolic simplicity. Our self-made people are as ignorant of the sanctity of the work of the hand as are the colleges and the magazines. Our devout preachers are apprehensive lest the line between the self-made middle class in our churches and the workmen, mostly foreign, who hate our churches, should be drawn even more sharply. They see that the disciples are going to be able to build larger houses of worship on one hand and bigger private residences on the other. They see we are going to be able to support living link
missionaries and buy automobiles, too, and maybe flying machines. And our preachers are alarmed when they consider the way the struggling foreign workman is apt to feel about a shrieking auto or an ostentatious house in the hands of vulgar church members. But they apprehend that while luxury makes social barriers the true love of beauty breaks down social barriers and works the will of Christ. It embodies that simplicity for which our fathers contended, that other simplicity which is in the very heart of the working man, and that further simplicity which is the very secret of art. Only the middle classes and the scholars escape the love of beauty. Read James L. Ford’s article in McClure’s Magazine for January on “The Drama.” It shows how our highest acting is based on the hearts of the people! It might be illustrated in another way—by that famous play—“The Servant in the House,” which involves not only a sensitive spirit from the standpoint of stage setting, the use of English, the properly restrained sense of the decorative, but has that reverence for the raw impulses of humanity from which come the best religion and beauty. Consider how the desire for loveliness led John Ruskin and William Morris to radical social reform. Consider how George Gray Barnard loves the criticism of the workmen best of all. Many disciples want to go back to the people, to understand the people, to minister to the people, but every effort seems artificial. Art is one handmaid of religion, furnishing the common ground. [Note 2]

III. — A Sermon for Bad Men.

This is a desultory series of articles with no systematic doctrines to enforce. With no special logic I here introduce a sermon for bad men. Let the preachers deliver it when the “Man About Town” is in the audience. You know, O Bad Men, that revelry is a necessity of the soul, and I grant that many a good time is more wholesome than it seems to the Pharisees. Christ himself appeared to be a gluttonous man and a wine bibber, a friend of the politicians and the sinners. Nevertheless, you know, O Bad Men, that this little town is full of children who have a right to inherit wholesome institutions of pleasure, noble customs of revelry rather than the debased, holy public splendor rather than poisoned splendor behind closed doors. They have a right to unspotted bodies and white minds, not overtempted, not cynically disillusioned. They have a right to grow up in a place for whose customs they have a thrilling reverence. By allowing crude shows in the theaters and failing to praise the good ones, by allowing hasty carnival decorations instead of those well thought out, by allowing outrageously poor pictures to be hung on the walls of your private houses, by allowing ordinary music in our streets, when good music can be had by prayer and fasting, by taking our pleasures like blind, hungry beasts, instead of men of judgment and culture, we are ruining the next generation, and shaming our town. Let the emblem of our town be the peacock, rather than the hog. The peacock is not a very lofty animal; vanity is the only thing that saves him;—by the right sort of vanity he gets along. He knows the value of the right sort of feathers, he succeeds in being harmless, in being a delight to the eye, in pleasing little children, making every park lovelier for his presence. Consider what the hog does under the same circumstances. He is a very useful animal, but must keep his place. He must not be hoisted to the chief seat in the City Hall, to the chief place in the Chamber of Commerce, to the chief place in the factory. We all know this; but further, he must not be hoisted to a place where his soul dictates our private pleasures, our public taste. As long as we govern the standard of public advertising, the standard of public parks, the standard of public architecture, by the hasty judgments of the greedy market place, we forget there is a hidden desire for loveliness in the most profane citizen. There is a hope for outer and inner beauty in the heart of the most un-Christian man. If you can’t be unselfish or philanthropic or prayerful or a good church member, you can at least be vain. You can at least see that your town is lovely as a peacock. It will be the
business of the church to give the peacock a soul. From vanity we can move on to pride, and from pride to wisdom, from wisdom to humility. Let us not be greedy and vulgar any more. [Note 3]

IV.—Art and the Church.

Let the disciple minister feel himself called upon to teach the population of his town that civic beauty is more valuable than civic wealth, that it is not so important for his city to be big as for it to be different; at the right moment let him hint to the city leaders that the little places in the world have been the most famous. Athens, in her prime, had about ten thousand houses. Florence, according to Baedeker, in the day when she sent the Renaissance into the world which became Art in Italy, and the Reformation in Germany, was not so large as Athens. Emphasize to your people the glories of the old-fashioned Nuremburg or slow-going Oxford, or our own Cambridge. These towns were not monsters of wealth or arrogance. Why should your village try to make itself a little imitation Chicago? Why should all the culture be painfully purchased in New York? What is the defect in your town that destroys the old home love in the boy’s heart so that when he returns from studying Music or Architecture in Europe he hates the home place? Isn’t it because you have developed no specially gracious village custom, village architecture, village parks? You have made no attempt to lay the foundations of the antiquity that shall be. Remember that some day your town will be a thousand years old, and other boys will return to it. Will it still be the same barren, nerve-rasping place? Any photograph of the old villages of England or France hints at the sort of a thing whose foundations we should endeavor to lay. [Note 4]

Our Middle Western cities are full of restless typical Americans who are too nervous and dissatisfied to be pleased with their limitations long. Some day in sheer desperation they will try to buy beauty by the wholesale, to introduce it in a lump. They will either buy things too fine for them to understand, or else too vulgar to be kept. Preparation, gentlemen, is the only thing to prevent this. For instance, I know a most respectable little county seat dominated by the Disciples for these hundred years. Now the grandsons and great grandsons of the men who went to Bethany have grown wealthy. They send plenty of money to the mission boards. They read our papers devotedly. Some of their children go to our colleges. They also have money enough to rebuild the county seat church. It is a monster. Every window is a blatant outrage. Every spot of color on the wall blasphemes. The architecture is no architecture at all. Yet our brethren are proud of their church. The farmers come in from adjoining regions and bring their families just to see that building. There is not an individual in that whole county who could be convinced that the old church, with its unpretending simplicity and its associations, praised God, and, that as far as the look of this one is concerned, it serves the devil with all its might. There is not an artist from Tokyo to Munich, no matter what his school, radical, conservative, symbolist, impressionist, but would have advised that company of Disciples that their old church was lovelier than their new one. There is no reason for this vulgarity except the outside reason, the particular type of civilization under which we live. These people would have fine souls and a desire for beauty, if they had lived in lovely villages from their infancy.

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

[End note: The Christian-Evangelist was a publication of the Disciples of Christ denomination, followers of Alexander Campbell and Campbellite traditions. Campbell himself founded Bethany College in Bethany, West Virginia (1840). Hiram College, Hiram, Ohio,
where Vachel was a student, is officially nonsectarian, but has always been associated with the Disciples faith. Springfield’s First Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, is the Lindsay family church. For additional information on the Evangelist and “Brother Garrison,” see The New Living Pulpit of the Christian Church: A Series of Discourses, Doctrinal and Practical, by Representative Men among the Disciples of Christ, ed. W.T. Moore. St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1918. Pp. 77-78. These pages are online at:

http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/wmoore/tnlpb/GARRISON.HTM

Brother Garrison resigned as editor of the Evangelist in 1912, but continued to submit articles for many years.]

Notes

[Note 1] William Morris (1834-96) and his Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood [PRB], along with sympathetic figures like John Ruskin (1819-1900), detested modern industrial society and espoused a return to handmade crafts. Poet, artist, and novelist, as well as a political socialist, Morris was one of Vachel’s primary “muses.”

Landscape designer and architect Humphry Repton (1752-1818) published three important books on garden design. See Stephen Daniels, Humphry Repton: Landscape Gardening and the Geography of Georgian England (Yale, 1999).

Aubrey [Vincent] Beardsley (1872-98), author and illustrator, excelled in one of Vachel’s favorite media: pen-and-ink sketching. Since Beardsley is known for his erotic drawings, Vachel rather daringly includes his name in this article for a Disciples of Christ publication.

Some of the best illustrations of American painter and illustrator Edwin A[ustin] Abbey (1852-1911) are published in The Comedies of William Shakespeare, 4 volumes (Harper Brothers, 1899), although Abbey is also known for several Shakespeare paintings. Arguably his most famous work is the “Quest of the Holy Grail,” mural decorations in the Boston Public Library.

Rookwood pottery, founded in Cincinnati by Maria Longworth Nichols Storer in the late 1870s, is generally considered one of the fine manufacturers of mass-produced ceramics. The original company suffered with the Great Depression and filed for bankruptcy in April 1941. A new “Rookwood Pottery Company” began in Cincinnati in July 2006.

[Note 2] Founded by Knox College classmates S[amuel]S[idney] McClure (1857-1949) and John Sanborn Phillips (1861-1949), McClure’s Magazine was an illustrated monthly periodical selling at the bargain price of fifteen cents. In 1902, the magazine was one of the first to be identified with “muckraking journalism,” publishing the criticism of Ida Tarbell, Ray Stannard Baker, and Lincoln Steffens, as well as literary works by Upton Sinclair, Rudyard Kipling, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Robert Louis Stevenson, Willa Cather, and Mark Twain. After many problem years, the last issue was March 1929 and the magazine was absorbed by The Smart Set. Humorist, critic, and dramatist James L[auren] Ford (1854-1928) authored a regular literary column for the New York Herald entitled “The Literary Shop.” Ford’s autobiography, Forty Odd Years in the Literary Shop, was published in 1921 and is available online at Google Books.

“The Servant in the House,” a modern morality play, debuted at New York City’s Savoy Theatre on March 23, 1908. Written by Charles Rann Kennedy (1871-1950), the play was performed by the Henry Miller Associate Players and starred Kennedy’s wife, actress Edith
Wynne Matthison. The five-act play is available online (EText-No. 11999) at Project Gutenberg: [www.gutenberg.org][Click on “Browse Catalogue”]

American sculptor George Gray Barnard (1863-1938) was gaining in fame at the time of Vachel’s essay. In later years, Barnard’s collection of discarded medieval architecture was purchased by John D. Rockefeller (1925), and it forms part of the nucleus of “The Cloisters” collection at New York City’s Metropolitan Museum of Art. In 1917, Barnard’s controversial statue of Abraham Lincoln was unveiled in Cincinnati, Ohio, with subsequent castings in Manchester, England (1919) and Louisville, Kentucky (1922).

[Note 3] “The Man about Town” is a William Sidney Porter (“O. Henry”) short story collected in The Four Million (1906) and available online at Project Gutenberg.


Let not our town be large, remembering
That little Athens was the Muses’ home,
That Oxford rules the heart of London still,
That Florence gave the Renaissance to Rome.  (ll. 1-4) [Poetry 168]

* * *

The following is a representative newspaper article demonstrating Uncle Boy’s efforts in the aftermath of Springfield’s 1908 race riot. The article illustrates his emphasis on youth, on beauty, and on ethnicity. It is published in the Illinois State Register (Saturday, January 2, 1909), p. 6; and the teacher’s name does not appear until the fifth paragraph (as if most readers already knew who the teacher would be):

ART CLASSES BEING FORMED

THIRTY LITTLE CLUBS WILL BE ORGANIZED HERE

Drawing, Designing, the Use of Colors and Construction to Be Taught in the New Course of the Y.M.C.A.

To-day will be a red letter day for art students in Springfield. Three grand systems of classes will be organized. At 2 o’clock in the afternoon the ward school boys will meet at the Y.M.C.A. to organize thirty little art clubs, for which the presidents and vice presidents have already been selected by competent teachers. At 4:30 a special committee of high school boys will meet with all boys in the city of their age who wish to learn drawing classes. . . .

All boys of high school age who wish to join these classes will meet with this committee at this time.

At 7:15 a business men’s class will be organized to which all men above high school age who have any desire to learn to draw or further their art study are urged to come.

These classes will meet twice a week to carry out very definite plans for learning drawing, designing, the use of colors and the general principles of construction.
This work will be in co-operation with the similar work already established by Mr. Lindsay in the West Side Y.M.C.A. in New York city.

**ORDER OF CLASSES**


Monday, 7:15 to 8 – High school committee men.

Tuesday evening, 7:15 to 8 – Business men’s class.

Wednesday, 4:30 p.m. – Ward school presidents and vice presidents.

Wednesday, 7:15 p.m. – High school committee men.

Thursday evening – Lecture to miners at Ridgely [mission].

Friday evening – Class in English for miners at Ridgely.

Saturday, 7:15 to 8 – Business men’s class.

These are Mr. Lindsay’s classes for January and February. All of these classes are art classes excepting the lectures to miners.

**LECTURES TO MINERS**

The lecture for the miners on Thursday will be for the purpose of finding out what they know and what they ought to know; to get them to state every grievance by series of questions each night—to be followed by a lecture, in which endeavors will be made to do some constructive work in making them American citizens.

[Friday classes will] be conducted according to a method introduced by Peter Roberts, a veteran miner of the east.

[Vachel’s textbook may be read online at Google Books: Peter Roberts, *English for Coming Americans: A Rational System for Teaching English to Foreigners*, published by The International Committee of Young Men’s Christian Associations. New York, 1910.]