Uncle Boy

A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay: Poet

Chapter Nine

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

by

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[This ongoing biography may be read online at www.VachelLindsayHome.org Choose “Biography” and then “Uncle Boy: A Biography of Nicholas Vachel Lindsay.” The biography and the website are sponsored by the Vachel Lindsay Association.]
9. SPRINGFIELD AND CHICAGO [1900-1901]

“I have a world to save, and must prepare, prepare, prepare.”

Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay must have realized just how eager their son was to leave Hiram when he wrote: “I want to get at that yard. The spirit moves me very much that way” (May 28, 1900). After all, past experience proved time and again that said spirit seldom surfaced in their son’s life, and his unenthusiastic response to household chores caused more than one family squabble. In fact, the continuation of his sentence likely brought knowing smiles to parental faces: “—though my zeal may not be so thoroughly in evidence the hottest days at home.” As it was, Vachel did not depart until the morning of June 14, when he boarded a train in G’ville and headed for his grandmother’s Rushville farm. On June 18, after a three-day visit, he was back in a Pullman and headed for Springfield, using some of his travel time to copy out a poem that he identified with earlier visits at the farm and at the nearby home of his beloved Aunt Fannie.

Entitled “The Mutiny” but published as “Crickets on a Strike” (Poetry 53-54), Vachel’s manuscript was carefully saved in one of Aunt Fannie’s scrapbooks. It is signed: “N.V. Lindsay—(Written a long time ago.)” On the way home from Hiram—Copied for Aunt Fannie, June 18, 1900” (Blair). In her book Ancestral Lines, Fannie acknowledges her nephew’s poem and asserts that it was first written during the summer, 1895: “I had not known he wrote verses but when I read this poem I knew he had poetical genius and henceforth always encouraged him in his natural tendency” (452). Since her nephew generally referred to the work as “The Foolish Queen of Fairyland” (see Poetry 839), “The Mutiny” is a pro tem title suggesting the author’s current state of mind. He knew that his recent decision concerning his future, at least as far as his parents were concerned, was tantamount to a mutiny or a strike; and he suspected that he was going home to face some not-so-harmonious music: “But the cold dew spoiled their instruments. . . . Instead those sturdy malcontents / Play sharps and flats in my kitchen floor.” Had he also known Aunt Fannie’s reaction to his poem, he might have received some comforting encouragement, just when he needed it. Fannie claims that the poem caused her to inform her mother that “Vachel would eventually make such a reputation for himself that later generations would look upon him much as we do Shakespeare or Milton” (452).

Once Aunt Fannie’s budding Shakespeare-Milton was back in Springfield, his guilt feelings helped him to be as good as his word. He postponed his ambitious pursuit of culture and self-education until late July and spent much of his time working in and around the house and yard. In odd moments, he wrote letters to Hiram friends whom he had left behind, mainly expressing the uneventful nature of his present life and claiming that the Lindsay family was, for the time being, at peace. Paul Wakefield, for example,
was informed: “It is a slow place, where I sojourn, and nothing happens” (July 21, Ward). Then, after the rest of the family left on their annual Colorado vacation, the Lindsay son returned to his pursuit of what he felt he needed to know in order to become the Christian democratic art leader of the future. On August 6, he boasted to Paul that he was reading “like a fiend,” although he added that it was his “rule not to read a word after supper.” Evening was the time to call on girls. He promised to keep “cool,” though, and investigate a new house every night, thus avoiding serious relationships. He claimed he had had enough of “that” at Hiram (Ward). [Note 1]

What Vachel was reading is difficult to summarize, because he seems to have worked according to whim. His notebooks contain several references to “discipline,” but his labors were anything but systematic. The one obvious resolution is the determination that an artist must educate himself: “For the building of cities and material civilizations a discipline from without is required for even the master spirits. Scientific, military, Legal^\textsuperscript{1}. For the artistic temperament there is no discipline profitable but self imposed” (“Culture” 1). Self-education, however, was fraught with danger: “As time goes by, one is more cautious about fitful self-imposed discipline. One must have few systems at a time, and fewer, and in the event of a new ones^\textsuperscript{2} failing, its more adequate substitute must be found at once. Find the exact limits of your will power, and do not either over tax^\textsuperscript{3} or relax it” (“Culture” 1-2). In spite of the author’s own desires and observations, “fitful” is a good descriptive word for all of Vachel’s notebooks, especially the seven that he carried home from Hiram. Thoughts are random in date of entry and random in subject matter, and entries dated “September 1900” may precede entries written in April or May of the same year. To compound the difficulty in determining chronology, blank pages were randomly filled during the first year the author was in Chicago (1901), wherever the pages occur in the books. Indeed, at some point in time, in his “Typical Saxon versus The Ideal Saxon” notebook, Vachel admitted: “I must go for the things and thoughts already written in this book and trace out their depth and height— their truth and falsehood. They are all myself—and a very diffused self already. And further diffusion is disintegration” (28). [Note 2]

The “few systems” that Vachel had in mind are discernible, but they occur with little semblance of order and they are far from obvious. In part, the lack of organization was due to the nature of the study. In putting together his “Homiletics” notebook, for example, Vachel essentially rejected any particular focus: “August 18, 1900—Let us be radical then. I believe in prodigious^\textsuperscript{4} general preperation^\textsuperscript{5}—and of special preperation—the merest trace. Let that then be the principle—prodigious general preperation, in all matters of sermonizing, religizing^\textsuperscript{6} and exhorting and speaking. Be the man always you may be compelled to be some time, or else fail” (13). An incidental entry in “What I remember^\textsuperscript{6} of The Science of English” notebook further defines his goal but also indicates the absence of systematic study: “When it comes to considering books that have ‘most influenced’ the century—I must not expect to read them all of imperative necessity^\textsuperscript{7}. But I must know of them, each one and be sure of the influence each one has had. Then I will know enough!” (32).

Vachel’s “design,” such as it was during the summer and fall, 1900, was to specialize in the influential books of the 19th century, using his notebooks to record random impressions. In many cases, he read biographies as well as primary works, and
one of his observations on Ruskin suggests that Vachel himself may have appreciated the “one stand,” the primary frame of reference, adopted for *Uncle Boy*. At the very least, this notebook entry demonstrates the value Vachel placed on biographies that focus on a single, central characteristic of their subject:

The great beauty of a dead master is that his work is all done, his life and many examples are all there to choose from, and no one phase of his development is too omnipresent to distort one. A great master treads devious paths before he finds himself at last, and his followers must wind and stumble and be lost behind him, in his lifetime. No living man then, should master me. If one dead master is outgrown, one must turn to another. Ruskin must be learned as a whole, and one must read many lives of him before one reads many books of his. The great inspirations in him are the elements of his soul, always constant in their many contradictory phases of expression. The thing to do is to find one stand he took, most central, most normal and most strong and characteristic in his life,—one gospel he preached, and one deed of success. From that one may look before and after. (“English” 66-67) [Note 3]

Several biographies help to determine an author’s central “stand.” But, Vachel added, “one must read several good biographies to eliminate the personal element in [a subject’s] historians”: “The truest follower of a great man is the posthumous disciple—or else the one who gets his greatest inspiration by happy chance, at his masters’ best period, and is led astray neither before nor after” (“English” 68-69). In brief, if you want to “master” Vachel Lindsay, read *Uncle Boy*, but read several other biographies as well.

Vachel Lindsay himself was the “posthumous disciple” of many authors this summer and fall, 1900, including Wordsworth, Keats, Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, Emerson, Thoreau, and Tolstoy. The “Saxon” notebook provides an interesting example of this disciple’s suppositions regarding the masters’ “most strong and characteristic” themes: “At last I am attending my choice of a college. It is organized within myself—the college of the love of the people. I have taken little of the course—and can attend no other institution of polite learning till I have finished in this. Christ is head—and professor of Life, Divinity and government. In every other department—he outmasters the masters. Ruskin fills the chair of manly Art. Tennyson the chair of manly music. Emerson the chair of manly hope, Tolstoi—glorious consecration, Carlyle the chair of practical accomplishment and real result, Browning the chair of Nature and Passion—Wordsworth the chair of Nature and aspiration. It is my ambition to be master of all the masteries of the men on this faculty—and the servant of the God at the head of this faculty” (41-42—dated “October 22, 1900”).

This particular aspiring student in “the college of the love of the people” left little doubt that his goals were to enhance his personal reputation and to facilitate his interaction with others: “It is well to master the vital and vitalizing classics of English—from a social standpoint. Any one in the literary atmosphere will catch the drift of literary fashions enough to maintain his self respect. They are not so worthy of study and anxious inspection, in themselves or their mandates. But dogmatism that results from a genuine inspection of a neglected classic brings literary assumption to its knees, and brings the service and respect of the few who truly know. When you get at the heart of it—it is a comparatively small field where one may soon be acclimated and citizened—and labor strongly for a lifetime” (“English” 22-23).
Young Uncle Boy was firmly convinced that democracy and learning must go hand in hand, and the following blunt statement is copied into no less than three of his notebooks: “The thoroughly educated fully agree with the masses” (“Saxon” 4, “Speaking” 10, “English” 12). In his “English” notebook, he further posited that caring for and about others was a primary source for manly influence and power:

In the world  
There are two forces  
Nature—which extends through every function of man—  
and love—wherby^ man may be divine in power.  
Two beings—God & man. (7)

The ideal Saxon, the Christian democratic art leader, must mirror God in man. Indeed, the one unwavering aim expressed in the Hiram notebooks is their author’s determination that the art of illustrating must be his life work. His choice of profession, moreover, reflected his missionary-like desire to assist and lead others:

My choice—September 17, 1900.  
Designing wins an art mastery in its highest estate, an income, and an art opportunity. Illustrating wins a personal following, in its highest estate, a parish world wide, an intellectual and personality ruling. I will illustrate, though my illustrations take the color of designs. . . . Designing is to be studied only as a means to illustrating. (“Illustrating” 38-39) [Note 4]

A “parish world wide” was his ultimate goal. He would not, as we have seen, have anything to do with amoral art, with art for art’s sake: “Lillies^ on the hill have been placed there by the Artist—but he allows us to take them to the children at Easter—to tell them of the ressurrection^—which is the more excellent way. And that is all there is to Art for Arts^ sake. The grass of the field may be cast into the oven to warm the wanderer. Thus may man improve on Art for Arts^ sake. . . . The only hope for a man in the twentieth century,” he vowed, “is to find out the one thing he can do the best, and do it transcendently.” For Vachel, it was to be “Designing or illustrating”:

Now I read history—that I may be the better illustrator, and for this purpose alone do I do any of these things—study poetry, read novels, study designing, study paintings, study the mastery of men, (study the art of mental, moral, temperamental and intellectual ascendancy), study the careers of illustrators, study religon^, speaking, culture, the Saxon Races, the Disciples, the American, French books. My one unwavering aim is that I shall illustrate. Let us never be mistaken. (“Illustrating” 15-16, 32, 45)

At one point during this period of preparation, the would-be illustrator waxed rhapsodic on the subject: “Behold I shall be a Caesar in the world of art, conquering every sort—every language and people and tongue of art—and lead their kings captive before the men of Rome” (“Illustrating” 67-68). Reading this entry sometime later, he scratched in a brief addendum: “(Wow!).” He was generally aware of his proclivity for the dramatic and, on more than one occasion, he exercised his good humor and qualified an earlier, particularly emotional outburst with sobering self-satire. [Note 5]
The kind of illustrating that Vachel had in mind was, in his words, “Christian cartooning” or “cartoons for Christ.” He argued in his “Illustrating” notebook that “Art as such has not possessed^ an efficient moral influence on mankind” (46). He intended to use illustrating for the salvation of all people by combining the principles of the popular political cartoon with the moral message of Jesus Christ. As he saw it: “The ideal cartoon has all the dogmatism of a parable” (“Illustrating” 5). He would become the new democratic leader by bringing true art and the Christian religion to a medium that already appealed to common people: “Cartooning as a fine art? Who will show us how? It is a characteristic of nature to be high art and low art too, to please the herd, and to please the rest, the leaders, the artists. Nature must be here imitated. We must be popular enough to be popular, and artistic enough to be uncomprimisingly^ artistic” (“Illustrating” 47). [Note 6]

One of Vachel’s ideas, for example, was something he called “Apostolic Christianity Illustrated. A series of present day cartoons of present day problems—with Apostolic texts.” Such a series was not to be for fun alone: “Rub it into the Disciple Church, from their papers” (“Illustrating” 44). In fact, rubbing in morality with artful cartoons was an idea that Vachel never entirely abandoned. Later examples may be seen in The Tramp’s Excuse (1909) [“Drink for Sale,” Poetry 22]; in The Spring Harbinger (Poetry 77-82); in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th editions of The Village Magazine (1920-25) [“Girls We All Know,” Poetry 416]; and in Going-to-the-Sun (1923) [“Words about an Ancient Queen,” Poetry 490]. There are many other examples as well.

The would-be Christian cartoonist/illustrator had no intention of becoming a stereotypical, namby-pamby artist. The pride of “manliness” is evident throughout the Hiram notebooks (the words “man,” “manhood,” and “manly” appear often). In “Culture,” for example, Vachel maintained: “The lion and the lamb shall lie down. It is a rare and royal spirit that will reconcile culture and manliness. Culture is like a bleating, bawling lamb, and manhood is a roaring lion, and they cannot divide the honors of the ordinary narrow human heart. Only strong Christian civilization or a Christian heart can bring them into peace” (21—dated “August 22, 1900”). In this regard, he readied himself for the different personalities that he expected to find in art school:

Sept. 30, 1900—It is well to undertake to be a certain limited self—a concentrated personality—to be supremely strong, and direct and gigantic and virile in the territory already staked out, and in the general tendencies called forth by my rather normal and natural life—rather than to follow the disproportioned personality that will be the first result of my first contact with strong abnormal influences; rather than any further cultivation^ of the habit of expansion at the expense of thorough conquest. I am strong and large and extensive enough now in outline. Let the rest of my life be simply doing my simple best ideals justice—rather than forgetting them in the joy of those new and strange. I write pretty well. I must write better. I can’t be a church pastor. Mustn’t ever dream it. I can dress better, and must learn it. I cannot be anything but a man, of the people. . . . (“Illustrating” 40-41)

A month earlier (August 20) he had written that “There is nothing immortal and great any more but . . . to put oneself into a cause . . . . To find great, simple causes and to fight for them. The only thing glorious still is an art like the Sword of the Samurai, of wonderful workmanship, of wonderful beauty, but glorious most of all because it is the soul of its
owner and because it fights well for its Captain, the Secular Christ” (“Illustrating” 25). He would be a Doctor Mohawk artist, a Samurai Caesar for Christ, perhaps even a Christ figure himself.

In the “Saxon” notebook, as an example, Vachel wrestled at length with the meaning of suffering and self-sacrifice and concluded that Christ’s life was to be his model: “At thirty one years of age it shall be my duty to start out to spend everything I have husbanded up to that time, to choose the suffering life without any equivocation— not expecting to live longer than three years. . . . Now at thirty years of age Christ began his service of suffering. Up to that time he followed out his own individuality and his own environment for a complete knowledge, mastery, of himself. It is for me to do likewise. Let it be definitely understood that every inch of my will up to thirty one years goes to the evolution of myself and the perfection of the mental, physical, spiritual machine. Not till then am I to choose any great scheme of suffering and self-spending. I have a world to save, and must prepare, prepare, prepare. Then it will be for me to save my world. I will constantly expect, that at thirty years of age, I shall choose the chance of utter suffering and the spending of self—to which I seem best adapted” (December 14, 1900). As a marginal note he added a quotation from Ruskin: “No great man ever stops working till he has reached his point of failure” (37-38).

Vachel later continued his thought, claiming that, after his 31st year, Tolstoi “shall find me his literal follower, and more . . . . As he has consecrated the novel—so may I consecrate art. And he is not Christlike enough. I verily believe there are situations wherein a man may wear himself out in three years, and burn his soul into twenty centuries thereafter. I cannot be utterly consecrated untill after I am utterly trained—I would be a useless madman. But I have the capacity for a deliberate monomania, I know. But I must accumulate something to be spent in this monomania. I must suffer with him” (“Saxon” 42-43). In the midst of his observations on William Blake’s life and work at the end of this notebook, he added: “The secret of creation is sacrifice—the very act of growth or sacrament and through this eternal generation where one life is given for another, and shed into new veins of existence, each thing is redeemed from perpetual death by perpetual change” (“Saxon” 58).

Thoughts of self-sacrifice and even crucifixion and martyrdom played an important role in Vachel’s concept of what God had called him to do with his life. At the end of his “Culture” notebook, he recorded the following prose notes for a poem: “Poem—what one who would be a great leader must hope to do. How to be an Alexander Campbell—and the results to expect. Those influenced most permanently and importantly are the descendants of ones adversaries who have been forced through the exigencies of conflict to take higher ground than ever they dreamed of. This influence and result will be grudgingly acknowledged for two generations, and exaggerated the third—when the tomb of the prophet will be erected over his martyr-grave” (68-69). The Christ/crucifixion/martyr motif, as we shall see, is an essential theme in Vachel’s work, especially in the early work related to his personal mythology as it is delineated by his “Map of the Universe” (Poetry 62). But now we are ahead of the story.

Writing in his notebooks during the summer and fall of 1900, Vachel explained to himself why it was necessary to leave Hiram as soon as possible, to leave even before taking a degree, in spite of his parents’ wishes. Christ was his model, and the vital
decade in a would-be savior’s life lies between ages 20 and 30. Vachel had reached the portentous age of 20 in November, 1899; and he found himself trapped in a typical Saxon educational environment, which was, in his mind, tantamount to capital punishment. He had to free himself as soon as possible: the vital years for preparation had begun and they would not extend beyond age 30. The following entry in the “Culture” notebook expresses both his belief and his desperation:

From his thirty second year a man lives in the past—he rises higher on old ambitions, he writes and draws and thinks old impressions, rearranging them, but he cannot see new things a new way if he would.

So the ten years from twenty on must be a period of careful and slow building. All a man does, the best he does, is to be loyal to his past—after he is thirty.

From thirty on is the great leisure period of study—and the comparison of one’s experience etc. with those of others especially the immortals’. If a man is a scholar at thirty, it means he has lost ten years of his life, hopelessly. (“Culture” 31-32)

The years from 40 to 50, Vachel maintained, are “the days for scholarly work,” not the years from 20 to 30. Then, he continued: “From fifty to Sixty God calls a man to be a general. From fifty to Sixty God takes care of a man. At best he has a chance to live over his youth with his artistic and his physical progeny, at worst he builds a raft of the wreck of his life. From Sixty to Seventy, if a man has lived perfectly, and attained his youth again in its first full measure—he may be a prophet—a sage, or a harper hoar, speaking with fire, and inspiring reverence. How wide must be the horizon, how multitudinous and alert and conscientious the array of experiences from 20 to 30, to furnish a life” (32-33). [Note 7]

In the summer, 1900, well into his 20th year, Vachel was anxious to begin the demanding task of “building” his life. There was much to do and little time to do it in. There was no time at all for a typical Saxon education. There was one’s duty to perform, not an externally imposed responsibility to parents but an inner, soul responsibility to prepare oneself to save one’s fellow man. Perhaps the most telling entry in Vachel’s Hiram notebooks is among the notes on Swinburne’s Life of Blake, near the end of the “Saxon” notebook:

Strangely severed from other men, [Blake] was, or he conceived himself more strangely interwoven with them. The light of his spiritual weapons and the sound of his spiritual warfare, was seen he believed, and heard in faint resonance and far reverberation among men who knew not what such sights and sounds might mean. If, worsted in this mental fight, he should let his “sword sleep in his hand”—or “refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears and natural desires” the world would be the poorer for his defection and himself called the base Judas who betrays his friend. Fear of this rebuke shook and wasted him day and night, he was rent in sunder in pangs of terror and travail.—(This among other things shows the essential nature of man is not escaped among the remotest fancies—his passionate sense of responsibility is in the core of his soul in spite of any folly. NVL). (48)

A would-be savior could not defect because of “natural fears and natural desires.” A would-be savior could not play Judas to the core of his own soul. It was one’s Christian “responsibility” to free oneself from the Hirams of this world, so that one could “prepare,
prepare, prepare.” Precious days were being lost, days that could never be replaced, days that would end abruptly in November 1909, at the venerable age of 30, when one could only “be loyal to his past.”

Part of Vachel’s preparation was simply a modification of his parents’ “one unwavering aim.” He was determined to be a “man of action” and to direct his attention to “one thing . . . and never leave it till it is done. The man of action begins to act when he begins to resolve and stops not till the thing is finished” (“Speaking” 10). To this end, he liked to set dates for himself: “Nov. 22, 1900. To try for a newspaper job by June [1901]. To learn every opening—every possible position—and start. That should be all my work, besides Art, in Six months to find a place” (“English” 72). “Within the next five years, I must be the biggest man of my size in Chicago, by January 1, 1905.” His “consecration day,” he proclaimed, must be “January 1, 1911” (“Saxon” 30-31). The “man of action,” however, was obviously allowed to modify his schedule if certain exigencies arose. The original intent, Vachel’s letters reveal, was to matriculate at the Chicago Art Institute in mid-September 1900. But the long-awaited matriculation day was postponed until January 2, 1901; and the reason is likely evident in a letter that the Lindsay son sent to his vacationing parents, a letter that he wrote on September 1, 1900:

I don’t know when I have been able to equal the intellectual stimulus and expansion of this August. I wish I had a month more. I am just fairly started. The Warner Library has been a great blessing. I have studied this week Thackeray—(and Pendennis), Keats—both in the English Men of Letters; I have read Ruskin, and made a short speech before the Christian Endeavor union, on Rest in Travel! . . . I wish I had time to study Taine and several other great Art Critics before I go to Chicago. I do not want to be an ignoramus when so much depends upon it. A great many artists have failed through lack of a wide acquaintance with standard poetry, history and criticism. Success in the newspaper and magazine world depends to a certain extent upon the friends to be found there, and a common knowledge and a common love of these things is the ordinary basis of friendship in such circles. I am very grateful for the time I have been allowed, and I have used it the very best I knew how. I haven’t read anything to please myself. I am going to make my first start in the world this fall, a start of my own choosing, and I feel so poorly prepared where I could be so well prepared if I only took the time.

What Jean-Paul Sartre refers to as the heavy burden of freedom was squarely resting on Vachel’s mind. Now that the future lay in his own hands, his doubts escalated. He felt it necessary, ironically, to continue preparing to prepare; and his tolerant parents evidently agreed to another five months of self-directed education. [Note 8]

In addition to prolonging his independent study, Vachel used the extra time to luxuriate in one of his favorite occupations: intense self-analysis and introspection. Perhaps the immediate impulse was derived from a request from Paul Wakefield, sometime in early August, for a candid character appraisal (a request that reflects Uncle Boy’s late Hiram role as a peer counselor). Friend Vachel responded on August 10, with a 17-page treatise that he later referred to as his “Epistle to Paul.” Generally, he found his friend sweet and good, except for an occasional, Swiftian irritability. As Uncle Boy’s
closest friend, however, Paul could not have hoped to escape a thorough analysis of his weaker points. It was true, Vachel averred, that Paul was a sympathetic person; but, ironically, Paul used his innate sympathy to hurt other people: “The blind intuition of sympathy of yours finds the sore spots and the soft places, in spite of itself, and strikes through the dark very surely, strikes home, just as effectively when you sneer, when you misunderstand, when your thoughts are unchangable. . . . This one talent of yours, Sympathy, is the most essential thing to real success in your calling or any other, for time or the eternities.” As a curative, Vachel advised his friend that Christian charity was more effective than “sarcasm and sneering,” which are “as black as gambling, for they gamble with the tenderness of hearts”: “—raillery is worse than drunkenness, it is prostituting a wit that is genial for a wit that is deadly. Judgement is an impious robbery, for it is stealing the prerogatives of Christ. The child-hearts are too precious. We must treat them tenderly—all human hearts are child-hearts, and we must not teach them the doctrines of pain or pessimism, by precept or example—and we must not cause them to stumble.” In conclusion, after extensive redundancy, Paul’s friend admitted: “You will observe I have spoken from some certain knowledge of myself for which I am indebted to a certain degree, to you. Nevertheless I have had your personality alone upon the dissecting table, and I could not say anything else than I have said, if I waited a hundred years for wisdom” (Ward).

Interestingly, Uncle Boy believed that he needed to exorcise “raillery” from his own existence. A few days before the “Epistle to Paul,” Vachel had dissected his own interpersonal relationships as follows: “Where is my failure with my friends? I have acquired unconsciously the habit of raillery and banter. This must go. It must be replaced by a sincerity that is not oppressive, that is not assumed, that is not unwholesome and is not offensive, that is bright and light and happy. This will be hard. ‘Jollying’ must go though. It must be totally suppressed. It is an unwholesome affectation” (July 31, 1900). At some later date he hinted at the source of his observations: “Ruskin opens our whole inner man to a new discipline” (“Illustrating” 48).

Vachel’s reasons for adopting a new discipline and for dropping all raillery are reflected in his notebooks, as well as in the above letter to Paul Wakefield. The leaders of society, the Christian doctors and the Christian artists, must be aware that their one unwavering aim is to serve others. To serve effectively, they also need to realize that the masses are essentially “child-hearts,” who have to be cared for with tender thoughts and with infinite understanding. In the “Homiletics” notebook, avuncular Vachel professed: “It is a great thing to hold the hearts of all the sweet, fickle, child hearted people. Child hearts are good for loving. Child hearts are the sort that love you for a whole day for a trifle—that come to you in an hour if you have called sweetly—child hearts are the sort that are offended at a trifle, and lost by a frown. He who keeps the child hearts that are near him is the man who gives them smiles always, and watches their small joys—and withholds from them those things which they misunderstand” (10-11). This missionary zeal, of course, was inherited from his parents and from his church. Moreover, by simple examination of roles, it would seem normal that missionaries experience a sense of maturity, if not outright superiority, in regard to the “child hearts” they are trying to save. Vachel’s feelings of superiority over “child hearts,” what I have elected to refer to as the avuncular side of his nature, does seem ironic in the light of his determination to be an equable “man of the people.” The emphasis on democratic equality, on the one hand, and
the concept of the superior art leader, on the other, appear to be incompatible perspectives. But appearances are often deceiving.

In Uncle Boy’s mind, Christ came to the rescue. Christ’s life offered the model solution to the above paradox, especially in the enigmatic doctrine that the Kingdom of Heaven is to be comprised of child hearts. In the “Culture” notebook, Vachel attempted to express the paradox as follows: “The road from faith past doubt to faith again is too long for weak humanity to travel—only the high souls must undertake it, and they must tell the children to stay behind. And the great man—after all—it has but one purpose with him—it is but a discipline to make his greatness human and as that of a little child—it will humble him to find he has traveled so far and reached the same place after all—that he is a child like the rest—and must travel his forest in a circle at best” (29). The true democratic art leader will mirror the anomalous characteristics of Christ. He will be a child-hearted leader of child hearts. He will be something of an uncle and something of a boy.

Vachel’s analytical mood this fall, 1900, as we noted in the fourth chapter, also led him to dissect his prize-winning, ward-school essays. His conclusion leaves no doubt as to how important these essays are to a biographer: he believed that all the ideas were still “a part of me” (“English” 55). Earlier, on August 12, he examined what writing letters meant to him, admonishing himself (and future biographers): “Do not despise letter writing. A circle of intellectual, worthy correspondents is a splendid field for the development of a wide sympathy, a training in the suppression of the ego, and good practice in English. When a man writes a letter, he should have a kindness in his heart, a rhetoric on his right hand, a dictionary on his left, and a skillful pen in his hand, and a forgiving correspondent in his mind’s eye” (“English” 14-15).

He even judged the quality of the entries in his notebooks and meditated on their usefulness to his letter writing and to his life in general: “These books will soon be too full, from the temptation to too much elaboration. Now this can be gratified by letters. In your correspondence, if you write from a theme in these books, you will give an expression of yourself you will never have occasion to repudiate, and the elaboration will make it more deeply a part of you, more consistent with its converse—which will probably be found somewhere in the work, and moreover the effort to stretch it on the frame of another mind should, with pains, make it more human, and unerratic, and consistent and cultivate^ the habit of the adaptation of the inmost self to the outmost world. . . . These books are to keep all my fundamental, youthful enthusiasms fresh and growing, they are to remind me that when I have chased one till it has hid itself, there are other old ones till it comes again, to keep me from chasing one till I will forget the rest, and fail to be full orbed” (“English” 18-19).

Along with friends, letters, essays, and notebook entries, Vachel continued to scrutinize human life itself during this summer and fall, 1900. We have already observed how he condensed human existence into decades: age 20 to 30 for “slow building,” age 31 to 40 for “living in the past,” etc. Interestingly, he dedicated one year—from age 30 to 31—to seeking a wife, and then he detailed his thoughts on marriage:

September 9, 1900.
The man of thirty-one should have run the gauntlet of possible human experience, normal—and righteous—he should have embodied it in his masterpiece and with that purchased his fortune and his leisure. He should spend this fortune in further enriching and refreshing the sources of his masterpiece, so that new work shall be up to the standard set before, yet as fresh and great, and unexpected. He should spend the first year of this leisure finding a wife and the second—. . . the most momentous of his life—in adapting his soul and his ways of life to this woman, and teaching her to adapt herself the best way to his work, and to best provide for its success. That is a square trade. A man^ ways of life may be variously altered, but his work has been written by God in his original heart, and cannot be altered. (“Culture” 30-31)

We, of course, have the advantage of hindsight: Vachel was some fourteen years late in “finding a wife.” And he never was able to purchase his fortune.

Finally this fall, 1900, Uncle Boy speculated on his future profession and on his future audience: “It will not be wise to be a prophet, nor yet a man with a mission, but just an interpreting artist. It is a mightier undertaking, in its possibilities than those of Raphael and Angelo, and to this work may be rallied many young hearts. It is a new cause, a new cause, waiting its exponent, who will unify, enthuse, and proclaim” (“Culture” 20). Specifically, he would accomplish his goal through cartooning:

November 1900

The great gospel to be preached by cartoon to the second generation of American prosperity is a clean sweet rugged youth. Let them be Rosevelts—[William] Pitts^, in soul and body. Let them begin again where their Grandfathers did, if by any artifice it can be brought about. They cannot be pioneers, but they can make themselves Grandfathers of the coming race who will class them as we class the pioneers. The nearest to rugged plain manhood in America—is found in the farm—and more specially in the machine shop.

The machine shop should be as much the fashion as the foot-ball field to keep our dainty darlings rugged and grimed. How can it be made an American Fashion? Study it till you learn it, and then cartoon how. (“Saxon” 18-20)

“It is necessary for [the artist] to make friends with strong young men, five to ten years his juniors,” Vachel wrote at the close of his “Illustrating” notebook: “to deny himself for them and hold his allegiance to them—and in the end they will give their allegiance to his art, and keep the name of it high, when he gets worn and old, and ready to hand it over to posterity” (74). Vachel loved the image of the wise counselor/oracle, the person who earned the adoration of the young, the “separate race,” Christ’s “chosen people” (Poetry 557). In addition, the stars were in alignment for a chronic starter: he was beginning what he believed to be his essential decade for development (age 20-30) at the same time the world he wanted to save was beginning a new century.

An introspective Vachel was generally a lyrical Vachel, and we should not be surprised to learn that the latter half of the year 1900 was a productive period in his poetic life. By December 22, he informed Paul Wakefield, he had finished eight poems since June and “sketched out two or three dozen” (Ward). One of these was the jubilant
“When Life Greets Life” (*Poetry* 789). He also wrote Paul that he planned a new poem, “Men of the World” (July 14, 1900, Ward), perhaps an early indication of the thought behind the “Litany of the Heroes” (*Poetry* 435-441). On September 5, five days before the rest of the family returned from Colorado, Vachel summed up his first summer of living alone, again for Paul’s benefit: “I have emphatically had a good time—for me this month. Nothing to jar me the whole time—lots of letters, lots of books, two new poems coming, and the pleasures of pensive regret—at idle intervals—over the unforgotten might-have-beens. That is an artistic summer.” Paul never knew him when he was in command of himself, he averred. Paul only knew a Lucifer/Lindsay who was “on the rack”: “I have yet to meet my first defeat in full posession of myself. Wait till I meet it in Chicago,” he vaunted: “I will be the Mark Hannah of Artistic Chicago in ten years. By the black chains of Lucifer I swear it” (Ward).

Vachel recorded his thoughts on versification in several of his Hiram notebooks, and his lifelong acceptance of the classical concept of poetry and drawing as sister arts began very early. “A poem is a problem in decorative design,” he proclaimed. Moreover, poetry, like art, was not a talent to be learned in a typical Saxon school: “The genius of poetry must work out its own salvation in a man. It cannot be matured by law and precept, but by sensation and watchfulness in itself” (“English” 20, 49). Above all, true poetry must be written by a MAN for the lasting benefit of humankind:

> He whose dream of poetry is worthy of his Saxon kind, is the one who seeks to chant a saga as fiery and as bold as those of the Gray bearded gleemen in the Mead hall of Beowulf, even before the Grendel was slain. There are bold hearts as many now to sing to—who love best neither the words that are plain nor the fancies that are fine nor the voice that is articulate with well chosen speech. They love best the great chant that comes like the roll and the reel of ten thousand martial drums, speaking nothing to them but that they are men, and that the world is a wild fight of bold warriors and that the joy of the battles coming is greater than any revel that has past.

> Still for the sake of those who learn their duty of courage only through the chosen words of the battle cry, who cannot feel unless they first fully understand—for their sakes we must choose our words well even in the heaviest phrenzy, and maintain the conscience of art throughout the most primitive ferocity.

> Thus we may make timid hearts bold and quiet hearts bolder, and thus in the homes and schools and marts and forums of the twentieth century we will not any of us forget that we—the least of us—are Saxons, born to dare, the race that shall dare forever. (“English” 45-48)

From the perspective of the visual arts, as we have seen, Uncle Boy decided to preach his moral message by expressing his ideas in the medium of political cartoons, since the child-hearted masses already knew how to relate to these cartoons. For like reasons, he was attracted to the idea of adopting popular songs as the basis for the music of his poetry:

> September 23, 1900—

> There is a law which we must find—then recognize and understand. The rude songs of the Sunday school and the revival are savage—but they have the tang of sweating,
dog eared, grubby, sacred humanity about them. After all they are the most beautiful, the finest—and the good. (“Homiletics” 14-15)

About the same time he alleged: “I think that my first poetic impulse is for music—second—a definite conception, with the ring of the genuine universe—third—clearness of exposition” (“English” 17). He did not mention the S.H. Clark poetry lectures that he had attended as a high school student, but the influence of Clark’s emphasis on sound, as well as sense, in poetry should be obvious (see Chapter 5, pp. 23-24).

Although Vachel’s “first poetic impulse” may have been music, his second was “conception,” and he knew that some conceptions are more “definite” than others. “It is a necessity,” he argued in his “English” notebook, “for a poet to maintain an all-embracing receptivity and openness of mind” (51). Most of the notebooks record ideas for poems, many of which (perhaps mercifully) were never written. However, one list of potential poems recorded in the “English” notebook serves as a representative example of the young poet’s thoughts concerning “all-embracing receptivity and openness of mind” (along with an important digression on “old letters”):

Twelve Toasts—each one a sonnet—Nov. 28, ’00.

1. To womankind. A novel sentiment. 2. To children. 3. To Beauty—beginning with the moon and ending with the voice of woman. 4. To America—phrases from the national song uniquely played upon. 5. To the Saxon Race. 6. To Friendship in feasting. 7. To memories of rejoicing. 8. To old letters—hard to destroy. What shall I do with old letters? Shall I burn them? Who could? Bury them—but that would be a grave on this grave-burden-earth. Tear them? Each one has a soul—it would be tearing a soul into agony. Leave them here—so many old letters—for the disrespectful dust to gather on—for curious eyes to read some day, after we are gone? Put them into a chest of gold and oak, cushioned on the lid with velvet over-wool-cushions. The key shall beat against my heart—hanging by a gold chain. The chest shall be my oracle by day and my pillow at night and they shall bury my pillow with me. 9—To the greatest city of the world. 10—To the men of the world. 11. To the Mississippi. 12 To the Mothers of America. (59-60)

The same day that these 12 “Toasts” were recorded, Vachel considered “a series of odes, hymns, addresses—imaginary visions, etc. of a series of English poetic masters—imitating each master at his highest and most individual metrical triumphs.” Since he knew his organizational weaknesses, he added: “The metre should be rigidly regulated” (“English” 61). At the same time, the “Homiletics” notebook includes a seven-page prose paraphrase for a poem on “the clean pig—a poem of dignity and simplicity” (November 12, 1900, 21-27). [Note 10]

Appropriately, Vachel’s overall view of a poet is delineated in his “Illustrating” notebook. He knew his own inclinations well, especially the urge to engage in self-analysis. “It behooves a man, once a year, to inspect his standing in this world,” he declared, “and study how he can improve it by readjusting the resources at hand”:

A child plans, roughly by the hour. A boy by the day, a youth by the week. A young man should plan by stretches of five years.

For five years then—I shall not read. For five years I shall bow to no books. For five years I have three things to learn—the gym, the art room, and mankind. No books, I say—only the poets and Shakespeare, and the notebooks, and an expense account.

In those five years to learn to be businesslike—prompt, and self-possessed! July 21—The poets are the only teachers. He who is most orthodox—and still a poet, is master for me. (55-56)

At last, by mid-December 1900, Vachel was tired of studying, writing, preparing to prepare. “Thank the Lord I am going to Chicago,” he wrote Paul Wakefield: “I am getting more tired of waiting than impatient to go. I can’t read with much interest any more, and seem to have written all the verse that there is at present within me. I don’t go to see the girls much, and there are no fellows here that think I am human” (December 22, Ward). He was ready to follow through on what he had promised his parents in September: “When I get to Chicago I will have neither the time nor the energy to spare to read anything. I will draw all day and study the city, and the people in it in the evening. I must have a wider and more thorough observation of the life of my fellow citizens. I want to study the types of every nationality, their ways and by ways. I want to know by my own observation all the phenomena of poverty, and of the business world, and of the intellectual and artistic world of Chicago. I want to know everything that an illustrator should know to make his business pay. There are a great many other things I want to know. I certainly will have no time to read. I want to be thoroughly prepared to apply my art education as soon as it is finished. Chicago and New York shall be my universities. I am going to be my own professors and my own diploma. Wow!” (September 1, 1900). He had his fears, though, and at the end of his “Disciples of Christ” notebook he penned a line that he would echo in his poetry for many years to come: “God help us all to be brave” (60).

On a clear and cold Wednesday, 5:10 a.m., January 2, 1901, an excited chronic starter boarded an Illinois Central passenger train at the Springfield depot. He arrived in Chicago shortly after twelve noon, taking seven hours to travel little more than 200 miles. His life over the next nine months would be nearly as regular as a railroad schedule, but a bit more expeditious. High school friend and new roommate, Fred “Bogie” Bogardus, greeted him at the station and took him to a downtown lunch counter for his first big city meal. Afterward, the two rode the elevated to Monkfield, in West Chicago, and walked to their room at 224 South Paulina Street, where they paid their first month’s rent, at seven dollars apiece. Bogardus left for classes at the Rush Medical College, and Vachel walked the 2.5 miles to the Art Institute, where he wandered the corridors and paid his tuition: $25, plus $2 for incidentals. “That about broke me,” he wrote in his diary-datebook (the first of many such datebooks in his life): “I postponed the locker till tomorrow.” After returning to South Paulina, he walked from 5:00 to 5:45, went out to supper with Bogardus, unpacked his trunk, bathed, and began writing his datebook chronicle. While he was living on his parents’ money, he felt obligated to account for every hour of his day and every nickel of his money. In addition to this daily record, he
began his Chicago sojourn by writing home at least once a week, describing his life in exceptional detail, exceptional, that is, even for Vachel Lindsay. [Note 11]

The morning of January 3, he awoke at 8:10, breakfasted at Coe’s restaurant with Bogardus, took the elevated to State Street, and walked three blocks to the Institute. After identifying himself as a student, he went downstairs and paid for his portfolio and locker ($1.05): “It was by the elementary room, at the end of several passageways.” A fellow student helped him arrange his portfolio, and he spent the rest of the morning trying to draw a sketch of a foot cast. After a downtown lunch, he returned to the Institute and drew from 1:00 to 4:00, toured the Institute halls and library until 5:00, walked home, and went to supper at 6:00. Back in the South Paulina room, he practiced his drawing, read a pamphlet from Frank Holme’s School of Illustration (see previous chapter, note 9), and again recounted his day in his datebook.

Friday, January 4, was much the same, although after lunch Vachel experienced firsthand the faceless anonymity of life in a big city: “Girl at door, when I came back [to the Art Institute] wanted me to pay 25 c. [admission fee]. Flattering. She had seen me about 6 times.” On the way back to his room, he dined on a lemon and an orange, writing in his datebook: “Sick a little.” The next morning, after a breakfast of Graham crackers, he wrote his first letter home and then took the 1:10 elevated to Powers Theatre, where he saw E[dward] H[ugh] Sothern’s Hamlet. He concluded it was not as good as the Walker Whiteside Hamlet he had seen in Springfield the previous October (see “Hamlet,” Poetry 426). Meanwhile, only a fragment of Vachel’s January 5 letter is extant: “The girls are an ugly lot. May the muse of art grant that a nearer acquaintance may change my opinion. If there are any princesses among them, they are very cleverly disguised.” He added that the criticisms of his teachers “always strike me as being very sound,” although he warned his parents: “I do not though, want to paint a sunrise letter. I do not want this to sound enthusiastic. I feel as cold as a butcher. I am satisfied and sanely expectant. As to my co-workers—some of them I can see, are doing as well as I could dream of—and there are a lot of chumps mixed in of course. . . . There are two women who go the rounds and criticise your work. They get around twice a morning at best, spending about a minute and a half with each student, or less. In that interval they are able to tell you the principal blunders of your drawing—and it has to be rubbed out—practically—and started again. I am learning as fast as I should expect.” [Note 12]

On Monday, January 7, he sent home another detailed letter; although, again, only a fragment survives: “Today was a representative day at the Art Institute. Fred and I had finished breakfast at the near by^ restaurant by 7:30. Then I cleaned up and washed my teeth and shined my shoes and put on my overcoat—I always wear that—and walked a block and a half south to the Elevated Station and paid the girl at the gate a nickel and watched her pull the bell rope—and walked up stairs^ and took the train straight east to the lake front. I got off at Adams street station—just one block west of the institute. Then I walked to the building—arriving there about 8:30. School begins at 9, but one may work most anytime. I climbed the big front steps, and went through the double doors. Then there is a brass railing and a uniformed guard. There is a guard in blue for every room, first and second floor. He is responsible for the appearance of his room. This guard at the front door stands by a young lady at a desk. The desk has catalogues and periodicals for sale pertaining to the institute. She also has the roll-book where she marks
the Art Student present, for the day—and then he may pass on. Every day but Wednesday’s^ and Saturdays—visitors must pay 25 cents to see the museum. They are not admitted to the School rooms—down stairs^. . . I went down stairs by a broad marble stairway. In the open hallway there were lockers against the West wall—and dressing rooms to north and south—and on the north near stairway—the old gentleman who sells portfolios and art supplies. On the South near the stairway—the registrar’s desk—where I paid my tuition last Wednesday. . . My locker is not in this hallway. I went south through a long passageway—and East—and there it was, by the Elementary Drawing rooms. I took out my portfolio—and hung up my duds. I took an easel from the pile in the North East corner of the Elementary room and set it up in the South East corner. Then I opened my portfolio. It is two large cardboards, about 36 by 20, hinged by a cloth back. In the portfolio. . . [fragment ends, Virginia]. Ten days later, Vachel wrote to explain his reasons for the extraordinary detail in his letters and datebook: “I have spent the evening—tonight—writing this letter. This diary system uses up two evenings a week. I will keep it up till you get a good idea of my work. Then you can read the old letters for details—and I will just send the things that are out of the ordinary.” Above all, he wanted to document his claim: “I study hard all the time I am in the building at something. I do not monkey away any time, sure” (January 17).

At first Vachel attended two non-credit classes during the afternoon session, a pen-and-ink sketching class with Miss [Martha Susan] Baker and an architecture class with a Mr. Shattuck (Vachel wrote “Statuck,” but “Shattuck” is more likely). Miss Baker emerged as the favorite: “. . . Miss Baker said I was working along the right line—and to just keep on as I have started. She does not tell this to everyone. She says they finish their drawings before they commence them—and that they put in too much detail and lose the general effect etc. I love Miss Baker. She is sweet and wears a blue waist and specks^ . She commended my minute sketches—(time poses)—today—and last week she passed them over to my neighbor for emulation—the first I ever tried” (January 17). After a few weeks, however, he discovered that he did not have the energy to draw for a full day and decided to concentrate on his for-credit morning class. The Institute’s mandated technique for the beginning student was “blocking,” that is, making pencil sketches of geometrical objects or of plaster casts, such as a foot or a fist. In Vachel’s words: “They (the authorities) require—the first month—that you reproduce the cast in the same size and position, proportion, etc. and draw the lines where the edges of the shadows come. No shading allowed—and no curved lines. All blocking. Beginners^ work looks better blocked, anyway. At the end of the month you hand in a drawing, as a sort of evidence that you are at work. At the end of six months, if your work will justify it, they will put you in the next class. . . . I do not learn faster than the rest” (January 17). The instructors emphasized accuracy, and Vachel’s letters echo a continuing refrain: “I find I improve a little each day” (February 2). To prove his point, he frequently sent examples of his work to his parents, and approximately 80 of his art school drawings—from Chicago and from New York (1901-04)—may still be seen. (All are collected in the Barrett Library at the University of Virginia’s Alderman Library.)

After dropping his afternoon classes, Vachel spent his free time reading extensively (contrary to his plan outlined during his summer of preparation). He used both the Institute and the Chicago Public libraries, reviewing a variety of art and art history books and reading James Joseph Jacques Tissot’s *The Life of Our Saviour Jesus*
Christ (1897)—in an edition that included Tissot’s illustrations. In his room at night, he wrote and revised poetry and studied the several figures of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (the “P.R.B.”): William Morris, Dante and Christina Rossetti, William Bell Scott, and a biography of Sir John Millais. Morris’ Hopes and Fears for Art. Vachel related to his father, led him to Ruskin’s work on Gothic architecture in The Stones of Venice. In turn, Ruskin led him to Blake, Swinburne, and J.M.W. Turner. “This sort of reading—once started,” he explained, “plans itself—and is always of interest, and solid . . . I am going to make the P.R.B. the basis and starting-point of any art reading I may do, because I can understand them and their spirit, and wherever they are compared with others—the very comparison will make the others interesting. When I say the P.R.B.—I mean what they were—and what they became—their friends, foes and contemporaries” (February 24). Earlier, on January 18, he had begun entering his observations in the first of five new notebooks that he would devote to his art studies, notebooks that he kept from 1901 through 1907. Although he assured his parents that he was “not here to read” (February 24), his datebook during the first few months in Chicago reflects time spent with the works of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Goethe, Byron, Keats, and Sidney Lanier, in addition to the writers of and on the P.R.B.

Vachel was especially pleased with his roommate: “He needs a nurse. He is a monomaniac on study” (January 13). On Saturday nights, study and drawing were set aside, and each boy spent fifty cents for an upper-balcony seat at one of Chicago’s many stage plays. (By April 1, Vachel boasted that he and Bogardus had “about gone the rounds of the theatres.”) Sunday mornings were spent in church, generally at Chicago’s West Side church (Disciples). Within weeks, Uncle Boy was teaching a Sunday School class of 17-year-olds, and he transferred his membership from his Springfield church. The pastor at West Side was “Brother” John Wells Allen. Casey Allen, Brother Allen’s son, was already friend to Paul Wakefield and soon would be Vachel’s friend as well. (In early May 1901, though, Casey Allen left Chicago for a job in Spokane, Washington.)

As far as Dr. and Mrs. Lindsay knew, their art student son was happy and working conscientiously, although they were anxious about his health. On January 20, Kate expressed pleasure with his reported progress, but she was concerned about his nerves and his diet: “I feel a little anxious about your food. I so often wish you could have three square, healthful meals a day at home. Be careful to select your food with reference to proper nourishing qualities and general healthfulness.” Next morning Dr. Lindsay scribbled a hasty postscript, apologizing for its brevity but explaining that he was working hard: “It takes much money to run us. . . . Take plenty exercise eat nourishing food—go to bed early enough to get sleep enough—Attend church—Do some church work of example—With love—Papa” (Virginia). Vachel’s responses amount to continuing reassurances that he was living just where he wanted to live and doing just what he wanted to do: “there do not seem to be any of the unexpected drains that come at Hiram—for a thousand student schemes. My life here, is in general, much more regular than it has been anywhere else. I am in a big machine, and it passes me along in a charming way.” And he insisted that, “While my eating does not have all the characteristics of that at home—I am enjoying it as much as I do any sort of eating—and get the right sort of nourishment therefrom . . . . I take just the sort and amount of exercise I need, with the neccessary^ regularity, without concerning myself to make myself do it. I am able to conserve my will in more important things. I eat simple
meals—but mighty good stuff—and seldom the same things twice, and at regular times, three a day—with a light dinner—that will not make me sleepy—such as I have always coveted” (January 24).

A week later he reiterated: “. . . all the energy I spent pottering around with people I could not avoid at Hiram—talking to them, understanding them, working on committees with them—going to the celebrations they enjoyed—and forcing myself into the spirit of them—all this drain goes straight into my art work now—and I dread any diversion of it into shallower channels. Such a thing will not come of course. But do not waste any sympathy on my loneliness, when I am not so” (February 2). And again, a few days later, he insisted that he was in the best of health: “I am in as good shape as ever that I remember” (February 11).

Vachel’s 1901 datebook, however, relates a different story, starting with the comment, “Sick a little,” on January 4. Dr. Lindsay’s son’s nutritious dinner on January 7 was a sack of peanuts and a glass of soda water. The next evening he dined on salted almonds; the evening after, it was six cookies. On January 10, he bought apple pie for lunch and ate a “bad” pigeon for dinner. On January 11, he felt “nerve-fevered” and was unable to concentrate on his drawing; he again had pie for lunch. On January 18, he cut classes and spent the day at home: “Went to room and napped most of afternoon. Horribly stupid, nervous lassitude of some sort.” He had oranges and bananas for dinner. On January 20, he succumbed to his fondness for sweets: “Bought candy at two stores on the way to church. Chocolate almonds. Dissipated!” On January 28, he was again too nervous to draw, so he walked home in the afternoon and napped. On an impulse he splurged and bought a two-dollar ticket to see Cyrano de Bergerac. The next day he felt guilty and decided to quit spending money on the theater (an idle resolution). On February 5, Miss Baker finally approved his “block” drawings (after first refusing them), and he celebrated with two pieces of lemon pie for lunch. On February 11, he noted: “a pain in my system.” And so on: the datebook contains several references to “nerves,” dizziness, and overall malaise, much of the ill health likely due to a lack of nourishing food.

In her copy of Masters’ biography, Olive wrote: “diet always erratic” (106). We may remember “the duck-pond diviner” in Adventures While Preaching the Gospel of Beauty, the diviner who prophesied that Vachel was a “Child of Destiny” and “fond of sweets.” This child of destiny was also fond of recording many particulars of his behavior in his datebook; and it is obvious that, in only a few weeks of exploring Chicago on his own, he had discovered the human Great Divide, the watershed difference between knowing one’s duty and actually doing it. Outwardly, he was intent on preparing himself as the mature Christian art leader of the future. Inwardly, he wavered and succumbed to puerile distractions: the popular theater, afternoon naps, chocolate-covered almonds, lemon pie. His guilt feelings, moreover, taught him that such behavior would not be forgiven by his internalized parent, his conscience, his self-severing wedge. Guilt feelings, however, were no more successful than intellect in Vachel’s futile efforts to control childlike urges and other lapses in his pursuit of duty. He was, in fact, a relatively normal, independent, self-divided human being, especially a human being who was/is a product of the Protestant ethic. He embodied an anomalous mixture of maturity and immaturity, man and boy, control and impulse. He would, like many child-hearted
Americans, waver back and forth between his separate sides for the rest of his life. He would be Uncle Boy.

The modicum of maturity manifest in Vachel’s Chicago letters lies in the fact that he was able to disguise his behavior when he wrote home to his parents. For their information, his story was consistent: “I am certainly at work more steadily than ever in my life before, because it is all work I can do without confusion of the nerves” (February 24). The tone of his letters was reassuring; the content was what he knew his mother and father wanted to read. The wavering son proclaimed to his parents that, at last, he had one unwavering aim.

5

By January 24, Vachel was acclimated enough to admit that a few of the students “look like pretty nice girls . . . . There are no extraordinary beauties among them—none to equal my dago^—on twelfth^ street—Springfield—but they are none of them as ugly as they looked at first. There are more redheads than I ever saw before.” (His “dago” on 12th Street was Nellie Vieira, who was of Portuguese blood and 9 years old.) [Note 13] About the same time, Vachel sent a candid letter to Paul Wakefield. He related how much he enjoyed his new freedom from academic study, and then added: “But now I go to my Art Institute—and draw my pictures right there—for their own sweet sakes—without any previous preparation the night before—or any review the evening after. I come home with my work done and my soul in debt to no broken promise to itself or its alma pater. Tis^ a consummation devoutly to be wished. I can’t draw worth a darn—but I get lots of occupation for my mind—and it kills time like everything. The Art Institute burns a hole in the day—a bigger hole in a shorter time than sleep itself could do. There is solid respite in it. . . . There is one fair woman though—I might tell you about her. I always do find an Eve in the desert. I am the victim of a fluttering heart. The only way I can forget this woman is to think of my little Dago in Springfield” (no date, Ward). There is no record, however, of this fair woman’s identity. [Note 14]

On the anniversary of his first month of study, Vachel advised his parents that he was “beginning to feel quite at home at the Institute—and understand it after a fashion.” He wrote nothing, however, about his “fluttering heart” or about his inability to “draw worth a darn,” claiming instead: “And while my work is far from being irksome at present—even the so-called irksome part of it—I think by the end of this term I will feel myself quite an artist in spirit—more in the art world than out of it—and since that is my natural atmosphere I do not suppose I will ever try to escape it. . . . While I do not think there are any profoundly accomplished draughtsmen here—at the same time—out of five critics—morning afternoon and 4 to 5 o’clock—I have received no criticisms that seemed unnecessary^, or unsympathetic, or finicky. Those stories of timid students withered in their prime by academic censure and iron routine do not go. . . . It is an amusing thing to notice the heterogeneous^ elements of the Elementary class. There are about one third as many boys as women. And the boys are all about my age—and seem to all be intending to be illustrators—but they do not look potentially great enough to scare me away from my future.” The girls, he claimed, were largely killing time. Some were mothers and even grandmothers “who come for a little art culture I suppose.” With characteristic humor, he added: “I do not say this to encourage Mama to attend. They do not look like
inspiring company.” He did expect, he added, more artistic students in the advanced classes: “The chaff is winnowed as in the higher classes of any school” (February 2).

Vachel’s one concern, he maintained, was that the Institute did not have “a very heavily charged art atmosphere, anywhere in the building . . . Whatever I absorb of art Spirit—I must manufacture for myself—which I am doing, as fast as my pores can take it in. The hour’s reading I do at noon—and the Saturday reading—are helping my outlook and complementing my work.” On the other hand, he was not at all concerned that he had made few friends among the students: “To actually draw well, and be in the state for rapid technical progress, requires a sensitive adjustment of the faculties—that with me is absolutely incompatible with contact with many people. I have to swallow the artist to become a man. It is sufficient to know that I can become one, after a fashion and in an emergency, without practicing the metamorphosis unnecessarily. . . . I say all this merely as an introduction that you may understand with what satisfaction I chronicle the fact that the Art Students are not over-social—and let one alone most delightfully. When I discover any real geniuses among them, I shall make a special effort to break down any coldness. Otherwise my time and my nerves are my own” (February 2). Apparently, though, as friend Paul Wakefield knew, there was one fair student whose attention Vachel’s cold, fluttering heart would have welcomed.

When the art student focused his thoughts on his favorite faculty member, Miss Baker, he observed that an art magazine had described her as “distinctly a product of the Art Institute having never studied elsewhere . . . That means two things (1) it means one may learn a business within the walls of Chicago—that is along the artistic line—and do at least tolerably well—and (2) it means that such a thing is not often done. So I suppose, at the present aspect—it would be reasonable for me to learn my business as well as Miss Baker has learned her’s—before going elsewhere. Of course we will wait and see.” Vachel then closed his long review of his first month’s effort by thanking his father for his support and by restating his own resolve: “I am glad Papa says he feels hopeful of my eventual success. I am sure my career heretofore has been little other than promise without performance—no matter how much promise—and no matter how you were willing to take the promise for its face value. It is a satisfaction to store up a series of crude drawings—each one with some effort in it—they are some sort of performance, anyway. . . . I have a great deal to do here—and I hope to keep at it. Within the field of art I must keep, in a sense—for even within it—the ways are so many and so devious that I will have to know something of all of them to choose the best. I do not expect to be anything but an illustrator—but even the thoroughly accomplished draughtsman has a very great deal to know and choose between. Yours with love Vachel” (February 2).

As time passed, Dr. Lindsay’s son became increasingly more confident. On February 11, he announced that he had not seen “any people at the Institute as yet that compare, in the promise of their first impression, with my intimate Hiram friends . . . . They do not look to be quite such a valuable sort of people. But I do not know any of them yet. There are a great many diamonds and rubies hid among them, of course, but I am not seeking goodly jewels at present.” He added that he had stopped attending the voluntary lectures in favor of further reading in the library and additional sketching. There was much to learn: “And I am a busy boy” (February 11). Fortunately, he added a couple weeks later, the Art Institute classes also did not compare with Hiram: “I am
going to learn to draw as hard as I can and read art when I cannot draw. There has scarcely been an hour since I have been to Chicago that I could not do the one or the other with my best attention. This is more hopeful an outlook than the see saw^ work of study and recitation at college. I know most everything I have read up here—remember it all in spirit, and most of it in letter.”

He claimed to have already filled 64 pages in the new notebook he had started on January 18, and he obviously relished the opportunity to concentrate on his own interests. By way of further comparison, he reported that, a few evenings before, he had stepped into a YMCA reading room “and shuffled through the papers . . . . I found in the diffusion of attention required to mix through the different sorts—that same old sensation of blankness and loss of attention that was my bane at school. I could not hurry through the papers and read them with any memory much, without a considerable effort of the reserve will power. Of course I expected to find them interesting and was surprised. This little incident proved to me how much I had been for the last month in my own proper environment, and how different these days are from the old days. I scarcely realized it before. Please accept my gratitude. Yours with love Vachel—” (February 24).

Actually, Vachel’s parents would have suspected “diffusion of attention” had they known about their son’s poetry writing. Again his datebook, not his letters, relates the story. On January 18, in addition to beginning a new notebook, he revised his high school poem, “The Battle” (Poetry 29). After a nap, he labored over an addition to his “Last Song of Lucifer,” an addition entitled “A Vision for the King.” A revised version may now be seen in the first 22 lines of the published poem (Poetry 362-363). On January 22, he sent a draft of “A Vision” to the Chicago American. On February 8, he wrote in his datebook: “Corrected verses all day. Wrote some odd verses, and rearranged them. . . . Wrote introductions to Lucifer’s dream & Song. Rewrote the prose of the Butterfly. Patched out the Shadow” [that is, his Hiram poem, “The Shadow and the Sentinel”]. He also was working on another dream poem, “Midnight Pantheism” (121 lines), a copy of which is in the Ward collection, as well as poems entitled “The Beggar Lady,” “The Fen King,” and “Rose Rhyme of the Wayside” (published as “Couches of Earth and Gardens of Roses,” Poetry 33). On February 14, 15, and 16, he stayed in his room and wrote verses, sending manuscripts to McClure’s, Curtis Publishing (Saturday Evening Post), Century, Harper’s, Scribner’s, Life, Outlook, Everybody’s, and Munsey’s. By February 20, McClure’s had rejected “Midnight Pantheism”: “Don’t blame them,” was Vachel’s candid datebook observation. On February 23, the Century returned its manuscripts. Other rejection slips followed in March and April.

The extent of his parents’ knowledge of this poetic activity was a passage from a letter written January 20. Vachel did not mention his January 18 nap, but he did admit to staying home all day, taking advantage of the fact that his roommate had had to leave for a funeral: “I revised and copied some of my more ambitious verse for a relaxation, and copied and classified a great many notes accumulated the day before. I copied and revised altogether six poems. Three of them are bound to succeed some day. They have many accidental merits that I did not arrange for, as a result of revision from other standpoints. I went to bed early.” Four days later, on January 24, he asked for a copy of his “hog poem” [see Note 10]. However, none of the surviving letters from this time mentions the Lindsay son’s intensive quest for publication.
“It is hard to push hard,” Vachel wrote home at the end of February, although he was convinced that he was “progressing a little . . . . My drawings look a little better and I am able to be a little more interested in them. Miss Vanderpole [likely Matilda Vanderpoel]—the critic of my cast work has commenced to give me a little special attention and seems to think I work hard, by some things she said to a friend of mine—Tommy Hoskins—it was” (February 28). On March 15, he was able to announce that, “with several other fellows,” he had been moved into the Intermediate room, although not, as yet, into the Intermediate classes: “This is to make space for the newcomers in the Elementary room, and also to give us new casts to work on.” For his own benefit, though, he admitted in his datebook: “Can’t sketch or draw a flowing line” (March 18).

Meanwhile, to his parents, Vachel continued to be reassuring. Recent studies, he insisted, provided reinforcement for his career decision. French critics (that is, in Vachel’s mind, Norman critics) insist that “English Art [that is, Saxon art] was distinctly a medium for expressing thought,” that “the great English Artists admit that the whole nation expects them to preach and to moralize . . . . Now don’t you see that this thought-worship on the part of the English Art makes it the fountain head\(^\uparrow\) and inspiration of the Cartoon—the popular illustration? That is the thing I have discovered this week—that the English Artists are the master spirits to inspire an earnest illustrator. The idea of Beauty seems to be always mixed in the English mind with the worship of thought or emotion. With the French it stands more alone as a thing of itself to be worshiped.” John Ruskin, he continued, “took permanent hold because he worked up a theory of art congenial to the spirit of Earnest\(^\uparrow\) Englishmen”:

Now I think America needs an Art Theory, an Art Criticism, on the same plan. Taine said that Art is not so much an absolute thing, as it is the blossoming of the leading ideas of a race or civilization, in a proportion and balance that represents best the spirit of the nation, rather than a world wide\(^\uparrow\) impulse for Absolute Beauty.

Now if we choose the most Democratic Art-form—we must take the Cartoon to represent the spirit of America. The only trouble is, no Critic has stopped to greet it as a form of high Art. We certainly need an American system of Art Criticism as much as there is a distinctly British and a distinctly French system. It would take a daring critic to stand up and defend our present day newspaper drawing as high art. Still it has the limitations and the possibilities that are bound to evolve a distinct school of Art in time.

Vachel did acknowledge that “William Morris and his successors have dealt in the problem of Democratic Art, especially in England. . . . But they have only laid the foundations of a work that will some day be done for America till the Avarage\(^\uparrow\) American is convinced that true Art is Democratic, and all that sort of a thing, just as some Artists are taught to prate that Truth is Beauty, and Beauty is Truth, Art is Religion\(^\uparrow\), Religion\(^\uparrow\) is Art etc.” (March 15). Art for mere art's sake was never part of the creed of Vachel the Conqueror.

A week after the above letter, on March 23, Vachel advised his parents that his roommate had been accepted as an intern at Chicago’s Cook County Hospital, beginning June 1. Then he boasted: “I also have had my share of good fortune. No more flunks for
me.” He had submitted his first drawings for formal evaluation. They had been approved, and he was now “a full fledged Intermediate . . . . That is considered a respectable record for one term. It certainly was no terrible chore, and since I can with a reasonable effort keep pace in technical progress with the rest, it will encourage me to try a little harder as the days go by. As a rule I am averse to these Sun-burst efforts because of reaction. Fred is an example. He will need a big rest and change now, till June 1.”

This first taste of artistic success put Vachel in an introspective mood, and he reviewed his first term in Chicago for the benefit of his parents: “Well, this term, I have learned a whole lot about art in general, and several artists in particular, and something about pictures and quite a little about Chicago, and also have kept pace in the drawing room. From my present work, I have no serious fears of being considered inferior in the artistic execution of my ideas, original and other wise^, when I have graduated. While my hand has its peculiarities, it seems as tractable as most, in execution, and I think the steady work of the next three years will make it a satisfactory servant. Two thirds of the art training is of the eye. How to look at things. That is a little harder for me, but comes with patience.” On the other hand, some of his fellow students reminded him of himself when he was at Hiram: “They are studying Art as I studied several things else, once, and they illustrate the law of compensations. I suppose they do very well at Latin, etc^, but they exhibit the most rank stupidity in using their heads and their eyes. It is astonishing how helpless they are, after the most patient instruction on the part of the critic and the most earnest attention on their own. It isn’t a question of manual skill, in the beginning Elementary work, only common sense. And I suppose we are all dunces at something.”

Nevertheless, he shrewdly proclaimed, his Hiram experience had been very useful: “I feel myself greatly at the advantage of the fellows in my class, and in general therefore to those of the school in all the accessory matters of art success. I do not believe there are a dozen men in the school of any college experience, since they started as my class mates^ have, from High School, or less—and have had no outlook but that afforded by the Institute and the city. While they are enthusiasts, or at least faithful workers, they have not that poise and outlook that can only come from a choice of their field, after a scrutiny of many, and a varied tenative^ experience at all sorts of mental exercise and environment. . . . Oh, if I can only keep up with them (the Art Students) I can beat them entirely, entirely. And I am keeping up, for sure.”

He was stunned, he added, to find “that several of the most fundamental books on general art knowledge remained on the art library shelves with the leaves uncut for two years,” until he cut them himself: “Here are a thousand, two thousand students in the main art school of the West, and yet I have no rivals in an effort for thorough study of these books. The students read a great deal, but read the endless art magazines, full of art gossip, and reproductions—but there is no way of determining how much of it will be worth while^ in Fifty years. I believe in books, of the authoritative sort. America is too large a place not to have a place in the Art world, and Art History, equivalent to her place in the history of government and civilization. There does not seem to be a distinctive American school of Art, yet what it should be is certainly a thing worthy of thought and speculation, that one may guide his work with faith and hope in that direction.” The only way to establish such a school is “a study of comparative art history and aesthetics”—from “the precisely essential books & pictures, that are not attended to the most by the
unthinking children following the routine of the school.” These “unthinking children,” in Uncle Boy’s mind, were little more than ordinary Saxons.

Finally, the would-be ideal Saxon detailed the changes involved in his moving to the Intermediate level: “A new critic, a man; another corner of the room; permission to shade ones’ drawings.” The catalog indicated that he could be ready to advance again in “four months, approximately. So you see,” he concluded with the optimism of a chronic starter, “with good work it could be done this term” (March 23).

On the evening of November 9, 1900, Frances Frazee Hamilton, “Aunt Fannie,” sat down to write a long letter to her nephew—only a few weeks before the beginning of his Chicago venture. It was the eve of his 21st birthday, and she had some advice: “Inasmuch as you are to grow about a foot and ten inches tonight, figuratively speaking that is, that you may reach the most important milestone in your life fully equipped, I’ll write a few lines of suggestions. Now, if you’re like I was at your age you will awaken in the morning to find yourself the same creature you’ve been all along and will spend the day wondering why some people make such a fuss about a man’s twenty-first birthday. Before it happens they make him think that on that special day at a certified hour all at once he’ll jump into a very wise man—perhaps you will—I know not, but as for myself, I’m not a man you see, I was the same stupid ninny I was before. You are a man, however, there’s the difference—and perhaps you will realize, what was only a sad disappointment to me.” She added that, when she was 21, she felt her old maid’s days had begun. However, as a man, he had time: he could wait until 35 before he would “a sure enough bachelor and had better begin to plan arrangements for matrimony.”

He was not to tell his “maw” about her advice. His “maw” would prefer “a long letter besmeared with tears, telling you what a dear child to me you have always been. How dearly I have always loved you, and even now how my heart thumps when I think of that dear, sweet, ‘tater patch’ of bygone days, of how you used to tell me of your ‘short panted’ trials, your many humiliations, disappointments and love affairs and how vividly they all return to my rusty memory, and now alas! all that is gone and you are this day a MAN! a sure enough man, big enough to vote for William Jennings Bryan without ever asking your old confidential auntie’s advice or consent.” Your “maw,” she continued, would want me to write “a long sanctimonious letter on religion and how to raise your children when you do get married, and all that sort of thing, but I know only too well how tight she’ll cram you with that sort of thing and so I’ll just scribble on—stuff—stuff—until I use up the rest of my letter and then quit . . . After all, my deary, I do feel sort ’o queerlike about you being a sure enough man. I do love you as you are but if you could be a child again just for to-night! How I would squeeze you and spank you and kiss your ‘tater patch’ and how, again, I would think you the dearest little fellow on earth!” (Virginia).

In spite of the “stuff” in this letter, “Maw” Kate Lindsay would have been proud and supportive, especially if she had known the further advice that Fannie sent a few weeks later, after her nephew had reached Chicago: “How do you like the long anticipated at last? Is the possession as great as the pursuit? Well, my honey I rejoice
with you that you are at last in art school. Now you must make the best of it and dig in earnest. You know how I believe in perseverance. I want you to believe in it too, you’ll never succeed any other way” (January 25, 1901, Virginia). Vachel may have recalled his mother’s letter from a year or two previous: “Your Aunt Fannie is a rare woman. She takes sensible views of every subject that we have discussed. She has a spinal column” (“Sunday, Oct. 22,” likely 1899, Virginia). [Note 15]

In any case, Vachel’s perseverance was soon apparent when, in early March 1901, his “Maw” asked if he could return home and help with the spring yard work. He waited nearly two weeks and then responded with obvious reluctance: “Please name the week or choice of weeks when I would be most useful at home. It would be as bad for me to leave one time as another. Still it would be well to know the week.” He offered additional excuses, and expressed additional disinclination. His parents replied that he could be excused. They recognized that Chicago was not Hiram; and they thought, anyway, their son was finally immersed in his professional preparation with one unwavering aim. In regard to yard work, at least, his resolution (or lack thereof) was again predictable.

Notes for Chapter Nine

[Note 1] Vachel’s letters to Paul Wakefield this summer, 1900, allude to continuing difficulties with the Hiram girls Vachel left behind. On June 16, he reminded Paul: “You promised to work a little jolly for me with the sweetest girl in Hiram. Well, do not forget it” (Ward). A month later, he wrote again: “I feel just like writing to Ruth [Wheeler] tonight. She is the only woman in the world I am sure is glad to get my letters. I will be damned if I will write though. I don’t want to bother her to answer me” (July 9, Ward). On July 14, Vachel announced that he had “quit” on Adaline Mugrage; and, on August 6, he hinted at a lover’s quarrel with a “Miss Hostetter” [likely Hiram student, Carmie Hostetter] (Ward).

[Note 2] Many entries in the notebooks manifest the author’s own awareness of his problems with organization and coherence. For example, in the notebook dedicated to “Speaking,” Vachel wrote: “August 23, 1900—Now when I get to Chicago I must not run away from any of the ideas and lines of thought and ambition already marked out in these note books. They are the flowering of all my past life, the simple and natural outgrowth of my freest soul, so I may be sure of working with a reliable foundation. It will be my duty to consult these, rather than add to them till each old page is immensely suggestive of a whole kingdom of thought, and at hand in a literary emergency, as well as having its effect when my personality begins to crystallize.

“I must work out these ideas rather than add to them. I must develop them into unity, consistency and force. My great danger will not be narrowness but diffuseness. I will be afflicted with a shifting interest in many new things, I will spread myself out like the Nile, and be soaked up by the desert. By a proper consultation of these, the works of the sage Confucius, I may keep myself to some uniformity of development. Few indeed will be my experiences not to be classified under the doctrines and purposes already laid down. I may break from my old life, but I must maintain a continuity with my old self. I should be so busy I have no time for many new notes. Heretofore I have oftener written new things than read over the old” (36-33—the pages are numbered from back to front).
Another entry in “Speaking” reads: “Dec. 4, 1900—It is plain that I must in Chicago learn the art of selection—in all matters. Promiscuous^ absorption is fatal. I must know what to go for when I get to France, and generalizing upon France and America—I must know the few things to be searched thoroughly in Japan” (28).

[Note 3] Compare the following entries in the “Saxon” notebook: “August 18, 1900—Study how, in looking at men, to strip them of the clothing of thought and culture—and leave the temperament bare, its^ nearly all of the man, anyway. The greatest philosophers, deep within the most scientifically established systems are forced at the last to make a choice between two paths where it is merely a question of temperament after all” (8-9).

“December 21, [19]00. In all the study of character—temperament is the most elusive theme—and the least delineated. And the still more deep mystery—the mixing of temperament—is studied least of all.

“Yet this is a great fact in life. A child’s^ temperament is a variably proportioned mixture of that of its father and mother. But only in solitude is the temperament absolute. When two dear friends are together each temperament is but the total of the two—intricately mixed—and expressed with difference only as the words and the mentality of the people differ. There is as much difference in the temperament of a soul alone and a soul with a friend—as there is between those of father and child” (44-45).

[Note 4] Compare this entry from Vachel’s “Speaking” notebook: “The laws of mens’^ thinking have changed. All true progress herafter^ comes from the masses. In America we have the first full Democratic field to work upon. All thoughts have been worked out—the Art is to^ leery to put a new thing—vitaly and perpetually into the life of the people. All the old arts have gone—we must learn the new Arts of Democracy” (11-12).

[Note 5] By way of contrast, in his notebook on “Illustrating,” Vachel wrote: “The fates deliver us from the day when we repudiate a holy enthusiasm. Let it be forgotten if it will hide itself, let it be transfigured or transformed, but give not that which is holy to the dogs of scorn, shame, or pride or affectation, be not ashamed of the lawful offspring of your heart, and do not apologize^ for your children like a Chinaman” (30).

[Note 6] Further clarification of Vachel’s purpose may be evident in two additional entries from the “Illustrating” notebook: “August 24, 00^. If you are going to thrust your morals down the throat of the artist—see that you thrust your art down the throat of the moralist. Alternate a cartoon bearing a ringing message with a cartoon that is nothing but high art. The angered Artist then will look for a moral where there is none, the holy Moralist will likewise” (31). “Before starting any high art cartoons for Christ—Study the cheap cartoons, if any particular ones have done any sure work, turned any political situation or brought about any real change on the face of the world. Let each series be a definite purpose—and unless that campaign is sucessful^—the cartoon is useless” (69).

[Note 7] The first sentence in this entry is squeezed in—as though it were an afterthought.

[Note 8] In a letter to Paul Wakefield, September 29, 1900, Vachel claimed that he was reading Shakespeare’s histories and planned a close study of the biblical prophets (Ward). For Charles Dudley Warner, see Chapter 8, Note 4. However, Vachel was confused: Warner’s work was on the American, not the English Men of Letters series.
Vachel also included public speaking among the arts, according to several entries in the “Speaking” notebook: “A speech, in the strict sense of the term exists only in the art of speaking” (5); “August 12, 1900. There is an analogy between a short speech and a short story. Both are a test of Art qualities” (37); “Speaking should be a series of pictures, when possible” (40).

On January 24, 1901, Vachel wrote his parents: “I want my hog poem—if you have a convenient copy. I have begun to see how I could develop the hog idea and make it strong. If not at hand—never mind. I didn’t keep a copy, you know.”

In 1866, a group of Chicago artists formed the Chicago Academy of Design. Twelve years later, in 1878, after various fiscal problems, the group invited a number of Chicago businessmen to assist in managing the school. The following year, however, the businessmen resigned en masse and formed another new school: the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts (officially founded on May 24, 1879). Three and a half years later (in December 1882), under the leadership of President Charles L. Hutchinson, the name was changed to the Art Institute of Chicago. Hutchinson served as president for 43 years. William Merchant Richardson French (1843-1914) was the director of the Academy and of the Institute from 1879 until his death. The patriarchal drawing instructor (for over 30 years) was John H[enry] Vanderpoel (1857-1911), whose book The Human Figure (1907) became a standard textbook in the field. Vachel’s first critic in his Elementary class was “Miss Vanderpoel,” perhaps Matilda Vanderpoel, sister to John Henry (both were born in the Netherlands). Other Vachel instructors may be identified: miniaturist Martha Susan Baker (1871-1911), sculptor Lorado Taft (1860-1936), painter Frank Phoenix (died 1924), painter and composition teacher Frederick Richardson (1862-1937), and still-life teacher “Mr. Wilson” (Chicago artist Louis W. Wilson, dates unknown).

On February 9, 1927, Vachel advised Harriet Monroe: “I will never forget what an absolutely rotten drawing teacher Charles Frances Brown was. I had to go to New York to get teachers, after sticking around the Art Institute from 1900 to 1904” [he left the Institute in June 1903]. Vachel added, though, that he “remembered with great gratitude the Art Institute as a Museum, if not a school, and was especially grateful, and am still, for the magnificent and highly browsable Ryerson Library” (letter, Virginia).

In Vachel’s notebook on “Speaking,” we read: “October 17, 1900. Why did Whiteside—in Hamlet—impress me as a demonstrator that man is less of an animal than ever I thought? When this body rots—how much of the man goes? None of the identity—but much of the unwholesomeness and deformedness of the mind—let us hope is healed in the ressurrection^. But still I have not yet understood why I was so sure that, in a new sense—man is not an animal. It was an extraordinary^ conviction, discovery. Parallell^ cases will probably occur^ in the future. They must be understood” (18).

On December 6, 1900, Vachel invited Paul Wakefield to come to Springfield and meet a “sweet little girl,” that is, Nellie Vieira. Her mother, he added, was a dressmaker (Ward). Mrs. Vieira was Kate Lindsay’s dressmaker; her daughter Nellie was ten years old.

One of Vachel’s closest student friends at the Institute, as we shall see, was Alice Cleaver. In early 1901, however, Cleaver had been at the Institute for more than a
full year. It is unlikely that she was the “Eve” referred to here. This Eve almost certainly was in Vachel’s Elementary class.

[Note 15] Aunt Fannie was a creditable artist in her own right and was likely pleased that her nephew had finally enrolled in the Chicago Art Institute. Three of Hamilton’s works are currently collected in the Vachel Lindsay Home, Springfield, gifts from Vachel’s niece, Catharine Blair.
Frances “Aunt Fannie” Frazee Hamilton