Vachel Lindsay

Poet Description:

Lindsay was born in his family home in Springfield, Illinois, delivered by his physician father. Lindsay spent nearly three years at Hiram College trying to fulfill his father's ambition that he become a doctor, but then convinced his parents art was his real mission. He enrolled at the Chicago Art Institute in 1901. Two years later, he transferred to the New York School of Art, but he was already spending a good deal of time writing poems. On a visit home in 1904, he had the first of many visions; one of the results was a large pen-and-ink drawing of his personal mythology, "The Map of the Universe." He began to issue illustrated poetry broadsides and taught art appreciation at New York's West Side YMCA. In 1906, he joined a friend on a tramp steamer to Florida. Lindsay decided to see America on the way home; walking six hundred miles and begging a few train rides, he made his way north to Kentucky. He continued walking on to Indiana. It was the first of several major walks, though on the later trips Lindsay brought books, illustrated poetry broadsides, and pamphlets with him to exchange for room and board. Rhymes to be Traded for Bread accompanied him on his 1912 trek along the Santa Fe Trail to Colorado and New Mexico. He took a train to Los Angeles, then hiked north to San Francisco. Meanwhile he was giving away poems and writing new ones. Earlier he had walked his native Midwest, giving away poems; no other American poet before or since has done anything quite the same. In 1914, Lindsay wrote "The Congo," which would win admirers and detractors and haunt him for the rest of his life. On demand as a performer over the next decade and more, his "Evening of Higher Vaudeville and Orthodox Verse" always met with demands for "The Congo." Yet Lindsay was moving into more visionary poetry. He spent the summer of 1921 hiking in Glacier National Park, an experience that produced the poems of Going-to-the-Sun (1923), illustrated in a style influenced by his study of Egyptian hieroglyphics. The poems are hymns to a mythologized nature and to a cultural zone, half material and half otherworldly, that Lindsay offered as an antidote to war and social misery. The public was uninterested. Meanwhile Lindsay had met and impulsively married Elizabeth Conner in 1925. His new work ignored, his marriage in difficulty, Lindsay took his own life in December, 1931, by drinking a bottle of lye.

Race/Ethnicity:
European

Picture:
Gender: Male [2]
Sexuality: Straight [3]
First Name: Vachel
Last Name: Lindsay
Birth & Death Dates:
Monday, November 10, 1879 to Saturday, December 5, 1931
School of Poetry:
Modernist [4]
Birth Place:
Springfield, Illinois
United States
See map: Google Maps [5]
Illinois US
Death Place:
Springfield, Illinois
United States
See map: Google Maps [6]
Illinois US
Group visibility:
Private - accessible only to group members
Source URL: https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/vachel-lindsay

Links
[1] https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/race-ethnicity/european
[3] https://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/sexuality/straight