

posit giant areas of color on a white wall.

And, one might add, it is—or was—the artist's function to solve tensions, as well as create them. The Morris Louis exhibit, which followed Newman's at this gallery, was summarized by Carlyle Burroughs of the *New York Herald Tribune* as follows: "No draper, seriously concerned with making an interior handsome and vaguely exotic, could fulfill his decorative function with better taste."

What can be said, in conclusion, without too much controversy is that the craft of Western painting is a graphic patrimony, a signal of civilization, handed down to us from a culture whose assumptions may in some cases seem outdated. Yet the craft itself can still be made to work for our time,

regardless of the spectacular attacks and cultural bluffs made on it by this exclusive clan or that. "To be out of step with your contemporaries," writes Mr. Washburn, "is to be camouflaged. Although clearly visible, no one may chance to 'see' you."

To which one can only quote André Masson in reply: "that which goes contrary to the prevailing taste is, for me, the most precious of things . . . whatever is scorned, despised or not understood by the society in which one lives has prospects for the future." Attacked on all sides, the craft of painting goes gradually underground. As Baudelaire put it in his day,

voilà ce que c'est de venir dans un temps où il est reçu de croire que l'inspiration suffit et remplace le reste . . . voilà l'abîme ou mène la course désordonnée de Mazeppa.

Whatever Made Tertullian Rave

Whatever made Tertullian rave
or strict Jerome in anger kick
at his cub clawing in frolic
and live flagellant in a cave

or grim Savonarola not recant
with fire at his fingernails
or Dante circle several hells—
tops cedars in the high Levant

with domes of lissome cumulus,
uplifts from molten Orizaba
flaming spews of welting lava,
steadies over waves, tumultuous

in storm, winds wild with birds
in panic, strewn from echelon—
and ekes from this balked hand
the twisting filament of words.

SAMUEL HAZO

The Crack-Up of American Optimism: Vachel Lindsay, The Dante of the Fundamentalists

PETER VIERECK

What is shoddy in the American myth is not affirmation itself; classic tragedy affirms. What is shoddy is not the hard-won affirmation that follows tragic insight but the facile unearned optimism that leads only to disillusionment.

THE END OF an outer material frontier to explore in the west and midwest has helped cause the increasing inner explorations of the spirit. Vachel Lindsay represents a transition. Apparently still an outer explorer, an evoker of picturesque place-names and loud American noises in the fashion of an older school, yet in reality an inward voyager of the religious imagination and the aesthetic imagination, Lindsay remains the finest religious poet produced by America's most local native roots. He is the Dante of the Fundamentalists.

To call Lindsay a mouthpiece of Fundamentalism, is nothing new. What will here be suggested as new (and as fruitful for

future application to other writers) is a conservative hypothesis about the three-fold interaction between Lindsay's human crack-up, his Ruskin-aesthete mission, and his self-destructive attempt to maintain, against his increasing qualms, his Rousseau-Bryan utopian faith (the faith of his Fundamentalist religion and Populist politics). To explore such non-lyric straitjackets of his lyricism, is, be it stressed, not the same as that totalitarian philistia which judges art by its politics. And what will last of Lindsay is a few dozen lines (to be cited presently) of great lyric art.

The patronizing condescension with which Lindsay is read today is his penalty