Lindsay, Vachel (November 10, 1879–December 5, 1931)

Vachel Lindsay was an American poet whose concern for developing a new, popular American language led him to becoming one of the first to write a serious account of motion picture aesthetics. Born in Springfield, Illinois, the hometown of Abraham Lincoln, Lindsay was pressured by his parents to become a doctor, but left Hiram College to study art in Chicago and New York. Encouraged to become a poet, he began wandering the country, reading and selling poetry in exchange for food, in the style of the medieval troubadours. Poems such as “General William Booth Enters Heaven” and “The Congo”, which offered a rustic and populist vision of democratic community and American national identity—as well as an exoticist vision of American others—made him famous nationwide, but he was most noted for his energetic performances of his poetry, which emphasized their musical qualities. His background in art and his personal ties to Lincoln and American culture led him to seek out forms of communication that were clear, direct, and popular, which he found in hieroglyphics and the cinema. His typology of film genres—Action (to him, sculpture-in-motion), Intimacy (painting-in-motion), and Splendor (architecture-in-motion)—emphasized cinema not only as actively visual, but as acting on the audience, becoming a new machine for educating and reconfirming American community.

Further reading:

Browne, N. (1989) *“*Orientalism as an Ideological Form: American Film Theory in the Silent Period*,” Wide Angle* 11 (4): 23-31.

Folks, J. (2001) “Vachel Lindsay's Populism in the Silent Film Era”, *The Midwest Quarterly* 43 (1): 80–94.

Massa, A. (1970) *Vachel Lindsay: Fieldworker of the American Dream*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wolfe, G. J. (1973) *Vachel Lindsay: The Poet as Film Theorist*, New York: Arno Press.

Paratextual materials:

Many of Lindsay’s works are now available online at Project Gutenberg or the Hathi Trust:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/author/234>

<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Search/Home?lookfor=%22Lindsay%2C%20Vachel%2C%201879-1931.%22&searchtype=author&ft=ft&setft=true>

Wikipedia photo:

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/9e/Nicholas_Vachel_Lindsay_1913.jpg>

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