

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

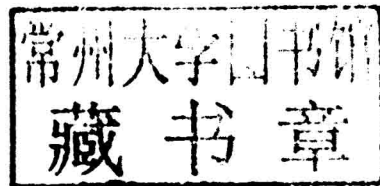
TCLC 314

Volume 314

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short-Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**

**Lawrence J. Trudeau**  
*Editor*



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# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

### Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. The great poets, novelists, short-story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Volumes 1 through 87 of TCLC featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of TCLC was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With TCLC 285, the series returned to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

TCLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), *Shakespearean Criticism* (SC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC).

### Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author’s name (if applicable).
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- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of titles published in other languages and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, plays, nonfiction books, and poetry, short-story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks. All titles reviewed in *TCLC* and in the other Literary Criticism Series can be found online in the *Gale Literary Index*.

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When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as Modern Language Association (MLA) style or University of Chicago Press style. Both the MLA and the University of Chicago formats are acceptable and recognized as being the current standards for citations. It is important, however, to choose one format for all citations; do not mix the two formats within a list of citations.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations*. Ed. Reginald M. Nischik. Rochester: Camden House, 2007. 163-74. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 227-32. Print.

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# James Branch Cabell

## 1879-1958

(Also wrote under the name Branch Cabell) American novelist, short-story writer, poet, critic, essayist, and autobiographer.

The following entry provides criticism of Cabell's life and works. For additional information about Cabell, see *TCLC*, Volume 6.

### INTRODUCTION

James Branch Cabell wrote novels and stories that address, in fantasy form, the disillusionment of the years following World War I. A seminal figure in the early-twentieth-century Southern literary renaissance, he is best known for the novel *Jurgen* (1919) and *The Works of James Branch Cabell* (1927-30), often called *The Biography of the Life of Manuel* or the Storisende Edition. That work comprises a series of works in various genres that cohere in a single narrative arc, featuring chivalric knights, idealized women, and heroic quests. Much of it takes place in an imagined European kingdom called Poictesme. In many of Cabell's works, including *Jurgen*, the protagonist sets off in search of his heart's desire only to find that, when he attains it, the reality cannot match his ideal. Due to its erotic imagery, *Jurgen* was deemed by some to be pornographic, but Cabell was exonerated of obscenity charges after a publicized trial in 1922. Although his popularity waned in the 1930s, many continued to regard him as a notable writer, and he exerted a distinctive influence on fantasy and speculative literature.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in 1879 in Richmond, Virginia, Cabell grew up hearing tales of the Confederacy, Southern values, and chivalric romances. His father, Robert Gamble Cabell II, was the grandson of a former governor of Virginia and the son of a physician. His mother, Anne Branch Cabell, came from a wealthy family. At the age of fifteen, Cabell enrolled at the College of William and Mary, where he taught French and Greek as an upperclassman. While there, he was involved in a minor personal scandal with an older scholar, but his family connections got him reinstated at the school, from which he graduated in 1898. In another ignominious episode, Cabell was suspected of murdering John Scott, his mother's cousin and supposed lover, in 1901. Although the real murderers were eventually identified, the allegation shadowed him for years.

After graduation, Cabell worked for newspapers in Richmond and New York, and he traced his mother's family history in *Branchiana* (1907). His enthusiasm for genealogy later shaped *The Biography of the Life of Manuel*, which covers a fictional family dynasty over several centuries. Also interested in history, Cabell served as an editor for the Virginia War History Commission and as a historian for the Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Virginia in the 1920s.

During this time, Cabell was also publishing fiction in popular magazines, including *Harper's Weekly* and *Collier's*. His first novel, *The Eagle's Shadow*, appeared in 1904, followed by the short-story collection *The Line of Love* (1905) and another novel, *The Cords of Vanity*, in 1909. In 1911, he took a job working for his uncle in the office of a coal mining company, but he devoted himself again to writing in 1913, after meeting and marrying Rebecca Priscilla Bradley Shepard, a widow who shared his interest in history. In 1915, the couple added a son to Priscilla's five existing offspring. After Priscilla died in 1949, Cabell married Margaret Waller Freeman, former editor of the Richmond journal the *Reviewer*, in 1950.

In the early years of his first marriage, Cabell published what many consider his best works and enjoyed his greatest popularity. Most responsible for his rise to literary fortune was the novel *Jurgen*, for which he was charged with obscenity by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. Made famous by the suppression of *Jurgen*, and exonerated at his obscenity trial by a judge who said the work displayed "unusual literary merit," Cabell dedicated the later novella *Taboo* (1921) to John S. Sumner, executive secretary of the society. In a lengthy note prefacing that work, Cabell thanked Sumner for launching him into popularity and financial success. Throughout the 1920s, Cabell's work was championed by such notables as writer and critic H. L. Mencken, Nobel Prize-winning author Sinclair Lewis, and fellow Virginian and novelist Ellen Glasgow. The advent of the Great Depression was accompanied by a shift in tastes toward prose that was less baroque than Cabell's. Readers and critics of the 1930s favored naturalistic novels that depicted life in gritty detail and exposed negative social conditions. Cabell's romantic fantasies fell out of vogue.

Cabell continued to write prolifically, however, and served as editor of the *American Spectator*, a literary newspaper, during the mid-1930s. He was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1937. The 1950s brought



a resurgence of interest in his works, and in the 1960s, in response to his influence on the fantastic in the arts, two journals dedicated to Cabell studies were founded. The better known of the two, *Kalki*, was edited for a time by noted science-fiction author James Blish (also known by his pseudonym, William Atheling, Jr.) and was affiliated with the James Branch Cabell Society. In 1970, Virginia Commonwealth University created the James Branch Cabell Library, where the author's papers are held.

## MAJOR WORKS

Of the dozens of books Cabell wrote over more than half a century, the novel *The Cream of the Jest* (1917) is often regarded as his finest work. Set in Lichfield, a version of Cabell's native Richmond, and in the imagined land of Poictesme, *The Cream of the Jest* follows Felix Kennaston through the writing of his novel, his daily life, and his dreams. Kennaston believes that a talisman he has found is a manifestation of a sigil, a word with magical power, from the book he is writing. If he looks at it while he falls asleep, he enters the world of his novel, where he is accompanied by an idealized woman, Ettare. Finding the other half of the talisman in his wife's dressing room, he comes to appreciate that she is his Ettare. In the end, the novel's narrator reveals that the talisman is really only a broken lid from a jar of his company's cold cream. *The Cream of the Jest* exemplifies Cabell's emphasis on the quest for beauty, the importance of the artist, and the necessity of dreams in the realization of happiness.

*Jurgen*, the novel that made Cabell a household name, is widely considered his most influential and enjoyable work. Cabell presents his cautionary tale about the illusions of youth and the disappointments of middle age in a thinly-veiled satire of the United States as the conquering kingdom of Philistia that spreads mediocre conformity, utilitarian attitudes, and antiliterary bias. The novel's eponymous hero manages to relive part of his life, balancing a sense of cosmic justice with his personal wishes. He ascends from duke to prince to king to emperor to pope, traveling from Earth to hell and heaven and comparing idealized women of his past with his own wife, who grows in his regard as the novel progresses. The book ends with the hero more content with his wife than he had been before the narrative began. Plain as she may be, she is a fine cook, and he is accustomed to her.

*The Biography of the Life of Manuel* traces the adventures and lineage of Dom Manuel the Redeemer, a swineherd-turned-ruler who first appears in *Figures of Earth* (1921). Following his obscenity trial, Cabell assembled several of his wide-ranging works—essays, novels, romances, satires, poems, and plays—in *The Biography of the Life of Manuel*, revising his texts to create a more cohesive narrative. After completing *The Biography of the Life of Manuel*, he shifted away from Poictesme and began publishing

under the name Branch Cabell. He was also the author of several memoirs and essays, including a subjective history of Virginia, which is mostly contained in *Let Me Lie* (1947). *Quiet, Please* (1952) and *As I Remember It* (1955) are more traditionally autobiographical but still reflect upon his home state.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Cabell's literary reputation has been the subject of significant critical discussion. He emerged from relative obscurity to literary distinction because of the publicity surrounding *Jurgen*. As Robert H. Canary (1968) observed, Cabell's rise to fame was fostered by "friends like H. L. Mencken and Burton Rascoe and enemies like the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice." Writing during the height of Cabell's fame in the 1920s, Percy H. Boynton (1923) argued that the author "demands a place in any short series on American contemporary writers because he is the most aggressive and most talked of romantic novelist in the country."

Although many readers have dismissed Cabell as a writer of romantic fantasies, others, including Ellen Glasgow (1930), saw more in his work. Glasgow deemed Cabell "already a classic," finding that his prose fits his content and that his themes are timeless, despite his problematic treatment of women. Glasgow maintained that one of Cabell's greatest assets is his dismissal of fear, noting that he uses romance, comedy, and imagination to conquer it. "Almost alone among American writers," she declared, "he has dared to look into the encompassing void and to laugh because it is bottomless." Similarly, Raymond Himelick (1956-57) judged Cabell's romance to be a means of surviving the mundane dreariness of existence. Contending that Cabell's typical romantic hero is better described as "a kind of cynical Morality demonstrating the reiterative staleness of the human spectacle," Himelick asserted that the author rejected the "romantic postulate of the supreme value of the individual" and avoided the "romantic predilection for agonizing over supernal injustice." Instead, Himelick maintained, Cabell took "wry delight at man's strenuous effort to gild an abattoir with pastels." Repeating one of Cabell's most frequently quoted beliefs, Himelick posited that in his "stance as the dauntless champion of escapism," Cabell insisted that "literature is a criticism of life only in the sense that prison breaking is a criticism of the penitentiary."

Like Glasgow and Himelick, Leslie A. Fiedler (1983; see Further Reading) found value in Cabell's dark side. He maintained that the author's ability to harness "wish-fulfillment fantasies set in a realm between dawn and sunrise, in which time is unreal and crime without consequence" is at the crux of his literary worth, calling it an "essential truth." Fiedler criticized Cabell's inability to see women as anything but ideals, yet found in his "callowness of prolonged adolescence" an outlet for darker fantasies. For Fiedler, indulging

in the pleasures of Cabell's romantic works equates with "giving the Devil his due," which, he observed, has its own value. Elżbieta Foeller-Pituch (2009) analyzed *Jurgen* as a "modernist fantasy." She argued that, in the novel, "[m]etamorphosis is shown to be the primary principle of life—we are all 'transmuted by time's handling' and so are the spaces we inhabit, both outside us and, most importantly, within our minds."

Katherine E. Bishop

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- The Eagle's Shadow*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1904. (Novel)
- The Line of Love*. New York: Harper, 1905. (Short stories)
- Branchiana: Being a Partial Account of the Branch Family in Virginia*. Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1907. (Genealogy)
- Gallantry*. New York: Harper, 1907. (Short stories)
- Chivalry*. New York: Harper, 1909. (Short stories)
- The Cords of Vanity*. New York: Doubleday, Page, 1909. (Novel)
- The Soul of Melicent*. New York: Stokes, 1913. Pub. as *Domnei*. New York: McBride, 1920. (Novel)
- The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck*. New York: McBride, 1915. (Novel)
- The Certain Hour*. New York: McBride, 1916. (Short stories)
- From the Hidden Way*. New York: McBride, 1916. (Poetry)
- The Cream of the Jest: A Comedy of Evasions*. New York: McBride, 1917. (Novel)
- Beyond Life*. New York: McBride, 1919. (Criticism)
- Jurgen: A Comedy of Justice*. New York: McBride, 1919. (Novel)
- Figures of Earth*. New York: McBride, 1921. (Novel)
- The Jewel Merchants*. New York: McBride, 1921. (Play)
- Joseph Hergesheimer*. Chicago: Bookfellows, 1921. (Essay)
- Taboo*. New York: McBride, 1921. (Novella)
- Works*. 19 vols. New York: McBride, 1921-27. (Criticism, novels, play, poetry, and short stories)
- The High Place*. New York: McBride, 1923. (Novel)
- Straws and Prayer-Books*. New York: McBride, 1924. (Criticism)
- The Music from behind the Moon*. New York: Day, 1926. (Novella)
- The Silver Stallion*. New York: McBride, 1926. (Novel)
- Something about Eve*. New York: McBride, 1927. (Novel)
- \**The Works of James Branch Cabell*. 18 vols. New York: McBride, 1927-30. (Essays, novels, plays, poetry, and short stories)
- Ballades from the Hidden Way*. New York: Crosby Gaige, 1928. (Poetry)
- The White Robe*. New York: McBride, 1928. (Novella)
- Sonnets from Antan*. New York: Fountain, 1929. (Poetry)
- The Way of Ecben*. New York: McBride, 1929. (Novella)
- Some of Us*. New York: McBride, 1930. (Criticism)
- Townsend of Lichfield*. New York: McBride, 1930. (Novel)
- These Restless Heads*. New York: McBride, 1932. (Autobiography and short stories)
- Special Delivery*. New York: McBride, 1933. (Fictional letters)
- Ladies and Gentlemen*. New York: McBride, 1934. (Fictional letters)
- Smirt*. New York: McBride, 1934. (Novel)
- Smith*. New York: McBride, 1935. (Novel)
- Preface to the Past*. New York: McBride, 1936. (Prefaces)
- Smire*. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1937. (Novel)
- The King Was in His Counting House*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938. (Novel)
- Hamlet Had an Uncle*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1940. (Novel)
- The First Gentleman of America*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942. Pub. as *The First American Gentleman*. London: Lane/Bodley Head, 1942. (Novel)
- The St. Johns*. With A. J. Hanna. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1943. (History)
- There Were Two Pirates*. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1946. (Novel)
- Let Me Lie*. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1947. (Essays)
- The Witch-Woman: A Trilogy about Her*. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1948. (Novellas)
- The Devil's Own Dear Son*. New York: Farrar, Straus, 1949. (Novel)
- Quiet, Please*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1952. (Essays)
- As I Remember It*. New York: McBride, 1955. (Autobiography)
- Between Friends: Letters of James Branch Cabell and Others*. Ed. Padraic Colum and Margaret Freeman Cabell. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962. (Letters)



*The Letters of James Branch Cabell.* Ed. Edward Wagenknecht. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1975. (Letters)

\*Also known as *The Biography of the Life of Manuel* or the Storisende Edition.

## CRITICISM

**Percy H. Boynton (essay date 1923)**

SOURCE: Boynton, Percy H. "Mr. Cabell Expounds Himself." *English Journal* 12.4 (1923): 258-65. Print.

[In the following essay, Boynton discusses Cabell's life, literary output, and positive and negative critical reception. He emphasizes the importance of the author's Southern identity to his fiction.]

### I

Mr. Cabell demands a place in any short series on American contemporary writers because he is the most aggressive and most talked of romantic novelist in the country, just as Mr. Dreiser must needs have a hearing because he is the most relentless realist. Dreiser believes in telling the whole truth about life and he finds the truth on every hand, revealed to the physical eye; Cabell contends that the only truth that is tolerable is the truth that repudiates the sordid and homely and wearisome facts of daily life. Dreiser's style is as homely as his material; Cabell's as ornate as his romantic dream-world. Dreiser's whole life has been identified with certain great Northern cities; Cabell's with Southern towns—Chicago versus Lichfield. Dreiser is a Puritan apostate—recalcitrant, but still a Puritan in tradition; Cabell is a Cavalier. There is only one point at which they agree—their dissent from the established conventional code, the rule of Mrs. Grundy; Dreiser ignores her or pushes her aside without apology, but Cabell is acutely aware that she is present, and takes a malicious pleasure in annoying her. Knowing that it would be useless to poison her soup, he at least seeks the satisfaction of ruining her appetite.

Because of their common contempt for the old lady they have acquired much the same set of hostile critics; and the fierce assault on them both has acquired for them, one cannot help believing, the same set of champions. Mr. Cabell's assailants have gone to lengths which remind one of the good old days of short and ugly words. Probably no American author since Cooper has been so roundly abused: "Slushy and disgusting," "Worse than immoral—dull," "Revolting," "A boudoir budget," "Hardly excusable in print," "The whine of a little old man," and the culminating censoring of *Jurgen*. It is a kind of vituperation that has made defenders of Cabell even where it has not made genuine friends for him.

### II

The discussion of Cabell's literary ways and works is not limited to what friends and foes have said about him, for he is a prolific commentator on himself. In the person of certain story-spokesmen, notably Manuel and Jurgen, Robert Townsend, Felix Kennaston, and John Charteris, he states his case in scores of passages and dozens of ways. He has little patience for the methods of the realist: "No one on the preferable side of Bedlam wishes to be reminded of what we are in actuality, even were it possible, by any disastrous miracle, ever to dispel the mist which romance has evoked about all human doings." Says Charteris, "If ever I were to attempt a tale of Lichfield, I would not write a romance, but a tragedy. I think I would call my tragedy *Futility*, for it would mirror the life of Lichfield with unengaging candor; and, as a consequence, people would complain that my tragedy lacked sustained interest, and that its participants were inconsistent; that it had no ordered plot, no startling incidents, no high endeavors, and no special aim; and that it was equally deficient in all time-hallowed provocatives of either laughter or tears." This fairly characterizes the two stories of Lichfield which Mr. Cabell wrote, *Cords of Vanity* and *The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck* (the remarks of Charteris comes from the latter), though the author, instead of labeling them tragedies, sardonically calls one "A Comedy of Shirking" and the other "A Comedy of Limitations."

In *The Cream of the Jest*, Horvendile—one of Mr. Cabell's two disguises in this book—takes up the theme:

There was once in a land very far away from this land—in my country—a writer of romances. And once he constructed a romance, which, after a hackneyed custom of my country, purported to be translated from an old manuscript. . . . I am that writer of romance. This room, this castle, all the broad, rolling countryside without, is but a portion of my dream, and these places have no existence save in my fancies. . . . I find my country an inadequate place in which to live. . . . There is that in some of us which gets no exercise there; and we struggle blindly, with impotent yearning, to gain outlet for great powers which we know that we possess, even though we do not know their names. And so, we dreamers wander at adventure to Storisende—oh, and into more perilous realms sometimes!—in search of a life that will find employment for every faculty that we have.

Storisende is in Cabell's Poictesme, "which is bounded by Avalon and Phaeacia and Sea-coast Bohemia, and the contiguous forests of Arden and Broceliande, and on the west of course by the Hesperides," a country which he believes "to be the one possible setting for a really satisfactory novel, even though its byways can boast of little traffic nowadays." However, he does not confine his characters to even an imaginary realm. They wander in all directions—to Alexandria, Aquitaine, Arcadia, Asgard, to Barbary, England, Jerusalem, Massilia, to Navarre, Olympus, Portugal, and Rome. And they cover all chronology in their orbit around the thirteenth century from which most of their beautiful happenings are supposed to spring. "Homer dreamed of

you,” says one of his lovers to one of his loved ones, “and Sophocles and Theocritus. All poets have had glimpses of you.” So he relates heroes and heroines in genealogies as inventive as his maps, and on a slender thread of heritage strings his garlands of slender stories, reaching through the ages, all dealing with the chivalric search for the unattainable, or with the gallant acceptance of the pleasures and inconveniences of life.

### III

Mr. Cabell's avowed intention is “to write perfectly about beautiful happenings.” To do this is not for him to achieve a perfect technique and then to exercise it with natural and spontaneous zest. He is a laborious pleasure-hunter. His style is like his use of geography and genealogy, and his partly actual and partly invented authorities. It is like the painstaking play in words—what might be called the jest of the cream in *The Cream of the Jest*,—which is wrought out concerning the sigil of Scoteia. Throughout the book it is described as a bit of metal with the magic power of invoking a dream life. At the end of the story it is explained as being only one half of the broken top of a cold cream jar marked with a design made up by “blending meaningless curlicues and dots and circles with an irresponsible hand.” Yet in a blank page before the title is a cut of the bit of metal; and the Cabell enthusiast who owns the copy before me has painfully deciphered the marks, which are upside down in the book, and which declare that “James Branch Cabell made this book, etc., etc.” A deal of work for so slight a conclusion! One is by this time ready to believe that the inscription thus deciphered is in itself a code, and that the quintessence of the cream has yet to be extracted. There is the same evidence of unstinted pains in the prose style; and one deplores, of course, not the pains, but the evidence thereof. It is all wrought out by hard plodding, no step of which is easier for all that have been taken before it. “Here was the word,” he writes of proof-reading, “vexatiously repeated within three lines, which must be replaced by a synonym; and the clause which, when transposed, made the whole sentence gain in force and comeliness . . . and the vaguely unsatisfactory adjective, for which a jet of inspiration suggested a substitute.” Not always inspiration, either, for “then you dip into an Unabridged, and change every word that has been written for a better one, and do it leisurely, rolling in the mouth, as it were, the flavour of every possible synonym, before decision. Then you reread with a corrective pen in hand the while, and you venture upon the whole to agree with Mérimée that it is preferable to write one's own books, since those of others are not, after all, particularly worth reading in comparison.”

Such processes do not lead to any spontaneity of effect, and you do not find it in Mr. Cabell's pages. But he has anticipated criticism in his comments on Felix Kennaston, his (as he might put it) so obviously autobiographic character. “His high-pitched voice in talking, to begin with, was irritating; you knew it was not his natural voice, and

found it so entirely senseless for him to speak thus. Then, too, the nervous and trivial grin with which he prefaced almost all his infrequent remarks . . . was peculiarly ungratifying.” Translated into prose style, these characteristics are Mr. Cabell's own on the printed page; though he ingeniously overstates the indictment and so forces whoever quotes it to become an attorney for the defense by deprecating its severity even while endorsing its pertinence.

His style is indubitably established, though it must be remembered that he writes sometimes as himself and very often in the manner of this, that, or the other author of whom he is obviously reminded. For himself he tends to long sentences, frequently periodic, with interjected parentheses, inserted modifiers, inverted and transposed members. He is consciously suggestive of archaism without being too archaic; and he depends for relief on the introduction of marked and homely modernisms. On the whole the style is attractive; sometimes it is charming. But certain mannerisms, like those of Kennaston's speech, are monotonously irritating. One wearies of the thousand-fold repetition of “a little by a little,” “by ordinary,” and the preciousness of his pet adverbs “kindlily” and “friendlily.” This is unnecessarily pedantic. He is pedantic, too, in the parading of his real and his imaginary sources. His stories are overloaded with display of historical precision. Knowing that on the whole fancy is more important than fact to the author, the reader is annoyed and distracted by circumstantial matters of chronicle and genealogy that delay action and throw no light on motive. He might well have taken a leaf out of a book of Howard Pyle, with whom he was early associated, and have emulated his elder's lucid mastery of the Robin Hood legend.

### IV

Mr. Cabell is a complete Virginian, which fact alone is enough to account for his love of fine and stately tradition. Only South Carolina would dare challenge Virginia's right to be considered the sum and substance of the South; but Virginia alone has the effrontery to take itself as seriously as South Carolina does; and the rest of the world takes it a little more so. They are both reminiscent states. (As, for that matter, Massachusetts and Connecticut are today—a free concession to any sensitive Southerner who may read these lines.) However, the reminiscent quality of the South is of two very distinct and highly contrastable kinds: its romantic chivalry turns back to a remote and idealized past; but its own gallant self reverts to a much nearer, quite disillusionized and sophisticated eighteenth century;—two sources that are worthy of more than a moment's consideration.

The remote past, and the idealized life to be found there, is the genuine age of Chivalry—“a world-wide code in consonance with which all estimable people lived and died. Its root was the assumption (uncontested then) that a gentleman will always serve his God, his honor, and his lady without any reservation.” It was a code under which gentlemen