

Genius Mapped and Charted

CARL VAN DOREN is a critic who is very sure of his own judgments, as what critic worth his salt is not. He believes thoroughly in James Branch Cabell's genius, and tells why clearly and with a deal of information in the first of the series called "Modern American Writers" (McBride). Perhaps the most interesting thing in the book,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

although the text is lucid and useful, is the Map of Poictesme contributed by Mr. Cabell himself. For admirers of this land it will be indispensable, at least if admirers of so glamorous a place happen also to be literal minded. Is it not curious that in an age so free from chivalry, its greatest exponent should be as popular as is Cabell? Take a passage from "Chivalry" which Mr. Van Doren quotes:

The cornerstone of Chivalry I take to be the idea of vicarship: for the chivalrous person is, in his own eyes at least, the child of God, and goes about this world as his Father's representative in an alien country. It was very adroitly to human pride, through an assumption of man's responsibility in his tiniest action, that Chivalry made its appeal; and exhorted every man to keep faith, not merely with the arbitrary will of a strong god, but with himself. There is no cause for wonder that the appeal was irresistible, when to each man it thus admitted that he himself was the one thing seriously to be considered. . . . So man became a chivalrous animal; and about this flattering notion of divine vicarship builded his elaborate mediæval code, to which, in essentials, a great number of persons adhere even nowadays.

This series should be more than useful. Already five titles are announced: besides the Cabell volume, there will be "Edith Wharton" by Robert Morss Lovett, "Edwin Arlington Robinson" by Ben Ray Redman, "Theodore Dreiser" by Burton Rascoe, and "H. L. Mencken" by Ernest Boyd, who edits the series.