

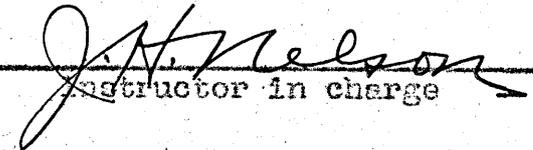
MR. JAMES BRANCH CABELL'S ACCOMPLISHMENT
AS JUDGED BY HIS OWN THEORY OF ROMANCE

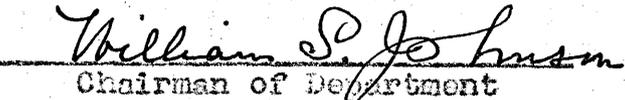
by

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PREFACE

My interest in James Branch Cabell began in 1924 when, as a senior at the Kansas State College, I read for a course in contemporary literature two novels by him, namely, The Cream of the Jest and Jurgen.

In this study my purpose has been to satisfy the desire to know more about Cabell, which arose as a result of the earlier reading of him, and to organize my observations into a readable form of criticism, which, I hope, may be used by some future student of Cabell as a guide in preparing a reading list and a study program of Cabell's works.

I wish to express my appreciation to Professor R. D. O'Leary who so ably assisted me in preparing my plan of approach, and to Professor J. H. Nelson who so carefully sponsored the actual writing of the thesis. I wish to thank Miss Ida M. Day and Miss Marjorie Rumble of the library staff for their help in securing much valuable material for my bibliography.

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Chapter I Introduction

Mr. James Branch Cabell of Richmond, Virginia, is, perhaps, as much talked about as any contemporary writer; but he is a very elusive person. Information about his life has not yet been published in any detailed form. The bare facts about his life and what he has done are all that are available; almost no printed narratives portraying his personality exist. From Who's Who for 1930 we learn that he was born in Richmond, Virginia, April 14, 1879, the son of Robert Gamble Cabell, M. D., and Anne Branch Cabell. He married Priscilla Bradley, daughter of William Joseph Bradley of Auburn, Charles City County, Virginia, November 8, 1913. They have one son. Mr. Cabell attended private school and the College of William and Mary, from which he received his A. B. in 1898. At William and Mary he served as Instructor of French and Greek for the year 1896-7. He worked in the press-room of the Richmond (Va.) Times, 1898; on the staff of the New York Herald, 1899-1901; and on the staff of the Richmond (Va.) News, 1901. From 1902 to 1910 he contributed short stories to magazines and conducted genealogical and original research in America, France, Ireland, and England. He engaged in coal-mining in West Virginia from 1911 to

1913. From 1916 to 1924 he served as genealogist for the Virginia Society of Colonial Wars and for the Virginia Sons of the American Revolution. From 1918 to 1921 he was president of the Virginia Writer's Club. He is a member of Kappa Alpha (southern), of Phi Beta Kappa, and of the Episcopalian church. His address is 3201 Monument Avenue, Richmond, Virginia.

No book of biographical material with Mr. Cabell as the subject has appeared, largely because he does not wish to reveal the details of his life. Mr. Burton Rascoe indicates Mr. Cabell's reluctance to talk in detail about his personal life when he says of him:

His eyes dull and his eyelids droop when he talks, as he seldom does, of the people and events of the life wherein he is embodied; but his interest quickens and brightens when he speaks of his mimic world, and of the persons and happenings there. In reality he is writing subjective autobiography of Cabell- endless recurrence of himself within himself. ¹

But Mr. Rascoe is not the only writer to discuss Mr. Cabell's aloofness. In evaluating several Virginia writers, Eudora Ramsey Richardson has decided that

Whether Mr. Cabell's shyness is caused by Richmond's lack of appreciation of his contribution to letters will probably always remain indeterminable. Richmond sees and hears him about as often as Rome sees and hears the Pope. Indeed he seems as unapproachable as the Kaiser at Doorn. I lie awake at night trying to think of clever things to say the next time I pass him

¹ Bookman, LVI (Feb., 1925), 742.

in the city library. Then when I do see him standing before a book shelf, I am as awed as I could be if Shakespeare had risen from the dead. So I say, "How do you do, Mr. Cabell?" and he says, "How do you do?" very politely, and I pretend that I came to the library merely to find a book.

As a matter of fact, those who know James Branch Cabell well declare that he is genuinely shy and not aloof because he recognizes the chasm that exists between genius and the mentality of ordinary mortals. The mere mention of his name before an audience in which he is endeavoring to be an obscure member causes that ready blush to run from the roots of his hair to the lowest point of visibility beneath his collar.²

Mr. Cabell's aloofness and his shyness are, however, only two of his characteristics which the critics discuss. Those who are interested enough in him to write about him have considered mainly his literary qualities, but Carl Van Doren has written about him as a man:

There are more arguments to prove that James Branch Cabell is a legend than to prove that he is a fact. . . . To these details³ this most juiceless of contemporary authorities adds only the titles of Mr. Cabell's books and his address. Remarkably little else about him as a person has been made public: a few attractive but non-committal photographs, a few bits of information little above the level of amiable gossip. All that emerges is the evidence that he is a Virginian of the old stock, cultivated and reticent, who with unvarying fidelity if with varying fortunes has given himself to the writing of books.

The legend which has grown up about Mr. Cabell no doubt owes its exuberance to the scarcity of facts upon which it has been fed. It speaks

²Bookman, LXVIII (Dec., 1928), 450.

³The details found in Who's Who, from which Mr. Van Doren has just quoted.

largely about his great acquisitions of medieval lore, and hints less largely at his excessive learning in various forbidden topics. It whispers, elsewhere, of such spiritual misdemeanors as in other ages were called compacts with the devil. It goes, even, to the length of mentioning, at a safe distance from the laws concerning libel, misdemeanors not so spiritual. That the legendary aspects of Mr. Cabell, however unwarranted, have such vitality shows well enough that they spring from the rich soil of public ignorance. ⁴

The comment just quoted indicates that people are trying to find personal data about Mr. Cabell, but apparently with very little success. Mr. Carl Van Doren's attitude toward Cabell, as revealed in the passage just quoted, very largely expresses the attitude of other writers, especially that of Mr. Burton Rascoe, who explains that

Many lurid tales have been written about Cabell, but they are untrue. Most of them have originated with the gossips of Richmond who, after looking upon Cabell as a F. F. V. ⁵ gone wrong, are now forced to regard him as a bona fide celebrity whether they like it or not. And they do not like it, for they do not at all understand Cabell, and hence are unable to patronize him as they would like to. Richmond will never forgive him for the bitter truths he told of it in The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck and in Cords of Vanity. ⁶

But the task of characterizing Cabell as a person is no more difficult than the problem of finding a description of him as a man. Mr. Carl Van Doren has referred to "a few attractive but non-committal photo-

⁴Van Doren, Carl, James Branch Cabell, pp. 1-3.

⁵First Families of Virginia.

⁶Bookman, LVI (Feb., 1923), 743.

graphs," ⁷ but Mr. Burton Rascoe has written the best description of his personal appearance, in which he states:

Cabell is a man of medium height, and of somewhat stocky figure. His head is finely molded with the broad forehead of an aesthete and the thinker, not unlike that of the young Augustus; his eyes are heavy-lidded and sleepy, such eyes as one often sees in old portraits of the cavaliers and courtiers of the times of the Stuarts, delicately cut and sensitive, generous yet not too full, the mouth of a poet but not of a philosopher; and between those eyes and this mouth he has a quizzical little snout. ⁸

After considering Mr. Cabell's personal appearance, one naturally turns to articles dealing with his manner, his behavior, in other words, his personality. The best account of his personality, perhaps, is that by Mr. Ernest Boyd, in which he calls Mr. Cabell

. . . a sober figure, in truth, with the formal manners of a country gentleman, but with the hearty, downright manner which might be expected from so farouche a devotee of open air and rural life. He wears glasses which give him the air of a lawyer; austere, old-fashioned glasses, which eschew the modernity, the intellectual connotations of tortoise-shell and its convincing substitutes. He says little. His demeanor is that of a layman, high in the favor of the reverend clergy, who is privileged to attend a meeting of the General Synod of the Episcopalian Church. . . a most respectable man, surely; quiet, dignified, embarrassed even by what little fame our having come there signified. Here is no antichrist to stir the Puritan from

⁷See second quotation on page 3.

⁸Bookman, LVI (Feb., 1923), 741.

his lethargy. ⁹

Turning from Cabell's personality to his intellectual characteristics, we find that Mr. Burton Rascoe has again furnished us a satisfactory discussion of his mental make-up when he writes:

Science, economics, sociology he knows little of; his knowledge of history is erratic, of philosophy and religion, artistic; and his one political doctrine appears to be that of hatred of Woodrow Wilson, the incongruous expression of which has, for me, marred two of his books. When Cabell tries to be topical he is usually lumbering. Like the courtier and the cavalier, he places polish, urbanity, and elegance, first on the list of virtues, and, like the cavalier and courtier, he has no very keen sense of ethical values. He is amoral rather than immoral. His creed embraces that type of honor which combines romance with cynicism. Manner with Cabell is much more important than matter. ¹⁰

The discussion of his type of mind leads one to inquire about his home surroundings, about his way of living, about his social activities; and again Mr. Rascoe is the most convenient authority:

James Branch Cabell lives a little way outside of Richmond in a middle aged house that has in it much of the Victorian, and nothing of the traditional Colonial of the South. The house is comfortable and uninteresting inside and out with little traces here and there of a certain modern efficiency- as in the folding typewriter desk in Cabell's study- that stand out boldly against a background of antimacassars and whatnot stands. The truth is that Cabell is blessed with a wife who is blessed with a sense of humor, and who sees to it that while the major portion of her husband has emigrated to Poictesme the part of him which remains at home is well cared for, let alone, and

⁹Boyd, Ernest, Portraits Real and Imaginary, p. 171.

¹⁰Bookman, LVI (Feb., 1923), 744.

humored. It takes genius to write as Cabell does, but that genius is as nothing to the genius it must take to live happily with a genius. And Cabell stays at home. To get him as far as New York takes months of urging on the part of everyone interested, and when he finally is ousted from his small work room with its three windows and its rows of books, it is almost impossible to make him meet people or to say anything when he does meet them.

His library is astonishingly meagre both in quantity and quality of the books that compose it, and this in spite of Cabell's just claim, made for not by him, to real erudition. He cares nothing for fine bindings or for old editions. The author most in evidence among his books is Hewlett, but one should not deduce from this that he owes much to Hewlett, any more than he does to Anatole France whom he read really carefully only after he had been compared to him. The materials that Hewlett has used in all seriousness Cabell has burlesqued, as in Jurgen and Figures of Earth.

He is one of the founders of that exclusive little club apparently created for the purpose of mutual admiration by Mencken, Hergesheimer, and himself. Cabell cannot stand criticism, a weakness that serves his work poorly. The success that has come to him in such a strange and ironic way ¹¹ after years of neglect and even contempt has embittered him rather than mellowed him. Most emphatically Cabell does not belong among those who, like St. Paul, "suffer fools gladly." He first entered the lists young, ardent, and unsuspecting; but as the years went by bringing the sting of new wounds upon old ones, he incased himself more and more in the armor of unreality, and with the sword of satire fought on. ¹²

It becomes evident, then, that Mr. Cabell has succeeded in concealing from the public nearly all of his personal history. When Mr. Rascoe says that "life has held great tragedy for Cabell," ¹³ no one

¹¹ Mr. Rascoe refers to the publicity given Mr. Cabell after the suppression of Jurgen in 1919.

¹² Bookman, LVI (Feb., 1923), 744.

¹³ Ibid., 743.

seems to know very clearly what it may have been. This tragedy may be some great personal loss which Mr. Cabell suffered in his youth, or it may be the sting of the public's unconcern about his earlier works. Everything written about Cabell as a man shows him to be a reserved, dignified gentleman whose very personality forbids him to talk intimately to newspaper reporters, interviewers, and writers of theses. 14

The discussion of Cabell as a man logically introduces Cabell the author, because behind his characters he himself always lurks, sometimes half-hidden, occasionally even in the open. It is not true, however, that he is essentially a dramatic writer; rather, he is more than ordinarily subjective, but he resorts to many tricks that puzzle the reader. His two most used devices are to place his opinions in the mouths of his characters, and to fabricate his literary sources. In general, the critics agree that

¹⁴My only personal communication from him contained (1) a mere acknowledging that he had received my inquiry about those of his books which I had been unable to obtain, (2) a statement that he could think of no way by which I might secure them, and (3) the polite closing, "but for the writing of you letter I wish to thank you." There was no answer to my closing sentence: "And I shall be grateful for any items of personal interest which you may consider useful or necessary in a thesis."

Every one of his heroes is essentially himself. Kennaston in the *Jest*, Musgrave in the *Rivet*, Townsend in the *Cords of Vanity* are all slices of the Cabell ego. Charteris¹⁵ is obviously Cabell.¹⁶

Even Mr. Cabell himself admits that he fabricates his literary sources and places his opinions in the mouths of his characters, in a notable passage in Straws and Prayer-Books so significant as to be worth the careful study of any reader of Cabell:

And when I talk about my own doings or my personal sentiments, I momentarily detect myself in heightening, softening, or overcoloring the reality, as if in an instinctive effort to conform with what my hearer will, conceivably, expect and approve. Certainly not much of me gets into my conversation. In writing, I do wax, as one might phrase it, bolder. . . Yet when I reflect how little I find, in so much writing, of any candid and fair expression of that person whom I with real regret accept as myself, - in my own thought's very privately issued version, with so many unopened leaves and with such handsome margins of error, - why, then, I am somewhat astonished and vastly pleased. I marvel at, for one thing, the maniacal zeal with which I have transferred the credit for almost every line I have written, to this or the other fictitious "source" or "translation." I seem from the first thus to have hidden myself as if instinctively.¹⁷

Therefore we see that the task of deciding what is and what is not Cabell's will be a difficult one. It is not the purpose of this study to dogmatize about Cabell, and to say that every opinion which

¹⁵ John Charteris is the man who expounds Mr. Cabell's theory of romance in Beyond Life.

¹⁶ Bookman, LII (Nov., 1920), 200-6.

¹⁷ Straws and Prayer-Books, p. 262.

Cabell's characters express is his own. Between now and the time of his death, Mr. Cabell himself may publish something which will throw a different light on the problems of this study. However, in this investigation, it shall be my purpose to advance findings which will be as nearly conclusive as the nature of the problems will admit.

#

Chapter II His Theory of Romance

Many creative writers before the time of Cabell have tried to explain their theories of romance; for a hundred years critics have been trying to define romance, some by analyzing its subject matter, some by removing everything that is not romance and observing what remains. A discerning critic belonging to the first group is Mr. P. H. Frye, who contends that

These several romantic schools agree in one respect- in their opposition to classicism of any kind. . . Hence, if classic be supposed to resume the spirit illustrated by ancient literature, then romantic will embrace all that literature which has grown up in independence or in ignorance or in defiance or in neglect of that spirit. In some such fashion, the word comes finally by one detour and another to denote the antithesis of classic and to imply another disposition of spirit altogether. Such is what I should like to call the critical significance of the word, a susceptibility to irregular beauty, a fondness for the striking and the unusual even at the expense of regularity and order, a preference for fascinating detail above symmetry and proportion, a predilection for the coruscations of style- for the glittering word and phrase, for the exotic and exquisite epithet, for everything that touches and thrills and dazzles, a hunger for sensation, even when these desires lead to a dissipation of the attention- such are its external qualities as far as it is profitable to analyze them at present. ¹

A helpful critic in the second group is Mr. Clayton Hamilton, who declares:

¹Frye, P. H., Romance and Tragedy, pp. 21-57.

No distinction between the schools is possible upon the basis of subject matter: the real distinction must be one of method of setting forth subject matter. In setting forth his views of life, the realist follows the inductive method of presentment, and the romantic follows the deductive method.

The range of romance is therefore far wider than the range of realism; for all that may be treated realistically may be treated romantically also, and much else that may be treated romantically is hardly susceptible of realistic treatment. Granted that a romantic have truths enough in his head, there is scarcely any limit to the stories he may deduce from them; while on the other hand, the work of the inductive novelist is limited by the limits of his premises. But the greater freedom of romance is attended by a more difficult responsibility. If it be easier for the romantic to tell the truth, because he has more ways of telling it, it is surely harder for him to tell nothing but the truth. More often than the realist he is tempted to assert uncertainties- tempted to say with vividness and charm things of which he cannot quite be sure. ²

Katherine Fullerton Gerould, another writer who belongs in the class of those who define romance by saying what it is not, agrees with Mr. Hamilton:

We shall do best in this connection to get rid of the notion that Romance demands either lurid adventures, or conventional emotions, or coincidence worked overtime, or the picturesque letting of blood, or even the happy ending. . . what a man does with what happens to him is even more significant than what happens to him. ³

But it remains for the dictionaries to summarize the numerous discussions of romance and organize them

²Hamilton, Clayton, Materials and Methods of Fiction, pp. 23-42.

³Sat. Rev. of Literature, I (April 11, 1925), 659-60.

into a few clearly stated, useful definitions. The Century Dictionary contains the following three definitions of romance, all of which may be useful in a study of Cabell's theory:

1. Originally, a tale in verse, written in one of the Romance dialects, as early French or Provençal; hence, any popular epic belonging to the literature of modern Europe, or any fictitious story of heroic, marvelous, or supernatural incidents derived from history or legend, and told in prose or verse and at considerable length.

2. A tale or novel dealing not so much with real or familiar life as with extraordinary and often extravagant adventures, or with morbid idiosyncrasies of temperament, or picturing imaginary conditions of society influenced by imaginary conditions.

3. A blending of the heroic, the marvelous, the mysterious, and the imaginative in actions, manners, ideas, language, or literature.

The New English Dictionary contains four definitions, similar to those in The Century, but somewhat more specific, which are:

1. A tale in verse, embodying the adventures of some hero of chivalry, especially of those of the great cycles of medieval legend, and belonging both in matter and form to the ages of knighthood; also, in later use, a prose tale of a similar character.

2. (a) A fictitious narrative in prose of which the scene and incidents are very remote from those of ordinary life, especially one of the class prevalent in the 16th and 17th centuries, in which the story is often overlaid with long disquisitions and digressions; also a long poem of a similar type.

(b) A romantic novel or narrative.

3. That class of literature which consists of romances; romantic fiction.

4. An extravagant fiction, invention, or story; a wild or wanton exaggeration; a picturesque falsehood.

In turning now to Mr. Cabell's theory of romance, we find that it is worth while to follow him through his entire discussion of the subject matter in Beyond Life, where he expounds his views most thoroughly. He begins with an explanation of romance, which, as Cabell conceives it, has its source in the "demi-urge" and its expression in various "dynamic illusions," and he continues throughout the volume to explain these terms.

Cabell does not use the term demi-urge in the original sense in which Plato used it, namely, as identifying the creator of the material universe, but in a more abstract sense; with Cabell it is the power of romance which becomes "a world-shaping and world-controlling principle." ⁴ He explains it further by adding:

I can perceive plainly enough that the shape-giving principle of all sentient beings is artistic. That is a mere matter of looking at living creatures and noticing their forms. . . . But the principle goes deeper, in that it shapes too the minds of men, by this universal tendency to imagine- and to think of as in reality existent- all the tenants of the earth and all the affairs of earth, not as they are, but "as they ought to be." And so it comes about that romance has invariably been the demiurgic and beneficent force, not merely in letters, but in every matter which concerns mankind; and that "realism," with its teaching that the mile-posts along the road are as worthy of consideration as the goal, has always figured as man's chief enemy. ⁵

⁴Beyond Life, p. 18.

⁵Ibid., p. 25

Thus Cabell expresses at the very beginning of his explanation his distinction between romance and realism, and makes clear to the reader his opinion that romance is the more useful.

That, then, is what Cabell would have as his standard of romance- "things as they ought to be." His demi-urge is, then, this power which will create in the reader's mind the illusion of reality, a power which makes the reader feel that it would be wonderful to live, and to a certain extent actually to live, in a land where such delightful things happen. The very title of the essays Beyond Life suggests the inherent quality of Cabell's romances, although Milton's original,⁶ from which Cabell secures the phrase, does not carry the meaning which Cabell attaches to it. He continues his discussion of the demiurge, giving a historical account of its development, noting especially that the Greek dramatists masked their characters and clothed them in draped apparel, in order to disguise their human imperfections; whereas the sculptors and painters, because the human body could be idealized with a free hand, dealt largely in nakedness, making men "as they ought

⁶"A good book is the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." Milton's "Areopagitica."

to be." "Equally in the Middle Ages," he continues, "did literature avoid deviation into the credible," ⁷ substantiating his conclusion by citing what he calls the enduring parts of Chaucer, namely, the Knight's Tale, the Prioress's Tale, and the Nun's Priest's Tale, all of which are based upon unreality. Then Cabell discusses the development of drama and poetry after Chaucer, after which he contends that

With the advent of the novel, . . . it was possible, really for the first time, acceptably to present in literature men "as they ought to be." Richardson could dilate as unrestrainedly as he pleased upon the super-eminence in virtue and sin, respectively, of his Grandison and his Lovelace emboldened by the knowledge that there was nothing to check him off save the dubious touchstone of his reader's common sense. ⁸

Then in discussing the present day situation in regard to romance, he adds:

And so today, as always, we delight to hear about invincible men and women of unearthly loveliness-corrected and considerably augmented versions of our family circle,- performing feats illimitably beyond our modest powers. And so today no one upon 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; and to the golden twilight of which old usage has so accustomed us that, like nocturnal birds, our vision grows perturbed in a clearer atmosphere. And we have come very firmly to believe in the existence of men everywhere, not as in fact they are, but "as they ought to be." ⁹

⁷Beyond Life, p. 29.

⁸Ibid., p. 35.

⁹Ibid., p. 43.

Finally he explains how the demiurge develops into the attitude of chivalry, which produces the "dynamic illusions." His statement reads:

And these aspiring notions blended a great while since, into what may be termed the Chivalrous attitude toward life. Thus it is that romance, the real demiurge, the first and loveliest daughter of human vanity, contrives all those dynamic illusions which are used to further the ultimate ends of romance. . . . 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 personal 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. ¹⁰

Cabell then begins his discussion of the "dynamic illusions" by showing that the attitude of chivalry is really the greatest illusion of all, and that, as soon as the person assumes this idea of vicarship, he prepares himself for belief in several of the allied illusions; for example, the illusion of love, which finds its greatest expression in the illusion of domnei ¹¹ or woman-worship, the illusion of gal-

¹⁰Beyond Life, p. 47.

¹¹Cabell discusses the illusion of domnei more at length in a later chapter of Beyond Life, but he adds here the amusing note that "There is something not unpathetic in the thought that this once world-controlling force is restricted today to removing a man's hat in an elevator and occasionally compelling a surrender of his seat in a streetcar." P. 49.

lantry, the illusion of good and evil, and the illusion of optimism.

After discussing romance and its results, those helpful illusions which have produced in man nearly all of his virtues, Cabell advances the contention that romance has furnished most of the vices of mankind. He digresses to spend a chapter in discussing witch-craft, to him one of the most remarkable evils ever created by romance.

But within the chapter on the witch-woman he includes his explanation of the illusion of love, "which romance induces in order to further the labor of the demiurge, and marriage is an estate wherein illusion quite inevitably perishes." ¹² But he admits that it is necessary for the spirit of romance to hoodwink humanity through this illusion of love, so that humanity may endure, and more generations may grow up and ascend to the marriage altar. However, he qualifies his hopefulness of the situation by saying: "Even where love-marriages are consummated, I suspect that few are prompted by the one love of either participant's life." ¹³ In summarizing the discussion of love, which he believes is an eternal quest, never

¹²Beyond Life, p. 74.

¹³Ibid., p. 76.

quite realized in marriage or anything else, he says: "Yes, certainly there is in every human being that which demands communion with something more, fine and potent than itself." ¹⁴

In continuing his discussion of several literary artists he brings in his next illusion, the idea of common-sense. François Villon provides the subject of the discussion, in which Cabell alludes to the fact that common-sense would not have provided Villon with the experience necessary to the inspiration of his immortal verses. Cabell for one, knowing that the practical-minded are not always the greatest benefactors of mankind, is unwilling to "contemn the Ballade au Nom de la Fortune, the Regrets de la Beale Heaulmière, and the Épitaphe, on the score that their purchase price was severally the necessity of forcing a man of genius to occupy a jail, a brothel and a gibbet. For again our moral prejudices fail to traverse the corridors of time; and we really cannot bother at this late day to regain the viewpoint of the Capetian police." ¹⁵ Finally in support of this idea of impracticality he says:

By making any orthodox use of your body and brain you can get out of them only ephemeral results. For all this code of common-sense, and

¹⁴Beyond Life, p. 82.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 104.

this belief in the value of doing "practical" things, would seem to be but another dynamic illusion, through which romance retains the person of average intelligence in physical employment and, as a by-product, in an augmenting continuance of creature comforts. To every dupe, of course, romance assigns no more than a just adequate illusion; and squanders no unneeded cunning in contriving the deceit. So with men it is a truism that people of great mental powers are usually deficient in common-sense; for only the normally obtuse can be deluded by any pretence so tenuous as this of the ultimate value of doing "practical" things, and the acute waste time less self-deceivingly. 16

Cabell leads to a consideration of his next illusion, that of good and evil, by expressing his general belief, which is:

Most great creative writers, in the pursuit of their emblematic art, have tended to present man's nature as being compounded of "good" and "evil" qualities, - presenting humanity in the explicit black and white of full-dress morality, as it were, without much intrusion of the intermediate shades of ordinary business-wear. And all the great creative writers have as a rule rewarded the virtuous, but they have punished the wicked invariably. Here we touch on what is perhaps the most important illusion that romance fosters in man.

It can hardly be questioned that "good" and "evil" are aesthetic conventions, of romantic origin. The most of us, indeed, at various removes, quite candidly derive our standards in such matters from romantic art, as evinced in that anthology of poems and apologues and legends and pastorals and historical romances known collectively as the Bible. And therein, as you will recall, the Saviour of mankind is represented as conveying his message by making up short stories in the form of parables, romance thus being very tremendously indicated as the true demiurge. . .

And were there nothing else to indicate the artistic origin of "good" and "evil," no one

¹⁶ Beyond Life, p. 114.

could fail to take note that "goodness" everywhere takes the form of refraining from certain deeds. Every system of ethics, and every religion, has expressed its requirements in the form, not of ordering people to do so-and-so, but of "Thou shalt not do this or that." Thus the "wicked" have always retained a monopoly of terrestrial dealings, since the "good" have largely confined themselves to abstention therefrom. . . . And religion, like all the other products or romance, is true in a far higher sense than are the unstable conditions of our physical life. ¹⁷

Turning back to a discussion of literature in general, and William Congreve in particular, Cabell composes the phrase which constitutes the keynote of all of his writings, "the desire," as he calls it, "to write perfectly of beautiful happenings," ¹⁸ and in that connection he approaches the subject of his fifth dynamic illusion, the illusion of art. He writes:

You had best yield blindly to the inborn instinct, and write as well as you possibly can, much as the coral zoophyte builds his atoll, without any theorizing. Assuredly you have not time to count how many candles are being squandered, or what precisely is their value. . . . the literary artist who is really in earnest must be content to do without any number of desirable human traits which he cannot afford. . . . Should he once admit that what he sets about is by any possibility not the most important thing in the universe, and quite incommensurate by every-day criterions, then his aesthetic grave is already wounded. . . . His daily associates, for whose intelligence (and there is the rub) he cannot but entertain considerable respect, may see clearly enough that art

¹⁷ Beyond Life, p. 147.

¹⁸ Ibid., 191.

affords in the last outcome a diversion for vacant evenings, or furnishes a museum to which sane people resort only when they accompany their visitors from out-of-town: but of this verdict the artist must not dare to grant the weighty, if not absolute justice. In fine, he must be reconciled to having people think him a fool, and to suspecting that they are not entirely mistaken. . . .

Moreover, the literary artist is condemned to strengthen this belief by means of that very drudgery wherewith he hopes to disprove it. For where other persons decently attempt to conceal their foibles and mistakes and vices, this maniac, stung by the gad-fly of self-expression, will catalogue all his and print them in a book. Since write he must, interminably he writes about himself because (in this respect at least resembling the other members of his race) he has no certain knowledge as to anyone else. ¹⁹

A few pages farther on he concludes his lament by declaring that

Literature is a starveling cult kept alive by the "literary." Such literature has been, and will continue to be always. . . . But always, too, its masterworks will affect directly no one save the "literary:" and to perceive this is the serious artist's crowning discouragement. For he has every reason to know what "literary" persons are, if but by means of uncomfortable introspection, and all and sundry of them he despises. . . . At such depressing moments of prevision, he recognizes that this desire to write perfectly, and thus to win "literary" immortality, is but another dynamic illusion: and he concedes, precisely as Congreve long ago detected, that, viewed from any personal standpoint, the game is very far from being worth the candle. ²⁰

Again Cabell takes up the long interval between the analyses of his illusions by a talk on literature,

¹⁹ Beyond Life, pp. 191-4.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 199.

this time on the dramatist Sheridan, whose happy-go-lucky (if not happy ending) life causes Cabell to discourse on the fallacious theory of equality, a theory which enhances the possibility of man's belief in the dynamic illusion of patriotism. This illusion Cabell takes careful pains to elaborate in a notable passage, which it seems worth while to quote in full:

Now patriotism is, of course, something more than a parade of prejudice, so flimsy that even at the height of its vogue, in war-time, anyone of us can see the folly, and indeed the wickedness, of such patriotism as is manifested by the other side. For with our own country's entry into the war, it is generally conceded that, whether for right or wrong and in default of any coherent explanation by our overlords as to what we are doing in that fighting galley, we can all agree to stand together in defense of our national honor. In large part, this is another case of doing what seems expected: and the vast majority of us begin by being patriotically bellicose in speech out of respect to our neighbor's presumed opinion, while he returns the courtesy. So we both come at last unfeignedly to believe what we are saying, just as men always find conviction in repetition: and a benevolent wave of irrationality sweeps over towns and cross-roads, with the most staid of us upon its crest excitedly throwing tea into the Boston Harbor, or burning effigies of Lincoln and Davis (severally, as the taste directs), or trampling upon Spanish flags, and organizing parades and passing resolutions, and even attempting to memorize our national air. . . Doubtless, all this is grotesque, upon the surface, and is of no especial use in settling the war: but it prevents us from thinking too constantly of the fact that we are sending our boys to death. . . The demiurge, in fine, to soothe bewilderment and panic administers patriotism as an anaesthetic. And as has been pointed out, elsewhere, we find that ardent patriotism can even be made to serve as an exhilarating substitute for lukewarm religion whenever the two happen to be irreconcilable. . . .

For patriotism is, of course, not merely an anaesthetic: to the contrary, it is, like all the other magnanimous factors in human life, a dynamic product of the demiurge. . . . To prefer your country's welfare to your own is rational enough, since it is but to assume that the whole is greater than the part: but when we proceed to prefer our country's welfare to that of any and all other countries in the world,- as we unanimously do, with the glowing approval of conscience,- we must progress by high-mindedly reversing the original assumption. . . .

And I, for one, find nothing unreasonable in the irrationality of patriotism. The other animals munch grass and paw at unconsidered dirt, where man not all unconsciously gets nourishment from his mother's bosom. For we know ourselves to be born of that coign of Earth we cherish with no inexplicable affection. Not only in spirit does our habitat conform us, since the land we love, that soil whereon our cattle graze, goes steadily to the making of plants, and thence becomes incarnate in our bodies: until we ourselves seem but a many agglutinate and animated particles of that land we love, with such partiality as we may not rouse toward those cool abstractions, equity and logic, but reserve for our corporal kin. Thus patriots may rationally justify the direst transports of their actions, if not the wisdom of their public utterances. For in battling for the honor of one's birthplace each hand is lifted in defense, not merely of opinions, but of the very field in which it was once dust: and he that is slain does but repay through burial a loan from his mother. . . . Our mother seems to be molested; and we strike to requite all those who trouble her, no matter what be their excuse. That only is the immediate essential: long afterward, when there is nothing better to do, we may spare time to reason. Meanwhile we know that, here also, the romance is of more instant worth than the mere fact. ²¹

Mr. Cabell goes a long way around to approach his last great illusion, which he no doubt considers the most universal, that of optimism, for he carries the

²¹ Beyond Life, pp. 236-40.

discussion back to the problem of "What is Art?" and especially to a certain phase of it, - "What can the artist do with the contemporary?" Using Dickens as a convenient example, Cabell arrives at the conclusion that the true literary artist can never employ himself in making transcripts from nature, and advances the presumably general opinion that

Few persons not already under restraint would care to deny that Dickens unflinchingly misrepresented the life he pretended to portray. To do this was, as I have shown, alike a requisite of art and of altruism: so the wise praise him therefore, knowing his merits to hinge far less on whether or no he has falsified the truth than on the delectable manner in which he has prevaricated. ²²

Thereupon he adds:

When it comes actually to reading time-hallowed books, however rarely such hard necessity arises in America, there is no doubting that most of us prefer the grotesqueries of Micawber and Swiveller and Winkle to a nodding intimacy with Hamlet, or to an out-and-out nap over Robinson Crusoe, or to a vain dream of having moistened the arid stretches of Clarissa Harlowe's correspondence with the tear of sensibility: and this does not prove that Dickens is superior in any way to Shakespeare or Defoe, or even Richardson, but simply that the majority of us find in Dickens less that is uncongenial. Mr. Bumble is not, upon the whole, a more masterly portrayed character than Sir John Falstaff: but Mr. Bumble is more generally familiar, and quite naturally finds a far larger circle of sympathizers in his last stage, - which, as you may remember, was not to babble of green fields, but to be bullied by his wife. ²³

²² Beyond Life, p. 247.

²³ Ibid., p. 251.

Finally he closes his introduction to the illusion of optimism by saying that

Of course, all this is "inartistic" . . . For it depresses the conventionally "advanced" to see the man deal so liberally in cheerfulness: and they resent his happy-go-lucky methods of creating characters that seem more real to the judicious than the people we sit beside in the streetcars, and (upon the whole) more vital and worthy of consideration than the folk who "cannot read Dickens." For Dickens regarded life from the viewpoint of a now unmodish optimism. 24

Here Cabell pauses to mention that Balzac wrote "really profound studies of contemporary life" 25 by the perfectly abnormal method of sleeping all day and writing all night, pointing out that "the later volumes of the Comédie Humaine are concededly the best, improving as they did in ratio to Balzac's increasing forgetfulness of the truth about his subject," 26 after which he returns to the subject of the contemporary, saying:

Art, then, must deal with the contemporary life by means of symbols. Never for a moment will art in dealing with actual life about us restrict its concern to John Jones, as a person, any more than, as I have suggested, does the art of the Bible pivot upon Abraham or Solomon as individual

²⁴Beyond Life, pp. 254-5.

²⁵Ibid., p. 259.

²⁶Ibid., p. 260. To this comment on Balzac he adds the rather amusing note of encouragement that "Given the requisite genius, any one of us may do well to follow his example. But the programme is arduous, and, first of all, you must be quite sure about the genius." P. 260.

persons. ²⁷

Then, as if by word of summary, Cabell writes:

All human imbroglios, in some irrational and quite incomprehensible fashion, will be straightened out to our satisfaction. . . . It (the illusion of optimism) is the anodyne, however variously labeled, of every candid philosopher in putting up with those innumerable, continuous, small, nagging and inescapable annoyances which compound his life as a human being: and it serves as cordial to sustain him in almost all his dealings with his contemporaries. Equally it is a creed to which the literary artist, also, must cling fast, yet not too desperately, in dealing with his contemporaries. It is the utterance of a man who, to revert to the old phrase, "has encountered Pan," and yet has perceived, too, that in everything romance, to serve the unforeseeable purpose of the demiurge, begets and nourishes the dynamic illusion of optimism. And he knows, he knows not how, that the demiurgic spirit of romance strives not without discernment toward noble ends. Thus it is alone that, in defiance of the perturbing spectacle of man's futility and insignificance, as the passing skin-trouble of an unimportant planet, he can still foster hope and urbanity and all the other gallant virtues, serenely knowing all the while that if he builds without any firm foundation his feat is but the more creditable. ²⁸

Before Cabell closes his discussion of the dynamic illusions, he offers a somewhat extended illustration in support of his opinion that it is by means of romance that we live in the highest sense and find our happiness. For this purpose he chooses a popular novelist, Harold Bell Wright, who, in addition to supplying the target for Cabell's verbal fencing, provides an example

²⁷Beyond Life, p. 267.

²⁸Ibid., p. 273.

of that optimism upon which Cabell has already discoursed at length, together with its attendant dullness, which two qualities form the basis of Cabell's final paragraphs about romance. In these paragraphs he states:

. . . that life is not a blind and aimless business, not at all a hopeless waste and confusion: and that he himself, however gross and weak an animal in the revelation of his past antics, will presently be strong and excellent and wise, and his existence a pageant. And to create this assurance is the purpose of all art. And in life, of course, the demiurgic spirit of romance induces this dynamic illusion in every moment of life, since without it men today would not consent to live. I need hardly say that in promoting any and all illusions romance has no more potent ally, anywhere, than dullness. . .

For our dullness and our vanity are the dependable arbiters of every affair in human life. . . Vanity it is that pricks us indefatigably to play the ape to every dream romance induces; yet vanity is but the stirrup-cup: and urgent need arises that human dullness retain us (as it does) securely blinded, lest we observe the wayside horrors of our journey and go mad. . . Meanwhile with bandaged eyes we advance: and human sanity is guarded by the brave and pitiable and tireless dullness of mankind. . . And finally dullness it is that lifts up heart and voice alike, to view a parasite infesting the epidermis of a midge among the planets, and cries, Behold, this is the child of God All-mighty and All-worshipful, made in the likeness of his Father! These and how many other wholesome miracles are daily brought about by our dullness, by our brave and pitiable and tireless dullness, by our really majestic dullness, in firm alliance with the demiurgic spirit of romance. ²⁹

And with that Mr. Cabell closes the main body of his analysis of the demiurge with its resultant dy-

²⁹Beyond Life, pp. 315-8.

namic illusions, reserving only a final paragraph for his statement of the goals of romance. In that paragraph he reasons that

It is dullness alone which enables us to hurl defiance at "realism": for these illusions that are born of romance, and are nursed by dullness, serve as our curveting and prancing escort, and keep at bay all interference, as we pass in a straggling caravan, with death already hot upon the trail, and human nature clogging every step like gyves. And thus protected, today as always our caravan accepts romance for guide; and strains and flounders toward goals which stay remote, and yet are fairly discernible. For that to which romance conducts, in all the affairs of life (concluded John Charteris), is plain enough, - distinction and clarity, and beauty and symmetry, and tenderness and truth and urbanity. ³⁰

Then Mr. Cabell, in the last chapter of his essays, Beyond Life, occupies himself largely in explaining those goals of romance: distinction, clarity, beauty, symmetry, tenderness, truth, and urbanity. He desires distinction

. . . for that existence which ought to be peculiarly mine, among my innumerable fellows who swarm about earth like ants. Yet which one of us is noticeable, or can be appreciably different, in this throng of human ephemerae and all their millions and inestimable millions of millions of predecessors and oncoming progeny? And even though one mote may transiently appear exceptional, the distinction of those who in their heydays are "great" personages must suffer loss with time, and must dwindle continuously, until at most the man's recorded name remains here and there in sundry pedant's libraries. ³¹

³⁰ Beyond Life, p. 318.

³¹ Ibid., p. 345.

And as for the goals of clarity and symmetry, he combines his desires for them by stating:

I want my life, the only life of which I am assured, to have symmetry or, in default of that, at least to acquire some clarity. Surely it is not asking very much to wish that my personal conduct be intelligible to me! Yet it is forbidden to know for what purpose this universe was intended, to what end it was set a-going, or why I am here, or even what I had preferably do while here . . . I seem to have done nothing with premeditation, but rather, to have had things done to me. . . It is against the tyranny of matter I would rebel, - against life's absolute need of food, and books, and fire, and clothing, and flesh, to touch and to inhabit, lest life perish. No, all that which I do here or refrain from doing lacks clarity, nor can I detect any symmetry anywhere, such as living would assuredly display, I think, if my progress were directed by any particular motive. ³²

The beauty which he desires is very clearly explained in his simple statement:

And I want beauty in my life. I have seen beauty in a sunset and in the spring woods and in the eyes of divers women, but now these happy accidents of light and color no longer thrill me. And I want beauty in my life itself, rather than in any such chances as befall it. . . I would like this life which moves and yearns in me, to be able itself to attain to comeliness, though but in transitory performance. The life of a butterfly, for example, is just a graceful gesture: and yet, in that its loveliness is complete and perfectly rounded in itself. . . There are many books, I know; and there is beauty "embalmed and treasured up" in many pages of my books, and in the books of other persons, too, which I may read at will: but this desire inborn in me is not to be satiated by making marks upon paper, nor by deciphering them. In short, I am enamored of that flawless beauty of which all poets have perturbedly divined the exist-

³²Beyond Life, p. 347.

tence somewhere, and which life as men know it simply does not afford nor anywhere foresee. ³³

After this follows a paragraph on tenderness beginning:

And tenderness, too- but does that appear a mawkish thing to desiderate in life? . . . All babies have a temporary lien on tenderness, of course: and therefrom children too receive a dwindling income, although on looking back, you will recollect that your childhood was upon the whole a lonesome and much put-upon period. . . . In courtship, I grant you, there is a passing aberration which often mimics tenderness, sometimes as the result of honest delusion, but more frequently as an ambushade in the endless struggle between man and woman. . . . Personally, I do not like human beings because I am not aware, upon the whole, of any generally distributed qualities which entitle them as a race to admiration and affection. But toward people in books- such as Mrs. Millamant, and Helen of Troy, and Bella Wilfer, and Melusine, and Beatrix Esmond,- I may intelligently overflow with tenderness and caressing words, in part because they deserve it, and in part because I know they will not suspect me of being "queer" or of having ulterior motives. ³⁴

And his desire for truth reads:

And I very often wish that I could know the truth about just any one circumstance connected with my life. Is the phantasmagoria of sound and noise and color really passing or is it an illusion here in my brain? . . . And yet this life- to which I cling tenaciously,- comes to no more. Meanwhile I hear men talk about "the truth;" and they even wager handsome sums upon their knowledge of it: but I align myself with "jesting Pilate," and echo the forlorn query that time has left unanswered. ³⁵

And finally he declares:

³³ Beyond Life, p. 349.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 351.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 353.

Then, last of all, I desiderate urbanity. I believe that this is the rarest quality in the world. Indeed, it probably does not exist anywhere. A really urbane person- a mortal open-minded and affable to conviction of his own shortcomings and errors, and unguided in anything by irrational blind prejudices,- could not but in a world of men and women be regarded as a monster. . . Yet I wish I could acquire urbanity, very much as I would like to have wings. For in default of it, I cannot even manage to be civil to that piteous thing called human nature, or to view its parasites, whether they be politicians or clergymen or popular authors, with one half the commiseration which the shifts they are put to, quite certainly, would arouse in the urbane. . . And it is this will that stirs in us to have the creatures of earth and the affairs of earth, not as they are, but "as they ought to be," which we call romance. ³⁶

And in this concluding paragraph we have in a nutshell Mr. Cabell's theory of romance, explained in a volume detailed enough to furnish an adequate basis for the study of his narratives.

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³⁶Beyond Life, p. 354.

Chapter III His Poictesme Novels

The remainder of this study is to consist of (1) a consideration of Cabell's actual writing from the standpoint of his theory of romance, explained in chapter II, and (2) a discussion of his specific literary characteristics. The most desirable method of approach is, then, to discuss his books individually or in convenient groups- groups which Cabell himself has arranged, or groups which naturally occur because of the character of the writing. The first of Cabell's own groups is that of the Poictesme series, which consists of narratives set in the fictitious, medieval country of Poictesme, inhabited by a host of fascinating people, created by the imaginative genius of Cabell's mind. Many critics believe that Poictesme finds its counterpart in medieval France, an impression which Cabell himself is at no pains to conceal, but which neither adds anything to the value of the narratives nor enhances the ease of their analysis; therefore it is advisable to proceed upon the assumption that here is a country with its attendant legends perfectly able to stand on its own merits.

Even after one has decided to discuss the Poictesme series first, the problem of arrangement is not complete. Upon what basis shall the critic set his books in order?

Obviously it is impossible to arrange all eight of them in a sequence according to literary merit, because several of them are nearly equal in stylistic and narrative merits. The simplest method would be to discuss them chronologically according to their dates of publication, but that would afford no intelligent basis of comparison, for Cabell, like many creative writers, develops not in a straight line but by high points of excellence followed by descents into mediocrity; consequently it shall be my purpose to handle the series in the genealogical order, that is, the order in which the characters appear family after family from one generation to another, beginning with Figures of Earth, in which we read the life history of Dom Manuel, the Redeemer of Poictesme and ancestor of nearly all the principal characters which appear in the other members of the series, and continuing to analyze each book, showing how Cabell has applied his theory in each story.

Episodes from Figures of Earth appeared in the Century magazine in 1919 and 1920, but it was not until 1921 that it was copyrighted in book form by Cabell himself.

The book begins, as many of Cabell's do, with a foreword in which he pretends to be deriving his story from some series of legends or myths, written by a

famous but now almost forgotten romancer. He explains that the gist of Figures of Earth is taken from Les Gestes de Manuel of the series, Popular Tales of Poictesme.

The narrative begins with Manuel, at the age of twenty, in the rôle of a swineherd, "living modestly in attendance upon the miller's pigs." ¹ He sits before a small pool fashioning out of marsh clay a figure of a man, at which he continually works, never quite molding it to his desire. The whole story is built up around this desire to mold figures of earth which will be of some worth in the world. The desire came to him, as Manuel says, "Because my mother was always very anxious for me to make a figure in the world, and when she lay a-dying I promised her I would do so." ² Thus the theme comes about as a result of Manuel's stupid but amusing misunderstanding of the colloquial usage of the word "figure." A stranger appears, who, after discussing with Manuel the matter of the figures, informs him that a wonderful adventure is awaiting him; namely, he is to rescue the "Count of Arnaye's daughter," ³ who has been carried off by "Miramon Lluagor, lord of nine kinds of

¹ Figures of Earth, p. 3.

² Ibid., p. 5.

³ Ibid., p. 6.

sleep and seven kinds of madnesses. He lives in mythic splendor at the top of the gray mountain called Vraidex, where he contrives all manner of illusions, and, in particular, designs the dreams of men."⁴ So Manuel girds on the charmed sword Flamberge, which the stranger gave him, cries farewell to the stranger and to the pigs, and marches away "to meet a fate that was long talked about."⁵

Before long he meets a lad, who calls himself, Niafer, going on the same quest. They march together, overcoming many obstacles in the mountain path- such as dragons and sharp spears- by Niafer's clever deceptions, until they reach the palace of the wizard. Here Manuel learns that Miramon is the stranger who gave him the sword, on purpose to conquer Miramon, because he is tired of the girl. In this connection Cabell causes Miramon to voice an opinion of love, an opinion which is the application of Cabell's theory, based on his dynamic illusion of love. The wizard says:

Love, as I think, is an instant's fusing of shadow and substance. They that aspire to possess love utterly fall into folly. . . . The lover, beholding that fusing move as a golden-hued goddess, accessible, kindly and priceless, woos and ill-fatedly wins all the substance. The golden-hued shadow dims in the dawn of his married life, dulled with content, and the shadow vanishes. So there

⁴Figures of Earth, p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 10.

remains, for the puzzled husband's embracing, flesh which is fair and dear, no doubt, yet is flesh such as his; and talking and talking and talking; and kisses in all ways desirable. Love, of a sort, too remains, but hardly the love that was yesterday's. ⁶

But now Manuel discovers that he loves Niafer, who is a servant girl in disguise; so he relinquishes the quest, and they go down the hill. However, before they can marry, they encounter two strangers, who demand the surrender of one of them. Manuel, in order to keep his promise to his mother, is obliged to let Grandfather Death, the first stranger, take Niafer, while he accompanies the other stranger, Horvendile.

After that Manuel makes expeditions into many provinces, and participates in love affairs with such charming ladies as Alianora, the Unattainable Princess, and as Queen Freydis of Audela. But he tires of them, and by performing a suitable incantation over one of his clay figures causes Niafer to appear out of it in human form. They are married, but Niafer is not content to travel about aimlessly; so she prevails upon Manuel to visit King Ferdinand. The king allows him to organize troops with which to conquer Poictesme, but Duke Asmund defeats him. Manuel and Nisfer then retire to Sargyll, a quiet place, where a daughter Melicent is born. Some time passes and Manuel, with the

⁶Figures of Earth, p. 26.

aid of Miramon's magic, is finally able to conquer Poictesme, after which he is referred to as Count Manuel, Redeemer of Poictesme. He and Niafer live in splendor, and a son Emmerick is born. Manuel wages more wars, wins, gains more fame, is blessed with more children, and at the last is ready to accompany Grandfather Death toward the sunset.

Thus in the first part of the Poictesme series we see the fulfilling of Cabell's theory, realized in the illusion of love, because in each episode of the quest Manuel thinks he is sure to experience the joy of perfect realization, only to find, in the end, that life is not as glorious as he had anticipated.

Domnei, (1920), genealogically the second novel in the Poictesme series, is a revision of an earlier publication called The Soul of Melicent, (1913). In the foreword, or, as he calls it this time, The Critical Comment, he accounts for the source of the plot in Le Roman de Lusignan of Nicholas de Caen, a thoroughly fictitious old French romancer.

The story opens with Perion convalescing at the palace of King Theodoret, who is to marry Melicent, and meeting all sorts of noblemen and important people, in the palace and at the home of Count Emmerick, Melicent's brother. Perion parades as the Vicomte de Puyssange, and, as he recovers, falls in love with Mel-

icent. He stakes his life on her trust, reveals himself as an outlaw, Perion de la Forêt, and awaits her pleasure. Melicent, astonished at his audacity but pleased at his attitude, promises to aid his escape. She is fascinated with him, begs him to take her away from this marriage with King Theodoret; but, because of his unworthiness, Perion fears to attempt such a stupendous flight. He leaves a note asking her to believe in him. But, disguised as the bishop who is to assure his escape, Melicent follows him to the boat. She gives him a ring, pledges faithfulness to him, whom she regards in all effects as her husband, and returns with the real bishop, who has just arrived, and Perion sails away to seek his fortune in the wars.

Demetrios, son of Miramon Lluagor, with his fleet captures Perion and his company and sends Perion's special servant, Ahasuerus the Jew, with a message to Melicent. But she has, in the meantime, disguised herself as a boy and gone out to seek adventure. She comes to the castle of Demetrios, who by a trick penetrates her disguise, whereupon she is obliged to sell herself to redeem Perion and his company. Time passes. Perion fights awhile for the King of Cyprus, then by chance enters the service of King Theodoret, who recognizes the same young man who before posed as the Vicomte de Puyssange. Perion promises to aid the king

in capturing Demetrios, a deed which will now please him more than the return of Melicent, whom he was to marry. Perion captures Demetrios, brings him before the king, but pleads for his life in order that he may return and protect Melicent from the anger of his other wives. Theodoret is loath to let Demetrios out of his clutches again, but Perion's arguments win. On the return, enemies outside the territory of Theodoret arrive; Demetrios escapes, but Perion is captured. Later Demetrios returns and, by a clever murder, is able to rescue Perion, who sells the ring Melicent gave him in order to pay for Demetrios's return passage. In return Demetrios gives Perion the magic sword Flamberge. But Perion flings it into the sea and promises to meet him in a fair fight some day.

After his return Demetrios lives awhile in splendor as before, until he is brought near to death by a battle wound. He calls in Melicent and promises her freedom. But Orestes, unwilling to wait for Death, smothers Demetrios, his father, and sells Melicent to Ahasuerus the Jew. Perion and his company arrive at the city gates. Ahasuerus, knowing that he can never win Melicent, betrays Orestes, letting Perion into the city and into the castle. Perion and his company kill many, including Orestes, and Melicent is free at last. Perion and Melicent are united in love, but it is not

the same joyous love they shared in their youth. Perion realizes that life with Melicent will not be what he had anticipated.

Thus ends the book which is Cabell's clearest picture of the demiurgic romance working in the illusion of love and chivalry.

The third book in the Poictesme series is Jurgen, (1919), which that futile gesture of suppression in 1919 brought into a prominence which has never been lost. In the foreword Cabell asserts that he has adapted the story from the longer La Haulte Histoire de Jurgen in the series, Popular Tales of Poictesme.

The tale opens with a certain pawnbroker, Jurgen, son of Coth, setting out to look for his wife, Dame Lisa, whom he suspects of having been carried off by a devil. As he seeks her in a cave on Amneran Heath, he meets Nessus, a centaur, who takes Jurgen to the garden between dawn and sunrise. Jurgen puts on a glittering, many-colored shirt, which Nessus has given him, and they ride "westward in the glory of a departed sunset."⁷ And in this garden they notice innumerable young people, which sight provides Cabell an opportunity to apply his theory of illusions by saying:

And all the faces that Jurgen saw were young and glad and very lovely and quite heart-breakingly

⁷Jurgen, p. 17.

confident, as young persons beyond numbering came toward Jurgen and passed him there, in the first glory of the dawn: so they all went exulting in the glory of their youth, and foreknowing life to be a puny antagonist from which one might take very easily anything which one desired. . . .

"For in this garden," said the Centaur, "each man that ever lived has sojourned for a little while, with no company save his illusions." ⁸

Jurgen and Nessus walk in the garden where they meet Count Emmerick's second sister, Dorothy la Désirée, whom Jurgen loved and wrote verses to in his youth. The sun rises, and Jurgen passes on to various other places,- to the home of Mother Sereda, to an imaginary place in which he has really married Dorothy, and back to Amneran Heath, where he sees many more former sweethearts. In the far end of the cave he rescues Guinevere from torture and takes her to Cameliard, where he becomes Duke of Logreus. Some time later, at the Green Castle, he kills a giant, thus restoring the happiness of Dame Yolande. Then follows an account of various other love affairs, after which Guinevere goes away to marry King Arthur, and Jurgen follows Dame Anaitis to her island, Coccaigne. But he tires of life with her; consequently he goes to the land of Leuké, where he marries Chloris, a hamadryad, and becomes King of Eubonia.

By the seashore one afternoon Jurgen meets Perion and Horvendile, who suggest that he should see the love-

⁸ Jurgen, p. 20.

liness of a certain Queen Helen. Here Cabell includes a discussion which exemplifies his theory of romance as realized in the illusion of love, namely, that the person loved is always the ideal. Perion recognizes in Helen the Melicent of his heart's desire, Horvendile sees her as Ettarre, and Jurgen suspects her to be Dorothy. These attitudes indicate Cabell's idea of the illusion of ideal love, an ideal which he thinks is never actually or completely realized by man.

But Jurgen is awed by the splendor of Helen's beauty and will not try to make love to her. Later he leaves the land of Leukê to sojourn in Hell, where he meets his father, Goth, who finds inadequate torment in a region where the devils are so busy they cannot properly attend to the fires. Not long after that he marries Florimel, a vampire in Hell. Jurgen enters into a political controversy with Satan, after which he departs for Heaven to continue his search for Dame Lisa, his wife. He gains entrance to Heaven by pretending to be Pope John the Twentieth, whose place is vacant because of a mistake in papal sequence. But Jurgen finds here only forgiveness and love and illusions; consequently, he journeys back to Amneran Heath, where, this time, he finds Dame Lisa. Then Jurgen remembers that: "Neither he nor Lisa, now, had ever been in the cave, and probably there was no longer

any such place, and now there never had been any such place. It was rather confusing. . . Then Jurgen sighed, and entered his snug home." ⁹

And thus it was that Jurgen returned from his dream to the quietness of every day existence as a pawnbroker. So with Cabell it is the dream which is the romance—the dream in which men are what they ought to be. But, as the dream passed for Jurgen, so romance passes for man, and he returns to the life "in which we are meat salesmen, or vestrymen, or otherwise worthy members of society." ¹⁰

The Silver Stallion, (1926), the fourth novel of the Poictesme series, Mr. Cabell professes to have translated from Bulg's Poictesme en Chanson et Légende, a series of 17th century legends. Before Cabell begins the narrative, he lists the ten lords of Poictesme who belong to the order called the Fellowship of the Silver Stallion. Then the story opens with these lords conferring in regard to the disappearance of Dom Manuel into the sunset with Grandfather Death, after which the lords decide to go out in all directions in search of further adventure.

The first tale reports the journeying of Gonfal, who, after loving Queen Morvyth, is beheaded for pre-

⁹Jurgen, p. 368.

¹⁰New Republic, XXVI (April 13, 1921), 187.

dicting that she will some day become old and unattractive. Then follows an account of Miramon Lluagor, the dream-maker, who has difficulty with his sorcery, and who is finally killed by his son, Demetrios, with the charmed sword Flamberge. After this Cabell records the adventures of Coth as he journeys west to seek Dom Manuel. Coth meets strange gods, marries Utsumé and rules over her country, Tollan, for awhile, then finds Manuel in the realm of Death. Manuel tells him not to be concerned about the difficulties of everyday life, but to remember that "the dream is better. For man alone of all animals plays ape to his dreams."¹¹ This statement expresses Cabell's theory of romance as realized in the illusion of optimism. Then Coth returns to Poictesme, where he leads a rather quiet existence and dies of old age.

"Now the tale is of Guivric of Perdigon,"¹² who rides into the east. He enters into many strange adventures, encounters magic in many places, and finally disappears mysteriously. Kerin, the hero of the next tale, wanders into underground passages, meets former acquaintances who now abide in the realm of Death, returns to Poictesme, where he lives to an old age, watching his son, Fauxpas of Nointel, grow into prom-

¹¹The Silver Stallion, p. 127.

¹²Ibid., p. 171.

inence. The tale which follows, namely, the account of Ninzian's sorcery and of his troubles with his wife, ends with Lucifer's appearance in the garden, in order to prevent Saint Holmendis from doing Ninzian any injustice. Then the story turns to Donander of Évre, who journeys to Heaven, where he entertains himself in many ways, including the creating and destroying of worlds. Finally he becomes an immortal, living in "his pleasant quarters in the everlasting vales of Ydalir." ¹³ The book ends by telling of Niasfer's devotion to the legend of her husband Manuel, in which Cabell again voices his theory of romance resulting in the illusion of optimism:

So does it come about that the saga of Manuel and the sagas of all the lords of the Silver Stallion have been reshaped by the foolishness and the fond optimism of mankind; and these sagas now conform in everything to that supreme romance which preserves us from insanity. For it is just as I said, years ago, to one of these so drolly white-washed and ennobled rapsallions. All men that live, and that go perforce about this world like blundering lost children whose rescuer is not yet in sight, have a vital need to believe in this sustaining legend about the Redeemer, and about the Redeemer's power to make those persons who serve him just and perfect. ¹⁴

The fifth novel in the Poictesme series, The High Place, (1923), opens with Florian de Puysange going

¹³ The Silver Stallion, p. 314.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 330.

from his home in Storisende into the Forest of Acaire. Mélusine, who by her magic has charmed the high place in the woods, guides him. While in the castle near the high place he falls in love with Melior, his dream woman. But he returns to Storisende and later to Bellegarde, where he encounters many adventures, among which are four marriages at various intervals. Florian, now middle-aged, returns to Storisende to marry a fifth wife. On the way he meets Janicot (Satan), who gives him some good advice. Before Janicot concludes his remarks, Cabell causes Florian to voice sentiments concerning Cabell's illusion of ideal love and beauty:

I do not speak any praise whatever of Melior, because her worth is beyond all praising. . . . When I was but a child her loveliness was revealed to me, and never since then have I been able to forget the beauty of which all dreams go envious. . . . Her beauty is that beauty which women had in the world's youth, and whose components the old world forgets in this gray age. ¹⁵

Then Janicot promises to release Melior from enchantment at the castle Brunbelois, and in return Florian is to give Janicot his first born. They put the contract in writing, and Florian rides away toward Brunbelois. With the magic sword, Flamberge, he destroys many monsters along the way; soon he arrives at the castle, which he finds interesting, now that the

¹⁵ The High Place, p. 44.

enchantment has been removed. Here Florian meets St. Hoprig, whom he worshipped in his youth. Hoprig is very much astonished to learn from Florian that he has been canonized as a Christian saint. Hoprig tells Florian that he will do his best to turn Christian in order to fulfil the legend. Florian goes out to the mountains, where he finds Melior, his beloved. Florian realizes that "all living had been the prologue to this instant: God had made the world in order that Florian might stand here, with Melior, at the top of the world." ¹⁶ Melior thanks him for breaking the enchantment and promises to marry him. Later, St. Hoprig marries them according to the ceremony of the province. Florian leaves to take the life of the Prince Regent, an act which is part of his bargain with Janicot. However, the Prince dies of apoplexy, so Florian is able to fulfil his contract even before it is due.

Florian goes away in search of adventure. He meets Janicot, who tells him how to find the magic sword, Flamberge. Guided by the sword, Florian leaves Antan, whereupon he encounters St. Hoprig, who explains more about his doings as a Christian saint. Florian departs for the Hotel de Puyssange, where he engages in several love affairs; but he returns to Bellegarde a short time before his baby is to be born. One evening

¹⁶The High Place, p. 76.

in the chapel of the castle Melior is warned, by the vision of Florian's former wives, of his bargain with Janicot, and is given a staff by which she escapes to St. Hoprig's house. Florian, after some difficulty and delay, arrives at Hoprig's hermitage, where he finds Melior and the new born child. Hoprig comes in and explains that he is the father of the child, saying that that was the only way he could save him from Janicot's contract. Hoprig and Florian come to blows, but in the moment of attack a peal of thunder breaks forth, and St. Michael and Janicot appear at the door. Michael aids Hoprig, and Janicot releases Florian from his contract. Melior picks up the child and accompanies Hoprig away on a golden cloud. Michael and Janicot converse and drink a long time, but cannot decide what to do with Florian. Finally they look up from their drinking and notice that he has gone to sleep. In speaking of Florian's dreams, Janicot speaks words which reveal Cabell's idea of the power of romance:

Meanwhile he does not drink, he merely dreams, this little Florian. He dreams of beauty and of holiness fetched back by him to an earth which everywhere fell short of his wishes, fetched down by him intrepidly from that imagined high place where men attain to their insane desires. He dreams of aspiring and joy and color and suffering and unreason, and of those quaint taboos which you and he call sin, as being separate things, not seeing how all blends in one vast cup. ¹⁷

¹⁷The High Place, p. 302.

But Florian's dream remains real, and, in the epilogue, Cabell explains that Florian grew up to enjoy a life of adventure. The whole book is simply Florian's dream as he lies asleep under a tree in his father's yard.

The last three novels of the Poictesme series, Music From Behind the Moon, (1926), The White Robe, (1928), and The Way of Ecben, (1929), are a trilogy of stories about Ettarre and her three lovers: Madoc, the poet; the Bishop of Valnéres; and King Alfgar, each lover appearing in one book in the order just named. In the conclusion to The Way of Ecben Cabell explains that these three stories were part of an intended long story called The Witch Woman. He says:

. . . with the ending of King Alfgar's saga I also take leave of "The Witch Woman," which was to have been a book. . . "The Witch Woman," . . . was to have contained ten fairly lengthy episodes entitled, in their planned order: The Music From Behind the Moon; The Thirty-First of February; The Furry Thing That Sang; The Lean Hands of Volmar; The Holy Man Who Washed; The Little Miracle of St. Leshia; The White Robe; The Child Out of Fire; and The Way of Ecben.

For this never written "Witch Woman" was to have been, in its Intended Edition, a dizain which would have followed through centuries, the adventures of Ettarre and her immortal souteneur, - or, to be wholly accurate, the adventuring of ten lovers of Ettarre who, howsoever differing in other respects, yet one and all committed the grave error of touching, and of striving to possess, the mortal body which at that time Ettarre was wearing. . . there will always be new stories about Ettarre, under one or another name, by the writers who shall come after my decaying generation. For all the young men everywhere that were poets have had their glimpses

of her loveliness, and they have heard a cadence or two of that troubling music which accompanies the passing of Ettarre; and they have made, and they will make forever, their stories about the witch-woman, so long as youth endures among mankind and April punctually returns into the world which men inhabit. ¹⁸

But Cabell did not develop the three stories equally; the first two are episodes, as he intended that they should be, but The Way of Eben is a substantial novel, ranking in size, at least, with his other novels in the Poictesme series. It is sufficient to say that Music From Behind the Moon is an episode relating the adventures of Madoc, a poet, who falls in love with Ettarre the dream woman, and who follows her elusive music to the land behind the moon. The White Robe is slightly longer, but not long enough to be called a novel. It relates the adventures of the Bishop of Valnéres on the earth and, after his death, on his journey between this earth and heaven. But, unlike the poet, the bishop does not succumb to her influence. Especially in his last adventure with her is he resistant. This occurs on his journey between earth and heaven. Ettarre appears on a cloud beside him, but after a rather long journey "that infernal automatic cloud had moored itself to the wharf of heaven," ¹⁹ and Ettarre fades away into the form of a dragon and falls down to

¹⁸The Way of Eben, p. 157.

¹⁹The White Robe, p. 1, section 10. (Each section of the book is paged separately).

earth, leaving the bishop to enter heaven in peace.

In a foreword to The Way of Ecben Cabell pretends to have taken the story from Garnier's anthology of Norrovian legends, and from the particular legend, The King's Quest, about which Cabell says that no prose version in English has appeared before. The narrative opens with an account of the warring of Alfgar, King of Ecben, and Ulf, King of Korn, for the hand of Ettaine, daughter of Thordis Bent-Neck. Alfgar wins, but on his wedding night, in a dream, he hears from behind the moon the music of Ettarre summoning him out of the set way of life. Alfgar knows his doom is near. He relinquishes his claim upon Ettaine and prepares to marry her to Ulf, explaining how "it is the way of Ecben to serve only one god, and one king, and one lady in domnei." ²⁰ Alfgar goes away, leaving Ulf to rule over Ecben. Alfgar goes to Darvan, has many terrible experiences, but comes out of the woods alive, because "upon him was the mark of the witch-woman whose magic is more strong than is that magic of time which betrays all kings of men into the power of the little people of Darvan." ²¹ From there Alfgar goes down into the cave of Clloth,

²⁰ The Way of Ecben, p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. 53.

where the ghosts of many of the dead were worshipping at numerous altars. He stops to worship a former god of Ecben. Coming out into the open again, he meets the old, thin, unlovely forms of many of his former sweethearts. They cry to him, as do many other women famous in history, who pass by. He meets Horvendile, the immortal, who "only of her lovers may not ever hope to win Ettarre. This merely is permitted me: that I may touch the hand of Ettarre in the moment that I lay that hand in the hand of her last lover. . . . So do I purchase an eternally unfed desire against which time- as yet- remains powerless." ²² And that is the substance of Cabell's theory- the eternal desire created by romance and fed by its dynamic illusions.

Alfgar continues on his journey until he hears the strange music which he knows can accompany no other than Ettarre. He realizes that his quest is ended, and says to her:

So I have won to you who were my lady in dom- nei and my heart's desire. But I am aged now, and time has laid hold of me with both hands, and with the weak remnants of my mortal body's strength I may neither take nor defend you as becomes a king of men. The music that I once delighted in seems only a thin vexing now. And there is in your face no longer any beauty that my wearied eyes can find. ²³

Then Ettarre replies:

²²The Way of Ecben, p. 102.

²³Ibid., p.

Yet even from the first, my friend, you followed after a music which you could not hear, and after a shining to which your eyes were dimmed. All that which other men desire you have given up because of a notion in which you did not quite ever believe. Yes, you have clung- in your own fashion- to the old way of Ecben. ²⁴

These passages just quoted illustrate what Cabell means by the demiurge leading man to create an ideal which results in illusions of one kind or another, that is, illusions which come to man when he follows his dream.

Then at the last Ettarre touches Alfgar, restores his youth, and they arrange a great wedding festival. Horvendile places Alfgar's hand in Ettarre's, but the gods of Rorn destroy him. Only Horvendile and Ettarre remain in the lovely garden between dawn and sunrise. "But Horvendile and his Ettarre, who are not either happy or quite human, may not, their legend tells us, ever die, nor have they yet parted from each other for the last time." ²⁵

And thus in The Way of Ecben Cabell shows us that Horvendile is the eternal romancer in search of his ideal, Ettarre, which he never quite attains. "But it is known that these two pass down the years in a not ever ending severance which is their union." ²⁶

²⁴The way of Ecben, p.

²⁵Ibid., p. 150.

²⁶Ibid., p. 150.

And with the closing of The Way of Eben we have the closing of the Poictesme series of novels, all of which show the reader how the power of romance leads man to pursue his dream only to find that the realization is less sweet than the anticipation, and that life thus holds for him a series of dynamic illusions.

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Chapter IV His Virginia Novels and Mixed Novels

After the Poictesme series of novels has been considered, the problem of approach becomes a simple one. Five novels remain, three of which are narratives of present day Virginia, and two which might be called mixed narratives since they concern both the people of present day Virginia and those of Poictesme. The Virginia novels will be discussed first, then the two novels dealing with the medieval and the present day people.

The Eagle's Shadow, (1904), the earliest of the Virginia narratives, is the story of Margaret Hugonin, her father, her friends, and her sweetheart, Billie Woods. The action occurs at Selwoode, the country estate of Frederick Woods, Margaret's uncle by marriage, and the real uncle of Billie. Under Margaret's roof are several other people, each seeking Margaret's aid in furthering some social or reform movement or charity cause, but who really wish to live on her hospitality. The theme is built up around the inheritance of the Selwoode estate, in which the wealthy uncle has placed his favorite design, the eagle, in every possible place- embroidered in linen, carved in wood, and engraved in metal. Billie quarrels with his uncle

and goes to Paris to become an artist. The uncle dies, Margaret becomes a very wealthy girl, as the manager of Selwoode estate. Billy returns, and the rest of the novel deals with the quarrels which he and Margaret have over the estate. But at the last Mr. Cabell says: "And I fancy that the Eagle's shadow is lifted from Selwoode, now that Love has taken up his abode there." ¹

The second Virginia story, The Cords of Vanity, (1909), is an account of a writer, Robert Townsend, and his life in Fairhaven. In early youth he loves a certain Stella, but she marries another. In college he loves Betty Hamlyn, but not in the romantic fashion in which he idealized Stella. Later he loves an actress who played a week in Fairhaven, but she already has a husband. Then follows an affair with Gillian Hardress, the wife of one of Townsend's friends. Some time later he is visiting in Lichfield, where he meets Stella again. During his stay there, she is injured when a horse runs away and upsets the buggy in which she is riding. Her husband is away dissipating, but Townsend tells her that her husband is becoming a famous lawyer, so Stella dies believing that she has inspired his success. Then follows an interval in which Townsend writes several books. After that he has an unsuccess-

¹The Eagle's Shadow, p. 256.

ful love affair with a Rosalind Jennett, who, like Stella, marries another. His last affair is with Avis Beechinor, who, at last, decides to marry Peter Bladgen, former husband of Stella. And the story closes with Robert Townsend saying to himself that he ought to tell Betty how he cares for her, but then "it would make her so unhappy." ²

The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck, (1915), the last of the Virginia narratives, opens with an explanation of the title. Cabell explains that the grandfather is an old china idol on the mantel who nods his head in consent when the china idol of a major-general asks for the hand of the china shepherdess. But she loves the little china chimney-sweep, standing near by. He and the little shepherdess go up the chimney, but the world appears too large for them. As they descend to the mantel, they see that grandfather has fallen and broken into three pieces. The family mend him by putting a strong rivet in his neck. He can no longer nod his head, so the shepherdess and the chimney-sweep remain together and love each other until they are old broken to pieces.

The narrative opens with a sketch of Colonel Rudolph Musgrave's life up to the time of the story,

²The Cords of Vanity, p. 341.

and continues with an account of his life in Lichfield. He is a genealogist and research writer by profession, and loves Patricia Stapylton. In telling Patricia about the china figures he speaks a sentiment that is undoubtedly Cabell's idea of the illusion of optimism:

You see these little china people had forsaken their orderly comfortable world on the parlor table to climb very high. It was a brave thing to do, even though they faltered and came back after a while. It is what we all want to do, Patricia- to climb toward the stars,- even those of us who are too lazy or too cowardly to attempt it. And when others try it, we are envious and a little uncomfortable, and we probably scoff; but we can't help admiring, and there is a rivet in the neck of all of us which prevents us from interfering. Oh, yes, we little china people have a variety of rivets, thank God, too prevent too frequent nodding and too cowardly compromise with baseness,- rivets that are a part of us and force us into flashes of upright living, almost in spite of ourselves, when duty and inclination grapple. ³

After some difficulty Musgrave succeeds in marrying Patricia, who bears him a son, Roger. But Patricia finds a packet of old love letters to a former sweetheart, who is now Mrs. Clarice Pendomer. Her reading of these letters, along with the knowledge of family scandals, results in an unhappy married life for them. Then Rudolph discovers that Patricia loves Jack Charteris, a writer, living in Lichfield. Later the shock of Charteris's death kills Patricia. Several years pass, and Rudolph realizes that he loves Anne

³The Rivet in Grandfather's Neck, p. 51.

Charteris, Jack Charteris's widow, but because of the "rivet" they do not marry. At the last Musgrave lives in memory of Patricia, whom he professes to have loved the best of all.

Something About Eve, (1927), the first of the mixed narratives; begins with an account of how Gerald Musgrave, an author living in Lichfield, puts aside his manuscript of an unfinished romance about Dom Manuel of Poictesme to become a magician. He leaves also a girl who loves him, Evelyn Townsend, wife of Frank Townsend. So, mounted on his steed, Kalki, Gerald Musgrave rides forth to try his magic. He rides into various countries, trying many ingenious tricks of magic, entering into love affairs, and seeking for a third to add to the universally known two- copulation and death. He is unsuccessful, so he returns to Lichfield to find that he has become a famous writer.

The Cream of the Jest, (1917), the second novel of the mixed narrative group opens with an introduction stating that this is the story of Felix Kennaston of Virginia and how he follows his dream, being led into Poictesme by the charm of the sigil of Scoteia. The story begins with an account of the preparation for the marriage of Ettarre to Sir Guiron at Storisende. Horvendile, a clerk, loves her but realizes he has no

chance to win her. However, Ettarre is sorry for him and says magnanimously, "My poor friend, we must get you a wife. Are there no women in your country?"⁴ And Horvendile replies with words that reveal Cabell's conception of the illusion of love:

"Ah, but there is never any woman in one's own country whom one can love, madame, . . . For love, I take it, must look toward something not quite accessible, something not quite understood. Now, I have been so unfortunate as to find the women of my country lacking in reticence. I know their opinions concerning everything—touching God and God's private intentions, and touching me, and the people across the road—and how these women's clothes are adjusted, and what they eat for breakfast, and what men have kissed them: there is no room for illusion anywhere. . . Ah, no madame; the women of my country are the pleasantest of comrades, and the helpfulest of wives: but I cannot conceal it from myself that, after all, they are only human beings; and therefore it has never been possible for me to love any one of them."

" . . . For you embody all that I was ever able to conceive of beauty and fearlessness and strange purity. Therefore it is evident I do not see in you merely Count Emmerick's third sister, but, instead, that ageless lovable and loving woman long worshipped and sought everywhere in vain by all poets."⁵

Horvendile leaves Storlende and goes to the castle of Maugis d'Aigremont with whom he plans to betray Ettarre. In the evening Horvendile returns, admits Maugis and his men into Ettarre's house, and tells her she is betrayed. But when they enter her room, Horvendile reveals his trick to Maugis and then kills

⁴The Cream of the Jest, p. 9.

⁵Ibid., p. 9.

him. Guiron, Ettarre's betrothed, enters. Horvendile explains the whole piece of senseless treachery, saying:

Indeed, how is it possible for me to make you understand? Well, I will blurt out the truth. 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, he pretended to translate from an old manuscript written by an ancient clerk- called Horvendile. It told of Horvendile's part in the love-business between Sir Guiron des Rocques and La Beale Ettarre. I am that writer of romance. This room, this castle, all the broad rolling country-side without, is but a portion of my dream, and these places have no existence save in my fancies. And you, messire,- and you also, madame- and dead Maugis here, and all the others who seemed so real to me, are but the puppets which I fashioned and shifted, for the tale's sake, in that romance which now draws to a close. . . .

It is not possible for you to believe me, of course. And it may be that I, too, am only a figment of some greater dream, in just such case as yours, and that I, too, cannot understand. It may be the very cream of the jest that my country is no more real than Storisende.⁶

But before Horvendile leaves Storisende, Ettarre gives him the broken sigil of Scoteia, a charmed talisman of the Dark Goddess, which will provide him safe conduct back to Poictesme, if he ever decides to return.

So Horvendile comes to the land where he is known as Felix Kennaston, writer, who has married Kathleen Epps Saumarez, and who lives quietly as a country gentleman in Lichfield, Virginia.

⁶The Cream of the Jest, p. 27.

One day he finds a fragment of gleaming metal. He examines it closely and finds it covered with strange characters which he cannot interpret. As he takes it up, the dream comes to him again: Ettarre's form appears before him; she tells him this bit of metal is part of the sigil of Scotela and that she wears the other piece of it. So Kennaston decides to preserve this gleaming bit of metal.

Kennaston writes and submits to several publishers a story, The Audit at Storisende, but with no success. Finally one company revises the title to Men Who Loved Allison and publishes it. Meanwhile he keeps the sigil of Scotela, and continues to have dreams. "There was no continuity in these dreams save that Ettarre was in each of them. . . . No dream was ever iterated, nor did he ever find himself in the same surroundings as touched chronology." ⁷ In these dreams, and indeed in everyday life, Kennaston spends much time wondering about the why of life, of the world in general, and of his own life in particular. In religion even he is unable to find an adequate solution of the why of life.

One day he finds on his wife's dressing table the other fragment of the sigil of Scotela, the piece which Ettarre had worn. He realizes that it is only

⁷The Cream of the Jest, p. 110.

the broken top of his wife's cold cream jar. Then one night, before Felix has time to mention the sigil to her, Kathleen dies in her sleep. Kennaston knows that everything in connection with the sigil has been a dream and that there is really nothing mysterious about it. Cabell closes the book with a summary which says that Kennaston is a typical dreamer, to whom "the dream alone could matter- his proud assurance that life was not a blind and aimless business, not all a hopeless waste and confusion. . . and that it is only by preserving faith in human dreams that we may, after all, make them come true." ⁸

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⁸The Cream of the Jest, p. 249.

Chapter V His Short Stories, Essays,
Drama and Poetry

After discussing Cabell's novels, one finds it easy to arrange the remainder of his works. The short stories logically follow, because they contain the most romantic material, next after the novels; then the one play; then the poems; and last, the essays and miscellaneous articles. The books of genealogy are not to be included in this study because they contain no romantic elements; they are simply records of biographical facts.

Because the material of the short stories is not written in any particular sequence, the chronological method of arrangement is the simplest to follow. The four series in their order of publication are: The Line of Love, (1905); Gallantry, (1907); Chivalry, (1909); and The Certain Hour, (1916).

Nearly all of the stories found in the four volumes of short stories have been printed in magazines, in practically the same form in which they appear in the collected series; consequently, this study contains no discussion of the magazine stories as units.

The same method of analysis is to be employed in discussing the short stories that was used in the treatment of the novels, that is, to analyze each

story and point out wherein Cabell has illustrated any ideas found in his theory of romance.

The 1905 edition of The Line of Love is essentially the same in the main body of narrative as the 1921 revision used in this study, except that the latter contains two added stories, one at the beginning and one at the end of the book, which link the stories to the Poictesme series and to the Virginia narratives. The introductory story, the one that connects the series with Poictesme, called "The Wedding Jest," relates that Florian de Puyssange, on the eve of his marriage to Adelaide de la Forêt, goes out to the grave of his friend Tiburce. Tiburce returns to life and drinks with Florian to the happiness of this marriage. The drink causes Florian to sleep thirty years. When he awakens he returns to the house, finds everything changed, and, after explaining the happening, falls in love with Adelaide's daughter, Sylvie.

In the second story, "Adhelmar at Puyssange," the hero, Adhelmar, suffers many wild adventures to save Hughes, the sweetheart of Melior, whom Adhelmar loves. He comes at last to die in Melior's arms, knowing that her kisses are those of pity, not love. The next story, "Love Letters of Falstaff," is an episode which tells of Falstaff's youthful love for a certain Sylvia, whom he meets again after forty years. Falstaff reads

over his romantic poetry contained in some love letters to her, casts them all into the fire, and forgets his youth by drinking a cup of sack.

The fourth story, "Sweet Adalais," relates how Fulke d'Arnaye wins the hand of Adalais, in spite of his more powerful rival, the Marquis of Falmouth. The next episode, "In Necessity's Mortar," records the nobility of François Villon in refusing to marry Catherine de Vaucelles after he returns from a life of dissipation to find that she still loves him. The next story, "The Conspiracy of Arnaye," considers the difficulties occurring in the love affairs of Raoul and Matthiette, and of how her uncle Raymond pretends to be marrying her to Monsieur de Puyssange. The episode which follows, called "The Castle of Content," is the story of how the poet Will Sommers aids Lady Adeliza to marry her true lover, Stephen Allonby. In the next story, "Ursula's Garden," there is a double plot. While Lady Ursula is choosing the Earl of Pevensey as her favorite, the Marquis of Falmouth discovers that Kit Mervale, one of Ursula's professed lovers, is really his own childhood sweetheart, Kate. Consequently, at the end of the story, there are two sets of happy lovers in the garden.

The ninth story, "Porcelain Cups," relates that Cynthia Allonby loves Ned Musgrave, but that she did

realize it until she learned of the death of her other two lovers, the Earl of Pevensey and Kit Marlowe. In her excitement she breaks her favorite porcelain cups. The last story, "Semper Idem," is an epilogue in which Cabell states that Cynthia Allonby of the Melicent line marries Ned Musgrave of the Virginia Musgraves. The book closes with comment on the theme of love and how each hero set forth in The Line of Love has known

. . . at least one hour of magnanimity when each was young in the world's annually recaptured youth.

And if that hour did not ever have its sequel in precisely the anticipated life-long rapture, nor always in a wedding with the person preferred, yet since at any rate it resulted in a marriage that turned out well enough, in a world where people have to consider expediency, one may rationally assert that each of these romances ended happily. ¹

Cabell begins Gallantry, the second of his group of short stories, with "Simon's House" in which Simon Orts, a vicar, kills Lord Rakesle to save Lady Allonby, whom the lord wished to marry. Lady Allonby leaves without learning that Simon will be killed for his crime. The second story, "Love at Martinnas," tells how Mr. Erwyn wins a promise of marriage from the widow, Lady Allonby, whom he loved in his youth. This story is followed by "The Casual Honeymoon," in which

¹The Line of Love, p. 260.

Captain Audaine has some difficulty in winning Dorothy Allonby, a step-daughter of Lady Allonby. The next, "The Rhyme to Porringer," marks an interval in the affair of Miss Allonby and Captain Audaine in which he rescues her from the attention of a rascal. In "Actors All" Dorothy Allonby, by lying to the Duke of Ormskirk, wins pardon for Captain Audaine; and, incidentally, the Duke reveals his love for Dorothy's friend, Lady Marion Heleigh. The sixth story depicts the character of the Duke of Ormskirk in dealing with Marian Heleigh's father, the Earl of Brundel. The next story, "In the Second April," in which the Duke of Ormskirk wins the hand of Claire de Puyssange, is followed by "Heart of Gold" which relates how the Duchess of Puyssange shows her true love for her husband the Duke of Puyssange. The ninth story, "The Scapegoats," depicts the deep patriotism of Prince de Gâtinais and his love for his son Louis. In the last story, "The Ducal Audience," the Duke of Nounaria admits that his success as Regent is partly due to the capabilities of his wife. In the unnumbered last section, "Love's Alumni," Cabell portrays the character of the average man, who does his best to live up to the idea of gallantry, but who, at best, is not "the man his Maker meant,- our deeds, the

parodies of our intent, in neither good nor ill pre-eminence." ²

Chivalry, Cabell's third book of short stories, contains an introductory note called "Precautional," which asserts that these stories are translated from the French of Nicolas de Caen. In the opening story, "The Sestina," Osmund Helcigh loses his life in saving the Queen, Alianora. "The Tension" is an account of how Queen Ellinoir is infatuated for a time by Prince de Gâtinais, but, after saving the life of her husband, Prince Edward, realizes that she loves him. The third story, "The Rat-Trap," contains the narrative of Sire Edward's wooing and winning of Dame Meregrett, sister of the King of France. The story called "The Choices" relates that Queen Ysabeau of France relents from her determination to kill her prisoner, Sir Gregory Darrell, and allows him to marry his beloved Rosamund, daughter of Lord Berners. The next story, "The Housewife," narrates how John Copeland causes Edward Plantagnet to appreciate his Queen, Philippa.

The sixth story, "The Satraps," tells of the love of Anne of Bohemia, Queen of England, for Edward Maudelain, a young man in the service of the Duke

²Gallantry, p. 342.

of Gloucester. But nothing comes of it because a queen may not leave her king for any common man. In "The Heritage," Edward Maudelain, in defense of Queen Isabel of Valois, fights nine opponents but dies at last in true chivalric spirit. The eighth narrative, "The Scabbard," is an account of Richard II's giving up the kingdom because of his love for the maid, Branwen of Wales. "The Navarrese" is the record of Antoine Riczi's love for Jehane of Navarre and how he gives up his power for love of her. It closes with an expression which illustrates Cabell's idea of the illusion of chivalry:

"Love leads us," he said, "and through the sunlight of the world Love leads us, and through the filth of it Love leads us, but always in the end, if we but follow without swerving, Love leads upward." ³

The last story, "The Fox-Brush," is an account of King Henry of England and how, under the disguise of Alain the harper, he wins the hand of Katherine of Valois.

The last book of short stories, The Certain Hour, is a series of tales which picture the point of highest emotional stress in the love affairs of various poets. The book opens with an "Auctorial Induction" in which Cabell, among other things, reiterates his desire to write perfectly of beautiful things. "Belhs

³Chivalry, p. 243.

Cavaliers," the first story, tells of the great love of Raimbaut de Vaquieras for Dona Biatritz. The second story, "Balthazar's Daughter," is an account of how Count Eglamore won the hand of Graciosa, Balthazar's daughter, after wounding Alessandro de Medici, his master. "Judith's Creed" contains an explanation of Judith Shakespeare's attitude toward life, which is really an expression of Cabell's idea of the illusion of optimism:

And I hold Judith's creed to be the best of all imaginable creeds- that if we do nothing very wrong, all human imbroglios, in some irrational and quite incomprehensible fashion, will be straightened out to our satisfaction. Meanwhile you also voice a tonic truth- this universe of ours, and, reverently speaking, the Maker of this universe as well, is under no actual bond to be intelligible in dealing with us. ⁴

The fourth story, "Concerning Corinna," is an account of the strange behavior of Robert Herrick and of how he kept for a companion a black pig which he called Corinna. The next story, "Olivia's Pottage," relates the great hour in the love affair of William Wycherley and Olivia Drogheda. The occasion was the narrow escape from drowning which he and she experienced on a sharp ledge by the sea. The sixth story, "A Brown Woman," tells of the love of Sarah Drew and Alexander Pope, who gives up his love for

⁴The Certain Hour, p. 100.

her so that she may marry her strong country lover, John Hughes. On the evening when Pope relinquishes her, she and her lover are killed in a thunderstorm, and Pope composes a poem on the occasion. The next story, "Pro Honoria," is an episode in which Robert Calverley gains the love of Honoria through the kindness of Lord Ufford, who takes a poison cup intended for Calverley. In "The Irresistible Ogle," we find Robert Sheridan marrying Miss Jane Ogle by a trick. But after all is explained she professes to love him anyway. In the ninth story, "The Princess of Grub Street," Paul Vanderhoffen wins the love of Mildred Claridge. "The Lady of All Our Dreams," the last story, is a tale of John Charteris and how he falls asleep and dreams that he has won the love of Pauline Romaine, his childhood sweetheart. In speaking of the dream, Charteris voices Cabell's aim in writing romance:

But I have never in my life permitted anything to stand in the way of my fulfilling this desire to serve the Dream by re-creating it for others with picked words, and that has cost me something. Yes, the Dream is an exacting master. My books, such as they are, have been made what they are at the dear price of never permitting myself to care seriously for anything else. I might not dare to dissipate my energies by taking part in the drama I was attempting to re-write, because I must so jealously conserve all the force that was in me for the perfection of my lovelier version. ⁵

And with this comment on the Dream, Cabell closes his

⁵The Certain Hour, p. 247.

last book of short stories.

The Jewel Merchants, (1921), Cabell's one play, is simply a dramatization of the short story, "Balthazar's Daughter," (1916), found in the series, The Certain Hour. The characters are Graciosa, Balthazar's daughter, Count Eglamore, and Duke Alessandro de Medici. Balthazar has been trying to make a suitable marriage for Graciosa, but she has not yet been settled upon definitely. One day Count Eglamore comes along and falls in love with Graciosa. Eglamore is in the service of the Duke, but the Duke is coarse and sensual, while Eglamore is refined and sharp-witted. When the Duke comes on the scene he also falls in love with Graciosa. After much disputing, Eglamore wounds the Duke, after which Eglamore and Graciosa escape, declaring their love for each other.

Of the two books of poems by Cabell, From the Hidden Way, (1925), and Ballades From the Hidden Way, (1928), only the former was available for consideration in this study. From the Hidden Way begins with an introduction in which Robert Etheridge Townsend, one Cabell's disguises, pretends to have based these poems upon pre-Renaissance formulae, and states that they must accordingly be accompanied by a prose pursuivant. The volume is divided into sections, each section having a title which suggests some characteristic of

the section.

The first section, "Mignonitis," deals with the little affairs of people as they go "in quest of the heart's desire." ⁶ The second section, "Epistrophia," contains poems about love and death and ideals of life, the stanzas of which end with the same word. The next section, "Libitina," contains poems in honor of "Fear, the god's ambassador," ⁷ of beauty, of age, and of destiny. "Hortensis" is a section of spring poems devoted to lovers who address such sweethearts as Ettarre and Phyllida. "Melaenis" contains poems of inquiry and doubt. The next section, "Scoteia," deals with various attitudes toward life, and is followed by three sections of love poems, "Apaturia," "Verticordia," and "Ridens." In this latter section the poet turns his attention especially to his lady-love's eyes and smiles. The last section in the book, "Armata," takes leave of love, saying:

Heart o' My Heart, thine be the praise
 If aught of good in me betrays
 Thy tutelage- whose love matures
 Unmarred in these more wistful days,-
 Yet love for each loved lass endures. ⁸

Cabell has written many prose articles which have been published in magazines and in book form, but the

⁶From the Hidden Way, p. 15.

⁷Ibid., p. 63.

⁸Ibid., p. 212.

essays available for this study are found in his two volumes, Beyond Life, (1919), and Straws and Prayer-Books, (1924). The first of these, Beyond Life, has been used as a basis for the discussion in Chapter II of this study, and contains a detailed account of Cabell's theory of romance. Straws and Prayer-Books is a series of essays explaining why Cabell became a writer. The whole book is really an enlarging upon the ideas expressed in Beyond Life. For example, Cabell explains more in detail how he writes (1) for his own diversion; (2) in order to evade the routine of the workaday world; and (3) because of his desire to play with thoughts, symbols, religion, death, imagination, and personalities. And it is with that purpose in mind that Cabell expects to write whatever he sees fit in the future.

Chapter VI His Literary Method

It is necessary to explain Mr. Cabell's general literary method before one can account for his literary characteristics. In his art Mr. Cabell has not progressed in one straight line toward a definite purpose; rather, he has shown a series of developments, which have advanced almost independently of each other. The comment from readers and the sharp criticisms of professional reviewers have caused Mr. Cabell to modify his tactics. In his youth he began writing romances set in medieval times, full of beauty and adventure; but the public did not welcome them. Cabell kept writing, gradually developing his qualities of irony and humor, but it was not until 1919, with the suppressing of Jurgen, that he attained a larger reading public. It was then- from 1919 to 1922- that his literary development reached its highest point of excellence. By that time his minor methods had all been absorbed by the method which employs irony and humor as its chief tactics, and the method by which the historians of literature are very likely to characterize him.

Along with Cabell's early writing of medieval romance came his interest in Virginia narratives. With his short stories containing adventures of chivalrous

knights, he published The Eagle's Shadow and The Cords of Vanity, two comedies of present day Virginia. However, this interest in modern life, and incidentally his portrayal of it in an almost realistic fashion, did not develop into a major accomplishment. His interest in fictitious characters, adventuring in his imaginary land of Poictesme, absorbed him almost completely. Consequently, after about the year 1913- the year in which The Soul of Melicent appeared- he confined himself largely to the writing of romantic fiction.

The difference is not great between the methods Mr. Cabell has employed in developing his theme in his various books, but the early volumes have a few characteristics not found in the later and more typical books. For example, in The Eagle's Shadow he speaks to the reader in certain asides, saying, "dear reader," "you will understand," etc., which are carry-overs from a preceding age of literature. In his later work he allows the reader to follow the story simply from the narrative itself, even as he does in all his short stories.

II

Mr. Cabell's method of constructing his romances, fortunately, can be discovered by a careful perusal of his work. The two most significant characteristics

of his method are: (1) his use of imagination, and (2) the episodic structure of his narratives. Cabell's imagination is apparently boundless. It causes him to disguise his authorship by fictitious sources or by professed translations. His imagination causes him to describe the weirdest scenes of Hell and the most brilliant array of celestial architecture. For one thing, his imagination leads him to devise fanciful names for his settings- countries, provinces, regions or localities, towns and cities, and courts and houses. The following representative list indicates the nature and extent of his imagination as revealed in the names he gives his settings:

1. Countries- Poictesme, Antan, Eubonia, Noumaria, Eben.
2. Provinces- Scoteia, Nointel, Falmouth, Puyange, Elfame, Vraidex, Audela, Valnéres, Cocaigne, Artein, Vel-tyno, Logreus, Leukê, Tollan, Darvan, Brunbelois.
3. Regions and localities- Argues, Acaire, Ath Clioth, Firbolg, Ammeran, Morven, Llaw Gyffes, Ydalir.
4. Cities and towns- Storisende, Bellegrade, Calenak, Pseudopolis, Narenta.
5. Courts and houses- Barathum, Chorama.

No less resourceful is he in imagining names for his characters than in devising names for his settings. The following is a partial list of names:

1. Men- Manuel, Jurgen, Goth, Alfgar, Adhelmar, Miramon, Lluagor, Florian, Pevensey, Fulke d'Arnaye, Ruric, Urdhr, Verdandi, Eglamore, Skuld, Perion, Mervale, Madoc, Hoprig, Horvendile, Janicot, Koshchei, Gogyrvan Gawr, Cannagosta, Guivric.

2. Women- Niafer, Adeliza, Alianora, Ysabeau, Ettarre, Graciosa, Freydis, Sereda, Morvyth, Utsuné, Thragnar, Anaitis, Chloris, Melior, Yolande, Suskind, Florimel.

And his imagination extends to naming such accessories of romance as swords and mythological figures; for example, the magic sword Flamberge, Nessus the Centaur, and the steed Kalki.

The sheer number of characters, accessories, etc., is closely bound up with the episodic structure of his narratives. One could scarcely direct so many characters without using a procession of episodes, or a long extended panorama of scene and event. Cabell's characters are continually going on quests- a quest for love, for revenge, a quest in magic,- always his characters are seeking something to take them away from the life that surrounds them when the story opens. And these quests are not confined singly to one book; consequently, the story of one single character may contain many journeyings. Figures of Earth offers an

example of this kind of structure. Manuel, the hero, goes from his first adventure in rescuing a count's daughter from the hands of a sorcerer through a series of adventures in love, fighting, and magic, to a long journey with Grandfather Death. Therefore, because of the nature of the narrative, Cabell has followed the episodic method of construction.

Some of the minor characteristics of Cabell's method are: (1) using the same character in several different stories and in correspondingly different situations, (2) repetition of situations in various stories, and (3) repetition of theme in several different stories. For example, Horvendile appears as a main character in The Cream of the Jest and as a minor character in Figures of Earth, Jurgen, The High Place, and The Way of Eben. The situation in which a hero pauses in his main quest to participate in such minor adventures as destroying monsters, assisting in local wars, and breaking magic spells, is used in Figures of Earth, Jurgen, Domnai, and The High Place. And finally, the theme of disillusionment at the end of a certain quest is used in Figures of Earth, Jurgen, Domnai, and The High Place. These minor characteristics are obvious to anyone who reads more than one book of Cabell's.

Chapter VII His Style

Cabell's style is thought by many to be a kind of triumph; and, particularly because it is highly mannered, one finds the analyzing of it easy. His style is conscious, deliberate, highly polished and refined, precious, but not euphuistic. In Beyond Life, Cabell, in speaking of Charteris, says:

Meanwhile he talked: and he talked in very much that redundant and finicky and involved and inverted "style" of his writings; wherein, as you have probably noted, the infrequent sentence which does not begin with a connective or with an adverb comes as a positive shock.¹

This chapter is to include a discussion of Cabell's (1) sentence structure, (2) diction, (3) rhythm, (4) symbolism, (5) imagery, (6) humor, and (7) irony and satire; and considering especially (1) sentence form, (2) idioms and colloquialisms, (3) archaisms, (4) coinages and anagrams, and (5) allusions.

In the main, Cabell's sentences are long. An occasional short sentence is inserted for emphasis. Most of his sentences are complex and complex-compound, and in the simple technical matter of punctuation he is careful. His long, involved sentences are properly marked off with commas, semicolons, and dashes.

After a consideration of Cabell's sentence form and punctuation comes the study of his sentence

¹Beyond Life, p. 18.

structure proper. Four things are true about his words in the sentence: (1) there is frequent preservation of the subjunctive, (2) there is over-emphasis on the "ly" adverb, (3) there is avoidance of the personal pronoun used in the last part of a sentence to refer to a noun in the first part of the sentence, and (4) he uses "do" along with the regular imperative verb form.

Passages which illustrate his use of the subjunctive are:

1. ". . . so that he find her no Guinevere." ²
2. "I prefer that he settle it." ³
3. "If she love this thrifty Prince." ⁴
4. ". . . even though his faith occasionally convert Earth into revolving shambles." ⁵

Specimens of Cabell's use of the unusual "ly" adverb are:

1. "laughed wheezily," and "lost the world worthily." ⁶

²Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 122.

³Ibid., 126.

⁴Ibid., CXIV (Dec., 1906), 149.

⁵Beyond Life, p. 238.

⁶Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 122.

2. "The light shone evilly scintillant." 7
3. "A shadow moved blackly upon the rough wall." 8
4. "The dragon bleeding uglily." 9
5. "He rose, tipsily fumbling a knife." 10
6. "Count Manuel that is so newly dead." 11

Lines which show Cabell's avoidance of the personal pronoun used in reference to a word in the same sentence are:

1. "I know that Heaven through Heaven's inscrutable wisdom, has smitten you with madness." 12
2. "And Kerin opened the door out of which Schlaug was used to go in search of Schlaug's little amusements." 13
3. "Manuel also sheathed Flamberge, and Manuel cried farewell to the pigs." 14

Expressions which illustrate Cabell's use of "do" along with the regular imperative verb form are:

⁷Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 128.

⁸Ibid., 129.

⁹Figures of Earth, p. 216.

¹⁰Harper's, CIX (Oct., 1904), 704.

¹¹Figures of Earth, p. 10.

¹²The Cream of the Jest, p. 29.

¹³The Silver Stallion, p. 231.

¹⁴Figures of Earth, p. 9.

1. ". . . but do you, Matthiette, make a true and faithful wife." 15

2. "And do you, Raoul, remain at home." 16

3. "Hughes, do you and these fellows ride to the coast." 17

4. "Do you stand in front as though to receive him." 18

I find that Cabell is no less careful in the selection of his idioms than in his arranging of words in the sentence. His sentences express a very specific meaning because of his care in choosing appropriate idioms and colloquialisms. In the main, his English idioms are regular and standard, but we find an occasional exception, such as:

1. Use of "loan" for "lend," as for example: (a) "Thou hast loaned me life and manhood;" 19 (b) ". . . so I modeled and loaned life to such a splendid gay young champion." 20

2. His frequent use of the expression "by this"

¹⁵ Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 126.

¹⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹⁷ Ibid., CVIII (April, 1904), 711.

¹⁸ Ibid., CXIV (May, 1907), 887.

¹⁹ Ibid., CXII (Jan., 1906), 198.

²⁰ Figures of Earth, p. 161.

for "by this time" or "by now," as for example:

(a) "England was in a panic by this and knew itself to be before the Bruce defenseless," 21 (b)

"She would be a woman by this, and it was fitting that he claim his wife," 22 (c) "He was by this

comfortably seated on the turf." 23

3. His use of "suspicion" for "suspect," for example: (a) "Meanwhile I suspicion that the poor captive will presently have visitors," 24 (b) "I suspicion many things, gray Manuel." 25

Because Cabell is so deliberate in constructing his sentences, we seldom find colloquialisms or homely figures, but occasionally a few occur; for example, note the following:

1. His use of "apt" in the sense of "likely" in such sentences as: (a) "We find that our example is apt to be followed," 26 (b) ". . . as pleasant spoken a gentleman as you will be apt

²¹ Harper's, CXII (Aug., 1906), 356.

²² Ibid., CCXIV (Dec., 1906), 147.

²³ Ibid., (April, 1907), 685.

²⁴ Ibid., (May, 1907), 879.

²⁵ Figures of Earth, p. 237.

²⁶ The High Place, p. 155.

to meet." 27

2. A frequent homely figure such as: "In this world every one must scratch his own back." 28

3. A colloquialism which appears in a slightly different form from the ordinary; for instance: " 'A card-sharp!' sneers the boy." 29 The common expression in this locality is "a card-shark."

In studying Cabell's archaisms we find that he has taken over words that are derived from ancient mythology, from medieval folk lore, from the vocabularies of various ancient learnings. The following are representative of his unusual words:

1. adytum- a private chamber
2. atelier- a workshop or studio (French)
3. aubade- open air morning serenade (French)
4. branle (bransle)- 16th century brawling dance
5. cashiered- discharged
6. cendal (sendal)- fine silk fabric of the Middle Ages

²⁷ The Eagle's Shadow, p. 8.

²⁸ Harper's, CXIII (Aug., 1906), 355.

²⁹ The Cream of the Jest, p. 190.

7. cittern- an old lute
8. cteis- a comb
9. catoblepas- an unknown mythical African quadruped. It has been identified with the genus name of gnu.

10. desiderate- to desire
11. eale- obsolete for "ale"
12. estrich- obsolete for "ostrich"
13. fescennine- scurrilous
14. fief- a feudal estate
15. geas- an agreement
16. hebetude- dullness or stupidity
17. ichor- ethereal fluid in the veins of the gods

18. leprichaun- a sprite or goblin
19. lingham- phallic symbol of Siva (Hindu mythology)

20. macis- a heavy staff or club
21. mantichora- an ancient monster
22. oneirology- the study of dreams
23. orgulous- proud
24. pavan- a 16th century formal dance in stately costume.

25. pleached- intertwined
26. serenas- cools or damps of the evening air

27. siccant- promoting drying
28. sigil- a seal or signature
29. spoorn- evil spectre or goblin
30. succubi- lascivious sprites or demons
31. susurrous- full of whispering sounds or

rustling

32. tesserae- pieces of marble used in mosaics
33. thaumaturgy- magic
34. ventripotent- having a large belly
35. yoni- symbol of female power in nature (Hindu

mythology)

Some of Cabell's coinages are:

1. aabec- a kind of tree with special bark
2. aank- an animal
3. bleps- a fabulous monster
4. bogglebo- a mythical animal
5. duergon- an animal
6. eglecopala- a fabulous monster
7. glisomarga- a supernatural being
8. kabalds- small mythical animals
9. leucargillon- an ancient monster
10. leucrocatta (leucrocuta- a fabulous beast
said to counterfeit man's voice)
11. rakhna- a small rapid running animal
12. spaks- sparkling, metallic insects

13. strycophanes- fabulous animals
14. sylen- a mythological character
15. tarandus- a supernatural being
16. tonthees- sparkling, metallic insects
17. zyxomma- a kind of dragon-fly

A few of Cabell's anagrams are:

1. Ageus- Usage
2. Caer Omn- Romance
3. Doonham- Manhood
4. Land of Dersam- Land of Dreams
5. Lytreia- Reality
6. Sesptra- Phrases
7. Turoine- Routine
8. Vel-Tyno- Novelty

Allusions, the last of Cabell's language traits to be considered, consist of two kinds: biblical, and classical. Examples of each are:

Biblical:

1. ". . . a darkness black as the lining of Baalzebub's oldest cloak." 30
2. "Hang you as high as Haman!" 31
3. "The foxes that Samson, that sinewy captain,

³⁰ Harper's, CVII (Aug., 1903), 328.

³¹ Ibid., CVIII (April, 1904), 710.

loosed among the corn of heathenry." 32

4. " . . . appropriate companions for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram in their fiery pit." 33

Classical:

1. "Ye are Phoenixes!" 34

2. "Why, 'tis a very Semiramis!" 35

3. " . . . may look for no Alcestis in his wife." 36

4. "The walk of a Hebe." 37

Cabell's prose rhythm is based upon the long sentence which is composed of several phrases and clauses. His rhythm is achieved by the smooth flow of these word groups one after the other. He does not write a few short, choppy sentences, then a long involved sentence containing almost no pauses. On the contrary, his long sentences contain groups of words, set off by commas, which are sometimes even shorter than an ordinary simple sentence, but which have the advantage of linking the word groups that appear before and

³² Harper's, CXI (Aug., 1905), 332.

³³ Ibid., CXIV (April, 1907), 682.

³⁴ Ibid., CVI (May, 1903), 914.

³⁵ Ibid., 912.

³⁶ Ibid., CVII (June, 1903), 122.

³⁷ Ibid., 125.

after them. Incidentally, the short sentences that do occur relate to the adjoining sentences closely enough to prevent sudden breaks in the rhythm. The following is an example of Cabell's long sentence divided into word groups which read smoothly:

Above them the air was heavy with the damp odors of decaying leaves, for the road they followed was shut in by the autumn woods that now arched the way with sere foliage, rustling and whirling and thinly complaining overhead, and now left it open to broad splashes of moonlight, where fallen leaves scuttled about before the wind. 38

In addition to the smoothness found in the passage just quoted, we notice, in the middle, a word group which has meter: "rustling and whirling and thinly complaining overhead." It is obviously dactylic, thus:

rūstlĭng and/whĭrlĭng and/thĭnly cōm-/
plāĭning ōverhēad

The following passage indicates how Cabell can achieve smoothness in a long sentence that has relatively few pauses:

He went out into the bright windy morning, and as he crossed the fields he came up behind a red cow who was sitting on her haunches, intently reading a largish book bound in green leather, but at the sight of Manuel she hastily put aside the volume and began eating grass. 39

In the following lines we notice the rapidity and ceaseless flow of ideas which combine to create

³⁸ Harper's, CX (March, 1905), 523.

³⁹ Figures of Earth, p. 249.

a feeling of pleasant rhythm:

But Gerald thought of his church, and of its handsome matters of faith in the way of organ music and of saint's days and of broadmindedness and of delightful lawn-sleeved bishops and of majestic rituals. He thought of newly washed choir boys and of his prayer-book's wonderful mouth-filling phrases, of rogation days and ember days and of Trinity Sunday. He thought about pulpits and hassocks and stained glass and sextons, and about the Thirty-Nine Articles, and about those unpredictable, superb mathematics which early in the spring collaborated with the new moon to afford him an Easter: and these things Gerald could not abandon. ⁴⁰

Concerning the aptness and worth of Cabell's symbolism critics are undecided; some say that it is necessary to understand his symbolism in order to appreciate fully his work, others that his symbolism is very unessential. One is tempted to disregard it, especially since many of his reviewers have discounted its significance. Hugh Walpole, a well-known British critic, says of Cabell's symbolism:

Nor do I think that the reader need worry himself here about symbols, metaphors, and philosophies. "The High History of Jurgen" is precisely what any reader chooses to make it. ⁴¹

The more obvious symbolism used by Cabell does not require much explanation; for it is clear, for example, that every one of his heroes represents Cabell himself

⁴⁰

Something About Eve, p. 44.

⁴¹

Walpole, Hugh, The Art of James Branch Cabell, p. 15.

as he goes on a quest which takes him away from the routine of everyday life to a land of beautiful happenings; and furthermore, every one of his heroes is essentially mankind in its search for a satisfying life. But it is the individual symbolic characters and acts which require comment. The following list of names indicates the nature of Cabell's symbolism of character:

1. Koshchei who made things as they are- a symbol of God.

2. Queen Anaitis- a symbol of Aphrodite.

3. Antan- a symbol of Hell.

4. Janicot- a symbol for Satan.

5. Ettarre- a symbol of the ideal woman which love creates.

6. Sereda- a symbol for time.

7. Jurgen- a symbol for jargon.

Examples of symbolic acts are:

1. Jurgen's donning of the Nessus shirt- a symbol of man's resolve to see all that is possible of life, and in so doing to steel himself for anything that may happen.

2. Jurgen's refusal to submit to the gods of Philistia: Vel-Tyno, Sesptra, and Ageus- a symbol of Cabell refusing to submit to the demand of America

for novelty, phrases, and usage.

In order to indicate that Cabell's writing possesses unusually vivid imagery, it is only necessary to quote a few of his figures of speech; for example:

Similes:

1. "To the left, a field of growing maize bristled in the uncertain slate-colored light like the upturned chin of an unshaven, slumbering Titan." 42

2. ". . . the winding highway that lay in the moonlight like a white ribbon in a peddler's box." 43

3. ". . . and the sky he likened to blue velvet studded with gilt nail-heads of a seraphic upholsterer." 44

4. "He saw the forests lying like dark flung-by scarves upon the paler green of cleared fields. . . very far beneath them a thunderstorm was passing like a drifting bride's veil." 45

Metaphors:

1. "A sudden rush of night swept toward her,

⁴² Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 129.

⁴³ Ibid., (Aug., 1903), 335.

⁴⁴ Ibid., CIX (Oct., 1904), 704.

⁴⁵ The High Place, p. 91.

big with the secrecy of dawn. The sky, washed clean of stars, sprawled heavily above,- a leaden, unalterable blank; the trees whispered thickly over the chaos of earth." 46

2. "For mouth she had but a small red wound, and her throat was a tower of builded ivory." 47

3. "Already that infernal automatic cloud had moored itself to the bright wharf of heaven." 48

4. ". . . these thin-blooded novels are broken out with a rash of descriptive passages." 49

II

Humor, Cabell's next literary trait to be considered, is expressed by the unusually apt word or phrase or by the incongruous word or phrase. His humor is so closely connected with his irony that it is almost impossible to find a humorous passage that does not have an ironical significance. But Cabell's humor is always witty and brilliant, never crude or clownish. The following excerpts are representative of his humor:

1. "Her gallant general was no longer extant." 50

⁴⁶ Harper's, CVII (June, 1903), 129.

⁴⁷ Ibid., CVIII (April, 1904), 707.

⁴⁸ American Mercury, IX (Sept., 1926), 4.

⁴⁹ Straws and Prayer-Books, p. 250.

⁵⁰ Harper's, CXIII (Aug., 1906), 359.

2. ". . . wasting the night in horticultural assassinations." 51

3. "King Helmas pushed back his second best crown." 52

4. "Dom Manuel went to the door of the enclosure, then to the windows, sweeping away the gilded tonthecs and the shining spaks, and removing from the copper nails the horseshoes that had been cast by Mohammed's mare and Balaam's ass and Pegasus." 53

5. "'Do you know that in spite of my joking I do love you a great deal?'

"'I would practice saying that over to myself,' observed Freydis critically. 'You should let your voice break a little after the first three words.'" 54

6. "For one thing, my image was an original and unaided production, whereas a baby, I am told, is the result of more or less hasty collaboration." 55

7. "He went out into the bright windy morning, and as he crossed the fields he came up behind a red cow who was sitting upon her haunches, intently reading a largish book bound in green leather, but at

⁵¹ Harper's, CXIV (May, 1907), 887.

⁵² Figures of Earth, p. 114.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 131.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 148.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

sight of Manuel she hastily put aside the volume and began eating grass." 56

8. "The colors of this beautiful young girl's two eyes were nicely matched, and her nose stood just equidistant between them. Beneath this was her mouth, and she had also a pair of ears." 57

9. "Yes, Lytreia shall be rid of her even though it is necessary that to undo her hoodoo I do with due to-do woo the wu too- . . ." 58

10. "Why, a rooster is the herald of the dawn, it is the father of an omelet, it is the pullet's first bit of real luck." 59

11. "Puritanism has many good points which it perhaps employs too much in the manner of the porcupine." 60

III

Like Cabell's humor, his irony, the last literary trait to be included in this study, occurs in the form of witty and brilliant phrases. His irony is never bitter or cutting, but always genial, tolerant, and amusing. It shades toward the gentler innuendo rather

⁵⁶ Figures of Earth, p. 249.

⁵⁷ Something About Eve, p. 115.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁰ Straws and Prayer-Books, p. 140.

than toward the sharper satire. Passages representative of his irony are:

1. "Indeed you have allured into eternal salvation- as the Archangel Orphiel has officially announced in this morning's report- no less than one thousand and a hundred and seven souls. In consequence, the blessed everywhere are at this instant preparing to welcome home the strong champion of heaven, with sackbut and with psaltery and with the full resources of the celestial choir." ⁶¹

2. "'For Jahveh made only one man, and never did do it again. I remember the making of the first man very clearly, for I was created the morning before with instructions to fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven, so I saw the whole affair. Yes, Jahveh did create the first man on the sixth day. And I voiced no criticism. For of course after working continually for nearly a whole week, and making so many really important things, no creative artist should be blamed for not being in his happiest vein on the sixth day.'

"'And did you happen to notice, sir,' asks Manuel, hopefully, 'by what method animation was given to Adam?'

"'No, he was drying out in the sun when I first

⁶¹American Mercury, IX (Sept., 1926), 2.

saw him, with Gabriel sitting at his feet playing a flageolet.'⁶²

3. "'Not at all! Nobody objects to the baby in itself, now that you are a married woman. The point is that the babies of Philistines are brought to them by the stork; and that even an allusion to the possibility of misguided persons obtaining a baby in any other way these Philistines consider to be offensive and lewd and lascivious and obscene.'

"'Why, how droll of them! But are you sure of that, Manuel?'

"'All their best-thought-of and most popular writers, my dear, are unanimous upon the point; and their Seranim have passed any number of laws, and their oil-merchants have founded a guild, especially to prosecute such references. No, there is, to be sure, a dwindling sect which favors putting up with what babies you may find in the cabbage patch, but all really self-respecting people when in need of offspring arrange to be visited by the stork.'

"'It certainly is a remarkable custom, but it sounds convenient if you can manage it,' said Niafer.

'What I want is the baby, though, and of course we must try to get the baby in the manner of the Phil-

⁶²Figures of Earth, p. 98.

istines if you know that manner, for I am sure I do not wish to offend anybody.'

"So Manuel prepared to get a baby in the manner preferred by the Philistines. He performed the suitable incantation, putting this and that together in the manner formerly employed by the Thessalian witches and sorcerers, and he cried aloud a very ancient if indecent charm from the old Latin. . .

". . . The stork said that by a little management he could let them have one of the children in a day or so. 'But how long have you been married?' he asked.

"'Ah, ever so long,' said Manuel, with a faint sigh.

"'Oh, no, my dearest,' said Niafer. 'We have been married only seven months.'

"'In that event,' declared the stork, 'you had better wait until month after next, for it is not the fashion of my patrons to have me visiting them quite so early.'

"'Well,' said Manuel, 'we wish to do everything in conformance to the preferences of Philistia, even to the extent of following such incomprehensible fashions.' So he arranged to have the promised baby delivered at Sargyll, which, he told the stork, would be their address for the remainder of the summer.

" . . . Manuel and Niafer, it happened, were fishing on the river bank rather late that evening when they saw the great bird approaching, high overhead, all glistening white in the sunset, except for his thin scarlet legs and the blue shadowings in the hollows of his wings. From his beak depended a largish bundle, in blue wrappings, so that at a glance they knew the stork was bringing a girl." 63

4. "I was a storm deity of the Midianites. But the Jews kidnapped me, in some way or other, when I was just a godling playing happily with my thunderbolts upon the flanks of Sinai." 64

5. "His priests were also kept sleek, and his confessor unshocked, by the Duke's tireless generosity to the church, and were all of unquestioned piety, which they did not carry to excess." 65

6. "'Monsieur Hoprig, for hundreds upon hundreds of years you have been a Christian Saint.'

"'Dear me,' observed the saint, 'so that must be the explanation of this halo.'

"' . . . So I have a legend! Why, how delightful! But come,' said the saint, abeam with honest

⁶³ Figures of Earth, pp. 227, 232, and 241.

⁶⁴ Something About Eve, p. 285.

⁶⁵ The High Place, p. 12.

pleasure, and with his halo twinkling merrily, 'come be communicative. . . '

" . . . 'Is it certain, my poor Hoprig, that you are actually a Christian saint?'

"There seems to be no doubt of it. I have tried a few miracles, and they come off as easily as sandals. . . and have moreover the gift of tongues, of vision and prophecy, and the power of expelling demons, of healing the sick, and raising the dead.'" 66

7. "But with the invention of printing, thoughts spread so expeditiously that it became possible to acquire quite serviceable ideas without the trouble of thinking: and very few of us since then have cared to risk impairment of our minds by using them." 67

8. "Truth, once hoisted from her well in primal nakedness, must like any other human failing be judiciously dressed in order to make an acceptable appearance in the library." 68

9. "Then his wife died. She died sedately, with the best medical and churchly aid." 69

Thus we see that Cabell's irony extends to religion, philosophy of life, and to much in the contemporary customs and manners of America.

⁶⁶The High Place, pp. 68 and 84.

⁶⁷Beyond Life, p. 30.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 247.

⁶⁹Music From Behind the Moon, p. 49.

Chapter VIII A Summary Estimate
of Cabell

From the preceding chapters of this study, it is perhaps evident that Cabell is a romanticist who, in acting upon a theory of romance formulated by him early in his career as a novelist, has created a whole realm of imaginative settings and characters. He is a romanticist, however, whose forte lies rather in humor and satire than in plot and character, for his characters are repetitions and find themselves repeatedly in the few situations which form the frame-work of all his narratives.

Cabell's romanticism has arisen from his interest in the life of medieval France, with its idealized traditions and its wealth of history and legend. The appeal to Cabell, however, has lain not in the simple parade of costumed heroes and heroines, but rather in the charm of an exotic beauty which, to the observer of the twentieth century, seems to have existed in the lives of medieval people. And how Cabell worships beauty! His romances reveal that he realizes its transitoriness, yet he prefers to enjoy such momentary beauty to dwelling on a lifetime of the commonplace. And that, in the main, accounts for the episodic structure of his work. He has

preferred to write about a hero going on a quest for beauty in whatever place or form he may find it— in the form of lovely women; in delightful meadows, forests, and cities; in courts, kings' houses, and palaces; on seas, battlefields, and in underground passages; and in many imaginary regions of the universe. He writes about climactic moments in these quests rather than about commonplace happenings in the lives of his characters. In short, he prefers to write about one type of character whose interests lie in such elemental and perennial subjects as war and love, adventure and the search for the heart's desire, rather than to diversify his characters, vary his plots, and allow the commonplace to creep in. Naturally, to some readers, this method seems monotonous, but Cabell has succeeded in writing stories which have fascinated many readers. Moreover, he composes sonorous, rhythmical prose on these recurring themes and motifs, melodies which some critics say have not been excelled by any present day American prose master. He is even more the artist than H. L. Mencken indicates when he calls him an "accomplished performer upon the parts of speech." ¹

¹ Mencken, H. L., James Branch Cabell, p. 20.

This romantic treatment of the beautiful is modified by his interest in humor and satire. His range in comedy is almost unlimited. In addition to finely drawn satire, irony, and innuendo, he employs farce, burlesque, and even vulgarity, an occasional lapse into which has cheapened his reputation. His favorite subjects for irony and satire are love, religion, morality, patriotism, marriage, politics, and art.

Cabell's philosophy is closely bound up with his theory that romance is the most precious of the possessions of man. Though he knows that the illusions of art, religion, love, and optimism are what make life endurable, he sees by observing humanity that such human ideals are likely to end in disillusionment. But if Cabell is a pessimist, he is, paradoxically, a hopeful one. The fact that he sends his characters on endless quests shows us that he sees satisfaction in the joy of anticipation, and that he values the real happiness to be found in the quest itself.

Cabell's style is what we might expect from an ironical, romantic idealist,- elaborate, rhythmical, allusive, sophisticated, and deliberate. He has read in strange rare books, and from these erudite

studies he brings esoteric learning and the vocabulary of a richly connotative style. He is so fascinated by exotic words which stir the imagination that he coins names of fabulous monsters and imaginary beings to add to his list of borrowings from ancient lore. His smooth rhythms and deliberate phrases occasionally become as monotonous as his episodic structure; but the general effect of his writing is pleasing. In reading Cabell, one feels himself to have been on a romantic quest, yielding some of the satisfaction which Cabell attributes to his adventurers who go abroad in search of the ideal.

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