James Branch Cabell's Jurgen: fulfillment and paradox

Elizabeth Witham Loving

Date of Award
5-1991

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Arts

Department
English

Abstract
James Branch Cabell's controversial Jurgen, is the novel that propelled him into fame. Suppressed as pornography only months after its publication, Jurgen drew attention from many areas. While Cabell's peers protested the suppression and praised the novel as a masterpiece, other readers were only interested in the forbidden "racy" language. Unfortunately, it was for the second reason that Jurgen became the most widely read of Cabell's works. The general public was not interested in his talent as a writer, but it was interested in a scandalous book. The novel's suppression received so much publicity, that everyone wanted to read it. This was a monumental problem in the development of Cabell's career as a writer because all of his subsequent work was compared to Jurgen as much of his previous work. People who had never read Cabell before began to read his earlier novels expecting them to be as risque as Jurgen. The public was disappointed in what it found, and the critics, while they appreciated some of the later work, could not remove Jurgen from their minds. This novel overshadowed everything Cabell tried to do right up until his death, thirty-eight years later. Thus, while representing a personal triumph of sorts, Jurgen ultimately became an impediment to Cabell's career, diverting attention and critical acclaim from his more ambitious literary achievements. Jurgen stands alone as both fulfillment and paradox.

Recommended Citation
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