FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary Genius: 25 Classic Writers Who Define English & American Literature
Barry Moser, editor
Joseph Epstein, illustrator
Paul Dry Books
978-1-58988-035-1
(September 30, 2007)

"There is no genius that is not touched by Madness," said Seneca as partial explanation — Joseph Epstein has narrowed the focus.

Epstein, former editor of the *American Scholar* for twenty years and a contributor to the *New Yorker*, has collected twenty-five pieces by contemporary essayists looking for clues to literary genius. Authors cited range from Chaucer and Conrad, to Wordsworth and Whitman. Engravings by illustrator and book designer Moser, creator of the Pennyroyal Caxton Edition of the Holy Bible, complement the essays.

"Timelessness, grandeur of vision, originality of outlook—" writes Epstein, "all these, in concert and worked at a high power, comprise genius in the writer. This and the ability to make us see constitute literary genius." Epstein first makes a distinction between scientific and artistic genius saying the former is more to do with reason, but lacks the *sui generis* of the artistic.

Reynolds Price, professor of english at Duke University, believes there are two basic earmarks of literary genius: the power of word, phrase and rhythm, and fertility of mind and language. He writes that John Milton shares the throne as one of the world's broadest-gauged epic poets; Homer being the other. Milton showed his mastery of verbal and emotional sublimity in his elegy "Lycidas." *Paradise Lost*, published in 1667 and written when the poet was blind, is a profound examination of God.

The *Pequod* goring the waves under an ominous sky and a whaleboat in pursuit are two of the illustrations accompanying the chapter "Herman Melville"; each foreshadows the "madness maddened" of Captain Ahab / Melville. William H. Pritchard, Professor of English at Amherst College, writes, "the more you read Melville and read about him, the more strange and finally unaccountable his genius becomes."

“Much madness is divinest sense,” cites Bruce Floyd, retired professor of American and English literature at Williamsburg Technical College, of Emily Dickinson’s line. Her poems are examples of originality and timelessness.

In “James Joyce,” John Gross, former editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement*, discusses *Ulysses*’ madness of complexities: wordplay, allusions, condensed syntax, splintered motifs, mimetic devices. The genius as innovator.

Literary Genius reacquaints the reader with worthy writers, yet there’s a sense of authors missing. The book, however, isn’t supposed to be all encompassing, only to provide examples of literary lightning.