

What a spurious thing is the written word. For those giving account of themselves in autobiography, their memories, diaries, etc must invariably lead to a false attitude. For who has a neutral prospect about themselves? Is it not a fact that the subject matter of all history is selective, according to the historian's preconceptions and that the biographies look for incidents that will conform to his theme and concept of the subject matter. Thus I make no claim to veracity, but at least I shall endeavor to be as frank and as honest as the written word is possible. And whatever I am loathe to edit will, I hope, be in good taste. -Not that I shall spare anyone if it warrants the right element of truth and that there being an absolute necessity to give perspective, depth, and definition to the subject told. Of course I shall color my narrative

Notes

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Notes for preface.

Were I to be overly modest or even correctly modest in the literary sense—that is, to state it cleverly, I would still be telling a lie, for I am vain like everyone else, and quite conscious of the mind of the limit of the things I can do. And a degree of amnesia about the limit of what I think I can do. This later fault—or virtue—I have lived with since I stumbled with the whirlpool of fame; and even though I might be cast off onto the [xxx] shore or sucked under into oblivion by time, I shall never lose the sense of my limitless possibilities. I have that eternal confidence like Peter Pan who in that intensely moving moment stands diffident, looking heavenward shouting I'm wonderful! I can do everything! This childish confidence has never left me. The only change is that I have a dwindling interest in certain things, and an increasing interest in others.

[notes on how to begin an autobiography]

How should one begin an autobiography? Not at the beginning, that is too commonplace, because everyone expects one to start there. But there are other reasons, academic ones, which if you allow me to, I will explain. In these rapid transitory times of ours, one must capture the interest of the reader at once. To start a biography as a child is uninteresting. All children are more or less alike. But, to start at a period in which the character and soul is developed. The author might succeed in attracting the reader's attention. All this must be done on the first page. When we have become acquainted with a subject, have learned about him to love him [?], then the author might digress and hark back to his childhood and the reader will understand

I write this book, not for any personal aggrandizement, but to reveal to myself the truth. [?]

In these rapid transitory times, literature has become a tedious, archaic medium of expression. It has been relegated to the quaint, stuffy, classic mind whose object has degenerated into making a task and study of its technique of analyzing and [xxx] the content, not for enjoyment, but for [xxx] as entertainment. Radio and motion pictures have replaced storytelling with the rank and file.

The true story of anyone's emotion if true they be and well-told is a document of valor and inspiration. That is the reason I am recording the sorrows and joys of my youth, because they were true sorrows and true joys that came like an [xxx] and when sudden and extreme success and affluence came to a shy and timid one who had suffered much humility.

Biography at best is counterfeit. The material is selective and treated rhetorically, according to the taste of the biographer. There the vulgar taste of a writer is often reflected on his subject. I know because I have been the subject, or the victim, at least, of several vulgar unauthorized biographies and from their spurious accounts of facts, I have been shocked, outraged and also amused by their absolute misinformation. What was most irritating, however, was their bad taste and a lack of imagination. The hackneyed theme of rags to riches—poor boy makes good—is about as tame as a Hollywood film version of the life of Sam Postner [?], Al Jolson or a George Gershwin. The names may be different but the plots are all the same. Not that I disapprove of the rags to riches theme, but it is seldom used in the proper way—only as contrast, seldom as a spiritual incentive.

It is basically as true as the [xxx] which can be quite vulgar.

Biographies at best are counterfeit. I know because I have read a half a dozen biographies of myself and from their spurious accounts of my life, I have had reactions of shock, outrage, indifference, and amusement. But what is irritating are the parts which are quite erroneous, the harrowing accounts of my impoverished childhood, the hackneyed theme of "rags-to-riches," "poor boy makes good," etc., which are so dull and vulgar and about as original and illuminating as a Hollywood film on the lives of Louis Pasteur, Al Jolson, or Caruso. All of them out of the same matrix. Even were their facts true, they mean nothing and explain nothing that accounts for development of character or rationalization of it.

Perhaps you will think I'm a snob. Well, I am. I am a snob in disliking vulgar statements and accepted values. When I take issue with these self-styled biographers and their concepts of poverty. Each one, without exception, has depicted my early childhood as grim and sordid.

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