

STATEMENTS OF BELIEF

The "Credos" of America's Leading Authors

We begin, in the pages below, a series of personal statements in which America's leading authors set forth their fundamental views on life and their own work. Other statements will appear in succeeding numbers of The Bookman. The task of getting these Credos together was performed by Mr. Erich Posselt, co-author with Miss Eva Herrmann of the forthcoming book, "On Parade".

CONFESSIO! Whoever told the truth about himself—or herself! It would either be hair-raising or dull. And only the dull would do it. Nor is anyone ever believed. I could say that I have never found anything satisfactory in life but writing, that I would rather write than even talk to an interesting man, and my friends at least would be skeptical. But then interesting men are few in real life, whereas in a novel you can concoct them and have everything all your own way. And whereas also you can forget the most charming of men while writing a book, the man cannot absorb you if there is a book in your head hammering to get out. But people have queer ideas on these matters. A very worldly woman in London once said to me, "You know, Gertrude, when you disappear for months at a time with a novel I assume that you take a man along with you". If I was surprised I concluded not to show it, and replied indifferently, "No, I always take the book at one time and the man at another. I find it impossible to manage the two at once". And so, I should say, it would be. But I have no intention of "confessing" in public or private.

Gertrude Atherton

* * *

I can make no comment on my work or my life that holds either interest or import for me. Nor can I imagine any explanation or interpretation of any life, my own included, that would be either true—or important, if true. Life is to me too much a welter and play of inscrutable forces to permit, in my case at least, any significant comment. One may paint for one's own entertainment, and that of others—perhaps. As I see him the

utterly infinitesimal individual weaves among the mysteries a floss-like and wholly meaningless course—if course it be. In short I catch no meaning from all I have seen, and pass quite as I came, confused and dismayed.

Theodore Dreiser

* * *

I have already summed up such comment as seemed necessary upon my own works in "Straws and Prayer-Books". I doubt if I could put the matter more succinctly.

I am sure, in any case, I could add nothing to the paragraph which Mr. Dreiser has written for you. Sincere and strong as has always been my admiration for his colossal sincerity and strength—and, above all, for his tenacious faithfulness to his art—it has not always been possible for me to agree with all the ideas of Mr. Dreiser. Hastily be it added, that any such uniform agreement would have been bad for both of us. But here I find him phrasing my own half-apprehended notions quite perfectly. I elect therefore to say, with extreme admiration and with equivalent meekness, just "Ditto".

James Branch Cabell

* * *

What does one write about himself for an intimate biographical note of this sort? It is far more obvious what not to say than what can be properly revealed. The writing of the most intimate lyric does not assume one-half the proportion of unwarranted exposure as does the bald, informative statement of one's pet adorations and aversions. Nor can one hide himself by going to his own work for succor; that must inevitably speak for itself. Those who have gone there for some knowledge of me already know that as a poet I am

intensely interested in preserving my own individuality, if that can be in any way aligned with an equally strong desire to evolve out of that individuality, with its markedly racial emphasis, some one song or lyric that may help establish my belief in the subsurface kinship of human beings. There is pleasure and pain in mere living; I believe both these aspects of life are intensified when one is a Negro in a white world; and I find their feather-strict balance so even that I am often inclined, to do what a poet should always shun: turn metaphysician and claim oneness for both pleasure and pain.

Countee Cullen

* * *

The only excuse for a novelist, aside from the entertainment and vicarious living his books give the people who read them, is as a sort of second-class historian of the age he lives in. The "reality" he misses by writing about imaginary people, he gains by being able to build a reality more nearly out of his own factual experience than a plain historian or biographer can. I suppose the best kind of narrative would combine the two like Froissart or Commynes, or Darwin in "The Voyage of the Beagle". I think that any novelist that is worth his salt is a sort of truffle dog digging up raw material which a scientist, an anthropologist or a historian can later use to permanent advantage. Of course there's Chaucer and Homer and the Edda, but that's all way over our heads.

John Dos Passos

* * *

I do not look on writing as a respectable profession: it is more parasitic even than the Law and not far above Advertising; as a business I despise it. That I must earn my living by it (having discovered too late what it is) distresses me, and is a Cross I must bear. Writing, in a land like mine, and in our cultural chaos, is worthy only when it is regarded by the author as a mission—as an act of Faith and as an act of construction.

I approach writing with a profound distrust of all verbalisms, all rhetorics, however disguised; and with a contempt for cleverness. The reason for this is that we need so sorely another kind of writing: the kind that is an *organic action*. When writing is less

than that, it is a danger in the world where all the high words of the past have rotted.

You will see, then, that there is a certain cleavage between me and most of my "confrères". I have personally nothing against them. But since their work, for the most part, is millinery and the concoction of candies, their self-importance is wearying. Of course, the American public, which is passive, intellectually effeminate and childish, is the creator of this self-importance. That is why the American public requires something better.

My purpose in writing is to create an organic act in this crucial period of the life of a country that symbolizes the crucial state and promise of the world.

What that act is, my work must tell.

Waldo Frank

* * *

I care passionately about people.

I think they are tinctured with enough of the sublime to make living in the hurting world, which they have cluttered with intolerance, vulgarity, cruelty, hate, lust and disloyalty, not only bearable, but an exciting and even sublime affair.

I take my page of the destiny of man out of my Book of Spencer and at the same time believe with Wordsworth that trailing clouds of glory does he come—and go.

When I think of my work I like to contemplate it in terms of plowing through the troubled and troubling scenes and getting said, in whatever manner or style my critics may arraign me for, some of this sublimity of the human race, which I love, and a member of which I beg to remain.

Fannie Hurst

* * *

I am credulous about the destiny of man, the future of the race, and the importance of illusions. I would like to be in the same moment an earthworm (which I am) and a rider to the moon (which I am).

Carl Sandburg

* * *

I am thirty-three years of age.

I am not yet old enough (and I hope that I never shall be old enough) to have a message. I have had a very good time. I hope to be able to continue to do so. I seem, in