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José
Luis Luis Perdomo Orellana/ Stephen Vizinczey
in conversation about "An Innocent Millionaire"

"Never give in inside your head"

TO: JOSÉ LUIS PERDOMO ORELLANA

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6) "Most [in Spanish "the majority of"] children who are subjected to extreme insecurity or deprivation are blighted for life by the threats to their survival." Is there any cure for that majority of deformed children?

SV: The only real cure is prevention. As doctors say, the best medicine is preventive medicine.

8) "What was the use of rosy fantasies?" Yes, Stephen, what use are they?

SV: In the case of Mark Niven, the answer is at the beginning of the chapter you're quoting from: "Mark was saved [from the ranks of the helpless and dangerous rabble] by conferring upon himself the advantages of noble birth. He made himself a prince - and what does a true prince know about servitude and compliance, pilfering, backbiting and twisting arms to get ahead? He is already there. He has the privilege of honour, the sword of an independent spirit, a multitude of generous and wilful sentiments, the courage of great armies and the revenues of royal expectations to maintain them. A prince does not mix with the crowd, he has no desire to get involved in sordid wrangles with indifferent or hostile people; he covets nothing that is theirs, he wants only what is his by birthright." [page 31 of Mexican edition.]

9) What is to be done in the presence of "the amiable, complacent grin of somebody who doesn't hear you but is willing to let you talk"?

SV: Just stop talking.

11) "There is always another job for most people, at least in times of general prosperity, and this puts some limit on the rudeness they can be subjected to." What is one to do in times of general unemployment, other than resign oneself and turn the other cheek?

SV: Never give in inside your head. In my youth, living under communist dictatorship, I often kept my spirits up by reciting a revolutionary poem in my head when I couldn't open my mouth.

12) Robert G. Madesko, the producer of successful films, says on page 52: "There is a general decline of competence - and that is how the world is coming to an end." What do you think of this statement?

SV: Everybody has its own favourite reason for the end of the world. That's Madesko's. I tend to believe in multiple causes.

1) Would you have liked to say something to Mark Niven after he wrote in his diary (at the age of 14): "Men are not brothers but strangers and no one is interested in anybody's story. People just do not give a damn about each other"? What would you have said to him? In what tone of voice would you have spoken?

SV: I would say, "Tell your story to me - I'm interested." And I would give him a hug.

3) Is it not an exaggeration to state that "each man's life involves the lives of all men, each tale is but the fragment of a tale - the tale of mankind's history"?

SV: No, it isn't. You could say that one of my main concerns is how apparently unrelated things interconnect. I hope that those who read my books will find it easier to recognize connections. The more connections you are able to recognize, the better you will understand your own life as well as the world. In science, too, the big breakthroughs come from discovering a previously unknown connection. I'm sure you have heard about the "butterfly effect" which can influence world weather patterns. The same is true of history, as well as the lives of individuals.

4) "... he (the young Mark Niven) sensed right then and there that his fingers weren't worth so much as a piece of old rug to other people. It was his first intimation of man's indifference to man, and he convinced himself early in life that he couldn't rely on anybody, not even his parents." Isn't this paragraph enough to make somebody misanthropic and paranoid?

SV: It shouldn't. Mark Niven himself finds several people in the course of his short life to whom he means a great deal. For me, personally, one person's love is sufficient to keep me from becoming a misanthrope.

5) A run of bad luck either breaks a man's spirit or inflames it... "How has your spirit reacted to runs of bad luck?"

SV: I tend to get inflamed.