

14) Do you know any cure for "the sickness of helpless longing, the kind of deep frustration that wears one out even when one is asleep"?

SV: No.

15) "No doubt eliminating politeness from society is a cost-effective way of hastening the day when people will bite each other in the street," you wrote a dozen years ago. Doesn't it seem to you that that day is every day of recent years?

SV: Yes.

17) Heller "acted on the principle that people needed more consideration than the giant conglomerate he worked for... Such adventurous executives, given to generous impulses, who no longer seek their own advancement yet still retain the positions of power for which they fought in their days of servile zeal, keep the bureaucracies of business and state from becoming totally moribund". Doesn't it seem to you that there are no Hellers left outside the pages of An Innocent Millionaire?

SV: I have met such characters in many large organizations. They're like undercover agents.

18) "... dentists are the luckiest of all healers, since they are not confronted with mortal diseases and earn their living freeing people from pain, knowing for certain that there is less misery in the world because of them," you say on page 77. Nonetheless, some statisticians say that a great many dentists commit suicide. What do you think of this contradiction?

SV: They are lucky as healers; that is not to say that they are lucky in their personal lives. But your statistics surprise me, so I must have missed something there.

20) "... whether people are good or bad, useful or harmful, depends not on their moral principles or even their conscious aims, but on the strength of their imagination." Could you add anything in this regard?

SV: Well, the idea in the rest of the paragraph. If you have the imaginative power to feel what it is like to be another person, to feel how other persons are affected by your actions, you're less likely to hurt them, because you yourself would feel the pain. I'm talking about normal people; psychopaths, sadists and the like are of course exceptions to this.

21) Is it not an exaggeration to say that "today people are no longer innocent of what they want: they think of making love at first sight"? [The Spanish translation is: "hoy en día las personas ya no viven ajenas a sus verdaderos deseos: a la primera mirada, ya están pensando en la cama" - "at first sight, they're already thinking of bed"]

SV: How much of an exaggeration it is depends on the age of the persons involved.

[Here the English is a little more subtle than the Spanish translation. The English text is "they think of making love at first sight", which is a play on words, because "love at first sight" is an old English expression for romantic love.]

22) "Politicians were dishonest - they never quite did what you paid them for." Is this your definition of "politicians"? Would you add anything, twelve years later?

SV: You're quoting a rich industrialist who bribes politicians and finds he doesn't get his money's worth. You can't have a general definition of all politicians. What you can say is that politics is a field where - as in the law - you need to have heroic qualities to remain honest and where you can be very well rewarded for being dishonest. So obviously the heroes are in a minority.

23) At the age of 17, Marianne "learned that the New York Times was an out-and-out capitalist rag, brazenly slanting the news to protect the system". What do you think of that newspaper in particular, and of journalism in general?

SV: You're quoting what Marianne's fellow students at Bryn Mawr say to her about the New York Times. To her father, the aforementioned rich industrialist, the New York Times is an out-and-out communist rag. In fact the New York Times is middle-of-the-road politically - it is the most liberal paper of the American establishment.

As for journalism in general, it is like politics - it IS part of politics. It is easier to be a hack than a honest journalist, just as it is easier to be a time-server than an honest politician. But actually there are many noble and heroic journalists. You can see that from the number of journalists who have been assassinated.

24) "But now even the dead can recover and multiply, and guess what? - we're hit by the population explosion, which is so bad that it's going to wipe out the whole human race, some experts say," Kevin Hardwick says on page 105. Do you think the same way?

SV: The population explosion - or rather, its consequence, ever-increasing pollution and exhaustion of the earth's

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