

TO: JOSÉ LUIS PERDOMO ORELLANA

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resources - is one of several deadly threats to the survival of our species.

25) Is there "anything that is all good and all bad"?

SV: There may not be many things that are all good, but there are certainly many things that are all bad.

26) "Considering that the Earth can't hold everybody and his uncle, letting the weak and stupid finish themselves off is a step in the right direction. Your problem is that not enough people are smoking." What is your opinion of this?

SV: You're quoting a chemical industrialist who is trying to justify his manufacture of poisonous products. It is a murderer talking, but he makes some kind of cruel sense.

27) "My heart sometimes overflows with tenderness - and at other times seems quite exhausted and incapable of being warmly interested in anyone." says Mary Wollstonecraft in the epigraph to Chapter 13. What can you do when you have an exhausted heart?

SV: You must fall in love again.

28) "There is no feeling in this world, no joy, no pain, that is not simply a question of money to somebody." Is this not enough to make you despair?

SV: You seem to be looking for reasons to despair! You might as well despair because the sun doesn't shine twenty-four hours a day. I don't write to depress people. On the contrary. What I try to convey in my books is that it is possible to keep our humanity, to be cheerful and happy even in the world as it is. I hope that readers who tell me that my novels convey the joy of living are right.

29) Do you believe in destiny?

SV: I believe in character.

30) "On this sunny green island of roughly twenty-seven square miles, rich and poor alike suffered the affliction of boredom." Don't you think that today everyone is bored?

SV: Certainly not! You can be bored only if you're not interested in people, if you are bereft of strong emotions - and if you don't read. To my mind, boredom is a just punishment for mental and emotional laziness and self-absorption.

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31) "... the loss and bitterness [the Spanish is "bitterness and frustration" - not quite the same] are nowhere so great as on stagnant paradise islands where there are no possibilities for advancement and a person can acquire very little beyond what he was born to." Don't you think that bitterness and frustration are becoming greater in every part of the world?

SV: Yes, we're entering an era of the very rich and very poor, with a corresponding rise in bitterness and frustration. It is so unnatural that something is bound to happen.

32) Have you any message of hope for those who "earn the acrimony meted out to those who do not know their place"?

SV: Those who do not know their place will always have a hard time, but I think it's worth it.

33) "Sex is too spasmodic to sustain passion," says Ken Eshelby. What do you think of that sentence?

SV: There's a lot of truth in it.

35) Is it true that "Hungarians tend to assure every stranger that Hungarian is a language worth learning because of its poetry"?

SV: Yes. And they are right.

36) In Dr Attila Feyer "Exile had opened a void where his native places used to be". How did exile affect you?

SV: It helped me to understand what is universally true and not just true for the people of a particular country.

37) "Like all wage slaves he had two crosses to bear: the people he worked for and the people he worked with." Is there anything that can lighten the burden of these two crosses?

SV: A sense of humour.

38) "Happy lovers are not born, they learn to outwit nature in some roundabout way." Could you explain to us what "indirect way" you are referring to?

SV: It is better to suggest things than to actually say them. If you've read the paragraph you'll know what I'm referring to. It is one way to overcome what I describe in the novel as "the twenty-minute gap, the abyss between the sexes" [page 159 of the Mexican edition].