

Writer condemns the indifferent

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Vizinczey: Well, they've chosen one of the thorniest paths to virtue...

Gateway: Is there something inherently corrupt in the legal system?

Vizinczey: There is something inherently corrupt in every system. Practice turns the noblest ideas into something in which the strong can get the better of the weak and the smart can get the better of the less smart.

Gateway: Don't tell me it isn't possible to be a virtuous lawyer!

Vizinczey: Of course it is, anything is possible. You can do a great deal of good as a lawyer, you can become a Ralph Nader. If

"They (law students) have chosen one of the thorniest paths to virtue."

you become a lawyer you become one of the more powerful members of society, a person who has many opportunities to do good and to do evil. The question is how you will use these opportunities. The problem is that you can earn the most money working for crooks or fleecing your clients.

Gateway: Your book is being attacked as cynical. How do you respond to that accusation?

Vizinczey: It's interesting that this was also the main accusation against my favourite novelist. Stendhal said, 'People call me a cynic because I like my statements to be true.' The cynic is the person who tells you white lies, not the one who tells you bitter truths.

But I think all phraseology like 'cynical' or 'optimistic' or 'sensitive' or 'warmhearted', all these adjectives which relate to personal qualities, are absurd when applied to art. We should make the same demand of novels that we make of mathematical statements: are they right or wrong, true or false? Art is either truthful or untruthful in some way. Whether 2 plus 2 equals 4 or 5, that is the question, not

whether it's cynical or optimistic. There is a right answer and a wrong answer. No, there is one right answer and a million wrong answers.

I hope I include in my book all the joys of life: I believe in love, affection, the sky, I believe in sex, I believe in goodness, even - what goodness there is - and I also believe in the immense possibilities for the individual. But I paint the world as a dangerous place, and it is dangerous. I think it would be very cynical of me to paint it as if people would not be in danger.

I say somewhere in the book, and I think it defines my kind of fiction, 'True stories should be read like intelligence reports, word from a scouting party, signalling the dangers ahead.' What I'm trying to do for my reader is to signal the dangers ahead. A scout is not cynical, he loves the world and he loves the people he reports to - that's why he warns them of dangers.

Gateway: An Innocent Millionaire has been called 'a classic 19th century novel about the modern world.' Do you agree with this description?

Vizinczey: I do aim to write the same kind of novels as Stendhal and Balzac. I ask the same questions. What is this world like? How can a reasonably decent person live in it? Who are his enemies and who can be his friends?

"There is something inherently corrupt in every system."

Also, I portray people in the light of their actions, not simply in the light of their thoughts and feelings. A person is what he does, not what he thinks or says. The worst villains can hold moral opinions.

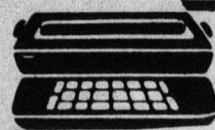
Gateway: Of all the many villains in An Innocent Millionaire, whom would you consider to be the most dangerous?

Vizinczey: The most dangerous is Hardwick. It's difficult to conceive of people to whom it does not matter whether

you live or die. Anybody who has grown up surrounded by love finds it impossible to conceive that there are people out there who don't give a damn about him, who are totally indifferent. And this total indifference of people like Hardwick is the greatest problem of the world. That's why we have the environmental crisis, that's why we are on the brink of nuclear war. I think the most useful thing a reader can learn from my book - and this is also *An Innocent Millionaire's* greatest social effect, if it has one - is that it explains and brings to life and brings close to the reader

this kind of indifferent character. It's not that he hates people - he just doesn't give a damn whether they live or die. And how it is possible to be like that is in the novel. I think in *Hardwick* I give a truthful and vitally important portrait of the kind of people who put the survival of mankind in question. And if we understand them we might be able to defend ourselves against them. We've got to recognize the immense indifference in the hearts of the people who are deciding on various policies which will determine the fate of the world.

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