

## GENERATIONS: NECESSARY DIALOGUES

### Foreword:

I have read with great interest "Generations: Necessary Dialogues" written by Culiță Ioan Ușurelu, drawn, as in other of his volumes by themes and problems concerning ethics: the eternal, historical, but also the contemporary, with a great number of examples taken from today's political scene. Titles such as "Character", "Diaspora-the exile", "On Sincerity", "The Leader", "Mediocre and Mediocrity", "Man's Solitude", "Are We Being Sincere?" , "Are We Mere Mortals?", "The Haughty" etc, are only a few chapters in the book, which attempt, through accessible language and without any didactic pedantry, employing meaningful quotes from universal literature, to comment upon, but mostly to debate the meaning of certain terms, professions, social drawbacks or profiles, all part of the noble desire to transmit to younger generations not only a viewpoint, but also a plea for value and culture, in the classic sense of the word.

The pleading and erudition of Culiță Ioan Ușurelu, teacher, reveals, beyond the teaching effort, the belief that Romania's younger generations will rediscover the path leading to those values, which have made possible not only Romanian creation and science, but also the lucidity and self-consciousness of the creator on both sides of the Carpathians. An interesting book, completely commendable due to the ambitious and difficult concepts discussed, a creative act honoring the career of a hardworking and devoted teacher, editor and chief of a culture magazine, literary animator of the famous area of Focsani, in Vrancea, where a considerable number of masterminds, mentors and masters of Romanian letters have wandered, from Al. Vlahuta to Duiliu Zamfirescu, among the classics, and also our colleagues, the poet Liviu Ioan Stoiciu and short story writer Varujan Vosganian.

**NICOLAE BREBAN**

## PREFACE:

The things which drew me to this book in the first place were the title ("Generations") and moreover, the subtitle: "Necessary Dialogues". I am making this remark in the context of today's world, where dialogue is almost completely absent. However, in the middle of this crisis, a writer, Culiță Ioan Ușurelu urges us to believe not all is lost. How does he accomplish this? By writing a book of dialogues, through which, using thorough research, talent and an unmistakable style (visible in other volumes: "Beggars in Ioden", "*Multum in parva*", "The Manor in the Vineyards", etc) draws us in the middle of conversations and disputes between generations. Even during these times when values have reversed, when everybody shouts at everybody, all believe themselves to be geniuses, politics is played by ear, and, where literature is concerned, no longer is the creation appreciated, but the demagoguery, and justice has been dragged into the derisory.

The author highlights in his dialogues about wealth, old age, kindness, character, culture, glory, beauty, intellectuals, honor, death or life, the flaws but also the qualities of a society unsettled by everything it goes through. Debates and confessions reveal, according to the age and intellectual abilities of the participants, great adventures, terrible disillusionments, and participating in the fascinating adventure of knowledge, issues which, ever since Plato, have been interpreted and misinterpreted. However, the author calls upon meditation, although in some nostalgic readers this may result in quite brutal reactions since nothing in the book is equivalent to the forgeries of a Rollerian history of the Romanians. If the volume "Generations" had not been written under the form of dialogues, it would still have survived as a novel or drama, (the author has also written a play under the same name, but unrelated to the texts of this book).

The book's impact is owed to the exceptional education of the writer, but –mostly – to ancient and modern sages, his honorable guests to this feast of wisdom. Therefore, there is not a lack of quotes (at some moments there is abundance, actually) and they enrich the contents with beauty and elegance.

I cannot make a secret of the fact that by studying the manuscript of this volume I have experienced a feeling of joy, discovering in Culiță Ioan Ușurelu a subtle moralizer, a formidable stylist at moments, a fighter who had the strength to try and even succeed in a field where many have failed. I have realized, thus, that in Vrancea County, the place where the great moralist and scholar Mehedinti has emerged, another book of wisdom and teachings has been born.

The author is "the man who shouts" about the many moral, political and social perils, deciphering a threatened and threatening atmosphere which could lead to an undesired ending: the upheaval of the stability pillars of national identity. The writer indicates that the time has come for a new reassessment of values ("*umwertung aller werte*"), the "role-models" in the book are in continuous dialectics of the contradictory, and the pillars of society are built on cultural and educational means, which the author presents through his extremely life-like and vigorous characters.

It would seem that the writer, with his affection for people, in a wish to set them on the right path, permanently applies Protagoras' statement: "man is the measure of all things". The same equitable measure is applied, as a matter of fact, in all his well documented interviews and articles in "Salonul Literar"(The Literary Lounge) magazine, which he himself is running with a steady hand.

I have wondered why in the volume "Generations", unlike other books, the Socratic irony is not always present. However I have found that, in a fight against "the recent man", one can only employ weapons this enemy uses himself: violent attack, passion, acrimony. Thus -in certain cases- the word becomes a punishing whip so he who receives it may reform afterwards.

Using a tone that is most uncomfortable, simply unconventional for some, under the appearance of designing theories on themes such as: politics, literature, love, faith etc, the writer's dialogue is fresh and natural, surprising in the tragedy of human existence, and also through the inner effervescence of the text, combined with an utter freedom of expression.

Clearly surpassing a so-called "culture of the province", Culiță Ioan Ușurelu meets serious and urgent themes without complexes or stereotypes, in the spirit of the great moralists. He avoids giving sentences; however he continues suggesting solutions for contemporaries as well as for those who are to come.

Through this book, so modern and challenging, by resorting to ethics, the author won a bet against himself and the world he lives in, and his pioneering attempt is placed among interesting themes and polysemous topics, comprised in the group of great works on moral.

Vasile IANCULESCU

## WEALTH, MONEY, CORRUPTION...

**SON:** Who should be the symbol of wealth, riches past and present, here and everywhere, father?

**FATHER:** Always, when talking about wealth, of treasures and riches, we think about the Argonauts who had set out from Thessaly, on their ship, the Argo, in search of the Golden Fleece from Colchis (modern day Caucasus), to the wealthy Croesus, who, since he owned the vast gold-bearing sands, was considered the richest man in all ancient times; or think of Mammon, the Syrian god of worldly gain.

**SON:** Are these indeed the only human riches? If so, then the human being, no matter how wealthy, is paradoxically, rather poor...

**FATHER:** You have observed correctly. It cannot be only this! There are other sides to human wealth. Are talent, mind and earnestness not riches? We are rarely reminded of, to mention just one case, another type of wealth. In many books, for example, we come upon the phrase "Croesus of Parnassus". To who was it addressed? Surprisingly, to a poet, whose interests were far from those of material nature. Indeed, he was the "rhymes billionaire", Edmund Rostand. Can there be greater wealth than this noble title?

**SON:** However man requires a source, albeit minimal, of income...

**FATHER:** Indeed, son, but not luxury, because the latter will keep the owner in a constant fear of losing it. I also know that any type of richness cannot belong to just anybody. Treasures bear resemblance to women of great beauty, kept hidden, locked even and only brought to light by daring, real men.

**SON:** But can anyone dominate women?

**FATHER:** Not quite. Once found and set free, these women, in all likeliness to treasures, cannot remain under some person's domination. And those who attempt to control them will only gain the perpetual fear of ending up without the conquered "possession".

**SON:** Why this hard labor to have everything, especially for us, who are born naked and we leave this world still naked, and in full knowledge that "a bite to eat and a cloth are not something to rejoice about"?

**FATHER:** Let us not forget that the means usually employed to gain money, wealth, prevent the person who gained them from enjoying too much what he has. We must remember the conceited words of he who has heaped a mountain of silver or gold: "This is who I am"! as it always happens, wealth quickly diminished, and something terrifying was left in its place:

death, whispering: "This is who / am"!...Before hearing the fatal words, of course, the wealthy man, hiding his flaws behind his wealth, will disavow all, especially his relatives.

**SON:** Have you ever seen, father, any rich man, who had gained his fortune through honest means?

**FATHER:** Seldom, and usually at crossroads between regimes , after revolutions or wars, when the moment found them in possession of land, which became expensive overnight, when...But no, one cannot achieve material wealth by doing good to others, but only through deceit, robbery and sometimes, though rarely, but not impossible, through work...

**SON:** This, there is no sense in us working if the results are the same!

**FATHER:** We must not think this way! We cannot sit on the fence our entire lives! Sloth is not a compulsory trait of all men...As for myself, I have striven to be human. However experience has taught me something: if you cannot gain plenty from your work, reduce your expenses. This is the only way to succeed in keeping material decline less visible. Anyway, rather than a fortune obtained through robbery and oppression, it's better to have no fortune at all. There is, however, something more precious than ostentatious overabundance, or wealth in every form: calm and sweet words. As the saying goes, "Good words cost nothing and are worth very much".

**SON:** How much strength does a man need to use his knowledge and skills only to create harmony around and not to reach, by stepping over dead bodies, material wealth?

**FATHER:** I will answer with a question which has bothered me throughout my life: being poor implies you are a weak character, an unworthy soul? I am asking after hearing many people saying such things. Thus, as you have said, unless you are willing to step over dead bodies, you are weak? Can material wealth elevate a wretched soul? This seems to me a golden, varnished exterior which vanishes with the first breeze and uncovers a rotting, cancerous body. More and more often we see poor people unwilling though to renounce their virtue, fulfilling their destiny with dignity, while rich people, when losing their privileged positions, complain, fail in finding their balance, and are capable of anything in order to regain their job, their palace, their fortune. And our newly rich, as well as the political class at the beginning of the third millennium, give us reprehensible examples of this. Especially since Romanians are after fast gain, overnight if possible.

**SON:** These are the infamous "swindlers", who, after questionable deals of millions of dollars and in one night or one week, turn from anonymous or unskilled into candidates for positions of great significance. However, in a matter of days, "cardboard millionaires" disintegrated, disappeared.

**FATHER:** Have these individuals been honest? Can we compare them to those investing in the stock market or various domains? Examining all sides of this problem, such fast gain, we ought to admit, must also have a dishonest component. My apologies to those bothered by this statement.

**SON:** This is what Epictetus used to say a few thousand years ago: "It is difficult to be wise while rich or to be rich while wise". Could it be true?

**FATHER:** Unfortunately I admit we live through times which often, if not always, force us to obey the power of money. And this power modifies relationships between humans. Anacreon pointed out, knowing this well, that money is the source of all evil: "hatred among brothers, contempt for our parents, murder and discord, and what is worse, obstructing the way to our hearts". This is where, from money and fortunes, corruption starts.

**SON:** But corruption implies a position. How may we define this concept?

**FATHER:** The dictionary would define it as a deviance from ethics, from duty, or distorting an idea, a sentiment, etc. As you have said, being corrupt implies having a position, and for certain advantages, you sell yourself. Or you force others to do it, for money or higher positions. In my opinion, being appointed in a position based on political criteria, not taking into consideration aspects such as ethics or proficiency, which may very well be lacking, is also a form of corruption. Actually, these are old habits of the Romanians; Eminescu himself had to deal with them at a certain point. He even gave a definition: "The real corruption is this: the tendency toward easy gain, without work, the desire to appear important without any merits, this is true corruption, which has as consequences hatred and envy against any other who gains the right through great intelligence or extraordinary character".

**SON:** It has always been said that wise men run from money or fortune. I don't think so...

**FATHER:** I don't believe this anymore, because they are people too, living among other people. Usually, a wise man has nothing but his mind. He perhaps wishes to eat better, to no longer sit in the cold, buy himself books. Is it so wrong not to want to be humble and humiliated?

**SON:** The symbol of money is Mammon. Well, I see all around me individuals whose only purpose in life is to worship this god. Are they wrong during these times, when, without money you are next to nothing, even a fool, though what you have written and done proves otherwise?

**FATHER:** Man's misfortune is that wealth (if he ever gains access to it) comes either too soon or too late, or during unfavorable times and doesn't last for very long. The fleeting character of wealth, money or institutions is accurately described by Robert Frost: "A bank

is a place where they lend you an umbrella in fair weather and ask for it back when it begins to rain”.

**SON:** A man of means, even if stupid, ugly and unworthy, may pass as immaculate, especially among “toad eaters”.

**FATHER:** Indeed, but God brings justice to this matter. Since riches do not last, knowing that, according to Panurge’s statistics, one of Rabelais’ characters, we know fewer methods on enhancing them (63) than waste them (214). However, due to the deceit of those around us, and the constant fear that anyone can take away your fortune or the fact that a table for one hundred of the poor is not big enough for two rich people, isn’t the price for money and fortunes too high?

Why is all this happening when human experience indicates that the human soul may be just as well buried under a pig sty or a pile of dollars?

## OLD AGE

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Pindar said that, since we die anyway, what is the point of going through the immensely frustrating old age, so difficult and lacking beauty?

**GRANDFATHER:** The wise man is certainly right...I thought about this too, about twenty years ago, what if we could omit this stage in life? Spend about 80 years of youth, and then, suddenly, depart. However, why avoid this difficult time? Some may say: Because there are no pleasures anymore, no joys; others demand to be left alone, promising to become true wise men when they reach old age. The misfortune is that old age makes us a burden and we move around like ghosts, not realizing we are no longer lucid. Others wish for death, but when the “Lady in black” arrives, they no longer want to embrace her. They forget they had wished for death, forget that this antiquated body works like a broken toy; it has all the organs, but each is lacking something...

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I have never experienced such situations, but I have noticed around me that especially during old age, when one needs so much help, people are abandoned. What else do they have left to wait for but death! It’s terrible that this serves as motivation to those who avoid them.

**GRANDFATHER:** I’m glad you choose to think like this about such a complex theme. If this is how you think, I, at least, in my undeclared selfishness still have a chance of not being abandoned by my dear ones...Now I remember the childhood of my offspring, whom I tried to educate by example, with great respect for the elders. I wanted to plant in their

subconscious the idea that they too will be old and their children will show them the same respect they themselves had paid to their elders. Prepare yourselves for this stage not only materially (though it is true, working while young may prevent old age from being impoverished). Thus, old age, a great burden, will not become humiliating, by forcing you, once an upright man, to beg for a slice of bread from the child you have raised with great effort and love. God forbid you should become dependent on badly brought up grandchildren. If possible, old people should avoid the company of the young, for the sake of us all...

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But what happens to wise men? How do they remain so until the end?

**GRANDFATHER:** The matter is simple and at the same time complicated. Old age for them settles first in the mind and then the body. In the case of the unwise, old age affects the body but never ripens the mind. When you see one's hair turning white, do not make haste and assume he also is wise. If his mind is mature or at least whole, you may place him among those who have not aged in vain. A good idea would be to observe his main interest: is it the spiritual or the material? Most lean towards the material. It is understandable, though, considering that as an old person you no longer have a job, you live on a small pension, everybody wants to inherit something from you, and unless you are wealthy, you are nobody's concern. Seeing my friends' despair when they can hardly handle the terrible imbalances in their lives, I become frightened by this *sine qua non* stage of my life.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But you have no reason to be frightened: we, the grandchildren, our parents, who are your children, your wife, who is not our grandmother, but is a very good person, we all will be around you. We promise...

**GRANDFATHER:** If only...However I notice that people who are dear to me (though nothing is the same with the love for your children), whom I have helped to a great extent my whole life, saying now, for reasons I fail to understand, that they have given me things, or that I have taken things from them... What has happened? Have values and memories been reversed?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Why do you worry so much? The ones you are talking about are older than you and no longer see things clearly...

**GRANDFATHER:** In this situation, I believe the words of the wise man who said that when God wants a man to be defeated, he first takes away his mind. Old and feeble-minded, we often use harsh words, which offend and hurt the ones we love and drive them away at the same time. I have often talked to the partner with whom I share my daily joys or sorrows about this, and with great kindness, she said I shouldn't let what old people say affect me,

for the simple reason that they no longer grasp the meaning of words or gestures. Let us not be stern with them because we will be like them (God forbid!). The paradox of old age is that pleasures cease to exist, colleagues from the same generation have gone to heaven, fame has dissolved, dear ones and young people have distanced themselves; the body is stooping; the wife is discontent with the meager pension, so demeaning; children become rude, to say the least or even brutal at times; the walk is slow and limp, the eyes are no longer of much use, ears fail to distinguish noises, teeth are no more but amazingly, these people want to live, otherwise they wouldn't fear death so much.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I take offense, as your seeing you have these doubts. If you hadn't raised us to respect our elders, perhaps you would have reasons for them, but since this is not the case...How can you imagine that after you have been there for my mother, for me and my brother during crucial moments, your children or grandchildren could ever leave you? We appreciate your role as a husband, but also as a parent and grandfather...And you have met the expectations...Even if in my childhood, and perhaps influenced by others, I have seen you as severe. Now I think you were completely right.

**GRANDFATHER:** Excuse me, I was talking about things in general, comprising, of course some personal experiences too. We always use these as a starting point. Do you know the most alarming fact? Nobody believes you are old. We think about these circumstances, about youth, so strongly linked to recklessness, not to say foolishness. But what about the old men feigning youth, or regretting it! What kind of fools are they?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I know from my grandmother, who was a real saint, that old age brings with it faith and not all the sorrow you were talking about.

**GRANDFATHER:** Unfortunately, I have started to experience it, sorrow is inherent. But in many cases, faith has a delivering role, because everyone gains hope that God will make the last part of their lives a lot less of a burden. I have seen old persons who do not fear death. They know, I think, that a clean life in poverty on Earth may bring bliss in the afterlife. So a few have found a remedy for old age and found the cure for fear of death. Faith makes us wiser, more temperate, maybe even better. Though, if you were not born to be good, you cannot really become...Believers are at any time prepared for the end of life...

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** When I analyze myself, I hope to reach old age and live a long life, but when I get to this stage, I cannot say if the same certainty will be there, although I am a pious person; not a fanatic, obviously.

**GRANDFATHER:** Terentius had created a character, Chremes, who thought of old age as a disease. A serious one, might we add; so serious that the only cure may be found inside a

coffin. But Terentius was wrong in thinking that old age is not part of the normal course of life.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Still, I do not see old people as inferior to young people, quite the contrary...

**GRANDFATHER:** Indeed, old Cato thought the same and obviously, so far, I completely agree. Through their experience and wisdom, old people are at least equal to the young, who are vigorous and enthusiastic. What else? The Romanian saying: "God grant me a young man's strength and an old man's wisdom", which illustrates better than any theory this theme: a sad one, but generous in its teachings.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I would point out to young people that the advice received from an old man is quite more significant than a young man's good-luck or energy.

**GRANDFATHER:** I hold the belief that only those who know what wisdom is, honor the age and the advice of old people. Unfortunately, many are waiting for old age but few know what form it will take. To the man who was used to a smooth, joyous and happy life, old age will bring with it unpleasant surprises. At my age now (of 63) I suppose I should be aware that various illnesses may fall upon me, that is why temperance is called for in all areas. Let us get used to this natural state and remember that even an old lion, although he roars with might, cannot even chase a mouse. Anyway, old age is not a time to expect the same carefree life of a young man, which may allow a pleasure found in alcohol, or a (fatal) joy of loving young women. Let us not exasperate young people with our torments, because at 75-85 years old, or maybe even earlier, you become a mere slave of your room. You cannot go out, cannot speak, and cannot wish...You are no longer capable of anything. Taking care of your old mother and father may be the only way for you to receive help from your children in return. Only the love for your elders will save you from a wretched, awkward and disastrous old age...

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** And still, how important it is to have an old person in our lives! Any young person ought to have such an icon to illuminate at least some part or if not his entire life.

**GRANDFATHER:** You can't imagine how much joy your words have brought me. Because advice given by an old man, even if it appears of little importance, has far greater value than a young man's luck, as it is a known fact that crucial decisions should not be made without consulting the elders close to you, who know the meaning and the purpose of the words, and think twice before speaking. Thus, due to great wisdom and a desire to be a whole human being, "an old man walks, but carries no burden".

## KINDNESS

**GRANDFATHER:** I have been thinking about starting our conversation by talking about kind people, with kindness as their main trait, especially nowadays when this "species" and this quality are quite rare.

**GRANDSON:** But we have memories or books, if nowadays we no longer find such thing. Still...let us not be elitists.

**GRANDFATHER:** You judge things well, my boy, and I apologize. There are and there will always be remarkable people in the world. Perhaps we exaggerate when we say that only in earlier times we could find qualities... Anyway, we must acknowledge that these benevolent beings were making homes, cities or countries more beautiful.

**GRANDSON:** Has their true value ever been recognized?

**GRANDFATHER:** No, they have not been appreciated, quite the contrary, they have been marginalized, cast away or slandered. What has been said, and what is said about this type of individuals? Only that they are "stupid for being good", "so nice that everybody takes advantage of them", "twice good must surely mean once stupid" etc.

**GRANDSON:** However, I believe that above all are their deeds, their kind advice, their children (when they choose the same path). I do recall, though not without some difficulty, some of your advice, Grandfather, which naturally I didn't fully understand as a child. But now, whenever I make a wrong step, I remember what you and my old teachers have taught me.

**GRANDFATHER:** If you are able to admit this, you are on the right path...And about kind persons, if you find among them some who had been rich at some point, if you ask them where their wealth is, they will tell you they have given it to where it was needed: schools, retirement homes, to the poor, etc. Unfortunately for these individuals, they see all the other people as good. So this would, normally, as in the rest of us, trigger disappointment and bitterness in the person who sees kindness being repaid with evil. But a truly kind man is not deterred by this; in fact he becomes an even better person, after defeating all pettiness, envy, hate and all the misfortunes he is forced to go through.

**GRANDSON:** So I suppose the wise man who said "You simply cannot get enough of good weather and kind people" was right.

**GRANDFATHER:** But you see, the wise man has also added "Become honey and risk being eaten by flies". Are we supposed then to be bad people in order to avoid this? I personally believe that, as in the case of a parent's love for the children, kindness doesn't ask for

kindness in return, but I am convinced that even if not immediately, acting kindly attracts good things.

**GRANDSON:** Do we all have to be kind, Grandfather?

**GRANDFATHER:** This is a question we always ask ourselves. I have heard that it is normal to be kind to the kind and wicked with the wicked. But will this bring about any change? I do not think so. Thus, we turn to Lao-Tsen's words: "I am good to who is good, and I am also good to who is not good".

**GRANDSON:** I have a young family and I'm trying to find out if kindness should be given sparingly?

**GRANDFATHER:** Surely that is the case. We will be good to our children, on the condition that they are also good. Because we often see that parents who are too tolerant raise wicked children. This is where a mother and a father should share responsibilities. Those who leave the child to do what he chooses might take offence, but in my opinion, the father should be more severe (when it is necessary) and then our children will grow up nicely, and be hardworking, clean, respectful, and pious.

**GRANDSON:** What about the mother?

**GRANDFATHER:** I know you are always thinking about the mother, particularly your mother. Yeas, her role in the family is essential. If she will take after the behavior of the father, with a diminished severity (most times only apparent), it will all be to the benefit of the family. If the mother is overly kind and permissive, thinking this way she protects her offspring, the situation will get worse and there will be no means to set straight the damage in the education of the children. The spoiled children will grow up to become rejects of the society and their failure to recognize any authority might put them in trouble with the law. A good wife makes a good husband and good children. She is a treasure for all of them.

**GRANDSON:** What if a child is born wicked?

**GRANDFATHER:** He may grow up to be a normal human being if in the family some strict rules are observed: the parent is aware of what he has to do and so is the child. This way we agree with those in ancient times who have said: "A bad colt may grow up to be a good horse".

**GRANDSON:** It is well known that kindness makes a person beautiful. How about beauty?

**GRANDFATHER:** There are many sayings in the folklore: "Beauty without kindness is like stale wine"; "Better kind than beautiful"; "Beauty without kindness is worthless"; "Beauty without kindness is like a house without a door or a spring without water", etc. Whenever

you make a new friend, when you get married, you should take this into account. Are we all doing this?

**GRANDSON:** But if you do so much good, and are the embodiment of kindness, who will ever thank you? I'm asking as a representative of the XXI st century.

**GRANDFATHER:** During the last century you could often hear the saying "Do good deeds, receive good things". Do many remember this? I obstinately want to believe it. Because anything that comes from the heart, without petty purposes, must reach the person it was intended for, no matter how bad that person, that environment, that country, that era..."Do good and throw it in the water, and if the world doesn't return it, a fish will..." .It's true, the all good done returns to us even when we don't expect it. When you think it is no longer possible. With one condition: that we ourselves do good deeds whenever we can.

**GRANDSON:** Is there an indestructible connection between beauty and kindness?

**GRANDFATHER:** You have more success with kindness than with violence, we must admit that. But as good man, if you are in an important position and you are kind to the wicked, isn't that quite unfair to good citizens? How far can kindness reach? So far that people cannot be bad anymore? I think only god, who were made to be kind can remain so, while with man this is not the case... However I think no man is as evil as not to be able to become good some day. When Tolstoy was asked "Are you a good man?" he responded quite interestingly: "Saying I am a good person would prove a lack of humility, thus I wouldn't be good, and if I say I'm bad, It would only be a pose! The truth is I am both. Being good is simply the wish to be so more often... And I do wish that..."

**GRANDSON:** But what would you say about someone who has permanently had the occasion to do wrong and did not?

**GRANDFATHER:** The one who has succeeded in doing this has always been and will be human. What more can we ask of this mere being? And, led by the power of example, shouldn't we all, whenever we are tempted to destroy or hate, envy or slander, calm down and think more? Nobody, under no circumstances deserves to be treated badly. But if we manage to do only that, we may consider we did something good. And hopefully, those around us would follow our example. Not doing wrong may sometimes be equivalent to doing good, or at least, there is something gained. Let us urge people to be good, and whenever we see in them a spark of kindness, let us compliment, encourage and stimulate them!

## EDUCATORS

**GRANDFATHER:** Horatio would say that “teachers are like gods, knowing good and evil”. As far as science is concerned, the poet was correct, but if we refer to daily life, the teachers’ life is a tragedy. The history of our people is filled with examples of martyr teachers, people involved in education who have devotedly and with great courage participated to the most important events of our country. Wherever they had lived, they managed to surpass their duty, and we have perceived them as parents who have influenced our personality.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I, as daughter and granddaughter of teachers, am aware of some details of their lives. That is why I would ask some (particularly those who had little to do with schools, or have something against educators) if they had any idea how ill were they and what a difficult life they have had? Many would wear the same coat tens of years or a ragged hat. Students couldn’t understand poverty in people with higher education.

**GRANDFATHER:** Not then, during communism, and not even now are people able to realize how hard teaching is. It is, for those who want the truth, the most difficult and important job. Unfortunately, the authorities have not and will not acknowledge the manufacturers of the manufacturer. Because, as an intelligent but dutiful person, the teacher has never traded the pen for a hammer nor turned the voice into a thunder to ask for his rights.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But I observe today all types of sabotages, misunderstandings, and by allowing politics to interfere, teachers have lost and will always have much to lose. But when finally they couldn’t take it anymore, they have united and started a general strike.

**GRANDFATHER:** Yes, there are sabotages and who knows what else. This way, the union for education is divided in about four branches, when in fact it should be more compact in order to become invincible. Under the present circumstances, only a part of the teachers go on strike or defends certain issues, which are of no interest to the others. And so on, until the force loses intensity and disappears.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But the ruling parties, the parliament members, don’t they realize the fragility and suffering of the educational system? Or haven’t they been inside schools?

**GRANDFATHER:** I am disappointed with everything especially now, when people of the ruling class are themselves professors, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and, surprisingly, even teachers, thus very close to what is taking place at the basis of the system. The principle of equality among those with higher education is not observed. In every field the principle stands, except for education. Thus, a worker without higher education earns more than a young teacher.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** That would be a reason for which young people flee the system. If not to go abroad, they choose other fields in order to earn more.

**GRANDFATHER:** True, in the educational system there are only people over thirty left. Eventually, if the teaching job doesn't provide the means to raise your children, you leave it for something which brings more income.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** So, under these circumstances, what should we communicate to our transitory leaders, who humiliate the intellectuals which represent stability and the school, which is the future of the nation?

**GRANDFATHER:** If those of the ruling class have been in schools (and we know some have), if they have been helped by teachers discover the world, then they should dissociate from political interests and give the intellectuals what they deserve for working with the most frail of all materials, the human soul. And besides, we would enjoy hearing among those elected the thundering voice of a teacher in the parliament, but only in the opposition, in order to energize those who are too passive, to break the shell of those extremely conservative and defend the cast away brethren.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I would agree, from my own perspective, due to the education I have received in the family and in school, that now, until it's not too late, we should respect our nation's spiritual parents.

## CHARACTER

**DAUGHTER:** Father, you have always told me to respect only the true nature of a person and not be overawed by someone's intelligence. Why is that?

**FATHER:** The reason is not simple, considering you only have true character on one condition: that you have had one before. And this character gives you a profound interior freedom, urging you to never act randomly, but on the contrary, to rise above the principles of randomness, preach and act for absolute goodness.

**DAUGHTER:** Usually, as a surprising paradox, a strong-natured man will not come public with his mistakes; he will keep them to himself. And it is a shame that this happens to quite extraordinary people...

**FATHER:** Public confession is not accessible to man...or not to any man, no matter how strong. Jesus Christ was part of a religious sect, that of the Essenians, who used as guidance this principle of confession. The sect did not have many members, but I can only imagine the relief of the man who had confessed not only to a priest but to the whole

community. Normally, after that there would be prayer and suffering, but the soul was cleansed.

**DAUGHTER:** Do you have a definition for character, father?

**FATHER:** To my knowledge, psychology tells us to define character as the sum of all the relatively stable characteristics of an individual's personality, which determine his attitude and actions inside a group. Therefore, we may even say that a man with (or "of") character is just an individual who is coherent in his personal behavior, but at the same time, he is the noble, illuminated side of humanity. I feel compelled to add that, as you have said, character with intelligence may accomplish plenty, while intelligence without character will never hold true value. For the real value of a human being is given by ethics. In such circumstances, though general opinion says otherwise, we conclude that only character contributes greatly to happiness and prosperity, and not, as people think, intelligence or wealth.

**DAUGHTER:** How is character built?

**FATHER:** Character is not built by the overly praised exceptional actions in exceptional circumstances, but by all the little, common habits, which disturb or calm our daily lives. Indeed, unbelievably simple. We may observe the essence of character by looking at man's semblance to oneself, which forms a certain personal style. Tudor Vianu used to say that "Stile is man himself".

**DAUGHTER:** Can will and sentiment, so much connected, exist in equal amounts in a man of character?

**FATHER:** It is difficult to keep these coordinates under control. But a much disciplined character may try this. And now I come back to the definition of character, which I find obsessive. Each of us who wants to have, or has at least one gram of character, may enhance it by completing it with good things observed in others. This is why character implies all energies to be focused on the disentangling from negative influences which come from the outside (or even on the inside) and on eliminating the contradictions which torment us and struggle to clear away faults characteristic to humans: fear, cowardice and vainglory.

**DAUGHTER:** From what I have noticed, from what you have told me, father, people with character have a certain beauty which draws people, not to mention their fully formed and asserted personality. Beauty and personality are most prominent when these benevolent individuals strive toward finishing their work.

**FATHER:** I completely agree. "*Fines coronat opus*" (The ending crowns the creation") as the philosopher used to say...

**DAUGHTER:** But what would happen if we somehow managed to give a young man the character of an old person? Would it be compatible?

**FATHER:** A grave mistake! The conflict between age and character would be instantly visible. The misfortune would be even greater if we came upon a weak character. When the life of such a person would be overwhelmed by emotions and feelings, I don't think he will be capable of any manly, vigorous act.

**DAUGHTER:** And then, Goethe, who found man laughable or Maiorescu, who found him pathetic, were both right?

**FATHER:** Ancient times come to our rescue again: "Man is the measure of all things"

**DAUGHTER:** Thus, as a curiosity or a natural thing, some say, why don't men of character usually live in harmony?

**FATHER:** On the contrary, I would say that those of different characters usually detest each other. Unfortunately we must speak unfavorably of these individuals, who, sometimes, taken separately are truly exceptional. But I would urge all of them: Be tolerant because the world holds a great variety of things, and where there's gold, there's also worthless metal. To get to know such people I think we should return to the definition of character (as we have already done twice before) and to how it is built or inherited. Such a complex theme seems to be of interest both to teenagers and to people with a long life experience, and there could be more than one straight answer to the questions "character" arises. It is thought to be the product of certain historical eras, in which mentalities are decisive, or it could be the flawless conscience of our individuality, with all its shortcomings or virtues (Schopenhauer), or it could be a long and miserable experience of life's disillusionment and sorrow. It is formed and modified over time, as a consequence of practical activity and acquired experience; we must never let character develop randomly, but direct it toward morality, the superior side of the human being, knowing very well that neither the sly fox, nor the lion with its mighty roar cannot change their nature and only humans have as many types of character as there are individuals, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** Character, as I see this, is a given and we must keep it, if we have it. The question is: How can we maintain it?

**FATHER:** It is within our (limited, it's true) powers to observe that time is the test for character, and without this rare and noble flower (especially nowadays), all knowledge, all the universal creation, absolutely everything is only mere distraction, of terrible selfishness. A man of awful nature, no matter how much he tries to conceal his true character, at some point will eventually be seen for what he really is. Even if treated

extraordinarily, the nefariousness of the soul would be obvious. A proverb comes to support our statement: "Character is not changed by good advice, like water, no matter how hot, will eventually cool". Misfortune allows our true nature to be seen, while happiness conceals it. However happiness is fleeting, unfortunately...

**DAUGHTER:** Could we educate character? And if so, how could we?

**FATHER:** Even from lessons in our childhood and teen years we find out that inheriting a great fortune or a famous name does not transform anybody into a personality. However character and mind can help us up to the top of the hierarchy, and be respected or loved. From my experience so far I can venture to say that anything (especially bad things) can be diminished (but only so!) through education. The more thorough the education, the better are the chances to change inborn flaws. By hearing the saying "you may wash a lump of coal a thousand times, but it still remains black", we can understand the role genetics play, but also the hope brought by education. It is difficult, but not impossible for a person to overcome a bad nature. Human nature is made in such a way that it grows weeds next to useful herbs. We should certainly take care of the latter and destroy the others, but who is there to teach us how to tell one from the other? Well, this is where school and education intervene. Let us highlight the primordial role school plays in building human character and let us give our complete support to this institution which, unfortunately has rarely been appreciated for its true value.

**DAUGHTER:** In this context, Father, how important do you think luck is?

**FATHER:** I would say each error caused by a person's nature can have serious consequences. However, if nothing of the sort happens, then it is due to luck.

**DAUGHTER:** But can people be left at the mercy of blind fate?

**FATHER:** Seeing but not pointing out the errors of those around us means we take upon us the responsibility of all the possible consequences. Thus comparing the thorns of human nature with the thorns of a rose may make us believe that a drop of blood or a little pain may be worth if it could, at least partly, prevent possible wrongs.

**DAUGHTER:** Father, I have read somewhere that there are varieties in human nature and I find it absurd. Am I wrong?

**FATHER:** I know there are three types of characters, according to some, and I agree. Thus, there is the character an individual imagines he has, the second is the character others think an individual has, and then there is the character which neither the individual nor those around him can explain. This last one is the true and only one.

**DAUGHTER:** I would like to end our conversation by returning to the comparison between character and intelligence. I thought you exaggerated the importance of character, but after also reading Eminescu's opinion, I think you are right. It is true; intelligence should only come in second to a true character. The Morning Star of Romanian poetry stands witness "Among intelligence and character there should be no choice: you can often find intelligence, but seldom character".

## THE OLDEST OCCUPATION IN THE WORLD: PROSTITUTION

**FATHER:** I shall approach a slightly sensitive theme in our conversation, but avoiding a certain misunderstood propriety; I believe there is nothing uncommon about a father talking to his son about the oldest occupation there is: prostitution.

**SON:** I remember the words of the great Balzac, on a person practicing prostitution: "Do not insult a woman who has fallen. Nobody knows how heavy a weight has fallen over her soul". I was impressed by what he had to say on the subject, though the aspect of prostitution in this country is sinister, to say the least.

**FATHER:** Maybe some "prude" will laugh at us talking about such a forbidden topic. It is probably preferred for all to avoid talking straight to young people and adults alike, about this scourge which -among others- affects Romanian society. As if this was the only thing missing... Nowadays, more than ever, we must warn teenagers, and not only, of the danger of falling into the trap of the so-called "pimps", individuals who make a living by exploiting human beings like animals. Radio, T.V. and media in general are means of propagation for this problem.

**SON:** No we no longer wonder when we see ads in the paper such as: "We hire ballerinas under 22 for Cyprus, Syria" or "We hire masseuses". Behind these ads prostitution might be hidden.

**FATHER:** I have read about or seen cases when naïve girls fall prey to such "pimps" who take away their documents and they become anonymous, objects for other peoples' fun, who are not allowed to say who they work for, what is their pay, who their "protector" is, who they are or who are their parents (probably desperately looking for their daughter). Indeed mere objects. What do they get in return? Beatings when they fail to do what they have been told or when they refuse their client's perversities or ridiculous requests. Sometimes even death. This is what awaits those who seek to evade poverty.

**SON:** Wouldn't it be better if prostitution were legalized?

**FATHER:** It would be better for everyone: the prostitutes would get regular medical check-ups which would be also good for the client. Also the state would have to gain, the budget would benefit from taxes upon those who sell their bodies...

**SON:** But do only women do this?

**FATHER:** No, certainly not. Quite a lot of men in financial dire straits choose to sell their "charms", or some do so because of illness or environment.

**SON:** Who could have such tastes?

**FATHER:** Usually rich but lonely women or even men with different sexual orientations or deviants. For such persons, what is normal becomes synonym to awkward and boring. And this stems from (we think) the lack of a serious preoccupation, or too much money. In the West (and perhaps in our country also) there are the so called "peep shows", where owners of such establishments receive money from the persons who want to be watched and also from those who want to watch.

**SON:** In Western countries, because brothels are legal, AIDS is to some extent, under control, at least in his sector. This doesn't happen here...

**FATHER:** There where prostitution is not regulated by law, the situation is serious. We, the Romanians hold an unfavorable place in statistics made in relation to this issue. What is there to do? Either legalize and regulate this occupation or take extensive measures among young people (and not only) for destroying or decreasing the devastating effects of the HIV virus.

**SON:** Couldn't we, these days, extend the theme to other fields?

**FATHER:** Surely we can! Especially politics...Haven't we heard the term "political prostitution"? What would you say about a leading member of some party switching sides? Can you comprehend how monstrous these stunts become? We could name a few specific examples... But we will let the reader discover them, for the simple reason that everyday our lives becomes worse and more insecure, and the political situation has become unstable or even dangerous for the safety of the state. We can only hope that one day things will change for the better, but the sad sight we have of the local councils or even the parliament chambers takes away that optimism from us.

## COMMUNISM AND NAZISM: SIMILAR ACTIONS?

**FATHER:** In the 80s I read a quote from J.P.Sartre, which left me indifferent. He, a supporter of the Left, said practically that the communist doctrine must impose ideas through assassination.

**SON:** How could you remain indifferent at reading such abnormality?

**FATHER:** The explanation is simple, albeit shameful. We, including those reading some foreign books, had learned in school and had been bombarded by the Romanian press with the idea that only the Nazis used assassination as a tool, killing political opponents or killing Jewish people in Camps such as Auschwitz, Dachau, Birkenau, etc. This is why we had no reactions whatsoever, not even among friends. You can imagine we couldn't do that upfront, first of all because no one would have published a text going against communist ideas, and second, we believed Sartre's quote to be pure fantasy.

**SON:** But who did you believe into, who did you admire?

**FATHER:** Under no circumstances Ceausescu. We had the "icons" given by communism: Fidel Castro, Ernesto Guevara, Patrice Lumumba and others.

**SON:** What was the message of these icons?

**FATHER:** They advocated for the good of everyone, love for people, being equal in the eyes of the law, to each after one's needs, etc. But Romanians were dying of hunger, were not allowed to take trips in the western world, could not be elected into the Great National Gathering (some sort of parliament) and were not given a job without belonging to the Communist party, etc. We didn't even have Sundays off, especially those in the educational system, because we were sent to do voluntary work with the students, and our work was in no way respected. Most years, from September to December (almost three months), classes were ceased and we would spend whole days in the fields. We picked the nation's corn, beans, and grapes, accompanied by the army. So who was talking about education, or freedom of speech as a right, a right for rest, etc.? We, the peoples of the Soviet Union, Hungary, Bulgaria, China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam and other communist countries have been kept starving, trapped behind frontier lines, so that the "monstrosities" of capitalism cannot enter. And what were these monstrosities? They were the freedom to think, to work, to live, clear and simple. We are not thriving now either, but that's a whole other story.

**SON:** Still, could we find any differences or resemblances when comparing communism with Nazism?

**FATHER:** What separates the communists from the Nazis? The declared ideologies, while facts and actions put them on the same scale. I even thought Nazis were more honest and sincere: everything they had written in their plan of government they did: anti-Semitism, wars for conquest, superiority of the Arians, etc, while communists put forward ideas as if taken from the Bible: equality among men and races, respect for values, loving your fellow humans, etc.

**SON:** Which of them have done things according to the plans?

**FATHER:** The Nazis have followed the schedule and committed the well-known crimes. While communists never went through with all the promises, and everything had been simply political demagoguery. Their empty words, in the name of some great ideas they have starved and killed millions of families, non-value started dominating everything, deceit, betrayal, stupidity became compulsory, the only truth was that of violence, prison, and democracy was present only in the constitution. Only after 1989 I have found out some details. It has been seen clearly that facts differ greatly from words in this system.

**SON:** I have read somewhere that even Panait Istrati, acknowledged European writer and friend of Romain Rolland, had been, even since 1925-1935 a supporter of communist ideas?

**FATHER:** I have read his work, and I have known his wife, Margareta. She explained that Istrati had been confused by the communist ideology, until he visited the Soviet Union and got to know firsthand the Soviet "democracy". When he expressed his amazement at the difference between what was said and what was done, he had been threatened with execution by the "great" man himself: Stalin. Thus, he ran away as fast as he could from the "land of bliss". This journey of Istrati happened 15-20 years before we had adopted the marvelous laws of communism. And our poor co-national only got to see (as Soljenitan, Saharov and others) the Gulag which killed the elite of the Russian intellectuals nor the hundreds of thousands of officers killed at the order of the insane Stalin, the six million victims of communism in Ukraine or millions of Bassarabians deported to Siberia.

**SON:** So why do we still have nostalgic people?

**FATHER:** Because some did well then too, in the middle of communist plague, or it is only the effect of the old ideas inoculated due to which today we have virtually no politics and a proliferation of extremism.

**SON:** And political extremism can only lead to hate, crimes and the destruction of the national democratic balance.. Unfortunately, what we see in the heart of the Romanian Parliament worries us...

## CHILDREN

**GRANDFATHER:** Most of us, today's old people, have been born during the first half of the past century and our view on family is that, without children, this "basic cell" of society has no meaning. I know my grandparents, as my parents, considered the biggest treasure of a family are the children, and they should have a strong think to those who give them life.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Whose role do you think is the most important in the formation of a child?

**GRANDFATHER:** The mother, of course. She is the potter and the children are the clay from each an entire being will be formed. Maybe this is why the children are for the mother the most precious things in the world, (and so do I), the most beautiful, the most intelligent (even if sometimes they are exact the opposite).

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** So do you suggest that even the worst of men soften when you compliment them about their children?

**GRANDFATHER:** I have always thought that people can become better if they have children. Maybe they are transmitted something from the innocence of those pure beings. I have always been there for the unfortunate friends of mine who have not been blessed with heirs. Their house, though rich, seemed deserted. But I have seen the opposite also: people who were miserable about having children. First I was intrigued, but then I agreed. Of what use could there be a boy, if he lacks any qualities and is most ignorant? He could be more like an open wound for the parents. There are worst cases, bringing unhappiness for a parent, who, in order for the children to have whatever they want, to see them cursing, shouting or wanting the death of their benefactors. This is when we remember that such specimens (and there are plenty nowadays), as the popular saying goes, had two midwives and that's why he had the crooked head, and went crazy. We observe this sadly while hoping that the good tree will bear good fruit.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I have read things which have left a better taste in my mouth. Some statistics (which frankly I don't believe) say children are inferior to their parents, and only rarely they are superior. From what I have seen in your family, and that of grandmother or the parents, but also in other families, this is not the case. I also think it's against nature. If this statistics were even the least bit true, it would mean that the human species is doomed to return to where it had left, and disappear. This is one question every parent, educator, member of the clergy leaders of states, etc, should ask: Where are we heading?

**GRANDFATHER:** You are quite a deep thinker, my dear! The things happening in this world do worry me. Still, we must remember quotes from ancient wisdom "*Ex ore parvolorum veritas*" (Children speak the truth). Only children, as long as their soul has not been tampered with or perverted are our joy and purpose on this earth; raising them implies a lot of care, debts and risks but also an accomplishment in the life of any normal individual. Success in this great enterprise which scares some, leads to a great feeling of accomplishment in any person, no matter what sort.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** How about failure of this terrible experience?

**GRANDFATHER:** Well, then we get to the examples above. I think nobody could envy a parent who had failed to raise his offspring, by giving them everything and forgetting to ask them to work, learn and respect others. Such parents only reap what they have sown, and by not teaching the children elementary skills, they were not showing love.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** The young ones need models and I thank God every day I've had you, my grandparents and my parents extraordinary in raising your children.

**GRANDFATHER:** I admit, I have had many moments when I broke down in front of exaggerated love. I have also been immensely fortunate that you have been a good and intelligent child and this allowed you to avoid illness and everything bad. The same can be said about your brother. Genetics certainly has something to say in the matter, and also the environment.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Speaking of models... They must be found at home, at one's grandparents, in books and by no means on senseless violence, non-value, sex, and most of all, sloth...

**GRANDFATHER:** (Let me, as a person working in the educational system) tell you that according to some statistics, boys in secondary school often get drunk, high school boys do it two times a week on average, while girls, once a month. Surely not all teenagers act in these situations but, if 10-20 percent of them do this, the educational system and the Romanian society are facing a free fall. The Minister of Education, the government, the parliament and society should regard this as a matter of utmost importance.

What kind of education can you ensure to such persons?

Is there any ounce of respect or desire to work? In this equation, parents who are at work from dusk till dawn, parents who went abroad to ensure some food for their children, and all parents in general should form an alliance with teachers and other factors concerning education and taking better care of the young generation. The future of the nation depends on it.

## CULTURE

**SDN:** When I look around today, all that can be seen are political scandals, financial scams, members of the parliament with a crude behavior, on television we can only watch stupid programs, all attempting to get watchers to laugh or cry , and the national televisions have even made a list of the ten best Romanians. Is this our culture?

If I may refer to the latest "achievement" of the national television, which is not a commercial television and should first of all help make a representative culture of the Romanians, I feel deep regret at seeing how next to Eminescu, Wurmbbrandt or Patriarch Teoctist names such as Mutu, Stelis (a porn star), singers of "manele" and other persons which are more anti-cultural than anything. However we do have scientists, philosophers, writers, students and even pupils with a vast culture, which are not on that list...

**SDN:** Therefore, how do we define culture?

**FATHER:** Beside the famous definition which warns us that through culture we may understand what is left after you have forgotten everything, I believe the true culture is that which the people can understand. I cannot understand the plan to make idiots out of people through television, by seeing shows made in extremely bad taste, promoting violence, awful jokes, or even the vocabulary and clothing of the prostitutes and guttersnipes on the street. This is why I think it is necessary to point out as often as we can that a culture is a spiritual climate where you live and manifest yourself in the creative area. Only this culture gives birth to remarkable art, gives us models we must follow, or idols to make our childhood beautiful.

**SDN:** From what we can see, the Romanians show a complete lack of the ability to absorb any of the teachings of the former order, as well as teachings of the present one.

**FATHER:** Not all of them, surely, But we seem to forget too easily that a culture does not form an individual or a generation, because it implies a live world collaboration when it comes to the process of thinking and exchanging values , in various directions of time and space. I am not an advocate for the idea of infusing foreign culture into our own, things which has happened in our country around the year 1948, and also through Eugen Lovinescu's synchronistic theory. Any uncontrolled imports constitute a danger; we can however assimilate what is closer to our ideas of life and art. We should mention in this context the opinion of Forster: "Only the things which make our rude behavior nobler and helps us love and refrain ourselves, are culture. All else are teachings, not culture". A man of culture is opened to nice, benevolent gestures.

**SON:** Do you think a man of culture is necessarily a walking-talking encyclopedia?

**FATHER:** Absolutely not! That person has enough knowledge, but not chaotic, they are organized in a thorough system. That is the only way that person will be useful to the society and himself.

**SON:** Is a man of culture free?

**FATHER:** It is normal that in places where there is culture, there is also freedom, because culture includes creation, and you cannot have creation without freedom. However, we don't always encounter creativity where there is freedom. Some researchers say that "a culture includes the sum of material and spiritual values of a people, linked through a complex system of existential issues, ranging from food to artistic creation".

**SON:** Then, in the western societies, to which we have aligned lately, and where there is no shortage of food and comfort is a given, there should be quite the cultural explosion! What do you think?

**FATHER:** Well, I don't think so...remember, neither freedom nor abundance can bring talent. Only true talent can develop and extend in these circumstances. A.D.Xenopol was right to conclude that "a first condition for culture is material wealth, which gives the man time to have ideas and even put him into the state of wanting to enlighten his mind". Culture is, indeed, a decoration for the happy, while for the unhappy it is a refuge. For us, the latter situation has been the truth for a long time. Sometimes the results were great.

**SON:** Is there such thing as pure culture?

**FATHER:** Nothing is pure, not even metal, or literary genres (as Calinescu had claimed). There is though "true culture", which is often paired by false culture. What could be the cause? The strong impact television and the internet have. When, for money or other interests, television promotes non-value, then it becomes a model, and the country's culture becomes its exact opposite, lack of culture. How many writers or men of culture do we see on T.V. and how many singers of "manele" or performers such as "Vacanta mare" instead? The percentage may be one to ninety-nine. That is the proportion. And then, how could we have pure culture? Lack of culture implies lack of education, which makes people have no respect for what belongs to others, work less and lose the conviction that work is the best means to have more. Where there is no morality, there is nothing left...

**SON:** Then what are all those who sing awfully, dance awkwardly, pretend to work, and waste paper with "thoughts" taken from "great" artists of the "manele"?

**FATHER:** Monsters without culture and education, individuals driven by interests such as sex, their stomach and richness. Have they ever heard (and if they had, what have they

understood?) Miron Costin's opinion on reading? He said that "during harsh times, there is no greater joy for someone than opening a book, because this way you will know what another person has thought. Then, when you close it, you find out what you think. Even if a book is a cold advisor, it is, nevertheless, a friend." And he said that a few centuries ago.

**SON:** There is something serious happening in the world: some can only accumulate, others only consume. Of what use would extreme richness be in the hands of an imbecile? We often see people with endless shelves of books in their personal libraries, but they are simply objects of decoration in the house.

**FATHER:** Books resemble people in some way. They have the same enemies: fire, humidity, beasts, time and their own content. We should always fear individuals who have read only few books, but mostly those who have read only one, as Thomas d'Aquino used to say, since they have acquired a single idea and that is the one they stand for. They become dangerous through their limits, obstinacy and fanaticism, dangerous even to themselves. This is why the family and the school should try to get young people to read, by forming a culture which can make them better, useful to their family and the country, and became more respectful for the individual and his achievements.

**SON:** Through culture only, man will create a mark of nobility, in order to identify a nation among others, especially now when we join Europe.

**FATHER:** True, culture will be our distinctive feature, more than our material accomplishments. Anyway, from what we have discussed in this chapter, it results that everything we call culture, beauty, good, truth and light, are born in great debates, struggles, and of course, pain. Then, as many have said it before, but with a Constantin Tassos accent, "a man of culture is a child of pain...at the root of each of his ideas there is a wound...a wound which became fruitfulness".

## KNOWLEDGE

**SON:** I remember certain episodes from childhood when you have tried to enrich our knowledge with maxims from the time of the Roman consulate. What a pity we didn't understand, or didn't want to understand those teachings! Only now can I comprehend the words of Socrates: "Knowledge and wisdom are exactly the same thing". Or others, of unknown authors, but interesting nonetheless: "The book is the torch for knowledge". Why are such maxim not taught in school? Why is the Romanian system filling the minds of the students with unnecessary notions?

**FATHER:** I find great joy in seeing my son, a representative of the modern generation having some ideas of my generation. Cicero would urge all people to "*Nosce te ipsum*" (Know yourself). I don't know if he got the idea from Thales of Millet, Chilon of Sparta or Solon of Athens! The important thing was the exceptional message, because without knowledge it is impossible to break free from the entire ancestral load we cannot move under. Among the most difficult but greatest events in our lives lies self-knowledge. Surely it is not an easy thing, but knowing yourself and the others is a form of complete knowledge. We often judge others without knowing them and it is a pity. Only by looking inside of us, and getting to know ourselves, will open the path to knowing others. Man's misfortune in general is that no one is ever going to bother extending the spirit toward the limits of knowledge; and this is because a capable man, full of qualities, often lacks one of the capital senses. Then all knowledge will flow from him like water, but soon we will not see it anymore. Then, the poor man will say "my science got me to a moment when I know how ignorant I am". By knowing his ignorance, sin or passion, can we deem that man "common"? I think we can already see him a few steps higher than those who admit nothing of their errors. Furthermore, we can even say that only he who admits his errors (sometimes even in public) will become great. He who will admit he is a fool, is actually devout, if not a wise man, because admitting one's own ignorance is the best sign of knowledge. And remember, we might think we know people from what they say, but true knowledge comes from seeing what they do.

**SON:** From what I have heard and the little I have lived, I can confirm what you have said. Thus, the subordinates (and I am among them) can be recognized by how they work, you know a friend in need, and a wife can really be known by the husband if, from rich and young transformed into old, poor and ill, and a child will prove his nature only after his parents, who had lovingly raised him, become old and helpless.

**FATHER:** Son, you have said things which stroke a sensitive chord of an old father, close to physical helplessness. By referring to the case you have mentioned, I could add some teachings about ingratitude, knowledge (of the self and the others): "If you won't let them die, they won't let you live"; "Feed the crow and he'll poke your eyes out"; "Warm a snake at your chest and he'll pay you back with venom"; "What is easiest forgotten? A good deed"; "Right doing, just as flowers, is nice when its fresh"; "Abundance forgets a mother and a father"; "When the mother feeds the child, she is good as the sky, but when the children feed parents, they count every day"; "we don't like to see those we owe everything to"; "Most people forget everything except being grateful"; "The haste some take in paying

back their debt is a form of ingratitude". Those who don't know such proverbs let feelings rule over such situation, when in fact the mind should decide.

**SON:** I have read, at some point in my teens, after your insistences, some of Plato's work. Then I was angry with you for telling me what to read, but today I am upset you haven't insisted even more in this direction. This is why I shall direct my son (when he will arrive) toward serious, exciting works. Even if at first he will not be too happy, later on he will surely thank me. Directing a child to the path of knowledge is the biggest gift you can give. Socrates and Theaitetos said that any opinion which has meaning, leads us to true knowledge.

**FATHER:** First of all, as any parent, I am happy my son has understood what my intention was, and the seed I had thrown years ago has now grown and bloomed.

Socrates and Theaitetos were right. An opinion without meaning will never transform into knowledge. Reality should be divided into what can be known and what cannot. I have always insisted that people should know themselves, because this can decide a man's destiny. By knowing yourself, you can work with your forces and talent. Only this way you will succeed in an area. Surely you will ask me how you can know yourself...

**SON:** Indeed, how?

**FATHER:** By asking the world. By knowing all your faults, you will not hurry to talk about those of others. By misinterpreting notions at the basis of knowledge, this handicap of humans is more dangerous than blindness. Thus, we can often hear some people bragging about reading a scientific work and understanding the problems discussed there. Actually, those scientific notions can only be comprehended after extensive research, and this is the only way to knowledge. By understanding you will know yourself and by knowing yourself you will value yourself. Is there any greater richness than this knowledge and value? This is the reason I think we should praise Bias, the philosopher, who, after leaving the city of Perene, and threatened by the personal army of Cyrus, had answered the question "where is your fortune?" by saying "omnia mea mecum porto" (All that is mine I carry with me). The question was asked by those who carried things from their houses. Thus Bias had demonstrated that the human greatness lies in wisdom and spiritual gain.

**SON:** How many people, especially these days recognize this?

**FATHER:** If you, a man who has not entered his thirties, have proved you can have a modern vision, but at the same time are able to admire the classical and ancient wisdom, I believe we must not be pessimistic. And because for a few years now we have stepped into the third millennium, I find extraordinary that we can still use the quotes of the ancient.

Vergilius used to talk about the single most important joy of the human being: "*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere*" (Happy is he who could know the cause of things). The poet seems to refer to today's people, trying to solve nature's mysteries, leaving all fear aside, despising the unpredictable or even death. Praise those modern Prometheus like figures, who, with courage and intensive study, managed to discover the great secrets of the microcosm and macrocosm.

## DEMOCRACY

**SON:** Father, I have heard from you and the others that you didn't live in democracy when you were young, and everything was a dictatorship, and filth.

**FATHER:** I must admit this, and I am compelled to say that not even today, when we enjoy certain liberties we did not have twenty years ago, we are living in a democracy, but not dictatorship either. Only that of money...

**SON:** I can see what happens around me and I think that granting democracy to people who are not ready to receive it leads to anarchy. I observe hooligans on stadiums, or the circus in the period of elections...

**FATHER:** We, those who knew that democracy meant the power given to the people (*demo*-people, *kratos*-power) and who wanted it so much, are amused but also terrified by what Churchill had said: "Democracy is the worst political system conceived by men, except for all the other systems which have been tried along the years". This, I think, answers your question.

And I think again of the period between 1944-1989, when uneducated and poor individuals were ruling the country as they pleased, with the aid of the Soviet Union. But in our country, where everything is original, there is today a strange democracy, where some have salaries of tens and hundreds of millions while others have nothing to eat. The distance between the rich and the poor is immense.

**SON:** I have not known the former regime; I can only see that neither of the leaders of Romania wishes to do something for our nation to be a prosperous one. On the contrary, my impression is that they climb on the shoulders of an already weakened and poor people, in order to go as high as possible politically and materially. Is this democracy?

**FATHER:** Surely this is not the way democracy should be. Its purpose is to offer the same chances to all. The constitution of every state has stipulations concerning democracy. Some are observed, others only sound good. We should think about political freedom,

equality of chances and of sovereignty. . But we do have unwritten laws through which democracy is maintained: moderation and calm. Do we want these qualities to become part of us in order to eliminate the beatings on the streets, sleeping in the parliament and - why not?- all the dubious activities going on local councils and town halls.

**SON:** Unfortunately it seems that internationally we are disregarded by some states or industrial concerns, which devise new treaties or contracts without taking into consideration the stipulations at the beginning of the Society of the Nations: all countries are equal in front of the law. We must accept insolence and lack of fair-play of the others...

**FATHER:** We keep returning to the ancient, from such a delicate position. They used to say that democracy had been invented with the precise purpose of joining freedom with ruling. It had been demonstrated that the "Roman Republic "had died at the same time as Greece, when the "Greek polis" had disappeared when Demosthenes died. These had been, actually, the last promoters of democracy in ancient times.

**SON:** What was the discourse promoted by these democrats? I only ask because the world is intoxicated by the empty words on the political scene today...

**FATHER:** You are right, my son, these last promoters of democracy have demonstrated that there is no other true political discourse except that.

**SON:** What about now?

**FATHER:** Now? Except for the democratic discourse there cannot be but words of praise. Before 1989, there was a so-called popular democracy in the country, where the proletariat and the peasants were said to lead the country: an immense deceit. What could possibly be known by the proletarian brought straight from the lathe after a few days of schooling from the party? No culture, no education, and he were supposed to lead; but how could he do that without any preparation? Thus lies began to be spread about industry being far better than it actually was, and agriculture the same. But all the cumulated lies made the system fall apart. The starvation of the people was hidden behind news about abundance, and "happiness" would fill all houses during the two hours of television broadcast every day, when news were all about the "great leader", Ceausescu. Or, the "father of the country" as he was called. That was the reason Romanians had one single wish: to become orphans (of both parents, surely).

**SON:** I believe poverty in democracy is preferable to the so called bliss next to despots, no matter how "illuminated".

**FATHER:** Do you really think so? Would you starve for the right to scold your leaders? To me, it seems more plausible to fight for democracy only when you have the chance of living

a better life. It is normal to desire freedom instead of slavery, but we should be careful not to obtain the freedom to starve.

**SON:** My opinion as a young individual is that democracy should always be chosen, since it has to do with the good of the people, and will teach people to think and set them free from a dark past like that which you have lived. Let us love democracy, which will eliminate the idea of culture as privilege and bring it among the masses, and make education a priority.

**FATHER:** If democracy doesn't have political virtue as fundament then what we have will be only a shadow of democracy. But in our case perhaps, since this shadow comes after a totalitarian regime, it may be at least superior to the past.

**SON:** But what if somewhere there is some sort of an overly democratic...democracy? How will it evolve?

**FATHER:** From what I know out of the reality of my youth years, this, almost without exception, becomes a tyranny.

**SON:** What was the birthplace of democracy? What about tyranny?

**FATHER:** Both appeared in Greece. Moreover, some citadels with a democratic society existed relatively close to ones which were tyrannical.

### ON THE DIASPORA AND THE EXILE...

**SON:** Father, I have searched in the dictionaries and haven't found the word "Diaspora".

**FATHER:** And you won't find it if you search again because dictionaries printed before 1990 define those who wouldn't come back from trips of studies abroad traitors, they were condemned, their houses would be confiscated, their children or their parents were ostracized...They wouldn't say they have joined the Diaspora.

**SON:** And still, what does it mean?

**FATHER:** I suppose the noun "Diaspora" may be defined as the sum of those citizens who, of their own wish, have remained outside the country's borders. We shall not include in this category those Romanians who live on the left of the river Prut, in Ukraine, Bulgaria, Hungary, etc, as well as the Romanians who had left after 1944, because they hadn't left the country willingly, they were forced to do so.

**SON:** I have read about some important figure or the other being forced to leave. May we consider equivalent the term "exile" with "Diaspora"?

**FATHER:** The exiled or cast-away person was forced to leave the country, for a limited period or perhaps his entire life, or the leave could be of one's own accord, in order to

avoid persecution. Ion Caraion gave a more interesting definition: "That which cannot be expressed in words is called exile".

**SON:** Who were the first Romanians to leave the country? Are there any records, or is it known from the folklore?

**FATHER:** The Romanians we know have left the country were those from Ardeal, in the XIXth and the beginning of the XXth century. They left, due to harsh financial situation, toward the land of Promise, the U.S.A., but also toward Australia, Canada, France, etc. Surely longing had brought most of them back home. With all they had earned. Those who couldn't or wouldn't come back have not forgotten they are Romanians and, because of that, they have formed communities with Romanian schools and churches.

**SON:** But what about when the communists came to power, Ceausescu and the rest?

**FATHER:** Unfortunately, immediately after the communists came to power, these uneducated and poor individuals started to threaten those who were wealthy and had important positions, started confiscating their houses, and eventually threw them into prison. As is normal, the continually threatened citizens ran away from the motherland, which could no longer defend them. Can you even imagine their situation? Actually, I believe you cannot comprehend the tragic situation of Romanians forced to live the place they were born, their entire life, family, earnings, some of them being renowned intellectuals. They had to do this suicide gesture, of throwing themselves into the unknown which often rejected them, or they would face death. They have all admitted, years after choosing this method of survival or to avoid communist pressures, that there, abroad, they were at least respected as human beings.

**SON:** I have only read after the Revolution that crossing the border by fraudulent means meant being shot.

**FATHER:** Indeed, like animals! Then there was the revenge those lowlifes, the communists, on the families of the people shot at the borders. But if people would have rather chosen death over living in Romania, we should stop and analyze the phenomenon. And all these had happened mainly between the years 1950-1980, quite close to our times. Let us pay attention, because many of those "leaders" are still in politics today.

**SON:** I only begin to realize how much terror was here, in Romania. We, the young, are quite oblivious of what had happened.

**FATHER:** This exact indifference should not exist...Why? In order to avoid that such atrocities happen again. Let us point out again that young (20-30 years of age) but also older people (40-50) had left their houses, their families, and memories of an entire life.

Shouldn't the more civilized countries ask themselves why? They didn't, or better said, they weren't interested. That is why an illiterate such our former dictator, got to be appreciated at Royal Courts as well as by Presidents and Prime Ministers of the western countries.

**SON:** But I can't really see many businessmen from the Diaspora, coming back with their money after 1989.

**FATHER:** You were little in 1990-1991, when the poor people came back. However they left again after seeing what was going on in Romania. Perhaps they had seen real democracy and it was nothing like what they saw here.

**SON:** Does that mean that the Diaspora and exile have remained the same?

**FATHER:** No, and this is the paradox. Instead of the number of people who leave to decrease, it has increased. Only for work (the so much humiliated "strawberry pickers") and others forever. We must ask: do people run away from good things?

**SON:** It is quite interesting that, wherever they go, Romanians lobby for their country.

**FATHER:** Indeed. But we cannot blame those who do not wish to praise the regime. We could say nothing to them, because there, as everywhere, Romanians are divided. Perhaps some had been sent with a certain purpose abroad! "*Divide et impera*" said the Latin. But who wants to divide and who wants to conquer? What do we do in the country, in order to attract them? How do we welcome them back to the motherland?

## ON EDUCATION

**DAUGHTER:** You have told me a few times a quote from Joubert which I couldn't stand when I was young. But today I am convinced that you and Joubert were right. Here are his words: "Children should befriend their colleagues, not their parents or teachers. These should only be their guides".

**FATHER:** I can't remember these words exactly, but I have taken them into consideration all my life. I have been deemed conservative, obsolete, a monster, surely, of the past, a follower of Macarenko, etc. And today, when I desire that mutual respect exist at school and at home, and the teacher should not be the student's equal, I consider that a certain distance should be kept between the students' and the teacher's desks, but this idea brings me critics, some even say I no longer am in touch with reality. But, is it a good thing that in cinemas, restaurants, culture halls and most places we can find young people cracking sunflower seeds, shouting or acting violent? Where will we be if schools or homes no longer value respect?

**DAUGHTER:** You are right. Romania after the Revolution talks little about education. We see or hear some politician bringing the topic to light, but only to gain popularity. We can also see one Minister of Education struggling for a normal budget, while another struggles to prevent teachers from having a decent salary, another wishes for a perfect system, etc. Sometimes we read in newspapers about some corrupt inspector, head teacher or teacher being exposed. And thus, we find out about the corruption being “eradicated” in the country, by accusing some teacher of not paying taxes for tutoring lessons...We also find out that when things became unbearable, teachers went on strike. Ridiculous budgets have always been allotted to paying teachers or to schools...Many seem to forget that education has not been given to children, but also one or two generations before...

**FATHER:** You are judging things the way you see them in reality. I will give some examples from our daily lives. Imagine you are walking in the street and have a group of youngsters in front of you. If you happen to hear what they are talking, you will be disgusted by the platitudes or vulgarity in their conversation. Another group approaches you, people of about 25-30, who are probably coming home from work, shopping or a bar. They jostle one another, spit, blow their noses wherever they want, maybe even on you. You, immersed in your thoughts and problems, try to avoid such degrading scenes, but are hit by someone riding a bicycle among the pedestrians. You hardly get to open your mouth when that person starts yelling at you: “Watch where you’re going, you idiot!”. You take the insult and pray for a Vlad the Impaler or think of China, where at some point, spitting on the street could get you arrested. Such displays are often seen in schools. This is the way some perceive democracy...

**DAUGHTER:** Are all people like that? Sounds like a Doomsday description...

**FATHER:** Fortunately we also have some earnest young people, in fact, this is what I call the real young people. The misfortune is, even if we hate to admit it, education leaves a lot to be desired in all the strata of society.

**DAUGHTER:** I have been to shows or conferences and it all turns revolting when young people who talk, yell at each other or simply make a spectacle of everything. I think there should be more done in schools! But doesn’t the family have any role in this?

**FATHER:** Actually we, the Romanians, always think we are great when it comes to education...We always have good results at the national or international Olympics, we have inventors, scientists... we have...So? Is this the Romanian education or educational system? These people who are exceptional in what they do, or geniuses, are only those granted a gift by God...But the peoples’ education is something else. This is where we should insist.

**DAUGHTER:** But what are politicians doing about it? Or their education (given how they sleep or speak in Parliament) is a guideline for the education of our entire people?

**FATHER:** Worse, when it comes to appreciating values, this doesn't happen. For a simple reason: "non-value" does not wish to vacate the position obtained during communism and we, willingly or not, we see so-called music shows with the famous "maneles", swearing and beatings on the streets, babblings and ridiculous programs on televisions, and serious problems in schools, hospitals, homes, etc. Is there nothing that can be done? We have so much to say...

## JUSTICE

**DAUGHTER:** According to some, the first injustice we have suffered was being born, while others say it is a great act of justice since not many get that chance. Can we agree or not with this?

**FATHER:** God has given us life, and these seems to me more than justice, it seems to be a real favor...It is certain that justice brings comfort, joy, and overwhelms the people. Scum of any kind, worthless people fear justice or try to diminish it. But when we receive it, justice rids us of bad habits, makes us be more restrained, defends our sincerity or naivety, and our good deeds are defended and rewarded. There where justice rules, it is quiet and peace, it is heaven on earth.

**DAUGHTER:** Surely, justice is not a being, but if we were to describe it, how would we do it?

**FATHER:** Justice should be accompanied by a royal scepter and crown. But we should mention an important "flaw", lack of vision. Why? Because never, when one takes a decision, should there be seen a friend or foe, rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, smart or stupid.

**DAUGHTER:** But there is something missing, the "portrait" is not complete.

**FATHER:** Indeed, the scales should not incline in favor of either parts, regardless of feelings or influences. We are talking here about an ideal situation, which, actually, is very difficult to encounter.

**DAUGHTER:** I think the condition is to believe such ideal situation can exist in reality. Anyway, I wouldn't like meeting someone who thinks is always right.

**FATHER:** What else is left to do but try to do justice in order to encourage it as much as we can? If we don't do it, how can we ask that others do it? You must give before you receive.

**DAUGHTER:** What is your opinion on "Do ut des?" (I will give you so that you give me)

**FATHER:** He who uses this motto, I perceive as being an unfair man, who puts his interests above those of others. Be fair to the unfair? If I were younger, I would probably burst with conviction: let us be unjust to the unjust! But at my age I say let us be fair even to the unfair people. I must tell you, I have never seen anyone having troubles after too much justice or kindness.

**DAUGHTER:** We must wonder, nowadays, a person who wishes to make a fortune at any cost, can that person be just?

**FATHER:** I can't see how that can be possible, because those who fight for justice are never wealthy in the material sense. But isn't the good you have done or the tears in the eyes of those who have just received justice, worth more than any fortune on earth? The light of your good deeds will shine over the darkness imposed by those who oppress us, choke us with taxes. If only we lived in a country where justice ruled...

**DAUGHTER:** But -it appears- not even the way things were given from heavens have necessarily been entirely just. How else can we explain wrongdoings, murders, robberies in this world? I think gods created "justice" with the purpose of discovering who are the virtuous among us. And then, should we be thankful to them for making this such a manifold world, where ugliness meets beauty, justice meets injustice, the genius with the idiot, etc?

**FATHER:** Thus, in an imperfect world, some perfect couples have been born: Fools with fools, fair with fair, crooked with crooked, etc. This is the way truly great people have come into being: those who have been born just and follow this path until the end of their lives. But I have been shocked, in my experience with people, by the relationship with religious people. I hope I'm wrong, but I haven't observed extraordinary kindness in these people. I have remembered that religiosity does not necessarily imply kindness. Thus I have come to a conclusion I don't really like: a non-believer carrying out justice can be better than a dictator-believer .

**DAUGHTER:** But what if one of us wants absolute justice , especially in an unfair world? What can we do?

**FATHER:** If you, by being sincere or doing the right thing, you tell a man suffering from a terrible disease he will die soon, what have you accomplished? Only an even more rapid death of that man. Is that a good thing? But if we had encouraged the man and giving him hope that through a strict diet he can be cured -and this way the man would live for one more year, or month, or week...Wouldn't that be extraordinary? How did we do it? A lie in such circumstances does seem better than an absolute truth.

**DAUGHTER:** I like the way you think even more since after the year 2000, in the Romanian society we may observe changes in behavior, fashion, education, medicine, history and everything else. Everything has changed for the worse compared to the period between 1930-1940, when, in spite being a royal and legionary dictatorship, in spite the strikes, man had honor, faith, etc. What is left of that? Politicians, but not only them, promise plenty of things, but it only applies to them and their families, who become millionaires overnight, lies protrude every environment, children no longer have respect for parents or teachers, people prefer to live together rather than marry, sexual perversions have replaced natural relations, history books no longer tell about great leaders but instead, they present announcers from the television. Soon we will probably read about singers of "manele", bungee-jumping winners of competitions such as "Ciao, Darwin!", etc. I wonder where the justice is, or where the values are. Now, when actors, composers, teachers and writers have nothing to eat and no means to pay taxes or rent! Surely this inversion of values will one day result in disorder, hate and who knows what other misfortunes. I insist upon this issue knowing that a society based on injustice, on people who had become too important overnight cannot resist.

**DAUGHTER:** Well, then where is justice?

**FATHER:** I might be wrong, but I believe that the notion of justice itself suffers changes after a while. But I cannot understand why the individuals who are becoming richer, happier, more powerful, don't try to be more just. I don't trust completely in the maxim: "*Fiat justitia, pereat mundus*" (Let there be justice till the end of the world!), but I wouldn't like to live in a completely unjust world. It is said that the one who has patience and justice will get to live the times he deserves, perhaps. But modern people seem to have lost patience and only want to live in the present, and some do so honorably at least.

**DAUGHTER:** What is the justice of the haughty? They are so many...

**FATHER:** The haughty cannot stand justice brought to the inferior people, failing to understand that these are the ones who will defeat them in the end. But this end takes such a long time to arrive, and I say this from the point of view of those who have been wronged.

**DAUGHTER:** But what if we'd rather bear injustice than be unjust?

**FATHER:** I simply cannot accept such an idea. Only saints are capable of observing such serious issues. I, as a simple dweller of this earth I strongly believe in all people's duty to fight for justice, at any cost...

## HERO, HEROISM

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Grandfather, nowadays I see in the parliament or the government some individuals who shout their love for the country and the limitless heroism they have had ever since they were born and have practiced ever since. Up until we have more than enough. Are these corrupted and boastful people our heroes and patriots?

**GRANDFATHER:** You surely are not as childish as to believe that! Duty or love for one's country urges us to do great deeds, which are consumed without glitter or immediate satisfaction. This would be the true heroism, silent, unknown by most, not shouted from the top of the lungs, on radio or television, enough to make you sick. Eminescu used to say that sacred things cannot be told in just any place at any time.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** In fact, how could we define a hero?

**GRANDFATHER:** He is no braver than the common soldier, but keeps his courage for a long time. During heroic eras, when the existence of the citizens was endangered, is when characters could be truly integer, the spirit of sacrifice dominated and nobody feared death. Then existence and the survival of the village were everybody's concerns. These circumstances produce three forms of manifesting truth: the martyr, the hero and the wise man.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** And still, the brave, the hero...

**GRANDFATHER:** True, it is said a brave hero is worth one thousand cowards, but a thousand cowards do not add up to the worth of a brave man. Actually, a hero is a person who has done his duty and prepared, through his own example, others who will perhaps become heroes at one point.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Can we compel someone to be a hero?

**GRANDFATHER:** In a degraded society, looking for a hero is like ordering an eagle locked in the basement to fly two thousand meters into the air. Paradoxically, after a battle or a war, those who had planned to become heroes meet those who became heroes without even thinking about it.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Don't tell me the latter are the proudest!

**GRANDFATHER:** Surely those who lack any merits are the ones who want to stand out, though wanting to be a hero and actually being one is quite different. When I think about these people, but also about the ones who are moderate and efficient, I remember some sayings: "He's so brave, he could cut a pie in half", "Fear breeds more heroes than

courage". "If the horse dies, the stable remains, if a hero dies, a deed remains" or "You can be a hero without ruining the earth".

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** What is the state of this hero? Is he happy? Sad?

**GRANDFATHER:** I would compare him with a genius, because they are quite similar. They are both silent types. But when they do speak, their word has weight. This rare being, the hero, dedicates himself to a deed, an action, which surpasses in importance any personal interest.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But who urges him to do good deeds?

**GRANDFATHER:** His own conscience gives him the power to win over his human nature, in order to promote ideal values, through his actions.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** But is this hero spotless?

**GRANDFATHER:** The hero is a hero in every action of his, but more so inside his heart. If he didn't think he could become one, he wouldn't become a hero. In a world where everyone is asleep, a hero is awake, and, as a ships' captain watches over in loneliness, while the rest of the crew sleeps or haves fun.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Still, you cannot be a hero, anytime, anywhere. I, for one, do not think our country can offer the premises for the formation of such hero.

**GRANDFATHER:** You are right! Usually, there are chances for heroes during, great movements of the masses, confronting natural disasters, etc. Though his reputation as a hero is usually related to misfortune, but no hero will ever disseminate hunger or bring death. He with rather face it for the sake of the community.

A true brave man will accomplish without witnesses what he would accomplish in front of the whole world. Thus, heroism is equated with a state of grace, a sign that egocentrism has been destructed, animal nature was overcome. After all, heroism is simply the art of serving by sacrifice.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** What can we understand from this? That heroism is not standardized and it is a sum of different historical visions?

**GRANDFATHER:** Exactly. The lives of heroic people are the best ethics and humanity lessons God has ever given to us.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Unfortunately, history offers few such examples, and the rest of us stand in disbelief. It no longer seems possible.

**GRANDFATHER:** It is so, unfortunately. But, although I believe in heroes, I cannot help observing that when a hero from a book has no explanation historically or no clear time when he could have appeared, he is nothing but a ghost. Both the hero and heroism have a

certain moment when they appear. Thus their nature is fleeting. When the great battles are over, only the folklore still holds songs of praise, transforming the hero and his deeds into a myth. Which is quite an accomplishment, though Byron says otherwise: "Pride, beware how the strong one remained but a song".

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Thus, history and literature perpetuate the image of the hero and heroic times...

**GRANDFATHER:** This explains the absence, in some regions of the earth, of monuments of the heroes. There aren't any because there is no need for them: heroes are alive through the songs, dances and stories of the peoples.

## IS VIRTUE POSSIBLE?

**DAUGHTER:** Jean Jacques Rousseau has told us many times "Who doesn't hate vice enough, doesn't love virtue enough". Can we agree with him?

**FATHER:** During his time-conditioned existence, man should ask himself: what is, and is virtue possible?

**DAUGHTER:** It seems correct to mention Samuel Butler's teachings: "In order to be of any use, virtue, like gold, should have a common metal, a more durable one, as an alloy".

**FATHER:** Quotes have their purpose, when they are not too many. Butler's phrase holds a great truth to it, because it is a fact that a virtuous person needs great strength to survive in this world of vicious and corrupted people. The least flaw in such a man is immediately evident.

**DAUGHTER:** Usually, faulty people try to mask their vice. And this type of specimens, as Sartre shows, have more chances to succeed in life, especially since it is easier to win over people by showing you are flawed.

**FATHER:** As you can see, governments and politicians illustrate this bizarre situation. For a reason all the more bizarre: a man of virtue will be avoided, if not destroyed by a corrupted and awkward environment. Thus we must ask ourselves: how many of those in important positions would accept near them a man of character, which, in everything he does surpasses his superiors?

**DAUGHTER:** Haven't you noticed that, as is the case with clothes, cars or certain politics, virtue and vices also follow a trend?

**FATHER:** They do follow a trend, it is true, but we seem to be unable to get out of it. We have been waiting for some time the return of the times of virtue. Ours is a religious people, hard-working, and if it has proper leaders, it can reach a state of grace, VIRTUE.

**DAUGHTER:** Virtue is often reproached with any apparent deviation, while for some vices we find strangely, plenty of indulgence.

**FATHER:** The man of virtue, this "rara avis" of our days is approached with distrust. If he is not thought to be an eccentric, he will surely be mistaken for a deprived man in disguise. More often than it should, though, virtue taken to the extreme can bring pain and suffering. This is why I think moderation in everything should be recommended. It is necessary that through virtue, men ought to stop fighting each other and try to win over themselves. Virtue is not something we are born with; you get it like a badge after a hard struggle with yourself and with life.

**DAUGHTER:** From what I have read and lived, I have noticed people say, like an excuse for the mistakes made when they were young, that there will be plenty of time when they are old to strengthen their lives.

**FATHER:** Dear daughter, you are so right! People forget that "infamies of today discredit the virtues of tomorrow"! I always enjoy reading thoughts of Marguerite Yourcenar. If youth destroys our common sense, moderation, kindness, selfishness and belief in God, what is there left of our lives? Will there be many who will remember us after we die? Or, if we have not been men of virtue, at least we should have promoted and encouraged virtue. These are thoughts for the soul and we should ponder upon them ever since our teens. You, young people, have the terrible mission of insisting on the topics we have discussed here. This is the only way the new generation will manage to remain close to the habits, traditions and virtues of our nation.

## **FANATICISM, TERRORISM**

**SON:** "The biggest enemies have had less victims than fanaticism", said Voltaire. And I would add that fanaticism turns into terrorism very fast. What do you think about the misfortunes we see, or watch helplessly?

**FATHER:** Indeed, in the last ten years, terrorism and fanaticism cause havoc in the world. Thus, a great number of innocent people are tortured or killed due to religious, economical, ethnical, etc. reasons in Algeria, France, Ireland, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, U.S.A., etc.

**SON:** Malraux had said "the XXIst century will be religious or it won't be at all" and there are some serious implications of this. Michael Faucoult adds: "When following the path to God, man is more than ever exposed to madness."

**FATHER:** I'm sure Facoult was talking about those benevolent people, so rare, which love "what is beyond the world". But let us be cautious! We cannot mistake these exceptional beings for pathological cases. These incurably ill people turn religion into a bat, which should strike those who do not understand it or follow another way to God. This way the terror starts and we know it has made so many victims in Yugoslavia, where thousands were killed, some even buried alive, only for choosing Allah or Buddha over God. This is the reason for conflicts, revenge, trials and many deaths. The fanaticism seeks to align all to what he believes (or doesn't), or else he threatens us with a Superior Being, uses it like a scarecrow.

**SON:** Even if we do not believe this crazy person, something happens and shakes something in the perception of God as kind and forgiving. Each sacred teaching or chapter of the Bible is interpreted by ear, and whoever fails to accept the version of the fanatics will attract upon him their wrath. The man who had made the mistake of not obeying is terrorized, or his family is, all in the name of a certain divine force. Of course mixing the divine into this is surely blasphemy.

**FATHER:** Even more unbelievable: some of these fanatics or terrorists think they bear inside a Holy Spirit, while others have already contacted God , who has already descended on Earth and incarnated in people known only by them. These are the Gods priests have no access to. Even worse, these people demand complete obedience and their orders can be related to money, family, etc. Members of such group or sect are usually quite different from the rest of us. They are either not married, divorced or widowers, because obligations toward a family could not be completed. I find such individuals to be completely mad.. , not intoxicated with the belief in God, as they claim.

**SON:** Perhaps you give a special meaning to the events because of your personal involvement and you have made a subjective analysis of the deeds of those you know, former friends, or even members of the family!

**FATHER:** You should be a better judge of these situations, dramatic at least, of my life, or better said, our lives, because to some extent you have also been affected. Maybe I have erred often, but I have always thought that by losing sleep or splitting hairs, or by permanently seeking harmony I could find a way to get fanatics out of my mind and soul. I have distanced myself from people who, lacking tolerance or human feelings, would try,

successfully or not, to destroy every human joy, or the normal wish of everybody to live and work normally, threaten marriages, love and the future of the children. I have asked myself if distancing from them was good, or them getting too close to those ideas was bad. Indeed, they had no chances of being the representatives of benevolent forces. The erroneous interpretation of sacred texts led, eventually to a dangerous indifference toward families or the world which exists in fear .

**SON:** Thus the huge belief of these people has scared you?

**FATHER:** Not belief, or, better said, not such an approach to faith. We are both aware that in man, everything should be moderated (*est modus in rebus*) and this is the reason we, common mortals will never survive next to extremely devout believers, if not fanatics, unless there is an accord between belief and their deeds or ours. We must attempt to reach a superior level of moral and love of god, but also for the love of fellow men, of the ill or helpless.

**SON:** Are the devout believers, *volens nolens*, fanatics in your opinion?

**FATHER:** If they see in others only enemies and not potential believers, then I deem them fanatics. Their fasting and prayers are in vain. Hatred for men, in general makes their religious gestures worthless, because "where there is no love, there is nothing..."

## THE WINDBAG

**FATHER:** Anton Pann, whom I have admired and I still admire, used to have a name for today's demagogue: windbag. He defined him in verse: "The man who is a chatterbox/Sounds like a carriage with an ox". We have quite a simple definition for such a man: someone who chatters a lot without really saying a thing.

**SON:** All right, I agree with you, father; however, ancient times have a completely different, even positive image for the demagogue to present: *demas* (people) and *agagos* (he who leads). For a real people, these demagogues would yield memorable discourses, arousing admiration, adoration, even ecstasy. What happened then and what do we see now?

**FATHER:** Today as well we see and hear discourses, but unfortunately we may describe these as awkward and nauseating. How can you stand to hear such a person, when your first instinct is to throw something at him, or just look away disgusted, and you can only compare him with a broken or a scratched record from grandmother's gramophone. Do you know what is even more revolting? These individuals do have success, of course, among

those like them who have cheated their way to favorable positions, deceiving those who have elected them and their superiors.

**SON:** Though young, I do enjoy turning toward my forerunners. I know this brings you joy, father, since my thoughts are similar to those you had tens of years ago, and this is exactly the reason I am sharing them. Maiorescu used to divide speakers into three categories: orators, rhetors and chatterers. If I were to bring this information to colleagues from my generation, I know for certain many would not be able to define the term "rhetor". I couldn't say they are to blame...more so are their parents. I did like Maiorescu, though today some pelt him with stones, claiming he had "helped" Eminescu die. What a horrendous aberration! Well, the great critic, sick of so-called speakers, would comment: "we pay attention to the orators, smile at rhetors and laugh at chatterers". He was also accusing these chatterers that the mere sound of their own voices triggers some immense pleasure, intoxication with words. He was certain, and I believe him, that from all things that can intoxicate us, this is the most dangerous and is a privilege of man only.

**FATHER:** But doesn't our Parliament today reveal to you such people, drunken on their own words, or even real drunks, who have sold their minds and ideas to the pleasures governed by Bacchus? These members of the Parliament, as many other dignitaries will bring us proof that they can easily find motivation and promises. But the words remain empty, without actual facts.

**SON:** Our "esteemed" demagogues are filled with hatred, envy, wickedness and conceit and that political babble which completes their stupidity. These trigger disgust and boredom from the part of the well-advised listener.

**FATHER:** Unfortunately for us, they are deceiving the ignorant, incapable or indifferent, and this way they are encouraged to be in charge of education or health in Ministries, municipal councils, etc. How are they elected, you wonder? With no education in the certain fields, they receive their jobs by pulling rabbits out of hats and ribbons out their noses, completing the show with cries and barks, in order to impress the honorable audience.

**SON:** I wonder if they apply the same level of sincerity to their fellow politicians as they do to their voters.

**FATHER:** At a certain point you will observe that these toad-eaters and loud-mouths would always trade the party which propelled them onto the political scene for a more powerful party which could ensure a better position in the future. Toad-eating, betrayal, false oaths? A simple matter of political gymnastics. He who throws the bigger bone will be

enthusiastically served; until there's nothing left of the bone. Then, again the roads lead to other privileged ones.

**SON:** "*Ad augusta, per angustā*"! (Toward great roads, using narrow paths). How can we explain that children, or teenagers nowadays fail to understand how much these aphorisms have tormented me in my childhood, and now, when I can finally grasp their meaning, I hold them very dear? Why don't you do the same with your students?

**FATHER:** But I do so, although our educational system is too "leafy" and doesn't even allow sufficient time for the requirements of the curriculum. Anyway, returning to the subject of demagogues, to the windbags, who don't appear so menacing anymore lacking the genius needed for the manipulation of thousands. Their repertoire remains limited to the well known swearing and indecent slogans in the Parliament, vulgarities, nepotism in public institutions and even beatings with everything that comes to hand, in the privacy of the city halls. Therefore, in the end, even the most fanatic supporter of the demagogues and windbags becomes saturated with the wretchedness of their words and deeds, and abandon them without regrets. Is there the case to feel sorry for them? Certainly not, because no matter how the wheels of politics turn, they will be all right.

## BEAUTY

**DAUGHTER:** I have often heard that "the beautiful get the dowdy married". I can't really grasp the meaning...

**FATHER:** You should know what Keats has to say about women, better said, about their beauty: "beauty is eternal joy". I do agree, however not completely. Thinking of the dowdy, I have read that Babylonians would buy, in special markets, the most beautiful women to make them wives. Some men would pay high prices for such a girl. In the same market there were also ugly women, and poor men. The ugly women had to pay in order to get married. As you know, it never rains, but it pours, the dowdy were also poor. What then? The unimaginable happened: the merchants would pay from the money taken after selling the beautiful, in order to find husbands for the dowdy.

**DAUGHTER:** A strange story, but it seems to hold some logic. Beauties among the ugly? Quite a spectacle! I believe God is the designer of the world we live in. Why did he give us beauty and ugliness to build it?

**FATHER:** Imagine all the churches in Europe looking like Notre Dame or Sacre-Coeur, and all statues like Venus! Would that be interesting or disturbing?

**DAUGHTER:** Disturbing and monotonous. But by no means shall I accept Aristotle's idea that gods alone have the right to beauty. However Theophrastus view, who considered beauty a "mute deception", seems more appropriate for us.

**FATHER:** But when Socrates compares it to "a very short reign" and Plato sees it as the superiority given by nature, after a lifetime's experience, I have said this myself and these views are in full accordance with reality.

**DAUGHTER:** Couldn't we live without beauty?

**FATHER:** I am aware, generally speaking, of the struggle, the effort and expenses necessary to attain or impose beauty. I would say this is not real beauty but a deceiving one, because physical beauty, this perfect harmony of all the parts of the body seen as a whole, cannot be bought, you are born with it. Being given this by God, the beautiful woman only needs to show herself in order to win. It's worth more than any fortune and unfortunately, in most cases, more than talent.

**DAUGHTER:** But who is there to decide who truly deserves the "beautiful" label? Who is to say if it is rightfully awarded?

**FATHER:** One can never be certain. Voltaire said of Shakespeare that he was ugly, a drunk and a brute, while at the same time all the English saw him as a god. On who or what does this truth depend? Place, time, education and interest are in my opinion, the main factors in the classification of this esthetic category: beauty. When time is the factor, I must point out what the conditions for beauty were in the Middle Ages: "a symmetric white face, prominent breasts, small waist". Thus, only the upper part of the body is appreciated. Later, in the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, the rest of the body started to be integrated in the idea of beauty, insisting on sensuality, potency etc. Around the year 1930 the portly women, with stout bodies were no longer in fashion. Now the tall, athletic, the hoyden woman appears onto the scene. The cinema will then completely change the ideal of beauty. Women bring their self-esteem up-to-date, and will adopt a modern attitude toward men, and especially, love. Thus, the beauty of the world becomes embodied by the great movie stars. But we can be certain that the ones who have designed and written this history of beauty are the men.

**DAUGHTER:** Is there or should there be any type of relation between beauty and kindness or between faith, kindness and beauty?

**FATHER:** I can't say there isn't any, for fear you might think I am superficial. Between faith and kindness, I personally have found no connection. Moreover, physical beauty has little to do with kindness, but a good heart brings kindness or even beauty, not to mention the harmony that blooms around a kind human being.

**DAUGHTER:** I, myself, after being married for years now, I still cannot say for certain: is it or should the marriage to a diva or a very handsome man be difficult?

**FATHER:** I am amazed you have no answer to that question yet...

**DAUGHTER:** I have an answer, but I will appreciate other points of view too!

**FATHER:** It is said, although we don't really take this into account, that it is not a woman's beauty the thing to guarantee marital bliss, but a woman's virtues. As do the men's. Nowadays, when electronics and the internet invaded our homes, is there anymore such thing as virtue? This could be the answer from some "clever" person. I'm afraid that over thirty per cent of young people would have for me. I can only hope I am wrong, otherwise what will happen to our feelings, souls and experiences? I have often heard beauty without kindness is like spoilt wine and we admire a kind woman because her beauty is her kindness, and thus becomes more attractive...

**DAUGHTER:** Following the same logic, I have one question: what is left of beauty, without kindness?

**FATHER:** The answer is NOTHING, or, at most, a house without doors, or a ship without sails or wind...

**DAUGHTER:** Then who should we, men and women, expect to meet or greet into our houses?

**FATHER:** Should being badly or well received somewhere surprise us in any way? Especially since we are aware that nice words, polite greetings and flowers have such a pleasant effect on those around us? Never a man in a bad mood will seem handsome. When a smile makes a face more beautiful, it is good, when it disfigures it, it is bad. "The face may make a statue beautiful, but actions do that to a person", said a wise man. Moderation in all man-made things is one of the most beautiful characteristics.

**DAUGHTER:** In my childhood, I used to get upset over great "truths", as "the clothes make the man, and the carpet makes a home". As far as I know, this is not always the case. Even if at some points this proves true, but the results are not lasting.

**FATHER:** Worse, the saying can prove to be completely false. Have you never seen individuals beautifully clothed, but in fact, the person was a mere holder of those clothes? Some mindless, soul-less mannequins... The donkey's answer fits in this situation: "Who are your parents? -My uncle is the king's horse!" The same thing with a common stone: "I am related to the priceless gems...". Avoiding normal answers in order to cover ugliness, and then present it as beauty: nothing genuine, thus making ugliness even more visible.

**DAUGHTER:** But what if someone (man or woman) will use their appearance to juggle the lives of the others? This way, a handsome man or gorgeous woman will seduce through

their flightiness, plenty of admirers. But what happens to the partners of these irresponsible people?

**FATHER:** Things will not end well, obviously. The partners of those frivolous individuals will become distant and indifferent and their marriage will turn into torture in situations where wisdom or moderation lack, or where the spouses will constantly seek confrontations and neither of them will approach the problem with at least a bit of moderation... Therefore, who do we choose? The beautiful? The wise? The kind? Crucial questions for us, poor mortals. Still, after hearing advice from those with greater experience, it would appear that man finds more often beauty in patience, knowledge, wisdom. So even the eyes of an ugly old sage we may find a light, which makes him and everything around him beautiful. Could this be enough of an answer for you?

### **THE FUNCTION: GRATIFICATION OR CURSE?**

**DAUGHTER:** Is it possible that in spite all misfortunes, joys and high positions a person occupies, for the person to remain human?

**FATHER:** Misfortunes are bound to wake you up, great joys to daze you, and functions to overwhelm you. As ancient times showed, everyone will go through the mistakes and exceptional acts that are inherently human. Thus, how can we tell a good man from a bad one?

**DAUGHTER:** I could say that the percentage is important here. There are positive qualities in you, given by genetics and education, and more than fifty per cent, which makes you good for the society. If more than fifty per cent are negative qualities, then you are surely seen as bad, if not evil.

**FATHER:** Let's imagine that a bad or stupid man (though nothing can be entirely so) becomes a leader. During all the years I have worked, I have had a perpetual fear whenever a colleague or an acquaintance became a superior; no matter how small, the person in charge of something, be it a factory, a building, a school, an army, etc. Thus an idiot or bad man who has reached some important position changes their behavior overnight. Everything resumes to one word: I. I have done, I...He will only create advantages for himself. Meetings led by this individual would last 3-4 hours without anything clear being said. Due to the tension created by this individual, subordinates began having headaches, stomach aches, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** The man simply mistook function for high reputation. Even if he didn't give you orders, his instinct told him to change his behavior.

**FATHER:** What you say reminds me of the story wit he German at a party or reunion. When you give him a handgun though, and refuse to obey his order, he shoots you. At least, this is how I've heard happened in the War. Thus, any man in charge, if he lacks character, nor education or culture, will think himself entitled to use his authority as a riffle or a bat against his subordinates. Friends have advised him to be wise and trust in God. Man, as he has been told, must also give, not only receive.

**DAUGHTER:** Well, it should be clear to him that function doesn't last forever...

**FATHER:** Not the case! The idiot who has been put in charge by some party or by a relative will think he can last forever. Nothing is learned from history. All those who have become leaders can be under the impression that the world ends with them. I have never envied these individuals, I have even thought they deserve our pity for something they cannot see but we can.

**DAUGHTER:** On the outside it is visible, but inside the system it is not.

**FATHER:** Indeed. Any function makes somebody dependent on something. When those persons are insecure professionally, cannot rely on anything, are not sure of themselves. They will never even dare go against a superior. They will praise any idiocy their bosses, or, better said, their masters would say.

**DAUGHTER:** What you say scare me and surely I wouldn't want a leading position if it is going to cost me that much.

**FATHER:** But none of the above could happen to a person mastering his skills. That person has nothing to defend; he is protected by the truth and his work. Such people, educated and good specialists, will change the atmosphere in their work environment when they reach a leading position. Subordinates do not feel like (and actually are not) subordinates. Some people in charge are spreading around them only warmth, kindness, harmony, security, holiness. Surely this type of people rarely accepts to assume leading positions in politics or culture. But when they do, we can feel some special vibrations in our souls.

**DAUGHTER:** In such cases I believe the divine forces are involved in the state of grace induced by benevolent persons, be them rich or common people.

**FATHER:** If we think about this a little, such people are leaders even if they are not officially so. They are listened to, and people follow their advice. But why? Because what they do is never out of interest, hate, wickedness, envy or cowardice.

**DAUGHTER:** I've read somewhere that Einstein always had peace and harmony around them..

**FATHER:** These beings emit ALPHA waves, according to scientific experiments. Imagine a person emitting ALPHA waves becoming the head of an institution, how would that be?

**DAUGHTER:** True anarchy...

**FATHER:** Not at all! All things would be regulated by respect, study, all persons aware of their roles, carrying out their duties without being ordered, without swearing or sanctions. It has been discovered that these ALPHA waves can be controlled and stimulated, through practice. And then our duties should be carried out without conflicts. Only when more of us will find physical and moral balance through contact with benefic persons and only in these situations will these human flaws disappear: wickedness, hate, stupidity, sloth, etc.

## GLORY

**DAUGHTER:** I, as a simple citizen, have always wondered how do we look for or keep glory.

**FATHER:** Heraclitus, from times long gone, warns us that above everything eternal glory is preferred though many (what could be the percentage? 70-80 %?) prefer immediate satisfaction and not more. How do we find and keep glory? I know that a small battle doesn't grant eternal glory, and neither easily obtained wealth nor glory last, but even wise men part from it with difficulty. Not to mention that glory usually comes very late, or even to your ashes.

**DAUGHTER:** Should we envy the glorious?

**FATHER:** Even if we don't admit, it is natural, and not a fault, to hope for, if not glory, at least an acknowledgement of what we are and what we have accomplished.

**DAUGHTER:** But what is glory, after all? Something we deserve or luck?

**FATHER:** I do believe it is a divine gift and not a consequence of our merits, in most cases. But here is another question which torments us: how durable is glory? How much do we know of those who rules over Rome, Athens, and the world? Close to nothing. And how many murders the glory of some has cost! Could they happen to know then that their glory would be so fleeting? Even if they had been aware that glory is linked to death, the feeling of glory made them love it and obtain it even for a price such as the freedom of the subdued.

**DAUGHTER:** *Vae victis!* (Woe to the vanquished!) How much truth and pain expressed through this quote!

**FATHER:** From what we have said, we should emphasize that the crown of laurels of the victors could not bring, as you have said, bliss to the vanquished, in any field, obviously. The field which I like, literature, has a definition of glory, which seems quite interesting: "The interior of the Temple (literary Glory) is inhabited by the dead, which during life were not in it, or the living, which, once they die, are thrown out. However the glory of those who died in battle is just as fragile: a simple link in a rusty chain, hanging on the neglected grave of the fighter, an inscription which faded with time and some guide is trying to read for a visitor wandering around the cemetery.

**DAUGHTER:** From what you have said, glory is more of a misfortune for people. However I have never seen anyone giving it up. Quite the contrary, they used all types of methods to achieve it.

**FATHER:** True, glory is often measured according to the means used to attain it. And then, I don't think we should envy the glorious because we can predict the ending. When Livius announced us that "he who despises glory will gain the real one", we remembered the authors which become famous through the works which show contempt for glory. I must say that sacrificing health, time, friends, family, children or even life will not ensure glory, because glory is pre-destined.

**DAUGHTER:** Is glory perpetual unhappiness? Or is it a deceiving unhappiness?

**FATHER:** Let us not hypocrites, though. It is a great joy, if not happiness. However when they find themselves at the peak, people should pay attention to the hatred of those who are down, the petrified faces and the frozen rocks around them.

**DAUGHTER:** This mysterious glory seems to have a bittersweet poison, but poison nonetheless.

**FATHER:** Its content is rather complex. On a first analysis, we find the main ingredients, such as: reputation, respect, into which we stir admiration and let them blend. With a deeper analysis, a darker one, dust and nothingness surface, destroying the original state of grace. This second component is, unfortunately, dominant. The destructive effect is rapid and total. This "short whisper in the eternal silence", glory, much like foolishness, avoids or hides death without defeating it, unfortunately. But hasn't Achilles' glory surpassed death?

**DAUGHTER:** However, literary glory seems different, and I tend to place it above the others, especially in durability...

**FATHER:** We reach a topic I know more about. I have been drawn to this even before I started publishing novels, short stories, etc. I could say, since I have started reading, and that is when I realized I also wanted to write. What I have observed since appealed to me,

but also bothered me: some have attained glory by writing well, others by not writing at all; and a more discouraging fact: the most famous writer is the one whose work is not extensively read. We only live with the permanent mentioning of his name in the media, and that is why we learn who that person is. It is obvious though that this earth is a table where all of us want to write our names.

**DAUGHTER:** But what if the table is full of names?

**FATHER:** This is the problem. We erase other names in order to write our own. I can imagine the simple scene of some people's eternal life and the others' frailty. Let us not mistake honor for glory, though! They are twins, but as was the case with Castor and Pollux, one was immortal as glory, at and the other mortal like honor. Usually glory is gained through great pains, if it is not destined. I insist upon this, knowing, as I have said before, that we have nothing and lose nothing without divine will.

**DAUGHTER:** I have always been impressed by Balzac, due mostly to his immense effort in creating his works. He used to say: "Oh, glory, sad commodity! Costs too much and does not last!"

**FATHER:** How right he was, and he had known fame! But I for one have enjoyed, at any age, the writings of Oxenstierna, especially "Pensees diverses". The joy of comparisons and the depth of his philosophy reveal to us the dangerous road toward literary glory, and the slight possibility of inhabiting it. Thus, to get there on narrow paths in the jungle, you have to destroy those unfortunate enough to have chosen the same route in the same direction. In the middle of the forest, before the moment of literary glory lays a road where there are thieves, but rarely someone brave enough to confront them. From time to time, there appears a blind Ghost, with a fake pair of scales, named Glory, pushing some of those who desire it inside the sanctuary. Inside we observe good books or chapters, or even pages, while outside there are heaps of books, offered to passers-by. Those books are received, but not read. Thus is literary life in our country different from that imagined by Oxenstierna?

**DAUGHTER:** "Other masks on the same stage!", and so we return, as always, to the great Eminescu.

## CHANCE

**SON:** We often say "luck is blind". Is it so? Or is this said by those not granted any luck by chance?

**FATHER:** Is there such thing as chance? Many of us wonder. In ancient times, everything was thought to be the grace of a god protecting men. Could we, as humans, ever say: "This could never happen to us"? On the contrary, chance brings sometimes more than we have ever dreamt or wished for. So chance arranges things better than we do.

**SON:** But what about the plans we sketch in our notebooks and our minds?

**FATHER:** Carefully made plans can often be defeated by chance. Should we curse and be miserable? Probably not, since people should learn to expect anything and everything, because nothing lasts in the space we traverse. Especially things that are predestined to happen will happen, without trying to seem pessimistic. And what happens to me can happen to anybody, to everybody, when the time is right.

**SON:** And then who do we blame? Luck or fate?

**FATHER:** There are important crimes or truths that become known only by chance. It is certainly the truth, as worldwide experience shows, the thing we fear most, but the thing which will come to us sooner than we expect. An old proverb says that we are the ones who make our own luck: "Call for luck, but also move your arms (lest you should drown)". In a fortunate situation, one cannot rely on luck alone. Whatever is fortunate or unfortunate for a part of the whole, can be good or wrong for the whole.

**SON:** The Ancient tell us chance is he prime minister of good-luck...

**FATHER:** They also say that a sane man cannot throw himself continuously into the void called chance. Because, we must admit, we cannot rely in any situation on a MAYBE...lacking content.

**SON:** What human flaw would you like to highlight here?

**FATHER:** Simply: Knowledge. The more knowledge we have, the less hazard, or even no such thing. And about that insecure MAYBE...I think it should be a last minute solution. When everything seems lost, "maybe" is that thin string which could actually save you from drowning.

**SON:** Many say chance is avoided only by those with remarkable courage, while others define it as being our failure to deduce the cause of the laws governing humanity. Could this concept of "chance" be used by the weak to excuse their foolishness?

**FATHER:** I would say that only the lives of the imprudent are lead by this game, sometimes sinister, of hazard. Our contemporaries have opinions which are closer to the ones which torment us. Psychologists, philosophers, etc, think that men can manipulate situations in life in order to reach the expected goal. They clearly insist upon the fact that chance does

not exist, simply because the world functions after precise mechanisms, although not all of them have been identified.

**SON:** Under the given circumstances, shouldn't we redefine hazard, chance?

**FATHER:** Certainly. Chance, hazard, are only a necessity we are not aware of. By seeing hazard as an expression of necessity, man becomes aware of himself and everything around.

**SON:** And from this stems total rejection of the idea of predestination, of Calvin?

**FATHER:** If it were after me, I would support Calvin's theory. However some philosophers and analysts make me rethink my theories. By reading over and over again certain theories, I have observed that everything that happens has a motivation and the link between cause and effect is indestructible. That well known ANANAKE (necessity), even if it bothers those who want to remain at the mercy of chance, is present everywhere... The cause is the factor we have to seek: cause, created by necessity "*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*" (After this, so because of this). Scholastics went further and attacked the erroneous concept of mistaking COINCIDENCE for CONSEQUENCE, and cause with accident. It is important to observe that some of these regrettable confusions (some quite intentional) led to the mistaken interpretation of diseases, wars, eclipses, etc.

## INTELLECTUALS

**DAUGHTER:** How may we define today's intellectual?

**FATHER:** As we can see, in a dictionary of neologisms from before 1990, an intellectual is someone who is specialized in intellectual activity, after a proper education, and works in the field of science, art, economy, technique, education, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** How about today?

**FATHER:** For years now we have been keeping an eye out for him in performance halls, at the great events concerning culture or science, but we cannot actually spot him. We can't find him in politics either...Others without education, but cunning, have replaced them.

**DAUGHTER:** I, as a child of an intellectual, I am aware they have a difficult time supporting their family from the meager incomes they have, especially when they have children...

Father: Well, I can say, in full knowledge of the facts, I have practiced the art of survival during communism, having a family of four members. But even now, or should I say, now more than ever, the intellectual struggles to buy products at a discount, since he cannot afford to pay full price, gives private tutoring lessons, in order to add something to his

income (a small salary or a pension), or works the land over the weekend, to ensure some food on the table.

**DAUGHTER:** But perhaps it's not a bad thing to have various interests, and if there are children, they will get used to working. This is what you did with us, when you bought some land outside the town. How much anger that "educational land" has produced for us... But now I realize you're right, and I would do the same with my children...

**FATHER:** Unfortunately, when parents do not reach an agreement when children's education is concerned, the children are the ones who will suffer later on. So, eventually, I sold that "educational land", influenced by some...

But let's get back to the intellectual of today, it is good that other interests occupy his mind, but events honoring Eminescu, Slavici, Mehedinti are left without spectators and it's sad. It is too bad, because Romania will claim the creation of our intellectuals as the biggest asset in the end, and not the tons of coal, grains or grapes produced...

**DAUGHTER:** But nowadays politics is full of intellectuals, unlike during communism, when it was filled with simple craftsmen, lathe operators and illiterates. Are we better off with intellectuals turned ministers and presidents of parliamentary committees?

**FATHER:** Sometimes it is fair for them to enter politics, because otherwise they would have remained anonymous. And by chasing some gain the new type of intellectual wouldn't become reprehensible. The Parliament shows us only the chameleonic intellectuals who switch sides over night and chose those in power or claim to be independent, when they can be found in some party or other. "Principles"; "The suffering of the many" Empty words...

**DAUGHTER:** So should we remove them from their positions?

**FATHER:** We in no way desire to cast intellectual away, but we would urge them to remember their purpose.

**DAUGHTER:** Lately though, a new side of the intellectual becomes apparent: failure to acknowledge the literary and scientific merits of some individuals who have not been extraordinary as human beings, but excel as writers or scientists.

**FATHER:** Especially after 1990 I have observed some ridiculous demonstrations from the part of a few intellectuals. This way, important creators such as Arghezi, Sadoveanu and especially, Eminescu have been disputed. Nobody believed that they would gain notoriety by contesting celebrities. The worst part is that students are confused: should they learn what the textbooks say or what they read in magazines, because the contradictions are shocking. What is there for the poor pupil to understand?

**DAUGHTER:** I have also met intellectuals who, out of indolence or indifference, have accepted the notions a false history has fed them.

**FATHER:** We find scoundrels, boot-lickers and blackmailers among intellectuals too. Moreover, some, for certain gains have even accepted the slogans of the miner's protests, when certain second-hand politicians from the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party have launched quite outrageous and revolting slogans such as "We work, we don't think" and "Death to intellectuals". And individuals without any traces of education quickly conformed to the ideas transmitted to them from the centre and soon, the Capital had been wiped clean of bald people with glasses, the symbols of intellectuality.

**DAUGHTER:** Certainly, I am aware that intellectuals have been subjects of such experiments.

**FATHER:** True, the intellectual has one major flaw: he thinks. And obviously some leaders can certainly do without these people to analyze their thoughts and deeds. These temporary leaders only need a colorless, odorless, "education-less" herd easy to lead and manipulate. This is why we should be careful to who we give our vote and struggle not to repeat the errors and nostalgias of the past.

### **DO WE LOVE, ARE WE BEING LOVED?**

**FATHER:** When you were little, you would ask me what love was. Surely we, the elders (with our prudish education, and a discretion which is hard to understand when talking about such subjects) would avoid any straight answer. However this is a feeling which has caused a great deal of controversy...

**SON:** I had imagined, when I grew up a bit, that it was all sexuality, vulgarity, sensuality...The surprising thing was that in my opinion only the righteous citizens were capable or worthy of love..

**FATHER:** No, love is the same for everybody, be they slaves or emperors. I have, however noticed what a good effect love has on those overwhelmed by it. If a lazy man is in love, surely for the sake of the lover he will become hard-working, while a coward will transform into a courageous person for the same reason. But it can also have the opposite effect, truly harmful in some situations. Let's take for example a normal man, quite mature, who is also presumably wise. A love unrequited by a younger partner will transform him into a madman chasing a chimera.

**SON:** Camil Petrescu had some statements about love and lovers that stroke me as odd, to say the least: "The mind should dictate what should be loved" or "lovers have the right of life or death over each other".

**FATHER:** It is true; this man of genius had some peculiar ideas about certain issues. Should we now mention his idea of coming up with a defense plan for the country during the War. But who can tell, maybe we would have had a better plan than that of the soldiers...However, it appeared as if some accidents which had affected him directly in the war have left him with certain physical defects. From this point on his ideas are somewhat far-fetched. In the case of love, I have always contradicted him, although some clearness of mind is sometimes needed in love...

**SON:** And how can we find love if we put it through a filter, the mind? Doesn't this feeling imply a greater freedom to act, a total lack of inhibitions? There is no such thing as love without a bit of madness!

**FATHER:** You are right, we must admit that! But you also have to agree that a man cannot think only with his heart. By doing so, he will be ruined, since reason is needed in all circumstances. No matter what, love is extraordinary when one is young. Old age almost strips love of its meaning. It isn't, though always awkward. There are various situations.

**SON:** But love can be of many kinds: for the country, for a position, for money...

**FATHER:** Surely the word has more than one use, but I want to point out one tragic aspect: the confusion between love and the fear of loneliness. When we give our love to the first person to come through the door, we may imagine we have found what we have been looking for. What a dreadful disappointment, but real, nonetheless. And true, there is such thing called love for one's motherland. Have you heard the expression lately?

**SON:** No I haven't, though I understand it's meaning...

**FATHER:** Why don't you explain it to the others? Are you afraid of being ridiculed? Well, this love for the motherland of rulers such as Mircea cel Batran, Stefan cel Mare or Ioan Voda cel Cumplit, Mihai Viteazul and others as well as the love of millions of common people has ensured the survival of our country, its territory and the customs which define us as a nation. Unfortunately now the popular motto is What Caragiale said: "I love treason, but hate the traitors". There are some more forms of love we can mention: "I love corruption, though I am not corrupt", "I love justice but I will not renounce the position I have received from scoundrels", "I love all parties, in order to keep my position".

**SON:** Well, in these cases, as the one with the avid love for money, we can speak of "famous love stories", for some positions held under the old administrations or currently held, when

worthless individuals don't want to leave their seats, assembling groups of idiots and toad-eaters around them, who offer support in exchange for support.

**FATHER:** Yes, I am familiar with these situations. I even know the mayor of a village who has had such a group ever since the elections. The love they have for each other is so strong that the leader, who is not even a local, takes no decision without consulting those impostors first. Every committee, every delegation can only be constituted of members of that certain group. Nothing can pierce this shield of stupidity, any complaint is destroyed. If their resignation is due, they simply ignore this fact.

**SON:** I would say that love, in any shade, is limited, and bound by either time or dignity. People should not forget that lustful love has its own moment, and nobody can rule over life; most of all, we should learn to give up forbidden love if times compel us.

## ANGELS AND DEMONS

**SON:** It is quite difficult to classify people into angels or demons. For the simple reason that the Earth doesn't host true, complete, angels or demons. It is certain however that mankind has known over the ages good or evil figures. The first tried to take thought beyond the limits of the human mind, helping people to stand straight on their feet, by guiding their eyes toward the sun of civilization.

**FATHER:** I find interesting your attempt to characterize in some way "angels", people around us, who have initiated and succeeded in doing only good things. I am sure that, like me, you have been fascinated by Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Voltaire, Picasso, Pasteur, Eminescu, Enescu, Brancusi, etc. This topic is quite interesting. However I would like for us to observe the opposite side, that of demons, because it is necessary to counteract wickedness and evil in the world.

**SON:** In your opinion, as I see, we should be familiar with and fight against the other aspect of human existence, the evil. I hope you are right though it's unfair not to analyze and support first of all the good persons.

**FATHER:** The battle against evil also implies certain sacrifices. As you see, we must give more space, in our life and society, to the attempts to know and destroy evil, which, in a leading position, can no longer be attacked nor dispersed ... This sort of evil people, as Piranhas will ruin all around them. Their conscience suffers some monstrous mutations which change their human character, abolishing for them the idea of parents or friends. They become fanatics, paranoid, etc. They now have a clear motto: "*Homo homini lupus*". We

could give plenty of examples, but we will mention some closer to our times: Hitler, Stalin, Mao Tze Dun, Fidel Castro, Ceausescu, etc. Yes, Cioran was perfectly right: "for the true politician, moral is a dangerous asset." These dictators, as others less notorious, forget power is fleeting and want to impose, dominate, exterminate even, and turn their will into law. They know little about the art of leadership, or democracy and forget that Horace had told them centuries ago: "Power without wisdom collapses under its own violence". In Romania, as in all the world dictatorships, these words hold the truth. Ceausescu had exited history in the same manner he had entered it: through violence.

**SON:** And what if some day people will say that such individuals have been necessary?

**FATHER:** That wouldn't surprise me! But our mission as mere humans is to observe in time good and bad persons. We will highlight the former, with its radiant face, bright mind, inflexible nature and beneficent force. We can even consider it our responsibility to protect them, fully aware that these good-natured super humans can see and sometimes even predict the future, but, in their frailty they can slip, they can be hurt, literally or not, while they are thinking of some complex equation, creating an unforgettable verse or an everlasting symphony. They love and protect human beings, because in their opinion "man is holy for man".

**SON:** And what about evil individuals? Do we have the power to annihilate them? Especially since we are fully aware of how convenient is our collective cowardice to the evil leaders we have talked about?

**FATHER:** This is where responsible persons, patriots, should step in. We should have, and it saddens me to say it, continuous monitoring over those who, after reaching the top of the pyramid, start to show their diabolic side the smile transformed into a grim, and the interest, for the good of the people transforming into personal interest.

These individuals will certainly be guarded by "thugs" paid from public funds, while their suite becomes an inhuman, corrupt gutter, while the apparent availability for dialogue is only reduced to one word: I.

**SON:** And what you think may happen to the one who attempts to unmask such a grant, exposing his interior and sometimes exterior squalor?

**FATHER:** I know what some consequences might be. I have lived, during communism, the terror of daring to criticize, protest or give an interview abroad about the so-called "democracy" during the "multilaterally developed socialist society"; I have also experienced the horror of knowing the next day you could perhaps lose the means to feed your children, the horror that, you, as an intellectual, could suddenly, through "educational transfer"

become an unqualified worker, a miner at 500-600 meters underground, the horror that a car your parents and brothers helped you buy might be confiscated, but from the perspective of the leaders, the car have been bought by unlawful means, etc.

He who would dare to expose the face of the autocrat in politics of the economy, would be put under surveillance, tortured, spiritually and materially destroyed and all these led, as J.P.Sartre believed, to their assassination.

**SON** : I haven't experienced this personally, but I imagine that these "anti"-human beings have drifted so much apart from what is normal, beautiful and good that they have ultimately lost all contact with reality, humanity, rendering, human speech obsolete, and leaving only a bark, understandable solely by their toadeaters.

**FATHER**: You know what is amazing? Without even the experience of a long life, you have inferred the chaos caused by the dictator in the world and inside himself.

Are you wondering about the reaction of the crowd? Well, it watches and stands amazed, sometimes becomes rebellious and, at times when it is no longer able to endure, eliminates the dictator, but usually does it far too late.

**SON**: But it would seem that Romanians, by dethroning and killing of Ceausescu, have demonstrated that "even polenta can explode" and that we are not "a people to accept any type of oppression".

**FATHER**: The destruction of this of this anti-human, Ceausescu has become unique (and here is another thing that makes this people so unique) knowing that these measures are seldom taken. But it was not the people who had decided this crime of Christmas 1989; it was some part of the frustrated leaders of the communist party and the Security Service. However those who have brought Ceausescu to his demise had been no angels, obviously. And the "freedom" they have brought into the people doesn't seem very natural to me. Freedom granted to people who are not prepared to receive it will lead to anarchy or - worse - as Balzac has said: "limitless freedom will annihilate freedom".

**SON**: Can, this misunderstood freedom spawn other demons?

**FATHER**: I don't believe so, especially during this time of adherence to NATO and the EU. But the demons might appear in the institutions of the State, inside any community, no matter how small. This is why we, the common people, as well as the civil society should focus our attention on such matters.

## EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** What beautiful words describe education as lace carved in stone. And moreover, these words hold great truth. But how does this complex and exciting process start?

**GRANDFATHER:** I think this extraordinary process of learning must be initiated at a young age, childhood even, in order to achieve satisfactory results. I remember a proverb which urges us to start learning as soon as possible: "If at forty you learn to play the drums, you'll be a master in your grave". Of course we may ask, rhetorically, where education or learning starts. Surely, it starts within the specialized educational system. Unfortunately we rarely mention that the Romanian system today, though often we encounter quite capable pupils, is not properly equipped, has no specializations in accordance with the country's needs, no thorough discipline, no equitable relation between punishment and reward, , does not accentuate students' duties, but more their rights, etc. Maybe some, those who do not know the first thing about the educational system, will deem me obsolete, but I have been in the system for fifty years and I notice that now, under the indifference of the authorities, everything is diluted in a system which up until recently was better than what the rest of Europe could offer. The future seems rather bleak.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Grandfather, I hope you didn't agree with Lenin when he said "Only a compulsory and free educational system for all children can save us, at least partly, from the darkness of ignorance".

**GRANDFATHER:** Why not? I admit, I hold no respect for the ignorant and wretched communists, however, in an over-impooverished Romania the gratuity of the educational system would be quite necessary. We will abstain from calculating how much a parent must spend in order to support a child, buying books, taxes for school, etc. Could this be a time for sacrifice and the sacrificed, both for teachers or students?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I can proudly say that my father and grandfather both work in the educational system, as I do myself, and I love this system, the way it is. I realize, unlike our politicians, that the purpose of teachers is sacred: that of transforming the little children of first grade (and this is the merit of the primary school teachers) into people able to build the destiny of the nation. Passionate teachers may resemble sculptors which make art out of raw material, or with scientists in a laboratory which, after numerous fine tunings manage to discover magnificent new substances...

**GRANDFATHER:** All my life I have wanted my descendants to avoid working in this system, and now you prove me wrong. Destiny decided that you should work in this environment as your parents and grandparents have and be devoted to the children you help. These gardeners of souls, the teachers, are like trees which you can recognize from their fruit, are people of great culture, but mostly, are deeply in love with the work of art they have dedicated their lives to: the human soul. There is an immense responsibility, but few people outside the system, and usually not the politicians, realize this; thus we can explain the difficult life these "artists of the soul" have.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Comenius said the secret of success in the educational system is to ask a lot, remember what you have found out and to teach others what you have studied.

**GRANDFATHER:** Indeed, the process doesn't ensure culture necessarily, but will surely give us some means of orientation. We might say, not the way Iorga used to, that all things above help us learn. And by adding the insistence of the teachers toward helping children, building their personality and instructing them to repress instincts, we have the true portrait of the people involved in education.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** It is said that if the teachers are skilled the students will be so, too. Is this still true, when absenteeism is growing, violence is present in every school, children mistake democracy for impertinence or laziness, respect is something of no use, and education is mocked?

**GRANDFATHER:** I am glad that only after a few years in the system you are able to evaluate the situation of the educational system, and education in general, very correctly. And this is the reason I ask you: can the educator influence, through a civilized behavior and thorough documentation, through personal example in every area, the education of the youth?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** We must not paint a picture in black only; however 30-40 per cent of young people may not be, let's say it bluntly, interested in school. But the others can be influenced by the educator-model.

**GRANDFATHER:** We must work against school abandonment and not only. I believe it is the time for a new curriculum to be made, in accordance with the needs of the students, and get rid of huge textbooks, where theory abounds in every phrase. But if those who are responsible for the destiny of the students have never been involved in the process of educating young people, they have no idea what it means to work with the minds of individuals. Or maybe worse, they know but don't care about the importance of education. ..We could advise them to learn, because one is never too old to do that. They should all

learn about honesty, because this should accompany education at any time, otherwise study would only be a golden coin tied around the neck of a donkey.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** We often see individuals who motivate their indifference for education by motivating it wouldn't bring them any money. Are they right?

**GRANDFATHER:** I would only say money never bring with them education, but only a diploma, a function, while education can bring money continuously. From the job you have got, according to your education.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I have often heard of such a phrase as "education thief"...Is that possible?

**GRANDFATHER:** It is possible. Honest thieves, if such an expression may be used, and we could name so those who learn from others.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** And what happens if while you learn, you lose your character, for one reason or the other? I have always wondered after seeing some cases...

**GRANDFATHER:** Then, surely in the equation you lose more than you win. But such misfortune can happen not only in the process of learning. It is more serious when it happens due to some function...

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** In my generation, unfortunately, there aren't many optimists who can consider education enjoyable or some means of getting rich. And still, I don't intend to stop promoting learning, because it is a thing for the mind and the soul, a treasure resulted from hard work, whose roots may be bitter, but the fruit is always sweet...

**GRANDFATHER:** Haven't you ever wondered, while pondering upon this subject, if learning doesn't have an opposite process?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Of course I have, and the answer is: it has.

**GRANDFATHER:** I can't imagine you have gone through this experience, but I must warn you that discarding information or habits you have learned is more difficult than actually learning. Thus, we should only try to acquire what is good, so we don't have to repair the damage afterward.

## THE LEADER

**GRANDSON:** I have often disputed with my friends over what a true leader should be like. One of my mates, you know him, thinks that those who have popularity should be leaders. What do you think?

**GRANDFATHER:** Not true! Just watch the persons at the lead of extremist parties. They enjoy great popularity among people with little education, confused individuals, or mentally deranged people. Popularity is without authority, nothing more than dust in the wind. As soon as a sensitive matter emerges (which can be challenged in order to insure more voters) the deceiving leaders head for this new objective and instantly forget the old one. Where is the stability of those who want to lead?

**GRANDSON:** Some leaders should learn that at some point you have to withdraw. In our country this doesn't happen ...

**GRANDFATHER:** The normal thing for leaders would be to withdraw from the political scene in certain circumstances (if one those has lost the elections, is old, is ill, etc ...). Also, true leaders, those who lead remarkable people, should at least have the wisdom of their subordinates.

**GRANDSON:** What if the leader doesn't appreciate the allies?

**GRANDFATHER:** When a leader despises those around him, he will gather around him only foolish people. The intelligent ones will not put up for long with this kind of treatment. History though has plenty of examples when mad men ruled over fools or smart people alike. Not to mention fools, who persisted in pursuing their goal and ruled countries for years on end. Recent history has such examples.

**GRANDSON:** "The one destined to order to others must be elected / chosen by all", as Plinius said. What relevance does this saying have in modern times?

**GRANDFATHER:** I could add to what Plinius has said that a leader should forget his origins. It is known that man was born free and desires to remain so. But what a paradox, he feels the need to be led, sometimes. By choosing a good leader, the people will have a better life! But how would a bad leader be? Cato said it is the one who cannot even lead himself. Poor peoples led by such men ... But when the waves are big, they could sink both the ship and steer man.

**GRANDSON:** The leader must attract the masses, but mostly, I think, the intellectuals. And the state, through its leader, must be a real Maecenas. Thus, the intellectuals, writers and all artists will stand in support of him. But with our country, as usual, things happen differently. Intellectuals are despised, underpaid, disorganized. Who wins from this situation? The extremists, fools and the cunning. The perennial character of a nation is often forgotten by leaders, and the fact that it consists of the prestige given by culture and remarkable works in any branch of the arts ...

**GRANDSON:** A leader is often deemed a “conqueror” which shouts wherever he can that this is his land and he is absolute ruler.

**GRANDFATHER:** Writers, philosophers and others have compared such a “conqueror” with a traveler, who imagines that by casting his shadow upon the land when he passes, he actually owns that land. No, a leader is not master! Let us observe the example of Jesus Christ, washing the feet of his disciples. Few leaders today could accept this analogy. No matter what, a true leader must not be relaxed after being entrusted the faith of a nation. The minimum training required for him is to learn how to let himself be led. Only then, after thorough analysis of this art, can he attain the ability to lead.

**GRANDSON:** “*Habemus papam*” would be the words which announced the election of a new Pope, after extensive and careful debates. Surely we can adjust the words to fit the election of the leader of a country.

**GRANDFATHER:** But what if the result had been dictated by petty group interests? We can observe that in our country nobody agrees with nobody, everybody either challenges or is challenged.

**GRANDSON:** There have been numerous debates on destiny and will; and confrontations.

**GRANDFATHER:** The innermost part of the individual is drawn like a magnet to a point of his existence: destiny. And then, may we say that takes us wherever we want. The ego of each of us has an important role. There is the problem! Some leaders seek to impose this ego on those shattering parties, etc. The actions of the leader are not well received when they go against the public interest. It is apparent, though that neither people nor things can stand back leadership and at some point, a “*Deus et machina*” (a providential savior), something, someone (from the inside or outside) intervenes and changes extended abnormality to normality.

**GRANDSON:** Should we think that God has absolute control over all things?

Usually individuals who want dignities come into power. They believe or know they are predestined to occupy such positions. If, by some miracle, some authority would analyze the candidates, they would see that only individuals who take pleasure in humiliating, subjugating or taking advantage of defenseless people come into power. However those elected should be spotless unbiased and altruistic. If this doesn’t happen, the tyranny will soon follow.

**GRANDSON:** You only envision the ideal leader who only exists in fairy-tales...

**GRANDFATHER:** No, I have also pointed out a dark side of a leader but if the proportion shows that the positive side is smaller, that individual should be removed. If I had something

to say in this chaos, I would wish for a secret thought to come true: that any individual who desires an important function should be evaluated thoroughly psychologically. If uncontrolled, that individual could obtain a leading position and use power as a rifle or a bat, harming those weaker, without personality education, intelligence. If such selection were to be made, we wouldn't have had Savonarola, Hitler, Stalin, Ceausescu, Fidel Castro and others alike. Any people is in need of benevolent leaders. We more than others, and we are left with only one hope: that the young, when they become leaders, be patriotic and wise, consolidating the moral force of our nation.

## MEDIOCRE AND MEDIOCRITY

**SON:** In the art world we permanently meet geniuses. If you have the chance to talk to a writer nowadays he will probably explain unbelievable things from other areas. He could tell you, for instance, that Eminescu, Arghezi and Blaga are nothing compared to him. I do remember some poet from my country, not a bad one, I have to admit, who have told me straight to my face: "Eminescu had only one volume, I have thirteen.". At first, I had thought he was joking, but really believed in his superiority compared to the national poet.

**FATHER:** As you have already pointed out, this field is flooded by geniuses. Not because this is truly the case but simply because egos are far greater than talent. The opposite of this situation is mediocrity aggressive or moderate.

**SON:** How should we comprehend this mediocrity? Where is its peace in our daily lives?

**FATHER :** I would define it as something in between the top and bottom of the mountain, something not up or down, neither white or black; not good but not bad, always somewhere in the middle. This is not something I regard as an insult to a man, I rather see it as a normal state. The Latin sage (we will always call upon ancient wisdom in our conversations) used to say: "*Homo sum, nihil humani alienum puto*" ( I am human, nothing human is strange to me).

**SON:** What should there be inherently human?

**FATHER:** Everything Stupidity and wisdom, love and hate, beauty and ugliness, as all the others which bring joy or sadness to our lives. If all these had an even distribution, we will have a mediocre man. When we are talking about extremes, the man will either be an idiot or a genius. We may consider that "the middle line is golden."

**SON:** Well, if this mediocre man is a nice person, why don't we leave him be?

**FATHER:** We will live your nice man alone. We should talk about the mediocre man who is also aggressive. Because it seems sometimes a good steady job is not enough, some individuals, these aggressive mediocre people work their way up to the hierarchy. He becomes noisy and impulsive. From that moment on this person can no longer be generous, and with a limited mind, does not understand those who do any acts of charity. They would act and risk for the general interest on one condition: to be protected.

**SON:** Is this man capable of love and hate?

**FATHER:** No, since passions terrify him. His narrow horizon is surpassed by those. At a certain point he would like to become a hero, but without taking part to the heroic act. If no one sees him hiding, he will declare and even believe he had been the one who had slain the dragon.

**SON:** But, when we observe all these persons in all fields we sometimes see remarkable deeds. Thus, they unite and support each other, which, to be accurate, we don't see in geniuses.

**FATHER:** This is the exact reason they become dangerous. Once one of them has got a high position, he will start lifting the others, also. Then they even start to think those jobs have been created especially for them. And this is where they start demolishing everything which does not resemble their image and building a world of their own. In Romania, before 1990 especially in education and culture, this enterprise had been completely successful: instead of bringing an uneducated person to a superior level of culture, things have been done the other way around.

**SON:** Don't tell me today everything is perfect!

**FATHER:** Absolutely not. Today everything is leveled down with the aid of political parties or fortunes. Any party will support an idiot who finances all the organization's actions. And you remain baffled at seeing who those in charge of the country are.

**SON:** I have heard stories from the 90's in China but also from the present times about the oppression of the mediocre man. In this communist country there is a uniform for everybody: the tunic, buttoned up to the chin. Is this possible? Can anyone make you wear a buttoned up jacket when it's extremely hot outside?

**FATHER:** And this is nothing compared with other things: a simple photo (in a newspaper) of a person with his jacket unbuttoned would be a sacrilege, the magazine accused of pornography and the editors arrested. I hope our country is over the awkward attempt to make our bodies, minds or actions fit certain patterns. But you never know.

**SON:** And thus, thinking about the mediocre, shall we condemn them all?

**FATHER:** Under no circumstances. Quite the contrary mediocre people, who accomplish their duties, are good family men, good friends, workers or intellectuals are the ones that keep society going. Not the geniuses are the ones leading and producing in a country, but the mediocrity and mediocre people. When they are in their proper places, they bring normality, even wellbeing to the nation. It is only bad when they become arrogant and think they have the right to rule, and align the world to their own minds. That is the moment to be concerned and oppose these individuals.

## POLITICAL MONSTERS

**SON:** I remember when I think about politicians, the famous words of Seneca: "Small crimes are punished, major crimes are flaunted". Or, in other words: You have killed a man, you're a murderer, you have killed a thousand, you're a hero.

**FATHER:** Well said. But let's start with facts. During childhood, teens of maturity we have been told of great acts of "super humans" such as Bulganin, Hruscirov, Gromako, Malenkov and Vorsilov, not to mention Stalin. At the same time, we would see in the papers individuals chopping people with an axe, then eating them or biting hundreds of peaceful and honorable citizens who could be these criminals doing all these monstrosities? No others than Dulles, Kennedy, Adenauer, Brandt or DeGaulle, leaders of the "rotten" capitalist system. This is what we were told.

**SON :** I have read that in a meeting or exam, if you babbled some stupid thing and attributed it to the communist leaders, you were listened to, or even congratulated ... Still it's hard to believe such stories.

**FATHER:** Everything you said, attributing it to the "esteemed leaders" became taboo and no longer needed clearing. Rulers with unlimited powers from eastern states were depicted in newspapers, radio and TV as the most honest, the purest, the most ...

Hruscirov's visit to the UNO was the event of the century, especially his gesture of tapping with a shoe on the table where tens of ministers were seated. Instead of being presented as gesture of poor education, it has been praised as an act of bravery on the battlefield.

**SON:** But you, the intellectuals, those who saw facts for what they truly were, didn't you fight to make your powers known?

**FATHER:** Within groups with the same opinion, we all showed we would all show disapproval, but inside the party we acted like used, broken machines, applauding any "initiative" as that at UNO. In the newspapers, things were painted in the most beautiful colors, wherever the

“beloved” leaders would produce hundreds of liters of milk each day. Terrible exaggerations to show how thriving and necessary the communist society was.

**SON:** I might be judging this wrong, but you and your leaders’ hypocrisy, shows the gutter you have all been in the lies you were born and died into. What an awful degradation...

**FATHER :** Easy to judge, if you haven’t worked during those times or find yourself in the need to bring food home for your children, or had to pay for the cold in your house or dress your children to go to school...

**SON:** And it all came from the Soviet Union, today’s Russia?

**FATHER:** I could say it came from Marx’s “Capital”, this father of all political monsters. And now let me tell you a few words about one of the monsters of my time: Hrusciov. He came to lead Russia in a period of crisis that of the Caribbean Sea. The quote he liked to say was: *“Si vis pacem para bellum”* (If you want peace, prepare for war). He declared himself anti Stalinist (though he used Stalin’s methods), thought he managed to avoid a third world war and the USA president Kennedy, and had nothing to do with that. He was acting toward the melting of the ice from the “Cold war” ... always “he”..Newspapers only printed news about him and his entourage and was declared the greatest hero of modern times. Numerous such things were fed to us ...

**SON:** Things were said, heard, declared ... but did you know the truth or will you ever find it out?

**FATHER:** The true face of the “peaceful” Hrusciov had been known. The “peaceful” leader, the most “humane” person in charge of the Soviet Union had executed at Katyn (Poland) as papers now prove, without any remorse, the 14.000 Polish officers, the elite of that army brutally repressed Ukraine, destroyed any possibility of rebellion from Leningrad or other cities, any opposition to the communist regime.

**SON:** Indeed a monster ...

**FATHER:** Stalin, by seeing in him no scruples, trusted him completely, and considered him the perfect monster.

**SON:** But didn’t the democratic countries of the West know anything about the communist monsters?

**FATHER:** I think they knew, but not even the Western leaders could speak

**SON:** How is such a thing possible? Countries where freedom of speech is in their Constitution for tens of hundreds of years, know the monstrosities in the Soviet camps and maintain silence? Why?

**FATHER:** That is the question: Why? Some said Hruscirov knew a compromising secret about the leaders of the West and forced them to remain silent. Perhaps things of such importance were sure to destroy the already fragile balance between the East and West. This is why I think it is necessary for us to ask ourselves what if we find out tomorrow, in a month or in a year that what have been told so far was a big lie? How will the heroes of today appear in a new light?

## DO WE OWN UP TO OUR WEAKNESSES?

**FATHER:** I would like to start our dialogue with a statement of the great Nicolae Iorga: "Kneeling sometimes makes you greater"

**DAUGHTER:** If I were to talk about myself, I'd say it is hard to recognize my mistakes, weaknesses, awkward deeds, and is even harder to admit that the mistakes and deeds of the others I readily observe and criticize.

**FATHER:** I could criticize you for this, but I myself feel tempted to do such things. Though now, when I am old, I have lost some of the pride and irresponsibility of youth. I usually admit errors or improper attitudes. However, I can't stop making mistakes. Not grave ones, but mistakes nonetheless.

**DAUGHTER:** Every day I am fortunate enough to see people trying to own up to some or even all their weaknesses, and it appears they want to become better, with a cleansed soul. For us, these people become the hope that someday, we all will follow their example.

**FATHER:** Latin wisdom has left a saying : "*Homo sum, nihil humani alienum puta.*" (I am human and nothing human is unknown to me). But what is human? Some say only stupidity, others say intelligence. From the world's wisdom, we find out that kindness-wickedness, beauty-ugliness, education-lack of it, etc are human. We must not have only defects.

**DAUGHTER:** But what is the necessary proportion between good and bad qualities?

**FATHER:** If in the combination defects-qualities the latter are prevalent, then the person is saved. When flaws are considerably more it becomes serious. Man should not be seen as completely bad, though, but neither completely good. Because he has continuously ups and downs. The attempt to rise above is important.

**SON:** What if, in life, though he is a rational person, does something wrong without meaning it? Should we think he is innocent?

**FATHER:** The Latins found an answer to this also: "*Errare humanum est, perseverare diabolicum*" (To err is human, to persist is foolish). But being human is an exceptional

quality: it can be re-born out of its ashes, like the Phoenix. Whenever it is down, but wishes to recover, with God's help, it will become stronger.

**DAUGHTER:** I have met people who do good, but also others who do wrong. Certainly I have avoided the latter, if I could tell it from the beginning. However, when you are young, you can be deceived by some who pretend to be good when instead they are evil. A great deal of suffering awaits those who fall prey to such individuals. Have you, father, ever met exceptional people?

**FATHER:** Yes, I have met a man like that. He would express his love for people through the good he used to do. By always acknowledge his weaknesses, which he tried to avoid as much as possible, he became, though old, stronger in his mind and body.

I think that, if he ended up bad, this was because of his intense wish to do good. He also used to be a remarkably educated man. Some say culture, education is all what is left after you have forgotten everything. My friend used to think what you learn is like flint stone and culture is the spark. In any enterprise, man will need a spark, he said. And, when it comes to admitting our weaknesses, the spark, the impulse are necessary.

## INSANITY OR WISDOM?

**DAUGHTER:** After reading the history of the empires, I have always appreciated the jesters around emperors and kings for a simple reason: they told the truth.

**FATHER:** Well, these jesters had a far more important role than simply amusing by their tricks and jokes. If they were wise, they could influence their sovereigns with a wise word said at a right time and could subtly intervene in delicate issues such as the people's freedom, the faith of those arrested for various reasons, the orgies of various public figures, the hunger of the nation, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** But what about countries without emperors or kings? Who takes upon him the difficult task of telling the truth?

**FATHER:** I hope we never get to the point where ministers or members of the Parliament bring the truth to us on a tray! Some could say to our faces: "They're not insane enough to do such thing!" Thus, it is impossible for the truth to reach us through them. And this, because during harsh times there is the audacity, if not foolishness, to expose yourself by calling a spade a spade.

**DAUGHTER:** But we still have the subtle means of the fable or words with double meanings.

**FATHER:** Indeed, we are left with this! This, or the shameless appraisal of any government. And if you happen to be the poet of the Court and write under a pseudonym (you never know who might come into power next) then it's for the better!

**DAUGHTER:** Can't a man remain dignified, no matter what?

**FATHER:** Each of those who have been given a bone to chew will say: "it is insane!"

Well, it is possible (especially today when investor certificates can be bought, or to attest you as a hero of the revolution) to get a certificate declaring you insane. Then, and only then you may start telling the truth, because everyone will deem you irresponsible.

**DAUGHTER:** This reminds us that there is but one step between the sublime and the ridiculous. And intelligent buffoons reach sublime through their wisdom.

**FATHER :** I'm sure this is the root for these people's beauty and tragedy both. We often ask: "Are they normal?". It is a fact that not all madmen are wise and certainly not all wise men are mad. Madness has limits, like anything else in this world.

**DAUGHTER:** It is said that a spark of insanity was present in Van Gogh, Dostoevsky or Nietzsche. The first two had been blessed by God and became a source of wisdom, while Nietzsche's super-human has spawned paranoid figures such as Hitler, Stalin, Ceausescu, etc.

**FATHER:** The madmen who choose art as their path are not dangerous and painful. Those who choose politics are.

It would be extraordinary if their obsession (any madman has at least once) were the fight for the wellbeing of the many. This way, their existence would be ideal for the country. But these miracles don't happen. In reality the madman politician or politician-madman has an instinctive perfidiousness, which only allows him to cater for himself (house, luxury car, a life of pleasures and abundance). Also this sort of individual possesses a morbid tendency toward disaster, bringing about hunger, hatred among co-nationals, wars, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** Can we, under the given circumstances, mistake the fool for a madman? Surely not. But I would suggest though no politician will listen, that paranoids in politics be observed from the incipient stages, because one cannot predict exactly what position they might hold in the future. And I have the conviction that these, unlike madman "of the arts", have no chance at wisdom.

**FATHER:** I would go even further: people who want or even deserve a certain position should be subjected to psychological tests. If this had been done ever since ancient times, we wouldn't have witnessed the burn down of the Rome, the Reichstag, the election of a horse among senators, we wouldn't have seen tones of bullies brought to the Senate to

punish political opponents. Would life have been better, more interesting would there have been less suffering?

I do not know but the best thing, we can do at the moment, is to think twice before giving our vote to one politician or the other.

## MAN – A VICTOR?

**DAUGHTER:** From what I have read, I can remember that only the person confronted with obstacles or perils, who doesn't let himself be discouraged, that is a true man.

**FATHER:** It is quite clear that every human being must gather and keep his forces in order to defeat illness, death and everything they bring. I don't argue in favor of seeking danger at any cost, but, when we must face it let us not run from that moment on, we will be unhappy. Because we no longer have any excuses.

**DAUGHTER:** I have had a friend who committed suicide. Many have considered him brave. A person with the strength to end his life when he realized he had nothing to look forward to. What do you think?

**FATHER:** I have never thought, nor I will ever think that a person who commits suicide can be brave. His gesture is that of a coward. Maybe this is the reason I don't agree to euthanasia either, though it is no longer against the law in some countries. My opinion – which I consider appropriate – is based on the courage to confront death rather than seek it. I have always considered life to be the best gift we have been offered. Our duty is to constantly work toward embellishing it.

**DAUGHTER:** Under these conditions, an intelligent person can only be a winner, right? But what if this person surrenders before the fight even begins?

**FATHER :** *"Exempla trahunt"* ("Examples convince us"), the swimmer who no longer makes the effort goes down into the waves, the bird which no longer flaps its wings falls and dies, etc. thus, without a struggle there is no victory. Each person's existence is measured in this battle which is life. Because man, at birth, was thrown into this battlefield. We could state "I fight, therefore I exist; I exist, therefore I fight". When troubled waters scare us, and we are in the middle of the storm, it's good to know we have no other chance than to fight with all we have left in order to defeat death. "After the rain, sunshine will come."

**DAUGHTER :** In my humble opinion, man must, wherever he is, save his own life, first of all because others who are weaker await his help. If, in life, you can't diminish the pain of others, at least, try not to increase it.

**FATHER** : I have wondered all my life if doing wrong can bring any satisfactions. I can't believe a human being seeks such petty satisfactions. I, however, feel that the moment we see tears of gratitude in the eyes of someone we have helped, that's when we can feel HUMA and WINNERS over the evil in us. Let us pursue the RIGHT and make it a goal in our lives.

## HONOR, HONORS, THE GIVEN WORD

**SON**: Excuse me, father, I keep seeing today's people running around gathering fortunes, or high positions, power, conquest of territories or even hearts. There is one thing I never hear anyone talking about: honor. Are they thinking of such things?

**FATHER**: Well, people in general think more of honors than of honor; not to mention that it comes without any effort to the rich. There is even an oriental proverb saying that no matter how wretched are your actions, if you are rich, you never lose your honor.

**SON**: But still, any spot of life leaves an imprint on the image of our honor...

**FATHER**: It is true. Ancient wise men would compare honor with a precious gem: any imperfection would lower the price.

**SON**: We are constantly fighting our enemies or even our friends in order to go up on the podium. Is that good? Are all the efforts, frustrations, misunderstandings, normal?

**FATHER**: From what I have seen and lived, I can say that especially among writers, where there's a so-called genius at every step, you will permanently find one who wants your place and sometimes gives you a "friendly" push into the abyss of anonymity. Up to a point, it is normal to fight for your place in the hierarchy, but without stepping on dead bodies...

**SON**: What about the written books, the great buildings raised, the amazing paintings your talent has produced, aren't they enough?

**FATHER**: Absolutely not. You must fight for the recognition of your talent. But it should be a fair, honorable fight, because prestige and fame must be earned each day. However honor must be kept at any price. This is what Schopenhauer has taught us, and let's take his word for it, especially since he had got the fame, honor and honors. I could even attempt a comparison: honor is like a mountain, tall and abrupt. By slipping and falling from the top, you don't have the possibility to reach the initial height again, assuming you are still alive...

**SON**: Are you still alive if you lose your honor? Does life have any meaning left?

**FATHER**: Somebody said that life is equal to honor. If you have lost one, you have also lost the other. As any treasure, once you lose honor, you cannot get it back.

**SON:** In other words, after losing your honor you have nothing left to lose ...

**FATHER:** Exactly. In situations such as this, society, unless it is utterly compromised as we see in other places, drastically sanctions lack of humanity. Dignified people will look away or frown at the sight of undignified people; by doing so, some members of society work towards the moral assassination of those around. First there will be few, but the numbers will increase...at least I hope this for you, the young people...

**SON:** We know of plenty of cases where men have sacrificed their lives for the good of the country, have died for a noble cause but have not received proper honors.

**FATHER:** The bad part is they are immediately forgotten and remain so forever. Well, sometimes we ask ourselves if these people have ever desired honor. Surely they didn't, and that is why they shall never receive it...

**SON:** Shouldn't we ask ourselves what do some types of people want?

**FATHER:** Surely all poor people wish to be rich, or at least decent, people in a middle class desire wealth but also honor, while the superior people only desire honor, knowing too well it is the only fortune of the chosen.

**SON:** I am not certain you are right, father, but I would ask: how do the chosen define honor?

**FATHER:** To them, I think honor is the inner conscience, while conscience is their inner honor. The important thing is that nobody will reach honor without going through the flames of virtue. But when do you think about honor?

**SON:** As a young man, I have always lived by the example of my parents. Whatever I have done has been honorable...

**FATHER:** Some think about this when they are young, others do it later on. Some should know that honor is, should be, the highest goal for which we struggle, and of all God's gifts this remains the most valuable. Through honor, every man can rise from any misfortune. You can also lose with honor, it is true, and those around you will not forgive you neglecting belief and honor. Any attempt to regain your status will be pointless afterward.

**SON:** What do you think about the honor of those with jobs in the public service?

**FATHER:** Oh, how many things should these people not lack? Every day I find they are governed by interests and are full of flaws...

**SON:** But the ancient times, from what I have read, has tried to teach us, even gave examples...

**FATHER:** Those great wise men thought it was better to die than be burdened by dishonor, though today it is seen more like a quality, and you advance through it...

**SON:** Can this be so serious? There is no way of avoiding it? Aren't there people who are not interested in fortunes, positions, etc?

**FATHER:** What I say might be disarming, but I can see individuals (in politics and culture) whose wish for greatness and honors is so great that it destroys any honorable intentions. Anyone with an opposing opinion turns from a friend into a foe.

**SON:** I have met people though, who honor has made better. I have noticed their noble and dignified character.

**FATHER:** It is normal for beings which have not been tainted by what is around. To them, honor is a mixture of respect for the community and also for themselves. They are aware the honor can resemble the eye, any impurity can damage everything.

**SON:** From Caragiale we know of another type of honor, the honor of the family man...

**FATHER:** Well, the paltriness of the merchants' environment can account for that...where immorality and lack of education were everywhere. A "Jupan Dumitrache" means limitless ego, which would have probably ignored the infidelities of his wife, provided that others were not aware. He, the absolute master, be cheated on? The honorable lover of...honors?! Fortunately, a Deus ex machine takes care that honors don't remain with the unworthy, reckless and impertinent. Someday, their unscrupulousness, envy and stupidity will eventually lead them to their demise.

**SON:** Do honors have a negative effect on negative people only?

**FATHER:** Unfortunately not. Even the best could change their behavior after receiving honors, even earned ones.

**SON:** Thus, even the best consider they are always entitled to honors?

**FATHER:** No, I actually don't think it's that harmful for people to want honors. These stimulate, even give an impulse to creativity, progress...But I don't agree with those who claim them as if the rest of us owe them...And their absence should not lead to despair. Everyone should take after the modest people who don't let honors change them and work just the same after. These people are exposed to envy, hatred and disparagement from the others. They can only work for the good of the others, but are completely exposed. Let us protect them...

**SON:** There are people who were born or have lived surrounded by honors and glory and desire to end their lives in the same manner.

**FATHER:** Some anecdotes could have even been comical if they had not been tragic to begin with. Thus, Carol the First of England wanted to be decapitated with all honors, and even an

assassin such as Bagrov, desired to be hanged with honors. And we could give more examples.

**SON:** In my childhood, I would hear the phrase “word of honor”, which gave solemnity to a promise. Why I can’t hear it anymore?

**FATHER:** Even I, at old age, have not told it anymore nor heard it. Young people certainly don’t use it anymore. It should be brought back. There are some other phrases expressing the same thing “Once you’ve promised something, it becomes a duty”; “Do not expect from others what you cannot do yourself”, etc. Anyway, a man of honor (and I wish there were plenty among young people) never forgets his word. For him, to honor means difference, respect for what deserves it, and that only a catastrophe could stop him from keeping his word. Let us hope the future will bring honor, honors and words of honor.

## PEACE AND WAR

**SON:** Livius showed that “Sure peace is far better and more prudent than an expected victory”.

**FATHER:** Livius urged people to live in peace. And this was because this Blue planet has been a stage for battles and only short times of pause, translated into PEACE for people. These short pauses have only been periods of truce when those with less means to fight gave up their justice and dignity, at least until they became able to forcefully establish them.

**SON:** There was a poet, Anatoli Alexin, who gave a definition of peace: “Let us all, inside our souls be poets/And instead of projectiles, let our planet hear/The sound of lyres forever!” Is this vision possible?

**FATHER:** How wonderful that would be! However, though I don’t want to agree with Cicero, he said at some point “When we hear the sound of weapons, muses are silent” and is quite true to reality...However, as much as we want peace, we shouldn’t mistake it or slavery, since peace is the freedom of that people to lead their lives in quiet, even if they are preparing for war. Slavery is the worst thing that could happen to a man or a people. It must be avoided in any way possible.

**SON:** Ancient wisdom shows that peace can be made with the worst of men, if the lives of people are at stake.

**FATHER:** It is true. When a life is saved, everything is saved sooner or later. However it might be, nobody is as crazy as to choose war over peace. For even one reason of the

thousand available, no one would choose war. In times of peace, children bury their parents, while at war, parents bury their children. Such a thing is abnormal and tragic. And Euripides calls those who think they can stop human suffering with the aid of the sword, mad.

It has been demonstrated over the centuries that non-violence is superior to violence and forgiveness more generous than punishment. Not to mention that non-violence is a law specific for the human species, where the superiority of the spirit should be dominant, while violence is a characteristic of the beasts.

**SON:** It is said that one day we will reach UNIVERSAL PEACE and this will happen even if individuals don't become better. The way the human species behaves nowadays does not increase our expectations of people ever being better. Quite the contrary I would say. However peace will be imposed, as there will be a new order of societies, a new science (so developed that a war would destroy both sides and probably the whole planet), or even new economical necessities.

**FATHER:** Well, this has always been the endeavor of humanity. And I remember Dimitrie Cantemir had been forced to choose war with the Turks in 1711, although he had always been a promoter of peace. In "The Hieroglyphic History" he writes: "One cannot consider another skill greater than that of turning belligerence into peace, and the sooner is this done, the more praiseworthy". His war against the Ottomans had cost him dearly. By losing this confrontation, he could not regain his fortune in the country, and he lived in Russia with his entire family.

**SON:** I consider peace to be the biggest virtue of all the civilizations, and war a heinous crime for all (except for wars led for defense). Victor Hugo, in "War Poem" calls for peace: "Oh, but I wonder that there are/Still angry arms which raise a weapon, /After the skylark sings"!

**FATHER:** Neither divine law or that of men allow anyone to pride oneself when he kills. Unfortunately, "war is the art of killing at a big scale and doing with glory things which, had they been done on a small scale, would lead to hanging". Surely you cannot use bayonets always or for too long, because they might become the weapons you are killed by. Though Prussian Junkers did not feel safe without weapons, ultimately I suppose even German soldiers have realized what ridiculous atrocity war brings about, especially after the final defeat in 1944-1945.

**SON:** "No redemption in the war", Vergilius had warned us in ancient times. Has anyone listened to him?

**FATHER:** Probably not, though in my opinion any general or leader has a sacred duty, to bring peace to those he leads. Only peace brings more glory than war. Peace and quietness gives birth to love, the stability of the nation and the couples, and cultural and material blooming. The conscience of every man has acquired the certainty that as long as we can live in peace, we don't have to await war. Man has the duty to fight for peace, though it is only a perpetual dream.

**SON:** But who can bring us inner peace? I think man alone can do this, even in the middle of a war outside him.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

**SON:** In the "Dictionary for Neologisms" I have found a rather simplistic definition of parties, and it is not worth mentioning. How would you, father, define these groups of people?

**FATHER:** The definition in the dictionary is correct, but perhaps I could complete it. Here it is how it would sound: Political parties are groups of people with a certain organization (there should be even more, if you ask me) and stability, with common interests in all fields.

**SON:** Isn't the political interest the first one?

**FATHER:** Of course. Any party wants to gain power. Actually, this is their only honest purpose. The rest...

**SON:** Some other interests must be linked to this gain, I suppose...

**FATHER:** The party reaches power based on a platform which comprises the social, economical, justice, etc. Based on the points in the platform which voters are interested in, the group wins the elections.

**SON:** I can see what happens to these promises...

**FATHER:** Unfortunately, as is evident these days, and not solely in our country, politicians rarely keep their word. Sometimes this is due to unfavorable economical conditions (as a poor state of the economics), but also groups of interests directing politics in completely other directions than those initially established.

**SON:** Let's call it party in the sense of association, a sort of marriage. The only difference is that in a marriage two persons contribute...

**FATHER:** You are right, in a sense. As in any association, even marriage, the couple or the group can grow apart...especially since in our country parties seem to have been created with the sole purpose of being dismembered...

**SON:** Not to mention the moving of members from one party to the other...Hearing what they say when they leave, like in a distasteful divorce, it's impossible to think that at one point they had the same point of view.

**FATHER:** The worst part is that this coming and going from political tourists is provoked by the minister, secretary of state or general manager positions, or simply by money, houses, and cars.

**SON:** But, father, who trusts these people anymore? Can they serve the interests of the many? And if not, why do we keep voting for them?

**FATHER:** I sadly admit that Nicolae Iorga was right when he had said (as a man who knew everything from the inside) that political parties have programmed to have some conflicts (perhaps specially designed) to display in public...There is a single thing not brought up: the interests of the country. Whenever the subject comes up, is used to build political image. There is even a more cruel definition, which is, unfortunately true: members of a party gather in packs like wolves so that they have their own comrades to kill in case they have no other prey. Simply observe the political scene between 1990 until 2009 and you will see it is as bad as it gets.

**SON:** Indeed, members of a party who got there out of interest can attack each other. No other field gives more truth to the saying: "*Homo homini lupus*". What we see now at the parties in charge and those in the opposition is the same thing which happened in the time of Iorga.

**FATHER:** In my humble opinion a party has no right to exist when instead of representing benefic energy; it brings only scandal corruption and plunders the people.

**SON:** At the head of some parties we can find bundles of people, all related, occupying all functions, while those who oppose this system are eliminated immediately, in spite of any possible good name, percentage in polls, etc. These leaders (of gangs, actually) do not think at all of the party. There are cases when voters have eliminated some parties from the political scene, and the parliament hasn't seen anymore any trace of the party who had mocked history, the people, everything.

**FATHER:** in other countries, political parties form, all together, the country, and others where parties represent only those who rob that country. Here, our politicians, once they got into the parliament, shamelessly voted astronomical salaries for themselves, pensions or luxury work cars. And this happens in a country where people starve.

**SON:** But don't these people think of those who had voted for them, who had trusted them and elected them to represent their interests?

**FATHER:** In no way! Please look at the culture, education, health departments. Do they give money toward these domains? Very little and we imagine why. There is no need for educated, cultured or healthy people, all that is desired is a hungry and easy to manipulate herd. Maybe that is why some analysts said the parties are more like gangs, which often fight for power. Political parties are only the visible part of the iceberg, while the rest is engaged in a fierce battle for certain interests.

**SON:** We are talking about belonging to a current, a trend, some ideologies or the fight for the interests of a party. The affiliation to something implies discipline, in order to recognize and defend principles.

**FATHER:** Which principles? What discipline? I have lived with a party with an iron fist: the Communist Party. There were no opinions that would differ from those of the leaders. But a party without various opinions is shapeless, dead. I consider the opinions of the members to be necessary, in no case dangerous. They do become so when they meet certain obstacles or if they are silenced. Such phenomena happen (we see them every day) when the leaders compel others to think as they do, otherwise they don't get on the lists of senators or members of the parliament.

**SON:** How about conscience? Or the survival of the party?

**FATHER:** Only conscience should dictate inside parties and not interests of the group, and honest people (where could they be?) to act the same, without being forced to sign a predetermined program. Everything should have honor as its basis, because every citizen and especially members of the parties should first tend to the wellbeing of the country and its future. But by doing so, he will be scolded by colleagues and leaders...We know some parties have at the basis of their program the suppressing of the true knowledge of the nation, and doing this is a great injustice and immorality. This is why true democracy in my opinion should be a discipline studied in schools, and the right of people joining a certain party respected, and each person should learn to respect the individual as well as the nation and fight for the future. A good motto would be "*vox populi, vox dei*" (The voice of the people, the voice of the gods).

## THE MOTHERLAND, PATRIOTISM

**FATHER:** Why don't you tell me, son, something about the idea of motherland or patriotism, nowadays when young people, or, at least, part of them, mock these notions...

**SON:** Not all think this wrongly! Those you are talking about are individuals without education, with nothing sacred. But they have become so due to the adults around them...

**FATHER:** It is true, that among us, adults, there are some awful people, , uneducated, citizens who would betray anyone in order for them to be all right. Only for them the notions we are talking about are obsolete but their behavior and ideas will eventually disappear, while the Romanian specific will not, not even after we join the E.U. . First of all because our culture is singular, and this reminds me of what Titu Maiorescu had to say: "In our blood lay asleep our ancestors, awaiting the time they will wake in greatness".

**SON:** I don't know how ideas from one hundred years before could be invoked here. I'm surprised you haven't mentioned Steven the Great!

**FATHER:** I have every reason for mentioning in this context, and you, the young, though you think yourselves all-knowing, will join Europe together with your parents. We shall base united psychologically, we will not imitate others, we will have complementary ideas, and we don't want to be dominated. National dignity will always be a given for us. Let us not forget that the government and parliament of a country die when the spirit of the nation no is longer and I have seen that happening very often.

**SON:** Horatio had a verse which no longer can be understood by young people: "*Dulce et decorum pro patria mori*" (It is a beautiful thing to die for your motherland). At least that's how I see some of my generation, especially since military service will no longer be compulsory.

**FATHER:** And then, I suppose you will understand what Latin poet Pacuvius had said: "*Ubi bene, ibi patria*" (Where it is good, that's where your motherland is). If so, is there anything sacred for young people? We forget that the Latin word for motherland, "*patria*", comes from "*pater*" (father) , the land baptized by the blood of the ancestors...

**SON:** Man tries to live a good life here on earth, to have some comfort, a car, a good job and that's about it. Other things, such as reward for the descendants and patriotism, are disappearing from the interests of the contemporaries?

**FATHER:** I can't see how young people can look at problems in such a way. I repeat: maybe only a small part thinks like that...

**SON:** That would be indeed nice, for them to be few...the Great Poet was also a great patriot but loathed those who shouted their love for the country from the top of their lungs. The sacred things should be said in the right place at the right time.

**FATHER:** We read and re-read from Eminescu, for whom the Patriot should have a sensitive heart, but also a cool mind. The country and patriotism are not about betraying the people

you have been born in. In this way, Ferdousi's statement that "it is happier he who dies in battle than he who has betrayed" is not exaggerated. Usually people who have no sense of the past betray. Unless you respect those who have died or worked for the country, you shouldn't proclaim your infinite love for the country. Some leave their country for a better one, more beautiful or richer. Does this mean that a man could choose his mother from the most beautiful of women? These individuals believe only a country full of riches deserves to be loved. Fortunately, people with these conceptions are rare.

**SON:** Still, after joining the E.U. I can't imagine keeping the identity...

**FATHER:** I believe that in these moments when boundaries disappear, the future must be vaccinated with our traditions, with our ancestors' bravery. Because no matter how much misfortune were to hit this land, everything the minds and hearts of the Romanians have conceived and felt must be completed by the energy of this people which went through time with their heads up. The fight for a single ideal of the people in these territories and their creative power has been actions which determined the maintaining of the race. When Cicero said "*Pro aris et focis*" (For the altar and the home) he directly expressed what Romanians would think. In fact, many rulers would shout before a battle: "For the nation and the country!" "For the country and the people!" How well it would be if the leaders we have today would act according to the above maxim, and have the same interests as the country. That would be the way to the absolute morality, giving up the individual for the general. I would like to live until our leaders feel the meaning of the ancient words: "*Ubi patria, ibi bene*" (Where there is a motherland, there it is good). We would be quite the same (please, God, grant this miracle!), under these circumstances, to Marcus Porcius Cato, who would work and eat together with his slaves, though he was a censor and consul of Rome. Without any arrogance, corruption, a real wise man and a patriot.

**SON:** But father, you have often been – I haven't had the chance to go – abroad. How does it feel not to have your country's land under your feet?

**FATHER:** I have often left for short periods of time in the West. Being far from dear ones, I can honestly say, made me feel a longing for the country, parents, and especially the children, no matter how well I had been received. I am honest when I say that all misfortunes, joys or pains of the country followed me and became my own. Though today, when those who succeed abroad are praised, I may come across as awkward. It would be great if our representatives abroad (who, in the name of the people, eat caviar and drink champagne) cared about the laws of his country and synchronize with the nation's joys but

also its misfortunes. What do we see? Contempt. People often forget that ancestors are living among us either as a blessing or a reproach.

**SON:** You are unfair, father! Stephen the great has been sanctified, at the end of every year, television film traditions from all over the country, councils of priests are seen at any anniversary or commemoration. ..

**FATHER:** That's exactly where the problem lies! An enormous amount of money is spent for things which only show at the surface, not to mention that often , traditions are transformed into kitsch, and those councils of priests appear everywhere, even if it is or not necessary. The Church has much to lose by going out too much of the holy sanctuary. I often see exaggerate praise for places and traditions that are strange to the Romanians. Things are not quite like that. Telling some individuals who promote such things that a real man is only he who, by defending his country, risks hatred, serious punishment or even death, is nonsense. What will that man understand? Even this individual will realize the importance of the motherland, but only when it will be lost...We could also say that when your honor is contested, or when you are offended, you find it hard to forgive, but when your country is mocked at, you find it impossible to forgive. Do those who offend our country that crops across our fields feed on the rain, while the land of the ancestors has fed on tears and blood? And let us not forget one more thing: When you are happy, everybody wants to be with you, even strangers. But in tragic situations, only those of the same blood will be close.

**SON:** You have become quite passionate, father. At my age and my studies, I wouldn't contradict you, but things have changed and no longer people pay attention to the absolute truths you have mentioned. You had to make plenty of sacrifices in order to get outside the country, while we get on the plane and there we are! This is why I have friends here as well as abroad. And I give my friendship to them, without any difference.

**FATHER:** I think you are right, for many reasons. I'm not sure, for instance that, under today's living conditions, when ninety per cent of the population is impoverished, Romanians are close to Romanians. Constant misfortune should normally unite people, with us it happened in 1989, but now they are torn apart by envy and hatred. It is as if we are living scenes from famous comedies. Only some "clowns" (called analysts) from the power's court or the opposition have the right to think and decide the truth for us. Can a people led by such individuals have any personality or independence? Has it any future? Or the ultimate goal is to make a mindless hoard out of the people?

**SON:** Do you agree with extremist parties which promote exaggerated nationalism?

**FATHER:** I do not, how could I? Some leaders of such parties consider that one cannot be a patriot unless you are the enemy of all other symbols in the world. True patriotism and being a true patriot implies sincere love for humanity. A national feeling insures the existence of the people but only generosity will allow the understanding of another people's view... The generosity of peoples should also be doubled by loyalty, or else any pact, contract, understanding that will not be respected may lead to major conflicts or even war. Motherland and patriotism are notions that are unknown to only one type of people: slaves, of any kind: slaves of money, pleasures, interest, of the politics, the slave which executes any order. Indeed slavery is the mother of the greatest sins. Let us avoid becoming slaves...

## TRUE FRIENDSHIPS

**GRANDSON:** Though my experience is not vast, I have heard and read about a great quality of man: friendship. Some say we must put friendship to the test as we do gold: with fire. But I found the Latin explanation much more interesting: "*Veræ amicitiae sempiternæ sunt*" (True friendships are forever).

**GRANDFATHER:** What the wise man says (be him Arab or Latin) is true. Anyway, without friends, man is poor. Even when he criticizes, a friend doesn't hurt you. The stone thrown by your friend doesn't crack your head, as they say. I think only smart people make good friends and this way misfortune is going to elude them.

**GRANDSON:** But today, in the market economy, doesn't it seem that we are constantly surrounded by enemies? Man is no longer sacred for man! Thus what do we do? Hunt each other and kill one another like beasts? No longer talk to, nor meet anyone?

**GRANDFATHER:** Perhaps we could return to the old friendships inoculated fifty years ago? Lenin and Krupskaja, Lenin and Stalin, Tito and his wife Iovanka, Ceausescu and Elena, that was in trend then! It is no secret that the battle among these was fierce, and "friends" of Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Ceausescu, did not reach old age very often.

**GRANDSON:** And still, haven't there been any remarkable friendships in this world? There must have been people who have respected the signs of true friendship (I have counted six): give and receive, share and ask, serve and be served, these are the qualities of a friend!

**GRANDFATHER:** Only by observing these rules of friendship we get to the old saying "A friend is a soul within two bodies". I shall give you some good examples. A friendship that remains in our memory is that of Eminescu, Creanga and Slavici. Eminescu, for example,

had sacrificed much of his time in order to rewrite the first texts of Slavici, who didn't master the Romanian language too well. The same Eminescu insisted that Creanga should write his famous stories and join "Junimea". We should also mention the village Dragosloveni, in Vrancea, which had periodically hosted Vlahuta, Delavrancea and Caragiale. A great friendship was maintained there, with great effects on Romanian literature.

**GRANDSON:** Are there friendships only in this domain of the muses?

**GRANDFATHER:** I have mentioned these because they are rare; some exaggerated egos are encountered in this field. Surely we could mention another environment, the political, but we would enter mined terrain, with interests which destroy any friendship, alliance or coalition. However, cases of true friendship have been seen in communist prisons, when people of different religions and cultures have sacrificed one for another. Some of the old men gave their meals or places to the younger inmates, in order for those to live and spread the beliefs further, into a better world.

**GRANDSON:** Let us return to the cultural field, though you have mentioned something which deserves an entire chapter: SACRIFICE.

**GRANDFATHER:** Nowadays the cultural scene from all over the country has severely deteriorated. Nobody accepts anybody, all criticize and are criticized. Perhaps there are special interests involved.

**GRANDSON:** Who cultivates friendships out of interest will also end them from that same reason. Thus, from my own experience I can say that you can be rich beyond your dreams, but unless you share that with a friend, you are not happy. What good is a life without friends?

**GRANDFATHER:** No good whatsoever. This is why, as an admirer of the contemporary men of culture, I believe there should be more kindness, tolerance and harmony. Long live old literary friendships! Lovers of literature, music, painting, sculpture are still waiting for the great banquet of friendship, extinguishing the conflicts inside creators of beautiful things. Let us hope we don't have too much to wait.

**GRANDSON:** And I would urge young people to try and have as many friends as possible, because an old friendship brings joy just like the beginning and preparation of a new one.

## **CAN WE CHANGE DESTINY?**

**DAUGHTER:** We often hear that if destiny were fair, we wouldn't have been born. I hope only pessimists, or non-believers say this...

**FATHER:** I am certain that if death wants to seal the faith of a prey, they the pray will head straight for the gun of the hunter. But what do you think about the saying: "we make our own destiny"?

**DAUGHTER:** I would say that, no matter the angle we choose to look at this, according to this maxim and the truth known by us, we each have a contribution to the completion of destiny.

**FATHER:** Athenagoras, ever since ancient times, had asked himself a question, which has been asked for generations now: is man's life determined by destiny or a divinity?

**DAUGHTER:** Destiny or divinity? No one has found the answer. But how could we interpret destiny or divine justice when a man has done nothing but good things, and only bad things happen to him? Or is destiny different from the divine?

**FATHER:** Some proverbs about this come to mind, with the main idea that everything we do comes back to us in some way: "Whoever digs someone else's grave falls in it instead", "You reap what you sow", etc. Can we appreciate or "under-appreciate" God? Some would even like to negotiate with divinity as in the market economy. Without realizing, we imagine God awkwardly human. It is a blasphemy. We are always forgetting that He is the Absolute and everything coming from Him is perfect.

**DAUGHTER:** Then am I, the common person, compelled to ask myself questions regarding God or destiny? Knowing that everything coming from him is perfect, why would a child be born with disabilities? What is that being guilty of in front of God?

**FATHER:** We may suppose that in another life that certain child had been a criminal, or even worse, his parents had been thieves.

**DAUGHTER:** But I don't consider this fair. Under these conditions, we are not born equal, as they say. How could we be so if in other lives we have had different paths?

**FATHER:** The messages of the Grail comfort us: in Creation there are perfect laws. There are no advantages or disadvantages as exist on earth. Thus, injustice is impossible. There are no common desires in the idea of holiness. If it were so, it would become trivial. I remember, from what I have read, though it is a limitless topic, which God's Love and Justice are in another dimension, which is not always compatible with the human mind. Jesus' words at the Last Supper: "I have yet many things to say to you, but now you cannot bear them". This is where the conclusion of Konrad Lorenz could help, as he says we are only "beings in formation", we are the missing link between the monkey and the men, we only have a "spiritual embryo".

**DAUGHTER:** Thus we have to follow our destinies as underdeveloped beings? But could we live without a destiny?

**FATHER:** The absence of destiny would be the absence of consciousness of life, which would bring us close to animals. When Simmel evoked the “passive” or “active” state of every man, he meant, I think, that which comes without our will, from the exterior, but also things which we owe to ourselves to accomplish. When we discover obstacles around us and take the necessary measures, this is the contact with destiny.

**DAUGHTER:** And what if an individual no longer desires to have anything to do with destiny?

**FATHER:** If that person desires to be someone else each day, in a different time and space, it means the true problems of life do not torment him. I believe everything that happens to us, whether we like it or not, is part of destiny. We all have to remain where we are and create a single purpose of our actions and inactions from our destiny.

**DAUGHTER:** If someone else but me would hear you, he could accuse you of too much closeness to human habits, which have an attraction force comparable to that of gravity. And once released from that force, limitless freedom will propel you ahead, leaving your destiny behind...

**FATHER:** It seems normal to attempt to moderate people’s liberating instinct, but I know, my dear that destiny cannot be avoided, annulled or overcome. Even if, when I was young, I thought I could take anyone on...I was under the impression that destiny ends once you die, but today I am not sure anymore. It seems destiny goes beyond our death. Through the memory of what has been created (if there is the case), or the behavior and accomplishments of the children of the deceased. Pessimism or optimism depends on the discussion of each of us with the other dwelling inside us. Man’s solitude, situated somewhere beyond the concept of space, can bring more wisdom or tolerance.

**DAUGHTER:** By reaching the issue of wisdom, tolerance and especially, total freedom, I have wondered if Robinson Crusoe had run away or had opposed his destiny.

**FATHER:** This Robinson wanted something different from what he could experience in England. Instead of humiliation and obedience he desired complete freedom. He hadn’t been offered the right to choose. Even that humiliation, had it been chosen by himself, would have been a type of freedom. As we know from Father Cleopa, Macarie Egipteanul and even “Robinson Crusoe”, the phenomenon of solitude (of isolation, in the case of monks) should precede the entrance into the world. First the inner desert should be conquered, then the distancing from worldly passions and then isolation into the desert. Robinson’s conscience was only defeated by destiny, which urged him to leave.

**DAUGHTER:** What had this man changed?

**FATHER:** Only a place, an island (England) with another place, where he didn't find freedom, but only the suffering he had already been accustomed to. Has he changed his destiny or went on living it?

## RESPECT FOR BOOKS

**FATHER:** During my career I have been passionate about the "titans" of our culture. Among them, there is Nicolae Iorga, who has a special place in my soul and my mind. He used to say ironically: "Our people has gotten used to reading books which read themselves". Indeed, he was talking about part of the Romanians, especially the rich, who buy their books and bind them in the most expensive leather. Those books could be a true spiritual feast for a poor intellectual. It's obvious the rich man will never read a single page of those books, though his library is gilded.

**SON:** You seem a bit harsh on the rich. I happen to know such people and they take interest in philosophy, literature ... Thus, it seems you exaggerate ... or couldn't be some reminiscence of past times.

**FATHER:** I cannot possibly be entirely wrong. I simply believe that reading is not in fashion anymore. I'm sure, however, even this famous "transition" will continue for a long time, everything will return to normal and the book will regain its place. For the moment, though, we may observe a dangerous, to say the least, trajectory of our culture. Everybody wants food, sex, luxury cars, well-paid jobs, and fortunes without effort. It's like we live in constant fear of our bodies being stolen and we live without reading, without helping those in need. It seems nobody gives heed to Miron Costin's words: "In harsh times, there is no greater joy for people than opening a book"

**SON:** I, from my experience, so far although I am just over my teens, think that this noble work with the book should start at a very early age. And in my opinion, it is wrong to do as many do today – let the child choose. How could the child possibly know what to choose? If it had been up to me, at that age, I would have chosen play ... which has its purpose, certainly ... But ... is this our life? Some child's play? And what would the consequences be? Not knowing even the simplest of things, and having difficulties in reading, even in high-school? Should we make baby-steps in every field?

**FATHER:** It's a form of our educational system and some accept it because children remain there in the afternoon, too. Today people seem to forget that childhood is the moment when

respect and the love for books are taught to the young. If the proper time for education is ignored, we will find ourselves in a world as we seen on TV, with illiterate billionaires and quite poorly prepared politicians. Some only know how to accumulate, while others how to consume. And an Arab saying takes my idea further: "An animal loaded with books will neither become wise nor educated; how could he know if what he carries are books or wood?"

**SON:** I have read somewhere that books have destines similar to people, for they share the same enemies: fire, humidity, beasts, time and their own content...

**FATHER:** It is true and, my son, I am proud to hear the words from your mouth. However the thing which terrifies me most is what Thomas d'Aquino said: "I fear the man of a single book. This man will never accept different opinions, since he has stopped at the barrier of reading just one book". Such individuals are limited, obstinate and fanatical, and so much so that they become dangerous for us, those around them as well as for themselves. This is where parents and teachers should intervene and urge teenagers and children to read. Only by reading will they be able to know and understand what happens in the world and become educated, better able to lead a proper life, will hold respect for man and for the country they live in.

**SON:** Anyway, children's education should not be left to the TV, but only by extensive reading. They should be taught to love books from an early age. Unfortunately only during ancient times had this thing happened. Do you agree, father?

**FATHER:** Moreover, Chinese ancient times saw rising up the only as result of competition or tests, and hierarchical ladder.

People of culture and scientists were stimulated by being offered official ranks, which ensured them a decent life. The state was as it should be in any place at any time: a true Maecenas. And, a thing which may contribute to our awe at Chinese ancient times we find out that a test for employing any public worker consisted also of ... Poetry. By reading of that, these are stories from another planet, being perfectly conscious of the fact that dictators have treated knowledge, theater and literature as worthless.

Emperor Yangdi's explanation was, to his glory, that literature is necessary in order to counteract the growing aggressiveness of the human being, and during his reign there was a perfect balance between Books and Arms.

**SON:** Where have those times gone? We ask ourselves today, when televisions promote crude ignorance, when most movies produced are mostly erotic or pornographic, horror, war, terror, etc.?

**FATHER:** As Murphy's laws tells us "when things go well, something bad is bound to happen". Thus, during Chinese ancient times, when the Book was treasured, the emperor Shi Huang Di, in the III-rd century ordered all books to be burned at the beginning of his reign. He, who actually loved culture, abhorred tradition.

But, it is a known fact: a country without tradition is headed to its demise. He had probably realized his huge error and then had the idea of building The Great Wall Of China.

**SON:** What was there to protect with his wall? A country without tradition or educated people? From what I know, China had been ravaged and even the Wall had to be guarded and saved from destruction.

**FATHER:** By whom? By those who, after the death of Shi Huang Di, have revived culture and science through written words. Of course, this lesson of the ancient times should have been pondered upon by the temporary leaders of the states which, by ignoring books and the future of the nation, direct a revolting budget toward culture and education. If this continues, we could be heading for a cultural disaster. And, unfortunately, not only cultural.

### **SHOULD WE TRY REGRET OR REPENTANCE?**

**GRANDSON:** Italians use to say: "He who regrets too late regrets in vain.". Are we that much bound to the past, Grandfather?

**GRANDFATHER :** It would be ideal for the man to be the embodiment of truth, righteousness, beauty, hope on this earth ... However each of us is bound to a shameful or glorious past. That certain past may sink us further into mistakes but if we manage to break away from it, we may get another chance to start our lives all over again. Therefore, we can clearly see that the past can influence us for the worse or for the better. This way its influence extends also to our descendants.

**GRANDSON:** Have we get any chance, to change something from the past ?

**GRANDFATHER:** This is something we can certainly attempt, if in the present we experience REGRET. If this apparent impossibility (for some) is not transformed into possibility, we will be further enslaved by our vices and our past and present mistakes.

From my personal experience I have observed that REGRET may have benefic effects on a tyrant, transforming him into a Kind man or on a Sadist, making him compassionate and makes a fool a little wiser.

**GRANDSON:** If we admit we have been wrong, (how difficult is it to admit!) we are taking the right step towards justice and lifting the moral. God Himself, as we read in the scriptures, urges us to REGRET: "Turn away from your wicked path!"

**GRANDFATHER:** Regret is closely related to repentance. When we carry in our souls too much guilt, our hopes for the better start to fade. Thus, we must attempt to repair our past wrongdoing and move on. By permanently feeling GUILT we cannot solve anything. The answer to the problem is to get back on our feet after numerous falls and constantly try to do things better and more correctly.

**GRANDSON:** Is this act of PENITENCE enough to quiet our souls ?

**GRANDFATHER:** No. What we actually achieve, by penitence is to cancel the so-called "normality" up to what we point. Otherwise, we live in constant discontent and we avoid at all costs being left alone with our conscience. This permanent tale of observation, of confrontation with the self, leads to a need to confess the sin, REPENTANCE. Once the sin is confessed, there comes redemption. Although a greater danger lurks nowadays: getting used to sin.

**GRANDSON:** This accommodation with sin could mean for some (the weak, I suppose) diminishing the gravity of the sin by perpetuating it? Isn't this the way to callousness, which makes sin appear as possible or even necessary?

**GRANDFATHER:** This is, indeed, a real danger. Those used to perpetuating sin follow also a false theory, which, in their minds serves as an excuse for their actions: the omission of EVIL. I believe that doing worse and worse things will cause even the genetic code of man to change. And this will cause individuals to be born evil. These evil newborns will be the descendants of those who have interfered with man's first impulse of being generous and altruistic. Under these conditions, man can become beasts ...

**GRANDSON:** What is there to be done in order to avoid such a worldwide disaster?

**GRANDFATHER:** it is both difficult and easy. It is necessary that this being destined to be GOOD and reach PENITENCE and REPENTANCE. Any coming to consciousness (even if later) and choosing the righteous path is beneficial. So, let us never forget the importance of PENITENCE and repent. As much as possible they should be preached especially of those who have not been aware of them. By doing so, the true believer (though not only) will achieve understanding of the DIVINE IDENTITY of the human being.

## LET'S LAUGH!

**NEPHEW:** According to Chamfort "The day most wholly lost is the one on which one does not laugh". Do you agree?

**GRANDFATHER:** Absolutely. And if you ask me why, I will answer that it is obvious for each of us how much our lives change in accordance with the people surrounding us. Some bring beauty and joy to our lives, others sorrow and discomfort. The first inoculate us with a state of grace, which, even if it is not happiness, it brings us closer to it. These blessed people laugh a lot and with all their hearts without mocking our infirmities or our failures. However laughter can also be evil and that is when it turns into a grin.

**NEPHEW:** What about those who never laugh?

**GRANDFATHER:** If they never laugh, then they surely must have a grin in one corner of the mouth. And this semblance of a smile -laughter is the awful, loathsome part of some individuals. For the simple fact that the grin expresses wickedness and scoffs at all that is holy in a human being.

**NEPHEW:** Sure, but is there really no chance for the people who never laugh? Are they truly wicked?

**GRANDFATHER:** It generally is a bad thing when a person cannot laugh. Or that person is ill and this brings, as we have mentioned before, sadness. It's true that real, healthy laughter can only be heard in few people, and is in direct connection to the sense of humor granted by God. And this type of humor is reverberating around. Humorous people through their own laughter or that provoked in others, bring beauty in life, freedom, or even the intensely sought catharsis. Who among us would refuse the company-even in loss- or even friendship of this type of individual? You will, of course, ask me if it is possible that God grants one so much good-luck. Sometimes, you get this chance, but pass it by without noticing. Not that is quite the misfortune!

**NEPHEW:** Grandfather, has God given you friends?

**GRANDFATHER:** I have had good and loyal friends, especially during my youth. Somehow once you get older, and you have already formed a family, a person's interests shift to another direction and he partially forgets about his friends. But you never forget, and you even seek those who have embellished your early years with their joy and humor.

**NEPHEW:** Talk to me more about the wicked side of laughter. Can you use it to mock and offend people?

**GRANDFATHER:** Have not, at times, those able to produce joy and harmony mocked us and the pettiness characteristic to the human being? Perhaps the purpose for this mockery is to convince us to straighten our actions: "*ridendo castigat mores*". This is why we should appreciate and stimulate the admirable wit of our humorists.

**NEPHEW:** The Apostle said: "Rejoice and be merry!" However I wouldn't put joy and gaiety on the same level.

**GRANDFATHER:** I cannot say I disagree. Neither I nor others consider them equivalent. I think joy implies a superior feeling of participation to everything that happens to us, and everybody around. I believe humor and sincere laughter are connected to joy and less with fun or partying. Which, we must admit, are necessary to a certain extent. However, in my humble opinion, we mustn't seek this inferior (or so I think) form of human manifestation. Though some of my (especially) poet friends, at such a party the muse for their verses might appear. Could it be so?

**NEPHEW:** I feel compelled to bring into our conversation a Japanese haiku (a literary form I enjoy very much lately). Thus, in a haiku, a man addressed a bare twig: "Speak to me of God, bough!". And then the twig bloomed. By replacing necessary things (*mutatis mutandis*) in our story, we may state, based on our previous conversation that God alone is present inside the person who, through beneficent laughter and their actions cause harmony and joy to appear around them.

**GRANDFATHER:** We can only conclude our conversation with the words: LAUGH, DO NOT GRIN, PEOPLE! BUT DO NOT GIVE YOUR LAUGH IN JUST ANY CIRCUMSTANCES!

## ROMANIAN CELEBRATIONS AND FASTING

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** As a Romanian girl born and raised in a family which cherishes faith in God, I have always been looking forward to the religious holidays. I would claim we all have a special need for such holidays. When I was little, I imagined life should only a continuous celebration.

**GRANDFATHER:** A continuous wish for celebration is, to say it clearly, a big mistake, first of all, because celebration is a crowning of days of effort and hard work. Clearly, those who do not work do not celebrate either. Only sloth is a continuous celebration. It is clear that those who do not work do not need a period of rest and joyous celebration.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I could add, after my experience so far, that a celebration is a way for people to evade their daily routine, escape the profane and rise toward the sacred. That is why religious celebrations should be respected.

**GRANDFATHER:** What about the period before the celebration? What do you think of the more difficult period of the fasting?

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** I make no secret of the fact I have always waited anxiously for Easter and Christmas to arrive.

**GRANDFATHER:** But waiting wouldn't be the same if before they came we had indulged in all types of food, with no restrictions. If the days of fasting are ignored, we could not take as much joy in celebration, we couldn't even see the difference. But what a special emotion for Easter, after celebrating the night of the Resurrection, you wash your face with water from the traditional cup with red eggs and money, and then, your grandmother, mother, wife, sister put the steak and the other goodies on the table!

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Aren't you a bit too idyllic where celebrations are concerned?

**GRANDFATHER:** Not in the least! This is how every family should celebrate, even the modern ones, which you represent. It is always necessary to return to the traditions of our childhood, in a family which bears respect to the human being and all that is holy.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Unfortunately, memories from the relatively recent past of the Romanians bring back images of Sundays with lists of "voluntary" activities, or close scrutiny of those who chose to believe in God.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** The absence of religious holidays, or indifference or hatred towards them has always lead to an accumulation of negative force, erupting in the human being, with immediate effects such as uncontrolled reactions, or psychic imbalance, etc. And I even think wars can be a consequence of the lack of religious celebrations.

**GRANDFATHER:** Well, I think the simple education given by the parents in the spirit of respect for the holidays could prevent many bad things. But what happens when not even the parents know the symbol of the cross? Perhaps they could learn from their children who seem to go more often to Church these days.

**GRANDDAUGHTER:** Individuals who work ceaselessly in this market economy no longer have peace or joys. They only begin to embitter and grow ugly (both their bodies and their souls) and old. Once entrapped by the mirage of money, they see nothing beyond that. So a good question for these people is if life has any meaning anymore...

**GRANDFATHER:** Let us ask ourselves and ask the others what life without faith can possibly mean. And when any holiday is near we should think more about our friends, our relatives,

or even our enemies to whom we must speak in a friendly manner, to the dead who await offerings from us and the due respect for all celebrations and all religions.

## THE AGGRESSIVE DABBER

**FATHER:** The individual we are going to talk about can be called the vile dog, the nincompoop, the wretch, the irresponsible, etc. There is no mistake in calling him all those names. He will be found in the least likely places: in the educational system, in local or county councils in the government and, of course, in the parliament. He may be dressed quite smart but can also wear work clothes, in order to show how close to the people he is.

**DAUGHTER:** But what does this little monster do?

**FATHER:** If you asked him, he wouldn't know what to answer. In fact, he is an individual who wants and sometimes manages to confuse, secures votes through empty promises, never sits still during meetings, hiding or ... extending the "emptiness of his brain", gesticulates violently, without mastering the true sense of his words. He praises anyone, dances as he is told like a puppet. Though he talks much he doesn't say anything and spits toward those who do not stand him.

**DAUGHTER:** But who can stand such an individual?

**FATHER :** Few, only a few do ... This is why he makes an entrance into any non-governmental organization, any party, council, committee, a monkey playing an elephant, only to move on to another group, the next season. He seems to like the most curious alliances: left, right. With one condition: personal gain.

**DAUGHTER:** But what does the scoundrel promise?

**FATHER:** It depends on the situation. Thus, he pulls rabbits out of the hat along with jobs, rewards, salaries with which he attracts the naïve. He talks about God or the church only during elections for precise purpose. But you never see him giving one cent for charity. Because this biped has no mother, no father, no religion, other than his own interests.

**DAUGHTER:** Has this person any education, any skills?

**FATHER:** in his spare time, this semi-learned (or should I say ... zero-learned) individual crows his undocumented stories in some newspapers owned by scoundrels like himself. He continually forgets that journalism requires more than the "University of Life". One needs culture, common sense and something he hasn't heard of: grammar. Fortunately, all these cannot be learned by ear.

**DAUGHTER:** The man who had written the Chronicles had said: "I shall be responsible of everything I write." Today, when any illiterate will start writing without having read anything, should the dictatorship of common sense not settle in the press, and intruders fired?

**FATHER:** They should, of course, be cast away, because this insistent, impertinent, by seeking functions and honors beyond his merits, is seen at any meeting where he speaks on command. The thing is that even though he thinks he is in the opposition, through his lack of education and monstrous mistakes, he actually serves the purpose of the government. Wherever he goes he leaves a bad odor. The party he adheres to remains without members, other groups dissolve.

He cannot comprehend that he should nourish, his soul with education. After many years of babbling, incoherence and awkward conflicts, he thinks he should finally learn to LISTEN and – for the good of us all – TO SHUT UP!

## MAN'S LONELINESS

**SON:** From what I observe around me and from my own experience, I have noticed that a well-known phrase from the "Ecclesiast" (IV,10) "*vae soli*" (Woe be to the lonely) hold such truth that it becomes unbearable for the person in this situation. I am talking especially about old people; I, for the moment, am young, but things are difficult any way.

**FATHER:** We are all asking what is so bad about loneliness, when in fact, things are simple: man is a social being, and this not created for solitude. And another observation: it has been demonstrated that two people are worth more than just one. Not even virtue, as Confucius teaches us, can stand on its own. The person who practices this superior mode of life, virtue, will surely have neighbors. Virtues, as vices, bring joy or sadness to the ones living around those who "live" in the true sense of the word.

**SON:** Many virtuous or exceptional people have opposed to times or clans. What have they achieved?

**FATHER:** Indeed, history is a witness of the fact that some have dared oppose the era in which they have lived. The surprising thing is that they've become outcasts those societies then were left alone, though, as seen after they have reasons to oppose, and were seen as representatives of the of the future. Their courage translated into power, the power not to be subordinated to any clan or trend. This is the only way they escape loneliness. A spring is alone too, as the folklore says, but gives birth to so many rivers.

**SON:** I have a friend, who, left alone, has tried to take his own life, burn the house ...

**FATHER:** That is a different thing. A person without judgment cannot be left alone to take serious decisions for himself or those around. It can become dangerous. The sad thing is that if a person decides to be alone, this is an extremely easy to accomplish goal. The others will live and love without observing the suffering of the lonely. Lately I have been asking myself a lot of questions on this subject. One would be if only loneliness may ensure peace of heart and absolute quiet, as the ultimate gain of the human being.

**SON:** I cannot say. It is a big dilemma, in any opinion. Still with little experience but from what I have read, that he who finds such states in solitude can be compared, as wise men said either to gods or animals. I always ask myself: is solitude a punishment or a luxury?

**FATHER:** Vauvernagues said: "solitude" is to the spirit what diet is to the body: deadly when it lasts for too long, but necessary nevertheless."

**SON:** For the moment, as I have said, I am alone because I am still young, but what good can solitude bring to old age?

**FATHER:** I believe an intelligent man, can under these circumstances, spend more time by himself, and – why not? – could deem these individuals heroes not loners! A person who doesn't know what loneliness is might say I'm wrong. I could reply that it is most difficult for man, this social being, to live a single day without believing that a thought or gesture implies the presence or absence of others. It would be normal for solitude to make you happy only if it offers you something to do. If it does not, then you surely are unhappy. From this point of view, a writer is privileged.

**SON:** But without major concerns at this one, where would loneliness take us?

**FATHER:** Where? Toward doing plenty of things, but wrong. First of all, association with questionable characters, who drink their wine in the noise of glasses and voices of thunder. There would be one more action – with good effects this fine – when man should live in solitude (in a couple) – love!

**SON:** But haven't you ever felt alone in the middle of a crowd?

**FATHER :** Ancient wisdom, be it Persian, Latin or Greek, ensures us that you can be alone even with a hundred thousand people around you, just as well as you can be without those hundred thousand. I could say one might desire solitude if one lacks true friends, or as the Persians say : "When you have idiot friends".

**SON:** How good is it to seek this punishment or luxury?

**FATHER:** After all, I think, only God is allowed this form of existence: solitude. For man, solitude is pleasant only if somewhere in the subconscious, there is a hope to meet friends

or enemies. The latter, especially through their constant and cynical pursuit, make you feel alive, feel like a real person. Moreover, if you win a battle against them, you can no longer say that, in utter solitude "even donkey may be your brother". From what I've seen or lived so far, I've observed that loneliness can bring one plenty of things, good or bad, but it can never give you character to begin with, no one can take it away nor give it.

## WE ARE BUT MERE MORTALS

**DAUGHTER:** Is there anyone on this Earth who wouldn't want to be well spoken of?

**FATHER:** We rarely meet such individuals but this desire is not the most important, but the fact that we forget to be good people good people in reality in order to be seen as such. Are we doing anything for our personality to have remarkable features?

I have admired Latin wisdom which gave us "*Memento mori*" but also Democritus saying that "when men try to escape death, they are actually running toward it". Recently I seem to fancy one of Stephen Covey's idea from his book "Seven arts of Highly Effective People", which can only change the reader for the better. He says that, before doing something, people should imagine their own funeral.

**DAUGHTER:** Quite an interesting idea! What would we like to hear in our eulogy or in the crowd which accompanies us on our last journey?

**FATHER:** Well, the idea is very good: some don't even think what comes after death. And maybe they are right, I can't blame them. However the end makes others think and ask themselves if friends or family would have any reason to regret them. After we have mentioned all the above, we may analyze how others perceive us with their eyes and with their hearts. This is why we are amazed by the lack of a "last thought" in some people.

**DAUGHTER:** I have recently met a person who, after living with his partner for 25 years realized she was incapable of kindness or tolerance. Practically the couple had never "worked". But why did he realize this after so long?

**FATHER:** I can suspect why. I think it was the love for the children, or indolence or the hope the partner will become more tolerant. We should all be aware that all actions or human creation have an initial, mental stage and another which deals with the accomplishment? And this is why I think he is to blame for not breaking up the relation from the beginning, as soon as he had noticed incompatibility. Why didn't he think of the awkward ending? No matter what, there has to be a "thought for the end"

**DAUGHTER:** Another of my acquaintances, a great lover of travelling abroad has taken a lot of humiliation from those around him, in times when the Western world was forbidden. People he knew used to laugh at him for the way he used to put maps of Europe and Asia on the floor and made travel plans. He had in mind exactly the cities and museums he was going to see, he was day dreaming.

**FATHER:** The man didn't deserve to be treated like that. I'm sure his reply was that dreams got him closer to the realization of his wish. Having no dreams would have meant that the chances of accomplishing what he wanted were almost null. But I suppose his dream has finally come true, according to the "thought of the end".

If we cannot become aware of, the initiative of the first creation (the dream, the plan) we will be modeled after the will of those around us and we will act as others dictate, in fact, our lives will be lived by others; this will have disastrous consequences.

**DAUGHTER:** The normal thing would be for us to write the scenario of our own lives.

**FATHER:** This is the only way toward being happy with we have done and happy about the persons who will accompany us on our last journey. The efficiency of our actions stems from hard work and, most importantly, good direction. Counting the grains of sand of the sea will not serve anyone and will not help us become accomplished people, because we have not chosen well our PATH.

**DAUGHTER:** This, a good scenario of our lives should include our possibilities, a very well-defined purpose and a "thought of the end" ?

**FATHER:** Indeed. Let us manage to lead our lives in such a way that nobody, friend or foe, could ever say "he has lived in vain", "he worked for nothing", or "he left the cat's skin to his successors". In anything we do we should think about our mortal nature. So let us make the best of our presence on this earth, for as long as we can.

## **ARE WE BEING SINCERE?**

**DAUGHTER:** A famous Frenchman would simply say : " Sincerity is not saying everything you are thinking, but thinking everything you say". How could we, simple people express this truth?

**FATHER:** I personally, have always asked myself if a person could judge another in anything. And my answer was that no man can do such thing in all fairness, since the human being is naturally prone to error. Can a guilty man convict another guilty man? And this has happened. Besides, what could there be to gain by a having a man punish another? There is

nothing to gain, unless that person will try to improve himself, or fight against his personal vices and preconceived ideas and against lies. Everything would be fine if man didn't think he could read the truth in the words or behavior of those around, because most times, except for the rare moments when people are sincere, things are judged according to personal interests.

**DAUGHTER:** The philosophers have drawn up theories on the words' purpose in hiding thoughts. How then can we talk about sincerity?

**FATHER:** Surely we can. Especially about honesty and what honest people have to endure. They will never enjoy a good position and will be cursed, cast away, offended, called stupid or even mad. Could those people be right?

**DAUGHTER:** Let us imagine, in today's context, when, especially in politics, everybody lies and deceives, somebody comes and reveals an important truth about a prime minister or a prefect. Since truth is usually hard to take, those involved will direct their revenge and power toward the person who had dared do such thing.

**FATHER:** You should pay attention even to friends' reactions. They will readily characterize the sincere man as awkward and ridiculous. Under these circumstances, the sincere person becomes a victim, an outcast. My opinion is that, in spite all evidence, truth and sincerity will eventually conquer over the fortress of wickedness and deceit. Moreover, man will not become stronger through sincerity, for the simple fact that petty interests do not concern him, nor do political ambitions or titles. Such people which are not interested in these things should fight and help only honest, tolerant and respectable people reach important functions.

**DAUGHTER:** I have read some articles, even books, taking on the issue of the universe being created especially for aggression or war. Under these conditions, can we be good, altruistic people?

**FATHER:** Those who have designed this theory, which is not entirely false, believe we are only endowed by Mother Nature with weapons of defense, thus we can never be attackers. I can't agree that things are exactly like this, however I do think we carry a weapon against liars, agitators and prankster: SINCERITY. Many have proved this: Andre Gide (he thought that sincerity alone would be enough to win over anything), Mircea Eliade, but even more, Eugen Ionesco. The latter, in a journal ("La quiete intermitante"), exposed himself to the world, proving that by admitting what his weaknesses were, admitting vices nobody thought he had, meanness, insomnias and fears (especially of death), made him a true man, and an example for the rest of us, which could be the same if we wanted that and worked for it.

Even if not all of us are drawn to this invincible force, SINCERITY, we all owe God; we owe our children and our parents to try.

## TALENT

**DAUGHTER:** I have always liked the definition of talent given by Eminescu "There are many flowers/But only few will bear fruit in this world/ They all stand at the gate of life/ But many will dry up and die". Thus, many try but few have chances, if the drop of talent is not backed up by a great amount of hard work and true education.

**FATHER:** I have encountered among Toparceanu's confessions a few thoughts, some quite amusing, about his opponents or his talent. Here they are: "Some of my good-intentioned colleagues say I have no talent. Well, that exactly what I take pride in. Everybody knows how to write if they have talent. But to do what I have done, without any talent? My colleagues bring me great compliments by saying I lack talent. They probably mean I have been naturally gifted like no other, since by only using my head I have managed to do what they couldn't, talent and all. In order to set things straight, they should say: Poor man, he's bursting with talent!" Therefore, one shouldn't wait for his talent to be acknowledged, by his fellows, especially in our country, where according to those involved there are more talented people than citizens in the country.

Obviously in these circumstances, intrigue is quite superior to talent. Because only intrigue makes something out of nothing, while talent, no matter how great, is enough for its possessor to appease his pain, and no more.

**DAUGHTER:** You scare me, Father. Still, our great national talents such as Eminescu, Enescu, Porumbescu, Slavici, Caragiale, Creanga, Sadoveanu, Rebreanu and all the others have been appreciated.

**FATHER:** Indeed, they have been, but how much they had fought against obstinate mediocre ... Talent is similar to money, you don't necessarily need to have it in order to make you talk as if you did. As long as we have reached the topic, let us say the story of the talents. God makes you a gift (talent) but your duty is to enhance it. How? Through thoroughly organized and permanent work. And Eminescu gave us a lesson in talent, genius and hard work. Each of his poems had 10-15 variants, which were all good for publishing.

**DAUGHTER:** How much work and talent can the process of creation take?

**FATHER:** I believe 5-10 percent is talent and 90-95 percent perspiration. And Aristotle added that the true happiness of man is to practice freedom of talent. What then, couldn't

be the excuse of a talentless creator? He says: "If I had talent, I would be imitated. If I were imitated, I would become a writer in trend. If I were in trend, I would soon become obsolete. Thus, it is better not to have talent." But to all this I would like to add that the most bitter revenge of the talent is that eventually he will vanquish those into envy him and his result will torment them. But often though the talented become overwhelmed with delight and indulge in certain pleasures which may lead to the loss of the divine gift. Let us not forget that were great talent has bloomed. There are also the seeds of major flaws.

**DAUGHTER:** Are these flaws linked to an extraordinary talent a person might possess?

**FATHER:** Unfortunately, the most acts of heinous acts of the human race have been performed by talented people, geniuses even.

**DAUGHTER:** As a consequence talent? But it's absurd.

**FATHER:** Directing ones energies toward talent only greatly diminishes all other qualities: where there's too much sensitivity, a person's force will decrease, when science draws them, they will be enemies of poetry, discourse, etc. And usually (not a characteristic of the Romanians alone though a poignant one in them) when a new field welcomes a new talent, the scum called mediocrity will try to sink him in vulgarity, obscure his qualities or even worse, nullify him completely.

**DAUGHTER:** So then where is the happiness of this individual? What benefit has talent brought him? I've read somewhere that talent means sadness and solitude. I'm sure that individual wishes to be normal. I quote from memory some verses written by the genius in his poem "Evening on the hill" ("So rich a night / To give a life for it one night"), in "The Evening Star" ("Take back my immortality/ And the fire in my eyes/And give me in return/An hour of love's might") What did the genius desire? To know the joys of the simple man, to know true love given only to the human being. Love, some other means of exploration and knowledge, would have made him complete. The talented man is - unfortunately - alone in front of a bare sheet of paper, an empty test tube, awaiting a magic potion or a black canvas. Will he enjoy - eventually - his creation? If his work was not appreciated, what would the purpose be in creating it? This is when he should face life in order to defend the purpose of his existence: creation.

**DAUGHTER:** What about the rest of us, the majority, should we despise it? Is society sustained by talents, geniuses or mediocre people?

**FATHER:** I am compelled to say that each of us has a certain role in society. And mediocre people are the majority both in numbers and importance. Craftsmen, workers, merchants, teachers, engineers, these are the ones on whose shoulders society rests upon. Talents

and geniuses are what make us unique and eternal. But there is a question for the talented: have you paid for your talent to the others, who – because of you – haven't got any piece of the talent-cake given by God? They were left nothing since you've taken it all! What is the duty of those chosen by God? To create for the benefit of the many who suffered such injustice.

**DAUGHTER:** How does the talented work?

**FATHER:** Easy to tell. Obviously such person readily manages to do what others cannot. And, if you, without talent can reach the performance, right there we have genius.

**DAUGHTER:** Does a gifted man need education?

**FATHER:** I have heard people saying that talent absolves you from having to study. And what do you do with talent? The bible told us for all to understand, in the story of the talents. If nothing is added to the talent, it is like multiplying it to zero: the result is nothing. And writers and scientists continuously prove this.

**DAUGHTER:** I can imagine what a force competition there is between the world of the talented and that of people with intellectual preoccupations.

**FATHER:** Very intuitive! It is a world which rather facilitates confusing, suffocating and stopping innate qualities than making an effort to revive or enhance them. This way we reach the inner impulses, but mostly the exterior ones of a talented man. By provoking and promoting such as impulses, a talented person can reach unimaginable heights in his creation.

**DAUGHTER:** Talent is mentioned in areas such as literature, music and arts, Can we only speak of talent in these areas?

**FATHER:** Generally speaking, those who analyze the phenomenon only refer to these areas. But is science possible without talent? No! Neither science is possible without talent, nor is talent possible without science. And the power of talent increases in accordance with the approached areas and themes. The biggest mistake a talented person can make is to force or strain talent by cultivating it on an arid terrain. Thus, man of talent, use your talent for what you do best, otherwise it will be in vain. Nobody can be above gods, who, may we say, had their own specialties: one dealt with the seas, another with wars, one with beauty, etc. No one can be great at everything. When looking at a talented man, the others may take satisfaction in saying "he is a very talented man, but bursting with human flaws". And the mediocre will be glad to find uselves (according to their own opinion) above the mistakes of the talented.

**DAUGHTER:** As a consequence of the above observations I can think of a dreadful insult which could be addressed to the worst of enemies, we could tell him: "You have got talent!"

**FATHER:** Indeed! Indeed! Your shocking but true conclusions make me feel good. If I might add the "insult" you have mentioned might be due to the fact that the talented man is, most times, difficult to bear for what he does (everything is perfect) or sometimes for his behavior. Such persons are of two categories: some, in whom there is a kind spirit dwelling, which makes them kind or, sometimes indifferent, and others dominated by a cruel spirit, which haunts them and devastates their souls.

**DAUGHTER:** Are they responsible of the things which happen to them? Are we guilty?

**FATHER:** This is how it was meant to be. In return, we must take more care of and protect these valuable (for their contribution to the artistic and scientific thesaurus of the world) beings; we should do this mostly because they are practically helpless – due to their major preoccupations – in front of life's hardship. Moreover, when we hear of someone bearing Ulysses' bow (a special talent or characteristic) or that someone we know is a great painter even without hands, let us not harm these persons through words or deeds, and on the contrary, let us admire them and have great awe for the miracle in front of us.

### TOLERANT OR TOLERATED?

**DAUGHTER:** All people wish for their errors, bad deeds or mishaps to be tolerated. However, few are tolerant to those who make mistakes.

**FATHER:** Indeed, man has had the permanent desire to be tolerated. But there is one forgotten detail: as the bible says, man has to be tolerant to those close to him but also to those who are not. To be honest, I haven't been very tolerant myself, first of all with myself and then with you, my children. Now, at old age, I am trying to practice tolerance, but not at any cost.

**DAUGHTER:** Up until I was 18, I wouldn't have admitted that your relentlessness, or even intolerance for us, Father have given us an impulse to work and prepare for life. Today I admit you were right. That was the reason we managed to have a higher education, have a secure job and be our own masters.

**FATHER:** I am happy you didn't want to become tolerated. By tolerating the meanness and flaws of the child, of the friend, thus these will become our own and there will not be no benefit for our loved ones, quite the opposite. Actually, we should go even further and not tolerate an aggressive, wrong and awkward politics. This would imply observing the

harmful, even disastrous effects and accept them. Then, out of love for everything Romanian, we will fight against (be intolerant) to evil. But let us do in the most civil of terms, without the vocabulary of the streets. "*Sine ira et studio...*"

**DAUGHTER:** I have learned a lot from the "Filocalia" such as : man is forgiven but his sins are not, that tolerance leads to tolerance and well doing.

**FATHER:** I believe an environment based on good will and understanding will create that certain harmony which everybody needs to reach. In no way can we mix this harmony with the requested consensus.

**DAUGHTER:** But what is consensus? I kept hearing that from a former leader and I've had enough.

**FATHER:** When it comes to the situation in which a country is (no matter of what nature), it means a pact with the devil. That would mean the permanent and unconditioned acceptance of deceit, empty promises, deletion, the impoverishment of the people, the destruction of the national spirit, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** Accepting this knavery goes beyond tolerance, it's blindness, cowardice or a certain benefit.

Unfortunately, you are right. And it becomes painful to realize the danger of such tolerance. Maybe tolerance should find its preferred territory in religion, but also in the relationship between races, parents and their children, teachers and their students.

**FATHER:** There is no measuring unit, but we must do this according to the child's or the parent's personality. Can you be rough with a child who does everything he is asked to do? It wouldn't be correct.

When it comes to religion, every person is free to live and hold the same faith as his forefathers. The serious problem is that of religious sects who can deviate from such religion and this may degenerate in violence. Tolerating such things is only proof of lack of lucidity and faith.

**DAUGHTER:** I am asking you and myself : have Calvin, Luther and others like them been tolerant?

**FATHER:** From what I have read, their benevolence went no further than the borders of their religion. One more time we observe we are only tolerant to our kind, while deter the others, destroy and even kill them.

**DAUGHTER:** Should people's opinions matter so much? What if some worships more than one God?

**FATHER:** Indeed! Why should it matter? A friend of mine, an orthodox priest is in good friendship with people of all religions. He said : "with those people I only discuss points of view we share which we share, things that bind us". He also said that you may forgive others for many things, but you may not forgive yourself.

**DAUGHTER:** But have the Holy Wars been Holy indeed?

**FATHER:** We cannot consider holy most actions that have been done during wars. We can definitely say that fanaticism in any shape or location cannot have positive effects because it only is a violent manifestation of intolerance.

**DAUGHTER:** Tolerating sloth and insolence in children, pupils, students, tolerating drugs, smoking and excessive sex is in my opinion a crime against humanity.

**FATHER:** I see you are very strict in matters of life and death of a nation and this makes me think that a part of the young people think things right, so all is not lost. This way we are pointing out what tolerance of the flaws and abuse of children harms them and the nation. We could also say that tolerance means listening to what another has to say. Not necessarily accepting that. Only time, this important judge may show who had been right. So let us not hurry to be right ... today. Let us modify a saying of the bible and adopt it to our title: "Nothing exists without tolerance."

## THE CONCEITED

**FATHER:** Over the years I have concluded that a saying of Aeschylus was perfectly true.

**DAUGHTER:** Do you mean "Everyone becomes conceited if things go well"?

**FATHER:** Yes. During these confusing times we see al the more that the scholar had been right. We can clearly see that nowadays a good person is seen as stupid, while an arrogant imbecile is seen as intelligent. People is full of people so conceited, so overawed at their own intelligence, memory and beauty that nothing can stand in their way. The must lead cities, countries, because, limited as they are, the most important functions or even worship them.

**DAUGHTER:** But who are, in fact these demanding individuals?

**FATHER:** We observe that, in case of danger, they are simply cowards, temped by money, praise and that's about it. Their huge egocentrism can only be surpassed by their limitless stupidity. The "*Sine qua non*" condition of conceit is, of course, stupidity. They are mere mice who thought they were casting elephants' shadows.

**DAUGHTER:** Are they grateful to anyone for what they have become?

**FATHER:** Not likely! A conceited individual is not even grateful to God for what he was given, and things he had deserved more. Those who are not like them and do not continuously inflict harm, steal from others nor have claims for some ministry, well, those are mocked or even eliminated from the positions they deserve. The conceited individual, once up in an important position, will start to annihilate those who know him for what he truly is : stupid, coward, despicable.

**DAUGHTER:** How about his relatives, who know him well?

**FATHER:** Simple. He won't acknowledge them or destroy them. Let us remember the donkey's answer to the question: "Who is your father?": "My uncle is the horse."

**DAUGHTER:** But still, the haughty individual is human, after all. Couldn't we set him straight?

**FATHER:** Unfortunately such an individual cannot see what he himself is truly like. He suffers from a terrible disease. He can quit smoking, alcohol, but the intoxication with his own ego is far too powerful. This man forgets he is not eternal, forgets to help those in need ...

**DAUGHTER:** Maybe getting rich too fast got this individual to behave this way. Is it possible for money to modify behavior so drastically?

**FATHER:** Wealth, but not only, may change a man. But I believe that only getting rich without working, overnight, makes a person conceited. When they are in a good situation, people become proud, haughty and ungrateful.

**DAUGHTER:** Why can't most of us realize that we have been sent on this earth in order to do good, to seek truth and breed harmony and honor? Why can't anyone see the wretches? How many rich people can you see in church and how many share a gram of their wealth with the crippled and the blind?

**FATHER:** By observing the past and the present governing class, we cannot ignore Pythagoras's piece of experience "the first to enter a stronghold is luxury, then the gorging, then excessive pride and in the end, doom". Why haven't people learnt anything from history? By imaging they are geniuses they imagine they are "making" history; they do not read, they "write" books. Because this is what happens to the irresponsible, the conceited: they "write" before reading, become doctor of Science without college education and they imagine themselves as members of the Academy just because they often pass by the front gate of that institution. Maybe a good thing would be to try and help these individuals, the conceited, who without any support, they will fall to destruction, but drawing many of us back.

## LIFE AND DEATH

**FATHER:** I don't know if it is a good idea to talk to my daughter, a very young person, about a subject such as death, but this is a theme found in each of us, therefore, in order to live our lives interestingly and in accordance with the superior principles of mankind we must be aware of all things, alive or not living.

**DAUGHTER:** Usually, we, the young, when we discuss death, imagine it impossible to be touched by the unmerciful Chronos.

**FATHER:** We must not wallow in someone's death, not even when your contentment comes from not being the one touched by death's dark wing.

But why so much grief and sorrow when the end of our lives comes? It's not worth it, especially at an age such as mine. A life full of good deeds and positive actions will ensure the lack of suffering at the end of one's life. However, if the life was filled with interesting (not necessarily great) deeds, then death would not be the end, because we and what we did will be remembered by the living.

Because dead in the absolute sense of the world can only be those completely forgotten.

**DAUGHTER:** I can't explain why, but a living person is always confronted with the strange tendency to be contested. All people want to nullify him, detest him, or, at best, ignore him. At least this is what I see around me ...

**FATHER:** You paint an all too black picture, but to a certain extent you are probably right. If I myself have had, in over 40 years of activity plenty of bad confrontations with various "philosophers" and "secondhand critics", then, as a beginner in your field, I can't imagine how you must escape: I'm getting closer to death. When you are about to kick the bucket or you have left this realm already, you suddenly turn from "anybody" into "somebody", "a remarkable professional", "a noble soul", the "ideal father or grandfather", etc. Things become quite hard to endure when the ones to say all the above are exactly the ones who up until yesterday had envied you, but hated you or slandered you ...

**DAUGHTER :** I believe this is how people have reached a conclusion that is deceiving, at best, one found mostly in Latin said by Chilon in Sparta: "*De mortuis nil nisi bene*".

**FATHER:** I'm glad you don't approve of empty praise. We believe it is the Christian thing to do when you mention only the deceased's qualities. But having only qualities is impossible in the world of people; maybe in the world of gods. Are we surely good, chivalrous or tolerant when we don't mention the bad deeds of those who have died? To people such as Hitler, Stalin, Ceausescu, Saddam, etc , who were murderers should praises be said ? Could

believers become after death good friends with sinners, geniuses with the mentally challenged, talented people with losers or the hard-working with the lazy? The victim equal to the executioner, this is unheard of!!

**DAUGHTER:** I shall attempt to make an experiment with a predictable result. I shall attempt to make an experiment abroad the obituaries from our newspapers. They will for sure imagine that at the basis of our society stand only the respect for the human being, love and helping your fellow men.

**FATHER:** Yes, surely the result will be that which you expect. But in any opinion not even the dead would fully agree with what had been written about them; maybe they would laugh in the faces of the hypocrites, with the "regrets" and the "condolences" they have expressed.

**DAUGHTER:** Generally speaking, I take God or Eminescu as witnesses to everything I do. In relation to the current situation, I recall verses describing Romanian funerals in the past and in the present, "And there will be some pretty one to speak / Not praising you but make himself / seem big." Eminescu describes perfectly the embarrassing spectacle, filled with hypocrisy we see at funerals.

**FATHER:** The man who enjoys the act of thinking is terrified of deceiving mourning, the falseness of the obituaries but most of all of vanishing into nothingness in the same degree they would probably be terrified of immortality, because the terrible nothingness dissolves all cognizance. A thinker like Măiorescu bother fighting, struggling, achieving some position, a job, a title, comfort, fame when, practically, our lives on Earth are temporary. Especially since most of us will go to Heaven. Why sacrifice ourselves to study or for our country when even without these efforts we still reach happiness?

**DAUGHTER:** So, should we rejoice when our dear ones reach happiness before we do? Not taking Immortality into consideration, should I do Good for Good's sake and avoid doing wrong due to the negative implications it has on you and those around you?

**FATHER:** These are questions most of us do not consider believers or not. And still believers see things from a different angle, and quite an interesting one: they don't fear death and many times they wish for it. I cannot forget how much serenity had an old man (a believer) in his gestures and eyes, while explaining the moment when the Grim Reaper would arrive: "Grandson, in my case, if this doesn't happen today, it happens tomorrow!". Without tears, without the deep meditation of the philosopher, without the sadness of a rich man, who leaves so much behind, without the anger of an author who has yet to write his masterpiece, etc.

**DAUGHTER:** A wise man used to warn us that grey hairs at the temples would announce death. I cannot agree. Although this is not yet the case for me, I do believe that is the moment when a person has completed his molding process and can become a leading member of the social group he belongs to.

**FATHER:** This is what my old friend's claim, knowing young people have plenty of energy to invest in work, they can easily absorb theoretical notions, but, by lacking empirical experience the results fail to appear. As in the Latin saying: "*Primus vivere, deinde philosophare.*"

**DAUGHTER:** It is said that a person who has suffered, created and through this became educated, is not dead, though in a grave.

**FATHER:** And so it should be. The dead person should continue to live in the minds of the others, through what he had created. But I am obsessed with stupid and wicked people. These are already dead while still being alive, no matter how rich they are or what position they hold. Even if you warn them about the consequences, they don't believe or do not care. Thus, not leaving this world is the problem, but the way you have lived. Act, make live, like the present day was your last. Do not put up with insult, though. What good would it be to live a long life in a desecration, shame and everybody's contempt?

**DAUGHTER:** Father, when is a good time for a person to start thinking of death?

**FATHER:** There is when death is concerned something that suits us: we think of it only when we get old.

How would it feel to think about it in your teens? We have no chance of ignoring death because we often find ourselves almost fatally wounded by the envy, hatred or wickedness of the others. These significant flaws, be they our own or of those, around us, they will relentlessly torment us if we are not taught to avoid them.

**DAUGHTER:** Still, if by a miracle we would be able to choose between life and death, what would we choose?

**FATHER:** Certainly, most would choose life. If we did the opposite, guilt would devour us. But I have quite another question: if we were to return at will from the death, would life have any meaning left?

**DAUGHTER:** In my humble opinion, in these circumstances life would use its value, since its beauty is given by its irreversibility. I could even say that just as light is an exception of darkness so is life an exception of death.

**FATHER:** My dear, even if we want to or don't we must agree that death gives solemnity and – why not – a great responsibility to life. How much repressed pain can the end bring!

Minor, daily events, otherwise ignored, would only gain value when they will no longer happen. Probably this sunset helps trace a contour and perhaps it even gives substantiality to things and people around us. Sunshine renders them less clear. When the light dims, we can be more perceptive and we can see everything perfectly. When we are lucid, we discover that none of the dead are celebrated anymore. All pay attention to the living, particularly those in important positions. "*Memento mori*" (Remember, you will die), this is what everyone should know. Only this way man will work as one who thinks himself immortal but also as one who thinks will die the next day.

**DAUGHTER:** Paradoxically I have seen people who had been dead while living. Their existence strokes me as pitiful and degrading. These are, in my opinion, the poor, the wondering, the very ill man, the stupid man and the one who is always serving others. In my opinion, father, it is better to be alive (even with the degradation and indignity) it implies than be dead. I am disappointing you, but this is what I think.

**FATHER:** You are young; you have all every right to speak so. Maybe after the years have passed you will reach a different conclusion. But death is no laughing matter. And still, in a book by Carpentier, a renowned writer, there is a scene where a man, not scared of death, which was seeking him, invited it into his house and attempted to seduce it. Death, which had taken everything seriously, ran away terrified of the lusty man; who managed to avoid it for a very long time. His game with Death was not lost. How many get this chance?

**DAUGHTER:** There are some who, after disrespecting everything in their lives and become insolvent in the presence of death. And this happens because you will have a humiliating end to an awkward life. While you were telling me we shouldn't joke about our life or death, I was thinking what circumstances could make us accept the end more easily. For example, the idea itself would be more acceptable if we could imagine life just as an inn, a place where one can rest, rather than a house where we should live permanently.

**FATHER:** I don't believe this. First, because death is the Great Unknown and man fears things which are not familiar. I would suggest another possibility: live with great contempt for death, knowing we are just travelers who at the end of our journey, when we reach our destination, should get off the ship we have taken. We cannot take advantage of captain or the crew's patience trying to extend the trip which has ended. Perhaps old people should be tolerated to some extent, knowing the young still have a hope to reach old age, while they have no more hopes. On the other hand, speaking of the young, we see them struggling to find work, are at the mercy of their employers, who can render them obsolete at any time. The ones born during the first half of the last century couldn't take the stress of not having

a secure job. We would perceive every such unexpected decision of the employer as death. And here we are again with an obsessive idea. Do science mind and experience have any purpose when confronted with death? Cosbuc said: "Such a great duty is life/That cowards see it like a knife". I wonder if it fears the courageous as the saying goes.

**DAUGHTER:** But Eminescu has told us a long time ago: "With life has death extinguished all the pleasure / There is nothing beyond, for dead are the ones who have chosen death." As for the great poetess, the Countess of Noailles, of Romanian origin, who have lived in Paris and sang in verses her love for the world around her identifying herself as the monolith of the drops of dew, with the fruit of the orchards and the colors of flowers, well, she had a tragic existence, for all her life she had wanted to know the purpose of all the beauty, and earthly wonders. Singing and not knowing what you are singing for, not knowing the purpose of all the wonders of human existence have been a burden which eventually had proved too hard.

**FATHER:** You amaze and delight me with your opinions, my child. Maybe I, so close to the end, could manage not to be terrified, because I have children who have a love for learning, for reading and are kind; by seeing the fruit of my efforts, I should feel quite content at the end of my new life. Those mentioned above together with faith and education are enough to resist fear of death (which is more difficult to handle than death), could resist vain laments which certainly don't bring back the dead and all types of dirge. Under no circumstances, said a sage, should you, while close to drowning ask the help of a frog.

Could he have been right? I am only asking because another wise man said we should do anything in order to salvage life.

He had also said that by saving yourself from death you could have the time to right your wrongdoing, your treacherousness, even your unforgivable knavery.

Or perhaps simply because a live man is worth more than a dead one. I could even make a parallel with the principle of communicating tubes: the fuller part containing experience, the emptier the part containing life, thus we are closer to death.

**DAUGHTER:** But what if we choose another option? I believe that only when life has drained completely we are more capable than ever of starting a normal existence, because we reach the top of our wisdom and experience. We know everything about live, why shouldn't we start over again?

**FATHER:** thank you for the kind thought. Moreover so since usually young people do not think like you. Many want to distance themselves from the experienced that bring, of course, with them, conservative traits from the past. These are also, for old people some

impediments in continuing their activities. We no longer have energy and the biological overwhelms the mental ...

Exactly when we reach an admirable amount of knowledge, something is opposed, cells self-destruct and death protrudes our every fiber. Unfortunately, anything born from a woman eventually dies. Death or the feeling of death become all the more disturbing when one lacks education. Let us try to educate ourselves and not to fear or avoid the unavoidable. Actually I believe that the pain is caused mostly by thinking of death and that thinking will no longer be possible. That terrible and intense expectation of death eventually kills us. But since death comes anyway, wouldn't it to be a better idea not to wait for it? In fact, waiting is our personal confrontation with solitude. Death should encounter us mentally prepared. This would be the most noticeable accomplishment of a lifetime. Easier said than done, but not impossible.

#### CULIȚA IOAN UȘURELU

- Born on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1944, in Movilița, Vrancea
- Graduate of the Faculty of Philology, at the Al. I. Cuza University, Iași
- Teacher of Romanian and French at many high schools in Adjud, Focsani, Odobești
- Among the initiators of the Students' Theatrical Session in Focsani, coordinating ten shows
- Editor and assistant editor of the prestigious "Revista noastră"
- Writes, coordinated by the literary critic Nicolae Manolescu, the monograph of "Revista noastră" (1987)
- Publishes the volumes: "PROFESORII-SUPLININD AU DOBANDIT"; "CERSETORI IN LODEN"; "MULTUM IN PARVO-MIC TRATAT DESPRE PERFECTIUNE" and "CONACUL DINTRE VII"
- Had, from 2003-2006 a permanent column in the ROMANIAN TIMES in Portland, Oregon (U.S.A.)
- Receives the honor "Man of the Year 2004" from "The American Biographical Institute" S.U.A. for special merits in culture and education
- In 2003 writes the play "Generations", which has been successfully put on stage
- In 2005 he was included in the "2000 Outstanding intellectuals, Of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" dictionary, published by the International Biographical Centre, Cambridge, England

- Is, from 2005, the coordinator of the only school magazine in Odobești, "Pururi Tanar"/"Forever Young"

The dialogues are dedicated to the father, who went to Heaven 27 years ago, and to the mother, whom God called to him only two months prior to the publication of this book. The loss of both parents has caused immense pain, but also an overwhelming unrest, because the absence of prayers from these loved ones make us more vulnerable, more exposed to perils, lonelier and closer to Death.

We hope this book helps diminish sufferings and brings knowledge, luminous thoughts and appeasement to the soul.

The Author.