

# ENGLISH

## CHAPTER 7: THE INTERVIEW



# THE INTERVIEW

~Summary~

**-by Christopher Silvester**

## Part 1

### Background of the Interview

Having a history of over 130 years, different people have varied opinions about the uses, modes and advantages of interviews. Till now, thousands of celebrities have been interviewed. Every educated person is familiar with it. Some people claim that it is a source of truth while others feel that in practice it is an art.

### Opinions about Interviews

Many celebrities despise the interview because it is an encroachment on their privacy. It depreciates their personality in a similar manner as depicted in some primitive cultures, where people believed that, if someone takes a photographic portrait of somebody, then one is stealing that person's soul.

VS Naipaul is of the opinion that interviews injure people as they lose a part of themselves. Lewis Carrol, the creator of 'Alice in Wonderland' was said to have a just 'horror of the interviewer' because he thought he would be treated as a celebrity. His refusals for interviews helped him keep his fans, acquaintances and interviewers at bay. This gave him great satisfaction and amusement. Later he would narrate such experiences with aplomb.

### Rudyard Kipling, HG Wells and Saul Bellow's Views on Interviews

Rudyard Kipling vehemently condemned interviews. His wife, Caroline, writes in her diary that her husband refused giving interviews because he considered them immoral, a crime and an assault which is worthy of punishment. According to him, interviews were something vile and cowardly. He neither held the interviewee in esteem nor the interviewer. Although Kipling criticised the interview, he had himself interviewed Mark Twain only a few years before this tirade against interviews.

HG Wells, an eminent science fiction writer, frequently gave interviews but, in an interview in 1894, referred to 'the interviewing ordeal'. Forty years after this comment, he interviewed Joseph Stalin, a great Russian revolutionary.

Saul Bellow felt that interviewers created so much tension and pressure that he felt suffocated. He describes interviews as 'thumbprints on his windpipe'.

## Summing Up the Genre of Interviews

Despite its disadvantages, the interview is an excellent medium of communication. Denis Brian gives an elevated position to the interviewer because of his power and influence over the interviewee. He terms the interview as an expressive medium.

### Part II

#### -by An Interview with Umberto Eco

The second part of the chapter is an extract from an interview of Umberto Eco, who is being interviewed by Mukund Padmanabhan from 'The Hindu'.

Umberto Eco is a renowned scholar who is known for his ideas on semiotics (the study of signs), literary interpretation and medieval aesthetics. He is also an author who has an array of works ranging from literary fiction, academic texts, essays, children's books and newspaper articles. He rose to prominence with his work 'The Name of the Rose' which sold a staggering 10 million copies.

## Eco's Views on his Philosophical Interests and 'Interstices'

The interviewer, Mukund Padmanabhan, quotes David Lodge (an English novelist) who had expressed astonishment at Umberto Eco's varied and sizeable works. He expresses his surprise by saying that how could one man do all the things that Umberto Eco did. Umberto Eco says that this is a delusive impression about him because he has always been doing the same thing by writing the same philosophical and ethical ideas in different genres.

Eco discloses his secret of producing such voluminous works. He utilises the 'empty spaces' i.e., the shortest gaps between two different works. That's the reason why he has produced so many works. He calls the 'empty spaces' "interstices".

## Eco's Intimate and Playful Style

The interviewer, questions him about his personalised style of writing which is quite different from the dull and drab style adopted for writing academic works. He asks him if this comes naturally to him or whether he has to make a conscious effort to develop this style.

At this, Umberto Eco replies that he learnt this style of writing when he was 22 years of age. At that time he had presented his first Doctoral dissertation in Italy. His Professor was impressed because he had included his trials and errors in it. He had told the story of his research. His Professor published his dissertation as a book which was his way of complimenting his student. Eco understood that he had to adopt the narrative style in his works also. This led him to become a novelist at the ripe age of 50.

At this stage, Umberto Eco remembers his friend, Roland Barthes. Who was, an essayist and died frustrated because he could not fulfil his wish of being a creative writer. Umberto says that he never felt this frustration, as even his essays had a narrative aspect to them. He says that he started writing novels by accident. They catered to his taste for narration.

### The Phenomenal Success of 'The Name of the Rose'

One day when Umberto Eco had nothing to do, he tried his hand at writing a novel. 'The Name of the Rose' made him famous as a novelist although he is an academician with over 40 works in non-fiction.

Most people know Umberto Eco as a novelist but this doesn't please him. He belongs to the academic community and participates in academic conferences. He writes novels only on Sundays. He accepts the fact that by writing fiction he can reach more people. He says, "I cannot expect to have one million readers with stuff on semiotics".

Mukund, the interviewer, asks him if he is surprised by the staggering success of the novel, 'The Name of the Rose'. As the 'The Name of the Rose' is a serious novel that spins a detective yarn at one level and also ventures into metaphysics, theology and medieval history, it is considered, a difficult and serious read.

Umberto Eco says that he is not puzzled by its staggering sales figures. The only people who look at this in disbelief are journalists and publishers. They believe that people like trash and don't like difficult reading experiences". He applies his own mind to this. He says that after working the whole day he refreshes himself by watching light entertainment programmes such as 'Miami Vice' or 'Emergency Room' after dinner. Similarly, everybody likes light reading only to a certain extent. As such, serious reading does have the capability to draw people.

The medieval period to which this book belongs could have played a major role in its success. For Umberto Eco, the success of the book is a mystery. If he had written it ten years earlier or ten years later it might have not been such a remarkable success story.

## Conclusion of The Interview

To sum up, The Interview summary, we learn how many people differ when it comes to interviews, nonetheless, they are very interesting and informative as seen from Umberto's interview.

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## NCERT SOLUTIONS

### Questions (Page No. 73)

### (Understanding The Text)

Question 1. Do you think Umberto Eco likes being interviewed? Give reasons for your opinion

Answer: Yes, Umberto Eco enjoys being interviewed, as evidenced by the animated tone with which he responds to the questions. He had no qualms about disclosing his writing secrets or his personal life experiences. Throughout the interview, his constant laughter and honest tone demonstrate his genuine interest in being interviewed.

Question 2. How does Eco find the time to write so much?

Answer: While explaining his ability to catch up with so many things in such a short period of time, he says he works in between the empty spaces he refers to as “interstices.” He actively uses the time we normally waste while waiting for somebody or doing something likewise unproductive to finish his work.

Question 3. What was distinctive about Eco’s academic writing style?

Answer: Eco’s writings, in contrast to other academic writings, are not boring or tedious to read. His work takes a depersonalized and informal approach, which makes his style interesting and thus appealing. Instead of formal essays, he prefers to write creative and narrative pieces.

Question 4. Did Umberto Eco consider himself a novelist first or an academic scholar?

Answer: Umberto Eco’s primary work was in academia, but he also wrote novels on occasion. He also stated that he attended academic conferences rather than meetings of Pen Clubs and writers. As a result, we can conclude that Umberto Eco saw himself first and foremost as an academic scholar.

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