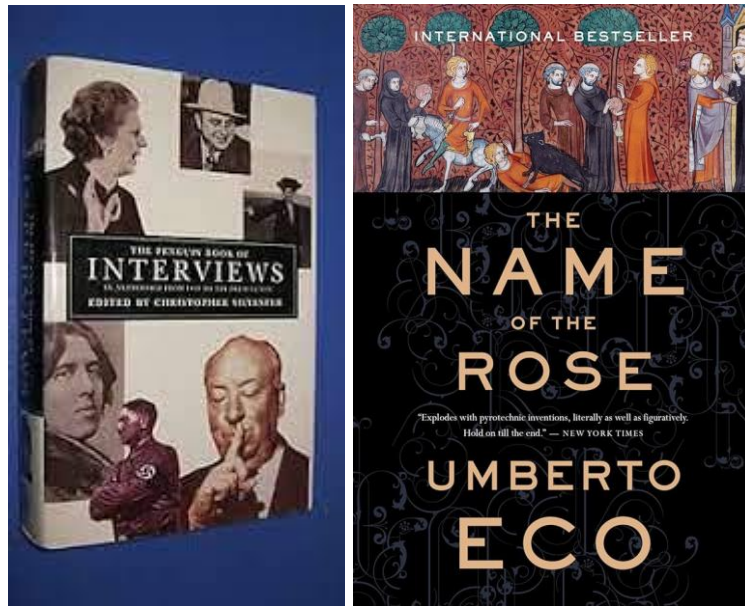


The Interview



History – The First published interview is by **Horace Greeley** in 1859 (Founder and editor of The New York Tribune) who interviewed **Brigham Young**, an American religious leader and politician. This gave the readers a sense of direct contact with the leaders. Interview grew as a new and powerful tool for revealing popular personalities behind their political or social events. 20th century is considered to be the Golden Era of interview with the rise of Radio in early 1920s as it brought the voice of the popular Actors, politicians, leaders and the writers to the house of the common man. It crossed the boundary between literate and illiterate as it no longer remained confined among the educated or literate class. Later in 1950, when Television entered the drawing rooms, it further added the visual impact of those popular personalities and their reactions during interviews. Thus the audio-visual element added new flavor to the electronic media and thereby, to journalism. Since interview is directly from the person concerned, it is more personalized and spoken in direct quotes that delivered firsthand information. Moreover, it makes a dull piece of news more humanized. Furthermore, the interviewer and the audience have the chance to probe and clarify the matter is discussion. This way the newsmaker or the interviewer creates a direct link with the audience and the public.

Given below is the time line of the writers who were interviewed when Newspaper Journalism started to flourish and for some others, the Radio and Television were booming. Quite naturally their reaction was initially negative until they found the brighter side of interview.

V.S. NAIPAUL:	1932-2018
Lewis Carroll:	1832-1898
Rudyard Kipling:	1865-1936
H. G. Wells:	1866-1946
Saul Bellow:	1915- 2005

Denis Brian: (1923-2017) who lived through the time of technological advancements, understood the actual reason for celebrities to initially react to interviews and so he quoted

“Almost everything of moment reaches us through one man asking questions of another. Because of this, the interviewer holds a position of unprecedented power and influence.”

For these reasons the celebrities were initially skeptical and loathed the process of interview and the interviewer. However, the celebrities later accepted and acknowledged the merits and so either consented to be interviewed or interviewed others.

For these reasons, **Christopher Silvester** wrote in his introduction to the Penguin Book of Interviews, An Anthology from 1859 to the Present Day

“Some might make quite extravagant claims for it as being, in its highest form, a source of truth, and, in its practice, an art. Others, usually celebrities who see themselves as its victims, might despise the interview as an unwarranted intrusion into their lives, or feel that it somehow diminishes them...” Page 1 line no. 7-12

“It is a supremely serviceable medium of communication” Page 2 Line no 9 & 10 from the bottom

PART-II

Let us analyse the given transcript of the Interview between Mukund and Umberto Eco

Mukund: The English novelist and academic David Lodge once remarked, “I can’t understand how one man can do all the things he [Eco] does.”

(Recognition and admiration from other writers of other countries)

Umberto Eco: Maybe I give the impression of doing many things. But in the end, I am convinced I am always doing the same thing.

(Humility of Umberto Eco)

Mukund: Which is?

(Mukund’s promptness to dig deeper but with politeness)

Umberto Eco: Aah, now that is more difficult to explain. I have some philosophical interests and I pursue them through my academic work and my novels. Even my books for children are about non-violence and peace...you see, the same bunch of ethical, philosophical interests. And then I have a secret. Did you know what will happen if you eliminate the empty spaces from the universe, eliminate the empty spaces in all the atoms? The universe will become as big as my fist. Similarly, we have a lot of empty spaces in our lives. I call them interstices. Say you are coming over to my place. You are in an elevator and while you are coming up, I am waiting for you. This is an interstice, an empty space. I work in empty spaces. While waiting for your elevator to come up from the first to the third floor, I have already written an article! (Laughs).

Umberto Eco was a professor, philosopher and a novelist. He portrayed that literature can also be a medium of expression of philosophical thoughts. He believed in the philosophy of peace, harmony and non-violence. His “Name of the Rose” is based on the same ethics of human behavior.

‘Interstice’ comes from a Latin word which means ‘Interval’. In physical sense it is used for a gap or crevice as in “Water seeped through the interstice of the ground”. In figurative use it is used as an ‘interval’ like ‘We all enjoy some jokes in the interstice of our works’. Note the confident yet humble explanation of Eco. The laugh at the end indicates that he enjoyed the interview and was not discomforted by the prompt question of Mukund trying to dig deeper.

Mukund: Not everyone can do that of course. Your non-fictional writing, your scholarly work has a certain playful and personal quality about it. It is a marked departure from a regular academic style — which is invariably depersonalised and often dry and boring. Have you consciously adopted an informal approach or is it something that just came naturally to you?

Note how well read and well informed Mukund Padmanabhan was about scholarly works and the works of Umberto Eco. It indicates an interviewer’s prior preparation for the interview.

Umberto Eco: When I presented my first Doctoral dissertation in Italy, one of the Professors said, “Scholars learn a lot of a certain subject, then they make a lot of false hypotheses, then they correct them and at the end, they put the conclusions. You, on the contrary, told the story of your research. Even including your trials and errors.” At the same time, he recognised I was right and went on to publish my dissertation as a book, which meant he appreciated it. At that

point, at the age of 22, I understood scholarly books should be written the way I had done — by telling the story of the research. This is why my essays always have a narrative aspect. And this is why probably I started writing narratives [novels] so late — at the age of 50, more or less. I remember that my dear friend Roland Barthes was always frustrated that he was an essayist and not a novelist. He wanted to do creative writing one day or another but he died before he could do so. I never felt this kind of frustration. I started writing novels by accident. I had nothing to do one day and so I started. Novels probably satisfied my taste for narration.

In this part of Umberto Eco's narrative, we see him as a person who completed his doctoral research at a raw age of 22. Instead of telling how a doctoral dissertation is to be written, he presented his personal experience and how one of the professors admired his style. He was never frustrated for not being a novelist until 50 when he accidentally started writing novels. At this point in the interview the readers find Umberto Eco as a prodigy with humility who has special liking for storytelling. Note how casual and humble Eco was when he said 'I had nothing to do one day and so I started'. **Umberto Eco's famous quote is "To survive, you must tell stories" as he considered storytelling is a fundamental human activity. The sense of the world, sharing of experiences and human connections are all woven in the fine tapestry of stories.**

Mukund: Talking about novels, from being a famous academic you went on to becoming spectacularly famous after the publication of *The Name of the Rose*. You've written five novels against many more scholarly works of non-fiction, at least more than 20 of them...

Umberto Eco: Over 40.

Note Eco's self-consciousness, confidence and pride

Mukund: Over 40! Among them a seminal piece of work on semiotics. But ask most people about Umberto Eco and they will say, "Oh, he's the novelist." Does that bother you?

Mukund is overwhelmed here which helps the interviewee to be comfortable and confident. On one hand, Mukund acknowledges his profound knowledge in Semiotics and on the other hand, explores the interviewee's reaction to his recognition among common people who overlook or ignore his reputation as a professor or philosopher.

Umberto Eco: Yes. Because I consider myself a university professor who writes novels on Sundays. It's not a joke. I participate in academic conferences and not meetings of Pen Clubs and writers. I identify myself with the academic community. But okay, if they [most people] have read only the novels... (laughs and shrugs). I know that by writing novels, I reach a larger audience. I cannot expect to have one million readers with stuff on semiotics.

Note how confessional Eco was as he began with 'Yes' (Does that bother you? Yes, that bothers me). He was proud to be a university professor. At the same time he is so practical as he accepted that his novelist profile brought him worldwide recognition which semiotics could not have achieved.

Mukund: Which brings me to my next question. *The Name of the Rose* is a very serious novel. It's a detective yarn at one level but it also delves into metaphysics, theology, and medieval history. Yet it enjoyed a huge mass audience. Were you puzzled at all by this?

Mukund Padmanabhan is trying to politely exhume Eco's reaction to the worldwide acceptance and popularity of the book which contained multiple aspects of intricate subjects. He is trying to figure out whether such popularity was expected or not.

Umberto Eco: No. Journalists are puzzled. And sometimes publishers. And this is because journalists and publishers believe that people like trash and don't like difficult reading experiences. Consider there are six billion people on this planet. *The Name of the Rose* sold between 10 and 15 million copies. So in a way I reached only a small percentage of readers. But it is exactly these kinds of readers who don't want easy experiences. Or at least don't always want this. I myself, at 9 pm after dinner, watch television and want to see either 'Miami Vice' or 'Emergency Room'. I enjoy it and I need it. But not all day.

The interviewee shuns the interviewer by condemning the journalists and publishers who often undermine the choice of the readers. He realized that only entertainment does not attract readers always. They want some challenging experience that promotes critical and analytical thinking. Eco won the heart of the audience by this statement as he rated them higher than usual and prevalent notions.

Mukund: Could the huge success of the novel have anything to do with the fact that it dealt with a period of medieval history that...

Mukund is cut short here with his question incomplete

Umberto Eco: That's possible. But let me tell you another story, because I often tell stories like a Chinese wise man. My American publisher said while she loved my book, she didn't expect to sell more than 3,000 copies in a country where nobody has seen a cathedral or studies Latin. So I was given an advance for 3,000 copies, but in the end it sold two or three million in the U.S. A lot of books have been written about the medieval past far before mine. I think the success of the book is a mystery. Nobody can predict it. I think if I had written *The Name of the Rose* ten years earlier or ten years later, it wouldn't have been the same. Why it worked at that time is a mystery.

Umberto Eco narrates how his book was underestimated in the beginning and how the publisher misjudged the choice of the readers. Eco's humility does not claim credit for the success of the book but attributed the success to multiple factors- choice of the readers and time. He also suggested that it would be wrong to predict the success or failure of a book before it hits the book stores.