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# The Paris Review Interviews, I



## Synopsis

A Picador Paperback Original How do great writers do it? From James M. Cain's hard-nosed observation that "writing a novel is like working on foreign policy. There are problems to be solved. It's not all inspirational," to Joan Didion's account of how she composes a book--"I constantly retype my own sentences. Every day I go back to page one and just retype what I have. It gets me into a rhythm"--The Paris Review has elicited some of the most revelatory and revealing thoughts from the literary masters of our age. For more than half a century, the magazine has spoken with most of our leading novelists, poets, and playwrights, and the interviews themselves have come to be recognized as classic works of literature, an essential and definitive record of the writing life. They have won the coveted George Polk Award and have been a contender for the Pulitzer Prize. Now, Paris Review editor Philip Gourevitch introduces an entirely original selection of sixteen of the most celebrated interviews. Often startling, always engaging, these encounters contain an immense scope of intelligence, personality, experience, and wit from the likes of Elizabeth Bishop, Ernest Hemingway, Truman Capote, Rebecca West, and Billy Wilder. This is an indispensable book for all writers and readers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I have read tens of 'Paris Review Interviews' and once had almost all the volumes they put out. This volume selects sixteen of the reviews including a number which for me were most memorable. ( Borges, Bellow, Hemingway,) The total list is:Dorothy Parker (1956)Truman Capote (1957)Ernest

Hemingway (1958) T. S. Eliot (1959) Saul Bellow (1966) Jorge Luis Borges (1967) Kurt Vonnegut (1977) James M. Cain (1978) Rebecca West (1981) Elizabeth Bishop (1981) Robert Stone (1985) Robert Gottlieb (1994) Richard Price (1996) Billy Wilder (1996) Jack Gilbert (2005) Joan Didion (2006) Aside from the writers I have named I would have preferred a collection containing other interviews, including the famous one with Faulkner. I would just like to point out the strange reversal of roles which has occurred in our Internet world. There are tens of Paris Review Interviews online, far more than are contained in this volume. It is almost as if the book here is a kind of toy, a mere adjunct to the total product which 'Paris Review Online' the Internet makes readily available to us. I understand the value of having a volume to hold in one's hand. And like most people I would rather read from a book than from a screen. But the 'online business' takes away from the special pleasure one might have had once at getting a 'new book' of one's own.

Perhaps this might be an obvious statement, for as the title indicates this collection of works from the Paris Review is a collection of interviews, but one that I feel need be made nevertheless. In reading over this wonderful work that contains interviews with Borges, Parker, Hemingway, Capote, Eliot, as well as many other legends of literature and 20th century intellectual thought, the reader is able to discover a truer sense of voice behind these renowned authors. We are given an amazing portal into the minds of these artists that ranges from how they approach their work and their diverse influences, to simply how they might view their lives and world around them. I would recommend this text to any person with even the most casual interest in literature, and for those who wish to immerse themselves with such authors and thought, I think this collection would be a perfect companion.

If you've ever tried to write or even wondered about the creative writing process these interviews will have you riveted. I expected some ego and posturing and there is a bit but most of the authors are amazingly honest....even Hemingway as he picks and chooses what he wants to discuss. Most delicious is when these writers give their take on fellow writers. Here's an example from Joan Didion, "There's a passage by Christopher Isherwood in a book of his called 'The Condor and the Crows', in which he describes arriving in Venezuela and being astonished to think that it had been down there every day of his life." Dorothy Parker says, "And I thought William Styron's 'Lie Down in Darkness' an extraordinary thing. The start of it took your heart and flung it over there." Best of all are their observations: "The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, xxxx detector. This is the writer's radar and all great writers have had it." Ernest Hemingway "But novel writing is something

else. It has to be learned, but it can't be taught. This bunkum and stinkum of college creative-writing courses! The academics don't know that the only thing you can do for someone who wants to write is to buy him a typewriter." James M. Cain "I had begun to lose patience with the conventions of writing. Descriptions went first; in both fiction and nonfiction, I just got impatient with those long paragraphs of description. By which I do not mean--obviously--the single detail that gives you the scene. I'm talking about description as a substitute for thinking." Joan Didion

No piece of writing gets so close to the heart of a writer as Paris Review Interviews. They are the most sophisticated interviews one can read. The magazine has successfully employed knowledgeable professionals to conduct the interviews because the person interviewing a writer must know the writer's work very well. I have read the four series of the interviews and enjoyed all of them. These interviews will tell you about the art of writing because being too theoretical - perhaps it all starts to sound very fake when one writes theories on art.

The flow of that Borges interview is fascinating. It seems done really in one sitting... honest, and unedited--unlike the most of the others, where, even in the introduction it is admitted that the interviewee had intervened so much in the final draft, the interviewee sometimes become one more interviewer... the writer/subject is interviewing himself/herself. (in any case, that's why many writers are willing to sit down for a Paris Review interview... because they are promised to have the final say on the output, if they so wish. even if deadlines are disregarded). Then next best is Hemingway's. Bristling machismo in some of the answers. You see irritation, willingness to participate, then irritation again. Then Billy Wilder's. It's amazing to discover that while he has been retired for so long when interviewed, he still has the wit and can recall personal events like it's yesterday. I'm wondering now why he hadn't made a film for decades, but was still very involved in Hollywood. (I gather from the interview that he still has an office he gets to everyday until he died). The rest are of equal good quality. While not remarkable in total, there is always a question that is answered uniquely and interestingly by the subject writer. I have to admit though that I'm not familiar with a number of them, and I still have 7 more to read though as of this writing. Yes, the interviews are available online, but for 10 USD, you also get a good quality paper (used in the book), designed to last long. Nothing beats reading, leafing through the pages, and smelling a brilliant book. :-)

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