

Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* continues to compel, intrigue and provoke readers sixty-one years after the murders it describes, fifty-five years after the hanging of the killers, and fifty-four years after its first publication in book form. It is a tightly concentrated, finely honed work that, within its comparatively compact compass, contains multitudes and ventures into the most dangerous territory with disturbing aplomb. This wide-ranging collection of in-depth, original essays probes into a variety of aspects of the book itself, the critical responses to it, its cinematic adaptations, and the many literary, cultural, ethical, psychological and philosophical issues that it raises.

In the opening essay, David Hayes poses a key question that, implicitly or explicitly, runs throughout this volume: “why does *In Cold Blood* remain a classic, still admired by so many nonfiction writers, taught in schools, translated into more than 30 languages, made into four movies, and still among the best-selling true crime books ever published?” Hayes highlights the vivid characterization and skillful intercutting and pacing of “a narrative that tells three stories”—the Clutters’, the killers’, and Dewey’s—“which build in suspense before converging in the second half of the book” to create “a reading experience [...] that enveloped readers in the same way a novel would.” This is not, however, to deny its departures from fact, the way it extends Capote’s “quicksilver relationship with the truth” that was already evident to some extent in earlier work such as *The Muses Are Heard* and “The Duke in His Domain.” Hayes acknowledges that *Blood*, if by no means as unprecedented as Capote claimed, was a pioneering work: “a signature moment” of the New Journalism and the “grandfather” of many subsequent “nonfiction novels,” some of which have also proved cavalier with the truth.

But, Hayes affirms, “all writers” who opt for the nonfiction novel must bear in mind “the contract they have assumed with readers: that what lies ahead is, to the best of their abilities, true.”

After Angela Tredell’s biography of Capote’s full and often intriguing life, Shirley Rash opens the Critical Contexts section of this volume by challenging a common perception of Kansas “as the most quintessentially wholesome and American of states” that can stand for all that it is best in the United States as a whole. She contends that, while literary critics have been drawn to this perception in their interpretations of *Blood*, contrasting the supposed rural peace of Kansas with the nomadic violence beyond the state line embodied in Dick Hickock and Perry Smith, historians have traced a more complex and fraught Kansan history. “Kansas *does* truly embody the American Heartland, but this reality is not solely one of the salt-of-the-earth farmers from the popular imagination. It also encompasses violence, chaos, and dysfunction.” Rash analyzes the ways in which *Blood* deploys “anti-pastoral tropes, undermining the apparent wholesomeness usually associated with the rural scenes depicted.” Moreover, the book suggests similarities between “killers and victims,” who “are all representative of some aspect of Kansas identity, whether that of the peaceful farmer or the vagabond. By extension of Kansas’s role as symbolic of America as a whole, they are all also emblematic of something distinctly American.” *Blood* “seeks to condemn neither Kansans nor killers but rather to illustrate a universality that transcends regional stereotypes” and that also encompasses the book’s readers. Rash concludes that *Blood* puts both its readers and also, more broadly, “American identity itself on trial.”

In the second Critical Contexts essay, Kelley Jeans points out that “[c]ontrasting the reception of Capote’s story when it was originally written and those essays written within the last twenty years shows a marked change in how the murders are viewed.” She surveys and summarizes twelve key critical essays of the twenty-first century, from Trenton Hickman’s important analysis of *Blood* as, in his words, a “template for fictionalizing nonfiction events in a novel,” through interpretations by Shulamit Almog, J. Madison

Davis, Michael Wainwright, Van Jensen, Sophia Leonard, U. Jadwe and H. Madden, Travis Linneman, Andrew Holleran, Svein Atle Skålevåg and Jacqueline Foertsch, to Naomi Miyazawa's analysis of the role of the photograph in *Blood* as both, in Jeans's words, "an expression of fine art and as factual reporting." The criticism Jeans explores offers many new insights into *Blood* and demonstrates the book's continued capacity to generate fresh interpretations and perspectives. While she acknowledges that Capote may not have invented the nonfiction novel, she cites Hickman's claim that he was "the first to bend it to his will so as to capture and control the reader through its peculiar style of panoptic narration," and concludes that *Blood* "remains a *tour de force* amongst nonfiction literature" that, despite its "detours from the absolute truth," "birthed an entirely new way to present literary journalism that continues to impact literature today."

Eric Wilson interprets *Blood* in light of concepts and perspectives drawn from the French thinker René Girard (1923-2015), whose work, especially in relation to the "scapegoat" (the sacrifice of an innocent victim to release community anger and restore social equilibrium) and "mimetic desire" (wanting something because another person or group wants it), has proved one of the most durable and fruitful bodies of twentieth-century thought, applicable to literature, sociology and a spectrum of other fields. Wilson contends that *Blood* is "a gothic horror story" in the form of a realist, indeed supposedly nonfictional, text that embodies gothic elements such as "monsters" and "ghosts" in real if terrifying figures such as "Hickock-Smith." In Girardian terms, Hickock and Smith form a "monstrous double" that bears "the collective guilt of the entire village," because its inhabitants, to a greater or lesser extent, envy the Clutters; Nancy Clutter is the scapegoat, and Alvin Dewey, the chief K.B.I. agent, functions as a "detective-restorer." It is this pattern that invites the notorious fake ending in Holcomb Cemetery that Capote supplies: Dewey, as restorer, is the figure who receives the revelation that Susan Kidwell is "the revenant/double of the dead girl, slain as the sacred scapegoat of the monstrous doubles of

strangers and citizens, the banished children of Eve and the failed heirs of the American Dream.”

The fourth essay in the “Critical Contexts” section offers a comparative analysis of *Blood* and Norman Mailer’s *The Armies of the Night* (1968)—two “nonfiction novels” that are, the essay contends, “ultimately about America—the identity, values, history, present and future of the United States.” The essay identifies both great likenesses and differences between the two. They differ “in terms of the kinds of place and person on which they focus,” with *Blood* spotlighting a prosperous farming family and a rural community and two itinerant killers who traverse America, while *Night* homes in on an elite of dissenting artists and intellectuals taking part in a huge anti-Vietnam demonstration in Washington, DC; in terms of “the absence and presence of the author,” with Capote scrupulously absent from *Blood* and Mailer very present, in the third person, in *Night*, which offers “a warts-and-all self-portrait of the American artist as a middle-aged man”; and in terms of the respective historical contexts of each book in the “tranquilized” 1950s and “turbulent” 1960s. The books resemble each other in their claim to nonfictional status; their inclusion of material from sources other than the author, such as autobiographical statements, letters, newspapers, psychiatric reports; and in their affirmation, implicit in *Blood*, explicit in *Night*, of the value of the novel form in writing about real events because it can illuminate areas beyond the reach of the searchlights of history and journalism.

In the first “Critical Readings” essay, Gene L. Newgaard focuses on the crucial question of whether “immaculate factuality” is at all possible if you try to blend the genres of journalism and fiction. He suggests that “[a]cknowledging the tension between the standards and techniques of the two genres, as well as human fallibility, calls into question whether any writer” who blended these genres “could produce an ‘immaculately factual’ account of any real-life event.” Newgaard examines “the genres” and “the factual discrepancies” in *Blood* and “their potential causes in relation to Capote’s claims” and argues that these provide “a much more balanced evaluation of Capote’s responsibility to factual accuracy.” He points out that

today the “public has become accustomed, through its consumption of literature and motion pictures,” to “the concept of ‘based on a true story,’ realizing that writers and directors take artistic license in recounting events sometimes.” Newgaard suggests that “if Capote had used the terminology ‘based on a true story’ it would have reduced much of the scrutiny and blunted much of the criticism.” He concludes that most of Capote’s facts are accurate and that “perhaps Capote fulfilled his responsibility as well as he possibly could when working within the confines of the genres he was blending.”

Stephan Schaffrath explores *Blood* as a book about “violence and its ensuing trauma”—not only the specific violence of the murders but also “multi-layered violence in general, as it is engrained in society during Capote’s time,” and as Capote understands it. Although Capote “never makes reference to himself” in the book, he is “the man behind the curtain,” a “Wizard-of-Oz-like voice that directs the narrative, that owns it.” The narrator presents Smith as a “tragic antihero,” who “does not seem to belong to what [David] Grossman has identified as the small percentage of humans who do not share the almost universal aversion to engaging in fatal violence.” In contrast, *Blood* depicts Hickock “as the psychopathic mastermind of the Hickock-Smith duo” who “meets every one of [Hervey M.] Cleckley’s sixteen criteria’ for psychopaths.” But Hickock also embodies wider social attitudes, exemplifying “male white privilege gone awry.” Male white privilege also inhabits the Clutter home, however. Nancy is the “the archetypal 1950s homemaker-in-training,” “whose entire *raison d’être* is to serve and please others”; Bonnie is the experienced homemaker who cannot live up to, perhaps secretly rebels against, her role. The murders expose fault lines in the family, the community, and ultimately the nation.

Torsten Pettersson’s essay acknowledges the multiplying criticisms of *In Cold Blood*’s departures from fact, which have become more strident in the twenty-first century, but argues that while the book “fails as a reliable factual account, it succeeds as a novel, as a literary work.” Although it “does not display the fictionality usually expected” of the novel genre, it does possess

CRITICAL  
CONTEXTS

# **“I’ll be damned if I’m the only killer in the courtroom”: Anti-Pastoralism, Violence, and Kansas Identity in Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood***

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Shirley Rash

On the morning of November 15, 1959, the community of Holcomb, Kansas, awoke to discover four of their own had been savagely slaughtered in their rural home by suspects unknown. Herb Clutter, his wife (Bonnie), and their two teenaged children (Nancy and Kenyon) had all been shot to death. Within a matter of weeks, law enforcement had apprehended and charged the two killers—Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, men with long criminal histories and no ties to Holcomb or Finney County. Truman Capote’s true crime classic *In Cold Blood* chronicles the story of the murders, the investigation, the trials, and Hickock’s and Smith’s executions.

For many readers, the book’s Kansas setting amplifies the horror of the quadruple homicide because Kansas is commonly perceived as the most quintessentially wholesome and American of states. Robert Smith Bader, Thomas Frank, John Gunther, Ralph Voss, and Dave Tell, among others, all discuss how Kansas has become a barometer of the true American spirit, its citizens perceived as “the most average of all Americans” (qtd. Frank 29). Frank notes that in fictional works, Kansas functions “as a stand-in for the nation as a whole, the distilled essence of who we are” (29). Even Superman, that most American of American superheroes, is reared in Kansas. (“Kansas may be the home [. . .]”). Bader observes that since the middle of the twentieth century, Kansas has represented “extraordinary ordinariness” for other Americans (125). This is a reputation Kansans, by and large, embrace. Indeed, for many Kansans, the publication of *In Cold Blood* unfairly maligned their state, which was incorruptibly “wholesome” in the eyes of their

fellow Americans before Capote came along. For instance, Voss (himself a native Kansan) contends that Kansans still find *In Cold Blood* deeply unsettling because the occurrence of a brutal murder in the middle of the American Heartland challenges the state's "image of a wholesome, well-scrubbed region" (209). Tell also comments on the book's disruption of the state's image, arguing that Capote juxtaposes "the wheat-bound, God-fearing people of SW Kansas [with] . . . urban problems of violence and maladjustment" (2) and questions the state's reputation in the process.

Nonetheless, as Bader repeatedly demonstrates in his analysis of the state's evolving reputation, such a portrayal of Kansas ignores the state's contentious history. Though literary critics frequently evoke the myth of a "wholesome" Kansas when analyzing *In Cold Blood*, historians more readily concede the state's inheritance of violence and tumult: Kansas's brutal Civil War legacy (in which the heavily divided state's very history was forged during the chaotic prelude to the war, prompting the early nickname "Bleeding Kansas"); the Manifest Destiny-driven push of native peoples off their land and destruction of natural ecosystems (all in the name of settling the frontier); the notoriety and wildness of the Kansas cow towns; and even its legacy of racially motivated lynchings and riots.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, despite the modern perception of Kansas as synonymous with normalcy, in its early years it was regarded as "freakish," according to Frank, because "[t]he place crawled with religious fanatics, crackpot demagogues, and alarming hybrids of the two" (31). Bader perceives the changing image of Kansas, from wild to tame, as being the state's reaction to its earlier history, even though elements of its past still lurk in the present (95).

That is not to say these factors make Kansas unrepresentative of American history and identity. Kansas *does* truly embody the American heartland, but this reality is not solely one of the salt-of-the-earth farmers from the popular imagination. It also encompasses violence, chaos, and dysfunction. In his presentation of the staidly normal and the misfit outsiders, Capote suggests violent criminality is a far more complex issue not only in Kansas but also in America as a whole.

Considering this violent past, it is overly simplistic to regard Smith and Hickock as somehow wholly alien to the world the Clutters inhabit—or even a recent intrusion in this pastoral landscape. Indeed, Capote repeatedly demonstrates that these two killers are just as much a part of Kansas and—by extension—America as the seemingly all-American Clutters and that the savage violence manifested that night in the farmhouse was not at all removed from the reality of life in Holcomb. Throughout *In Cold Blood*, Capote relies on anti-pastoral tropes, undermining the apparent wholesomeness usually associated with the rural scenes depicted. Ordinarily the cozy farm scenes Capote portrays would spark a nostalgic memory of placid domesticity; however, in Capote's book, they do the opposite. The lovely farmhouse that should symbolize peacefulness is the scene of a vicious multiple homicide, and the rural farmland the Clutters live on that should guarantee isolation from the horrors of the world does nothing of the sort. By marrying the farm imagery of pastoralism with the gothic elements of sensational murder, Capote uses anti-pastoralism to render what would traditionally be considered normal and, therefore, desirable—i.e., the Clutters' world—horrifying and undesirable. The juxtaposition of agrestic imagery with the dark imagery of the gothic holds up a mirror to the unseemly side of America's heartland that reflects her own violent nature.

Furthermore, Capote frequently draws parallels between the respectable Kansas townspeople (the Clutters included) and the two killers to demonstrate their similarities. He also calls attention to the area's history of violence, another subtle reminder that the popular perception of Kansas as a land of bland, meek farmers is patently untrue. To claim *In Cold Blood* demolishes the state's innocuous reputation, as Voss and Tell have suggested, overlooks the reality of the state's history. Likewise, to claim the Clutters represent one side of American society—one that is harmless, good, and normal—and their killers are the complete antithesis of this image disregards the numerous clues Capote offers throughout the text that challenge these stereotypes. Capote questions what constitutes Kansan identity and, in the process, American identity. Because of the common perception of Kansas as a microcosm of the country, the depiction of

Kansas extends beyond that state to encompass a broader depiction of America, too. As Capote explained in an interview with *Playboy* a couple of years after the publication of *In Cold Blood*: “[I]f you ask me who best represents the *real* America, I have to say a very modified and much more soiled and complicated version of the Clutter family. But Perry Smith—and I single him out because he had a deeply psychotic criminal mind, whereas Hickock was just a smart-aleck, small-time crook—does represent a very real side of American life” (Norden 133, italics in original). In his presentation of the Clutters and the criminals, Capote is advancing all of them as representative of not just the people of Kansas but also the people of America as a whole.

### Subverted Pastoralism

To this end, Capote evokes traditional pastoral images when he portrays the Clutters in the book’s first section, which chillingly contrasts the family’s mundane final day with their killers’ ominous progress across the state of Kansas. At face value, these images of home and hearth further highlight the differences between the family and the men who slay them, making the consequent shattering of this cozy atmosphere even more horrific. Bucolic imagery is perhaps expected in such a tale because pastoralism has a long history in depictions of the Midwest.<sup>2</sup> Capote certainly employs imagery traditionally associated with agricultural small-town life in his portrayal of the family. As such, Herb Clutter is often portrayed in relation to his farm on that fateful final day, and the text features him reflecting about his land. For Clutter, the land is fertile and beautiful: “An inch more of rain and this country would be paradise—Eden on earth” (Capote 12). Clutter, in fact, devotes a lot of his attention to cultivating an orchard on his property, which Capote explains as Clutter’s “attempt to contrive, rain or no, a patch of the paradise, the green, apple-scented Eden, he envisioned” (12–13). On the surface, these passages portray the pastoralism and fertile land many would associate with a farming region, but as the text shows, this view of the land derives more from Clutter’s mind than from the reality of

the land. His farm is prosperous—his silo is brimming with wheat he has harvested (Capote 11)—but the land is not classically beautiful in the traditional sense. Even Clutter concedes the land lacks the rain to transform his farm into the Edenic paradise he envisions.

Just in these minute details, the bucolic image of farmland is tweaked, but Capote's questioning of the innate pastoralism of western Kansas delves further. As such, Capote extends the Eden metaphor beyond Clutter's own view of his property to include other gardens in the area, all of them ultimately futile attempts to create an idyllic, Edenic paradise in Kansas, according to George R. Creeger. Indeed, Creeger points to the name of the nearby town of Garden City as symbolic of "the myth of the Garden" and, thus, indicative of the townspeople's "attempt to recapture Paradise, to fulfill the American dream" (15). He contends the gardens in the text represent this impulse even more strongly. Beyond Clutter's lovingly tended orchard, Creeger also points to the presence of Bonnie's window side garden and Alvin Dewey's own metaphorical garden, a rural plot of land to which he hopes to retire (16).

However, in the wake of the Clutter murders, these gardens lose their appeal and, consequently, so does the pastoral rural life that the family represents. Toward the end of *In Cold Blood*, Capote observes that Dewey's "garden" will never become what he envisions because his wife, Marie, is so horrified by the Clutters' fate that she refuses to live in similar rural isolation (341). Marie Dewey blatantly rejects the image of rural farm life as an ideal. Rather than envisioning it as a peaceful respite, she sees this rural land as a nightmarish, potentially murderous place. As Creeger notes, Dewey's garden dream is ultimately futile, Clutter's beloved orchard is taken out by a plane before his own death, and fragile Bonnie's lovely flower garden succumbs to "autumnal decay" (16–17). Creeger posits that "[o]nly one garden in the whole book seems immune to violation"—the town cemetery (17). This symbolism is perhaps intentional, for Capote repeatedly draws attention to the town as a decaying force. In fact, Capote's first description of Holcomb is ominous and unthriving:

# CRITICAL READINGS

# When Blending Genres, Is Immaculate Factuality Possible?

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Gene L. Newgaard

The factual accuracy of Truman Capote's 1965 publication of *In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences* has endured extensive examination, in large part due to Capote's claim of the book being "immaculately factual" and of it being a "nonfiction novel," a new hybrid genre Capote claimed to have created (Plimpton 1, 25). Although this fusion of journalistic and fiction-writing techniques enabled Capote to compellingly recount the brutal 1959 murders of the Herbert Clutter family of Holcomb, Kansas, Capote's rendering of the investigation and the capture and execution of the killers making the book an international bestseller and literary classic, Capote's claims have cast a shadow over the premier achievement of his writing career.

The exacting standards of journalistic and nonfiction writing open Capote to extensive criticism both regarding factual discrepancies as well as his research techniques and objectivity concerning principal individuals involved in the story. Capote's claims, if taken literally, are deserving of examination and criticism, and had he not made them, *In Cold Blood*, may not have been held to such exacting standards.

When looking at the larger perspective of whether the fusion of journalism and fiction writing can fulfill those standards, it is far from clear that Capote could realistically meet his self-proclaimed standard when presenting this real-life tragedy in a fictional narrative format while adhering to the stringent standards of journalism. Acknowledging the tension between the standards and techniques of the two genres, as well as human fallibility, calls into question whether any writer could produce an "immaculately factual" account of any real-life event, therefore, lowering the bar to which

*In Cold Blood* has been evaluated. An examination of the genres, the factual discrepancies, and their potential causes in relation to Capote's claims provides a much more balanced evaluation of Capote's responsibility to factual accuracy.

## Genre Conventions

To evaluate Capote's obligation to factual accuracy based on genre conventions, we must define what constitutes journalism and fiction writing and examine how *In Cold Blood* makes use of techniques unique to each and their sub-genres.

Capote used many of the techniques related to the area of journalism known as traditional news writing (Newgaard 3). Journalism adheres to standards such as maintaining factual accuracy, attributing facts to their source, using direct and indirect quotation, use of third-person perspective to maintain objectivity, and identifying a prescribed set of facts such as who, what, where, when, why, as well as explaining how (Newgaard 3). Limitations inherent to prescribed content and a desire to include additional elaboration characterize the development of the "feature story" and "New Journalism," a sub-genre of journalism that's definition more closely mirrors what Capote did in *In Cold Blood*.

"New Journalism" is defined by author Tom Wolfe in his 1973 book *The New Journalism*. Wolfe says its "extraordinary power" comes from its use of "extended dialogue, scene-by-scene construction, third-person point of view, and documentation of status details" (qtd. Stull 166). David L. Eason in "New Journalism, Metaphor, and Culture" (1982) says that it differs from traditional journalism in that "it treats events as symbols of some deeper cultural trend, ideology or mythology" (146). For instance, Capote acknowledged his opposition to capital punishment, and it is viewed as an underlying theme of *In Cold Blood*. Mark Weingarten, author of *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight* further defines "New Journalism" as "journalism that reads like fiction and rings with the truth of reported fact" and references George Orwell's biographer Bernard Crick who wrote Orwell admired (Charles) Dickens's talent for "telling small lies in order to emphasize a big truth" as a "major

tenet of New Journalism” (qtd. in Voss 84). Nick Rance, a former Middlesex University professor, in his essay “‘Truly Serpentine’: ‘New Journalism,’ *In Cold Blood* and the Vietnam War,” quotes Capote biographer Gerald Clarke as saying that Capote:

emphasized the ‘barbed wire of fact’ as prescribing limits to his imaginative scope: ‘Yet within those boundaries, he believed that there was far more latitude than other writers had ever realized. Freedom to juxtapose events for dramatic effect, to re-create long conversations, even to peer inside the heads of his characters and tell what they are thinking.’ Ostensibly, this is a formula heralding peaceful co-existence between fact and fiction: on the other hand, the facts will not be so rebarbative as to be proof against a subjective perception of them. (81)

Characteristics of these definitions fit the techniques Capote employed in the novel and may explain some of its factual weaknesses. Capote combined these techniques with varied and similar ones (i.e., third-person objective viewpoint) used in the fiction-writing format of the novel. “The novel is a form of fiction writing that uses narrative viewpoint and dialogue to tell an extended story. The author creates characters, situations, actions, and outcomes, and develops them into a plot, which may or may not have a basis in reality” (Newgaard 4).

Fiction writing . . . incorporates a variety of narrative viewpoints including first (subjective) and third (both objective and subjective) person. It also incorporates techniques such as flashbacks, in which events that happened prior to the action portrayed are incorporated into the story to provide the reader with background information necessary to understand it or a character’s motivations, and foreshadowing, which allows the author to enhance the suspense or emotional appeal of the

story by incorporating (often through the use of dialogue or action) hints of impending events. (Newgaard 4–5)

Capote used flashbacks especially regarding Perry Smith's motivations, as well as implied foreshadowing created by the readers' foreknowledge of tragedy to create suspense. "One example is the way the contrast of Mrs. (Bonnie) Clutter's despondency despite the family's peaceful, idyllic life mirrors the impending shattering of that stability by two brutal murderers." (Newgaard 16). In his book, *Fact & Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel*, John Hollowell says ". . . dramatic events are foreshadowed, and dialogue takes on hidden meaning not apparent in its original context." As novelists have no choice but to make use of elements from real life, Hollowell believes "Capote had to impose a form—a narrative structure—upon the experiences he had so carefully documented." Even with Capote's stated claim of being "immaculately factual," Hollowell says he was equally cognizant of "the need to select and arrange his materials for maximum emotional impact" (70–71). There is an inherent tension between journalism and fiction, "New Journalism" requires extensive research using direct quotation from interviews and strict adherence to factual information gained from interviews and documents. The novel relies on imposing narrative structure (e.g., foreshadowing events and providing conclusions) and knowledge of characters' thoughts and motivations. It is a unique challenge to blend these techniques—a challenge that may have resulted in many critics, as well as family members, friends, and acquaintances of the Clutters, not to mention the killers and investigators of the crime feeling that Capote's claim to being "immaculately factual," was anything but.

### **Factual Inaccuracies and Possible Explanations**

Criticism of the factual accuracy of *In Cold Blood* generally concentrates on Capote's descriptions and portrayals of individuals and accounts of some events. Patrick Quinn, in a review of Ralph F. Voss's *Truman Capote and the Legacy of In Cold Blood*, says that "Capote's treatment of the victims while caring and compassionate,

caused resentment in some circles in Holcomb, as did his portrayal of the residents, some of whom questioned the veracity of Capote's account" (qtd. Schaak 131). A close examination of some examples of each makes apparent the liberties that Capote took in relating the story of the Clutter murders and the investigation that led to the capture, conviction, and execution of Perry Smith and Richard Hickock, but also potential explanations as to why Capote took those liberties—some consciously chosen, but many others due to having to rely on subjective viewpoints of sources and human fallibility.

The portrayal of Bonnie Clutter, wife of Herbert and mother to Nancy and Kenyon, stands out as one of the most criticized by family members and acquaintances. Capote portrays B. Clutter as "nervous" and having suffered "little spells" which he attributes to "'sheltering expressions' used by those close to her" (7). He says that "poor Bonnie's afflictions" were "not in the least a secret:

everyone knew she had been an on-and-off psychiatric patient the last half-dozen years. Yet even upon this shadowed terrain sunlight had very lately sparkled. The past Wednesday, returning from two weeks of treatment at the Wesley Medical Center in Wichita, her customary place of retirement, Mrs. Clutter had brought scarcely credible tidings to tell her husband; with joy, she informed him that the source of her misery, so medical opinion had at last decreed, was not in her head, but in her spine—it was *physical*, a matter of a misplaced vertebrae. Of course, she must undergo an operation, and afterward—well, she would be her "old self" again. Was it possible—the tension, the withdrawals, the pillow-muted sobbing behind locked doors, all due to an out-of-order backbone? (Capote 7)

The reader is left with the impression of B. Clutter as mentally unstable and Capote discredits the reported diagnosis of her condition in this passage. He reinforces his description through the

# RESOURCES

## Chronology of Truman Capote's Life\_\_\_\_\_

- 1924                    September 30. Capote is born Truman Streckfus Persons in New Orleans, Louisiana. His parents are Augustus Archilus Persons (1897–1981) and Lillie Mae Persons (née Faulk) (1905–54).
- 1928                    Capote meets Nelle Harper Lee.
- 1930                    Summer. Capote is left with his mother's elderly relatives (Lillie Mae's guardian and first cousin, Jennie Faulk, and her sisters Sook (Nanny Rumbley Faulk) and Caille and brother Bud in Monroeville, Alabama, for the foreseeable future.
- 1931                    Lillie Mae leaves her husband and moves to New York and unofficially changes her first name to "Nina."
- 1931                    November 9. The divorce of Capote's parents is finalized.
- 1932                    March 24. Nina marries José (Joe) Garcia Capote (1900–82).
- 1932                    September. Nina sends for Capote to join her and Joe in New York City.
- 1932                    Capote attends Trinity School, New York.
- 1932                    Capote wins a Scholastic Art & Writing Award.
- 1935                    February 14. Nina and Joe's petition for adopting Truman is granted. Truman's name is changed to Truman Garcia Capote.
- 1936                    Capote attends St. Joseph Military Academy, an all-boys military boarding school.
- 1937                    Capote returns to Trinity School, New York.
- 1939                    The Capote family moves to Greenwich, Connecticut. Capote attends Greenwich High School, Millbrook, Connecticut. Here he is encouraged by his English

## Works By Truman Capote

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### Novels

*Other Voices, Other Rooms*. Random House, 1948.

*The Grass Harp*. Random House, 1951.

*Breakfast at Tiffany's: A Short Novel and Three Stories* ["A Diamond Guitar"; "House of Flowers"; "A Christmas Memory"]. Random House, 1958.

*In Cold Blood: A True Account of a Multiple Murder and Its Consequences*. Random House, 1966.

*Answered Prayers: The Unfinished Novel*. Random House, 1986.

*Summer Crossing*. Random House, 2005.

### Short Stories

*A Tree of Night and Other Stories*. Random House, 1949.

*A Christmas Memory*. Random House, 1966.

*The Thanksgiving Visitor*. Random House, 1968.

*One Christmas*. Random House, 1983.

### Nonfiction

*Local Color*. Random House, 1950.

*The Muses Are Heard*. Random House, 1956.

*Observations: Photographs by Richard Avedon, Comments by Truman Capote*. Simon and Schuster, 1959.

*Portraits and Observations: The Essays of Truman Capote*. Random House, 2007.

*Brooklyn: A Personal Memoir; With the Lost Photographs of David Attie*. The Little Bookroom, 2015.

*The Duke in His Domain*. Penguin Modern, 2018.

### Stage Adaptations

*The Grass Harp: A Play*. Random House, 1952.

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