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Spring 5-2009

Unconscious Projections

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Recommended Citation

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Unconscious Projections:

Truman Capote's Personal Betrayal of his Nonfiction Novel

I Fact versus Fiction

On November 14th in 1959 in the small town of Holcombe near Garden City Kansas, a family of four were brutally slain in their home. The perpetrators broke into the house during the night, cut the phone lines, tied the family up, and proceeded to shoot each victim in the head. Almost no clues were left behind and no motive could be found for murdering the Clutter family who were very gentle, well respected people. The seemingly motiveless murders caught Truman Capote's attention, and he was in Kansas just a couple weeks later to write a journalistic piece on the effects of murder on a small town. However, when the suspects—Dick Hickock and Perry Smith—were apprehended the story evolved into a much more complicated and much longer work that finally became *In Cold Blood*. The book pioneered the seemingly paradoxical genre of the nonfiction novel, but Capote remained firm that it would remain entirely factual through rigorous research, interviews, and reconstruction.

Regardless of Truman Capote's claim to have written an entirely "true account of a multiple murder and its consequences" with *In Cold Blood*, this is in fact not the case. The story of the Clutter family's murders acts instead as a canvas on which to paint the personal interior dramas that he had been writing about from the very beginning of his career. While *In Cold Blood* remains firmly grounded in reality, and Capote dogmatically researched every detail of the case and the people involved, there remain many discrepancies that oppose the novel's claim to factuality. Additionally, Capote takes serious liberties with the story in stylistically manipulating the unfolding events in order to heighten the suspense of a story of which we already know the

end. Further, and most problematic is his potentially unconscious alterations and fabrications made to the character Perry Smith because of the uncanny similarities between the two. It is onto this figure that Capote maps the themes of his earlier and highly personal work, which were primarily dealing with rejection, coming to terms with one's own identity, and failure—both in one's personal life and in accomplishing one's dreams. These themes were extremely personal issues for Capote and help explain the sense of otherness he felt but were also extremely personal issues to Perry Smith—or at least in Capote's rendering of him—and allow us to draw fairly extensive parallels between the author and his dark protagonist. In this vein, it seems that keeping with his trend of writing autobiographically inspired characters, Perry Smith becomes a projection of Truman Capote and significantly changes the way we as readers must view the “nonfiction novel.”

In Cold Blood was received with much praise in general, and for the most part, critics “tended to classify *In Cold Blood* as simply an extreme form of a familiar class of writing, the documentary novel,” but interestingly, if not surprisingly, “Capote [did] not classify his book this way, but [tended] always to speak of it as something unique” (Nance 177). Though I would argue this novel is a unique combination of objectivity and personality, this approach is not new for Capote. However, in facing the reality beyond the interior dramas he was used to having control over within the pages of his stories, “a strain developed between Capote's intellectual strategy and the emotional reality he faced” (De Bellis 530-32). This strain was further pushed to its limits in the very personal relationships he eventually developed with many of the novel's characters' real life counterparts, which caused him to indirectly reintroduce himself into the novel—ultimately a severe betrayal of his claim of objective factuality. While Capote inserts himself and his preferences to some degree merely in the personal interactions with the people of Holcombe, which were necessary to write the novel, he also developed many acquaintanceships and even friendships among these people. However, no relationship was so close or

simultaneously so necessary and so problematic to the creation of the story as Capote's relationship with Perry Smith. Perry becomes the central figure of the novel, and creates a dark binary to the Clutters' lives and deaths that is more psychologically and philosophically probing and really more important than the story of the initial murders. Perry's is the story that Capote ultimately chooses to tell through this narrative, and it is this that allows Capote such freedom in exploring his own inner world through Perry, who is in a sense his doppelganger, a version of himself if he had made different decisions.

The confusions spurred by the contradictory aspect of the genre name Capote assigned to *In Cold Blood*—the nonfiction novel—carried over into what the purported aim of the book was as well. Presumably designed to deliver the facts of the story while simultaneously providing an in depth look at the lives of those it involves, the nonfiction novel was meant to bridge journalism and human drama. Ever cryptic about his own life and work, Capote seemed to foster both antithetical ideas of the story. As he “claimed that his new art form contained not only perfect factual accuracy, but ‘the poetic altitude fiction is capable of reaching,’ his own intentions did not seem precisely clear” (De Bellis 519). Moreover, it seems important to ascertain what Capote's intention for writing *In Cold Blood* actually was and why the goal of ‘immaculate factuality’ appealed to him (Nance 179). Capote's “stated purpose in attempting a nonfiction novel was to achieve an artistic and personal liberation—to escape from his private imaginative world into the larger world of reality,” and in writing *In Cold Blood* he believed he had achieved that goal (Nance 216-17). However, I would argue that this is where Capote deceived himself. Instead of escaping from his interior world into cold, hard, immutable facts, he projects that world onto those facts, yet he wants to believe that the conclusions drawn from this endeavor are fair and true. Capote clearly identified with Perry, and is concerned about Perry's fate because it is also his own as an outsider to the main stream of society.

Though the novel was being pulled between the two poles of fact and fiction even in Capote's own mind, “few people questioned Capote's assertion of complete accuracy” (De Bellis 519). This is perhaps because he was so avidly public on the point that “the foundation of *In*

Cold Blood was to be ‘immaculate factuality’” (Nance 179), but Capote still made “nearly five-thousand changes, ranging from crucial matters of fact to the placement of commas” between its serialized publication in *The New Yorker* and its release by Random House Publishing a year later, which is clearly problematic when promising an entirely accurate story the first time (De Bellis 519). On one hand, “such specificity gives *In Cold Blood* ‘persuasiveness of fact,’” but it also raises questions about the accuracy of the narrative, since the *The New Yorker* version was ostensibly correct to begin with,” (De Bellis 522). I would further say that Capote’s specificity allows him to create more of an illusion of factuality than anything else and that it also allows him to make a subtle commentary of defense for Perry Smith. By being able to include or exclude even the smallest details and describing events so precisely in *his own words*, Capote is able to lead the reader to certain conclusions that further his own agenda of redeeming the Capote-like killer, and this agenda was not so far from those of his earlier works which were ultimately trying to rationalize and accept outsider behavior.

Perry is eerily like the characters that Capote had previously created in those earlier works, so much so that he even said that “Perry was a character that was also in my imaginations” and that he “could absolutely...[have stepped] right out of one of my stories” (De Bellis 532). This links the highly personal created personas that Capote relied on in nearly all of his fiction to a real, flesh-and-blood person. Perry’s extreme similarity to Capote’s earlier creations supports the idea that Capote either may have made serious alterations to the character of Perry to bridge the gap between the real man and the typecast characters he resembled. If he did not modify Perry in any great sense, then Capote was extremely lucky, but that does not negate his personal involvement and projection that is still evident in Perry’s character. Moreover, even if Perry was merely coincidentally this similar to Capote’s cast of characters, it seems like it would be problematic for Capote to really treat him as something different from those previous characters. Given such freedom to mold and create the characters in his fictitious works, especially those based on himself, it would be difficult to treat the eerily similar Perry as something not able to be manipulated. But either way, Capote recognized the Perry in the book

to be not only very like him physically but also very like him emotionally because of their traumatic childhoods.

It was obvious why Capote had finally decided to write about this “story of the murder of an exemplary American family, an act of apparently ‘motiveless malignity,’ [because it] carries a universal appeal for readers, no matter how they view its ultimate meaning: as symbol of violence in America; as the failure of the American Dream; or as a social study of death-obsessed criminals” (Garson). Yet his choice of a subject that could reflect so many meanings leaves open the possibility—and I think it positively asserts—that Capote is finally responsible for assigning that “ultimate meaning” and that this power, while not unusual in the creation of a piece of art and particularly one of fiction, is problematic when the writer is claiming to be an objective onlooker and nothing more. This is why he is not an objective narrator, nor merely a passive presence in this story at all. He is trying to make this series of facts say something more than a news report of them would, but in doing so, he loses touch with the reality of the events because he becomes carried away by his personal project of redeeming Perry Smith. Just like his earlier stories, *In Cold Blood* is ultimately interested in exploring Perry’s life, his feelings of rejection, and how such feelings affected his life and those of the Clutter family.

In Cold Blood then should not be treated as something other, something wholly different from the things he had written previously, because really it is merely another step in his evolution as a writer dealing almost entirely with personal subject matter. This supposedly new art form is the result of a conscious effort to move from the inner world of his childhood to the outer world of real people and real events, and *In Cold Blood* is the culmination of his efforts to move this direction in his work. As William Nance put it: “So far has [Capote] moved in twenty-three years of publishing that one is tempted to identify at least two distinct Truman Capotes. There is, of course, only one: *In Cold Blood* retains deep traces of the earliest stories, and the intellectual toughness so evident in the nonfiction novel was really there all the time” (Nance 11). This is definitely true of Capote’s narrative style and thematic undercurrents if not his topical subject matter. He had always been writing under an assumed style of objectivity by

creating narrative distance between the speaker and the events he or she is recalling, and it had also been a trend of his to work toward absolution for his Capote-like characters, both of which he implements to an even more extreme degree in *In Cold Blood*.

In this way, the formal approach to his earlier work is not dissimilar to his approach in *In Cold Blood*. It is as if he were trying to solve a mystery even when addressing his struggles with self-identity in his childhood; even in *In Cold Blood* Capote is not really interested in the obvious mystery of who perpetrated this crime, which he reveals very early on in the novel, but is more interested how the fates of these individuals came to cross paths. It seems as though he is searching for an explanation and a truth that he believes already exists but is both elusive and ambiguous; this is especially evident in the way that he tirelessly tries to uncover the most basic and primary reasons for the unusual behavior of his characters. This search manifests itself as the discovery of homosexuality in the character of Joel Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* just as it manifests itself as an understanding of behavioral and genetic influences in the character of Perry Smith. Both of these subjects—dealing with his own homosexuality and coming to terms with debilitating childhood influences—are issues that Capote coped with in his own life and probably on a day-to-day basis. His feeling of otherness is pervasive, and is something he both admires and criticizes in his protagonists as in himself. This is evident in his use of detached narrators that remain disembodied and seemingly objective while reflecting either back on himself in earlier years or on someone like himself whom he is intrigued with and puzzled by, as is the case with Perry Smith. Yet, even when dealing with a real person outside of himself and presumably outside his creative control, childhood influences play a central role for Capote in discovering and explaining why one is led to become the person one does. Perry was abandoned by his parents, physically abused as a child, sexually abused as a young man of petite stature, and in general given very few opportunities in life, all of which play integral parts in Perry's behavioral patterns and the forming of his adult idiosyncrasies. Capote too had a trying childhood that shared many similarities with Perry's, and it is because of his biographical

information that he takes such an interest in Perry and is so determined to make sense of his crime in a way that deflects blame away from him.

II The Man and the Myth

Capote said of his youth that it was “ ‘the most insecure childhood [he knew] of,’ and [while] his early stories are psychological records of it,” it remains true that at least “some knowledge of Capote's early life is essential to an understanding of his work, for that work, even through *In Cold Blood*, bears the clear marks of his childhood” (Nance 12). I would further argue that some knowledge of his earlier fiction and its personal elements and themes are equally necessary for understanding *In Cold Blood* specifically. These earlier stories essentially act as a bridge between Capote's biography and this supposedly factual and impersonal piece of literature; it is fairly easy to see the parallels between his life and his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, but it requires an understanding of how such a character as Joel Knox relates to Perry Smith to bring *In Cold Blood* full circle. An understanding of Capote's personal involvement in such earlier works allows us to see the overall interrelation between his personal life and the literary narrative it was woven into throughout his career. Capote constantly sought to explain himself and his unusual appearance, voice, and lifestyle and did so largely by setting up equally unusual characters and then trying to rationalize their behavior and accept them in some way. In doing this, he expressed a personal need for acceptance as well, but also expressed a strong sense of denial in his own behavioral shaping and instead chooses to blame his parents and a society that does not understand him. It is therefore nearly imperative to look to Capote's childhood to understand where and why Capote used such creative license within a story that he advertised as, and perhaps self-deceivingly believed to be a factually correct journalistic account. It is these personal elements carefully—or unconsciously—embedded into the story that give the novel its resonance and ultimately its meaning.

Truman Streckfus Persons was born into a family that was both unloving and unwilling to accept him. His mother and father put him in the middle of their separation and the subsequent,

very drawn-out divorce for a large part of his childhood; yet even in the middle of this debacle, they pushed him away and left him in Alabama under the care of four elderly, distant cousins (Clarke). He became something his parents fought over but that neither wanted to spend time with nor get to know. When his mother Lillie Mae finally won that fight, took custody of him and was forced to get to know him, she did not like what she found. At this point, Truman was quickly approaching adolescence but “remained small and pretty as a china doll, and his mannerisms, little things like the way he walked or held himself, started to look odd, unlike those of other boys” and his voice began to sound “strange, peculiarly babylike and artificial, as if he had unconsciously decided that that part of him, the only part he could stop from maturing would remain fixed in boyhood forever” (Clark 42). Nina—Lillie Mae’s assumed cosmopolitan name—was “more than concerned” about Truman’s oddities, “she was obsessed” and did everything she could “in hopes of finding a cure, a drug or therapy that would turn him into a real boy,” yet “no one was more aware that something was wrong than Truman himself.” (Clarke 43). His physical appearance marked him as different from very early on in his life, and the theme of otherness is one that persists through *In Cold Blood*, and into his final novel *Answered Prayers*, which deals almost entirely with Truman’s own existence on the fringe of society and his flouting of social norms.

Though his mother showed great indifference toward the son for whom she had fought, she did introduce him to New York City, which to Truman was the epitome of art and culture and which opened him up to a new and more accepting world. Young Truman took the name of his stepfather during this time and became Truman Garcia Capote, but he also assumed much more than a new name during his adolescent years in and around New York (Clark 38). Truman began coming to terms with his differences—both artistic and sexual—and though “he was no

less anxious to be liked than he had been” he started seeking favor on his own terms “deliberately and with design,” and using his talent for storytelling and natural social charm, he gradually became the Capote the public came to know (Clark 47-8).

The rejection and betrayal that Truman felt from both his parents was already firmly established at this point in his life and seems to have fueled this desire to find acceptance elsewhere—in his created literary worlds in addition to his real life. This led him to create characters that were different in some way and then create acceptance for them. Such issues are thematically sustained in his work for the rest of his life, and strong feelings of rejection are evident in nearly all of Truman’s protagonists as well as a search for one’s own identity and place in society. These efforts all seem on some basic level to be attempts to explain and accept himself and his own differences. Due to Capote’s preoccupation with his own otherness, it is impossible to read any of his work as independent of its creator. On this surface his literary career spans many forms and genres, yet for all this apparent diversity, he was thematically and inescapably rooted to these inner demons. Even his experience with Perry becomes an attempt to redeem a murderer, which goes back to finding redemption for himself and being accepted by a society that just does not understand those outside of “normal” boundaries. He sought to create for himself a world of dreams and fantasies. This world partially manifested itself for him in the form of huge success and fame as a writer and the comfort of the world of the social elite; however, in his mind, as evident in his body of work, he never felt fully accepted and tried to rewrite his own history in an attempt to try to find acceptance for the characters into which he so lovingly embodied his own fears and desires.

Capote’s life and work are obviously deeply intertwined even through *In Cold Blood*, but the line between the facts of his life and the way in which he wished them to be viewed become

blurred by his fabulous storytelling both on the page and in his day-to-day life. It is therefore difficult to determine how much Capote might have been aware of writing himself and his personal issues into his work. He rarely admitted to anything true and often admitted to things that were blatantly false, so it is only in the careful analysis of his work and the parallels between all of his stories and the motifs they maintain that one can hope to uncover some truths—or at least hints of the truth—about Capote’s own emotional hang-ups. The progression of his literary career shows consistent use of biographical information but in varying degrees of transparency, and mapping out this progress provides a consistent strategy for interpreting Capote’s work as a whole. While characters in his earlier works of fiction provide what seem to be clearer, more self-aware portraits of himself, I believe that his portrait of the life and death of Perry Smith is more revealing. He was conscious of their similarities, but unconscious or in denial about how deeply and emotionally connected he was to Perry, and it is this unconscious effort that allows an unfiltered glimpse into his deepest issues and fears of rejection and how such rejection may have permanently shaped him into something not normal, someone *other* like Perry.

Such autobiographically influenced characters are more easily recognizable in earlier works, which are fanciful and more stylistic than substantial, but often use what is immediately familiar to the author as subject matter—himself and his childhood—which is hugely revealing of his own inner anxiety and feeling of rejection. Almost all of his stories are centered around a single figure, who may or may not resemble Capote superficially, but these characters all carry some inner burden of the author. And though Capote is harder to recognize in characters like Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* and should not be recognizable in Perry Smith, who is a real person, he is still buried within these characters and not perhaps as deeply as he intended himself to be. It is important to look back at how Capote treated such earlier embodiments of

himself to recognize how Capote is undermining his illusion of objectivity with the same kind of indirect self-illustration.

One example of Capote being very visible in his own fictitious creations is in his first novel, *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, in which the character Joel Knox is uncannily similar to a childhood Truman Capote; this is clearly not by accident. Having trouble finishing a novel he had previously begun writing, Truman decided to drop it and write a novel set in the south about a young boy who is ostensibly without parents, who is forced into a metaphysical journey of discovering and coming to terms with himself as a homosexual (Clarke). Most of the action of the novel is contained within young Joel's mind as he struggles to make sense of the strange world around him and his place within it. This narrative certainly seems to reflect Capote's own struggle to fit in.

At the beginning of this novel, Joel Knox travels alone on his way from his surrogate home with his relatives to live with a father he has never known and has idealized in his mind. On this journey, he is sized up by a truck driver who embodies masculinity as "a big balding six-footer with a rough manly face," and having "his notions of what a 'real' boy looked like," was offended by Joel's appearance (*Other Voices* 4). In this man's opinion, Joel is "too pretty, too delicate and fair-skinned; each of his features was shaped with a sensitive accuracy, and a girlish tendency softened his eyes, which were brown and very large. His brown hair, cut short, was streaked with pure yellow strands. A kind of sagging, imploring expression masked his thin face, and there was an unyouthful sag about his shoulders" (4-5). Further his voice is "uncommonly soft," which—if nothing else is—a definite reference to Capote's own boyish self (5).

In writing *Other Voices, Other Rooms*, Capote achieved a sense of liberation that gave him "the ability to place his alter ego in perspective by somehow managing to find it embodied

in real persons he [had] known, thus freeing himself from it while at the same time continuing to possess it lovingly,” (Nance 71). Under this new-found artistic freedom and after the creation of Joel Knox, Capote is moved to create a character farther removed from his history and less easily recognizable as himself. Even as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was bound within a character that was based on a combination of his mother and an amalgamation of many of his female friends, she gave Truman the canvas to explore the sense of “otherness” that he had always experienced. Holly, like Truman, is “a real phony” and a sort of spectacle for others, but they are also both people that have few real relationships in their lives and who prefer to put on a good show rather than reveal the ghosts from the past and their innermost fears. This echoes Capote’s own adoption of the very flamboyant social attitude that the public saw but that concealed great emotional pain and fear under the surface. Capote played up his celebrity status and essentially made his public life a show making light of his own differences, but he clearly still felt very haunted by his childhood experiences as evident in his work—though only evident in his work.

Furthermore, because Capote is more easily recognized in the narrator who is both a writer and a homosexual who has just moved to New York City, Holly appears more of a fabrication than an embodiment of his own social anxieties. She at first appears to be nothing more than an interesting object on which the writer-narrator is able to cast his ideas and opinions on much like the African sculpture of the head that so resembles her; however, “in admiring Holly he is being true to himself, making that act of acceptance that has been the dominant impulse in most of Capote’s writing” (Nance 119) because she is ultimately a truer representation of him than the Capote-narrator and more based on him than any real person he has known.

The narrator of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* exhibits issues with fear and insecurity but his compensation for such issues is much less excessive and much more what would be thought of as normal. Holly comes to carry the novel's plot and intrigue with her flamboyant topical personality and undercurrent of psychological fear, and the narrator, while still the one describing her, is really doing so more through her own language. The narrator is so taken with her that she is able to explicate her personal philosophy on life through him, and in this act, the two Capote figures—the normalized version and the unaffected version—are brought together

Holly is different and exists on the fringe of society, but she is charming and appealing for all her differences, and those things which set her apart from others are finally what is most admirable about her. Holly's manager O.J Bergman, who is one of her only "friends" that knows her real story, says he "[likes] the kid. Everybody does, but there's lots that don't," and that he sincerely likes the kid because "[he's] sensitive, that's why. You've got to be sensitive to appreciate her: a streak of the poet" but "you can beat your brains out for her, and she'll hand you horseshit on a platter" (*Breakfast at Tiffany's* 30-1). The oxymoron that everyone likes Holly but that there are many who do not as well is also fitting of Capote's social life; he was "a favorite household pet" to the elite who he entertained with his antic, but on the other hand, he had a sharp tongue and when it was directed at you, it was undoubtedly unpleasant (Allan 10). Yet even this unpleasant streak that the two figures—fabricated and fabricator—share comes from a deeply sensitive place in their psyches. They both wore masks of sociable, uninhibited people to hide their insecurities and fears.

Her manager declares that "she is a phony. But on the other hand, she isn't a phony because she's a real phony. She believes all this crap she believes. You can't talk her out of it," (*Breakfast at Tiffany's* 30). This illustrates both dreamer, idealistic qualities and an unswerving

commitment to her own principles however abnormal society deems them to be. She is “a real phony” because she believes this personal philosophy and lives by a set of rules that, while contrived, are her own. For Holly, “honesty to oneself, or acceptance of one’s identity, is as important to [her] as it came to be for Joel Knox. All her life she has known deprivation and death and fought a desperate battle against fear,” (Nance 123). Even though this story seems more objective and mature than *Other Voices*, it deals with exactly the same personal issues.

Further, this philosophy on life clearly parallel Capote’s own perspective and “that Holly makes honesty to self her guiding principle is not surprising when we remember that on the deepest level she is the Capote-narrator’s alter ego, representing for him...the strange unconventional side of him,” (Nance 119). I think that more than being the obviously semi-autobiographical Capote-narrator’s alter ego, she is Capote stripped of all social façade and in this way is a more real representation of Capote’s self identity and the narrator only a projected version of himself that lends to the story an objectivity that would otherwise be lacking.

III An Outsider with an Editing Eye

It seems that Capote was drawn to the writing of a nonfiction novel to distance himself from himself, but he clearly subverted this effort at every turn. The narrative of the true event of the Clutter family’s murders and then their murderers murders is steeped in the atmosphere of Capote’s earlier fiction, and the assumed factuality of the novel should not obscure the fact that what *In Cold Blood* ultimately provides is Capote’s view of the facts, which were highly and purposefully skewed.

Without the claim of being based on true events, Truman was able to take ample liberties in the creation of his fictional stories and characters. However, there is evidence enough to claim

that he took liberties with *In Cold Blood* as well. *In Cold Blood* was originally published in four installments, and before Capote released it in novel format, he made substantial changes both grammatically and factually to the original text, which was assumed to be correct already. Such changes betray the assumed accuracy of the text and Capote's adherence to the facts of the story, and Capote even "unabashedly concede[d] that one might 'manipulate' as readily in the 'nonfiction novel' as in fiction [saying] 'if I put something in which I don't agree about, I can always set it in a context of qualification without having to step into the story myself to set the reader straight'" (Rance 87). Of course, I believe that Capote did step into the story himself—though not to set the reader straight but rather to push the narrative in one direction—but this concession acknowledges his loose treatment of the facts and illustrates how Capote would have been able selectively use verifiable information to lead the reader to certain conclusions.

Recreating the final days of the Clutter family in the first section of *In Cold Blood* entitled *The Last to See Them Alive* required Capote to find at least one person—still living—that was with each of the Clutters in each scene he illustrates. It is impressive the extent that he is clearly able to reconstruct these scenes of their lives in a seemingly legitimate way even while suppressing all internal citation of his sources. After interviewing each of these sources about their encounter with one of the Clutter family on their last day, he reconstructs the scene being careful to leave that source in the scene as a character in the novel. These character versions of his sources seem to corroborate Capote's version of the events and to some extent offer verifiability, but they remain his characters and subject to the artist's subtly crafty hand. Moreover, some of his sources seem unreliable; many of the people he interviewed were children, many did not possess the privileged information about the Clutters to offer such intimate portraits, and almost all were still grieving for their community's loss.

Capote subtly uses juxtaposition to elevate the sense of drama but also to infer the thoughts and feelings of those characters that were already dead when he wrote this. For instance, when Herb Clutter is shown purchasing life insurance the day of his death, Capote infers that “thoughts of mortality must occur” (*In Cold Blood* 47). He does so again when he shows Bonnie Clutter giving one of her prized miniatures away and telling the thirteen-year-old recipient that “little things really belong to you...you don’t have to leave them behind,” which underscores the fact that she will not be able to take such items with her into death (27). This scene also relies on the highly unreliable witness of the young girl to provide such insight. He tries diligently to provide as much emotional scope for the Clutters as he does for the killers, but reconstructing such information would have been much more difficult, if not impossible. Such forays into the psyche’s of the deceased family seem rather forced and more a patchwork of fact, rumor, and interpretation and never feel intimate in the way we are able to see inside the mind of Perry Smith and even Dick Hickock on occasion.

The example of Capote interviewing a young *impressionable* girl to provide character development and foreshadow the murders creates further skepticism of the legitimacy of Capote’s proposed unswerving adherence to the truth. Though he was undoubtedly a brilliant man with an exceptionally good memory, his interviewing techniques have been called into question. He took no notes during interviews but claimed to have trained himself to memorize ninety-percent of all spoken conversation and then would transcribe notes from memory afterwards; it was his theory that taking notes or using a tape recorder “inhibited candor” (Clarke 322). Obviously not taking notes in interviews does have its advantages, and undoubtedly he was able to get his interviewees to spill more information because of the illusion of informality his approach created; however, this also seems somewhat deceptive and most likely allowed for a

certain amount of leading the subjects on Capote's part. It seems like it would be immensely easy for such a manipulative man to lead his interviewees to give him the information he needed—or merely desired. Wilma Kidwell—the mother of Nancy Clutter's best friend—said that “it wasn't like he was interviewing you at all,” and that “he had a way of leading you into things without your knowing it” (Clarke 322). It seems that this technique would have made it rather easy for Capote to make his material conform to his predetermined vision of the novel while maintaining the guise of legitimacy and objectivity.

That is, however, something Truman would never admit to doing. Being very charming and having an unswerving ability to always get what he wanted may have been a gift, but it seems that it was a gift much employed during his interviews, which negatively affected the objectivity of his work. On the other hand, his gift of an audiographic memory presents another, more readily provable, issue to his credibility; he immediately—though indirectly—admits to not having *perfect* recall and provides critics with ample evidence to point out any such inaccuracies that this method might have been responsible for. He provides quotes and reconstructs scenes based on ninety-percent of what actually happened. The question then is whether or not the other ten percent is merely lost or ad-libbed.

It is also problematic that this claim cannot be tested or verified. Simply because he said that his memory could perform in this way does not mean that he was able to consistently meet this quota. So, the fact that he admitted to an imperfect—though impressive—recall of interviews on top of the fact that most people, those he interviewed included, do not have similarly functioning memories and had no forethought to mentally store such mundane encounters with their neighbors, clearly leaves room for much human error—accidental and otherwise—in such a collection of purportedly cold, hard facts.

Capote also used his fame to glean desired information out of the Kansans he interviewed. Though initially wary of him, the citizens of Holcombe and Garden City eventually warmed up to Capote, and entertaining him became a very popular thing to do; as Clarke put it “he was an attraction and people didn’t want to be left out,” but of course they did not realize what they were getting themselves into (Clarke 323). Such an invitation into the personal lives of his guests was like an all access pass that he utilized to the fullest extent. George Plimpton’s *Truman Capote* “revisits Capote’s *In Cold Blood* and the author’s often flamboyant interaction with the individuals from whom he gleaned the details necessary for his famous ‘nonfiction novel’” (Hickman 464). One of these interactions is recalled by Harold Nye, who was one of the Kansas Bureau of Investigation officers, and explains that one night in Holcombe during Capote’s time there, Capote took this Mr. and Mrs. Nye—a typically conservative, mid-western couple—to a lesbian bar and then a gay club to which they, as expected, reacted with some horror (Hickman 464). One of many scheming exploits that Capote seemed to have taken such pleasure in, he seems to have intentionally pushed the Nyes out of their comfort zone to exact some sort of response from them for either his own enjoyment or for someone unknown practical purpose.

Hickman draws from this anecdote that “[Capote’s] choreography of this incident reflects a similar strategy in *In Cold Blood*,” and that “in the novel, Capote stages his story as he staged an evening for his Kansas guests, containing his characters within specific boundaries not only determined by the ‘history’ of the actual Holcomb murders but by Capote’s own desire for drama and scandal” (Hickman 465). While I agree that Capote managed and manipulated the sources of his information, I would more specifically narrow the boundaries of the stage that he sets for the narrative. Familiar with writing in a certain style and stories of a specific emotional tone, I

believe he created parallels—whether intentionally or not— between the real event of the murder case and the many fictional situations he had written into his earlier novels and stories.

Subsequently he uses his interviewing prowess to evoke certain sentimentalities that would allow him to map his well-established personal themes onto the real story without ever having to appear to be making any commentary or contributing any of his own opinions or ideas, which he ends up rampantly doing anyways though in slightly more subtle ways.

I argue that by the time Capote sat down to write the novel—and definitely by the time he finished it—that he knew that story and those faces and names better than he remember his childhood—however haunting it might have been. Capote even said of himself that “before [he] began [*In Cold Blood*], [he] was a stable person, comparatively speaking,” but that “afterward, something happened to [him]” and he “just can’t forget it, particularly the hangings at the end” (Allan 15). This confession that he became unstable because of the writing of this novel is clearly indicative of the extreme emotional impact it had on him and shows how this experience might have been even more haunting than his own childhood because of his personal involvement in the case, in the novel, and in the character of Perry Smith.

IV The Fates and Failures of Perry and Truman

Admitting the difficulty of his goal, Capote remained adamant about his plan in writing *In Cold Blood*. He knew he was walking a very narrow line and took extraordinary pains to stay within the limits of verifiability while exploring the inner human dramas of people already dead or scheduled to die. The balance he created—he thought—would enable factual material and a

more fictitious and more entertaining writing style to co-exist; however, this balance was concerned with the technical writing of the novel, and he did not take into account his emotional and personal involvement with the characters. Perhaps he was never consciously aware of the extreme degree to which he projected himself into the character of Perry Smith.

The themes of rejection and betrayal that are so evident in both Capote's and Perry's childhoods provide parallels to his earlier fiction, and subsequently the tone, themes and atmosphere of those stories infiltrates the real world of *In Cold Blood*'s real-life drama. Perry is in every way "a dreamer, an androgynous father seeker like Joel Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms*," and "like Holly Golightly he seeks his own morality," (De Bellis 533) and these parallels tie Perry to Capote's earlier seemingly autobiographically based figures, which more clearly ties Capote himself to Perry.

Furthermore, the themes of fate and secular predestination become major ones as the novel's events play out because Capote is trying to find redemption for Perry's actions and his skewed sense of morality due to his projection of himself onto Perry. His attempt to create 'vertical movement' as well as 'horizontal movement' in the novel ends up being an excuse to explore the past as well as the present of Perry's miserable life and create an intimate view into his mind, both of which are done to create sympathy for the character and help to explain his atypical behaviorisms and unusual attitude toward society and morality that further Capote's case for redemption.

This personal contribution is particularly evident in the way that Capote deals with fate in *In Cold Blood*; he goes to great length to create the feeling—at least—that all these characters were brought together by a greater power though not necessarily a religious one. Critics have noticed this and heavily criticized him for it including Norman Mailer—a fellow nonfiction

writer—who found fault with Capote in this area for deciding “too quickly this is all hereditary, that in their genes his killers were doomed and directed to act in this fashion” and that “there is no other outcome possible” (Rance 82). While I agree Capote believed this was the only outcome possible, he uses more than just genetics to explain how Perry is brought to kill the Clutters; childhood abuse and neglect greatly influence Perry’s already unstable psyche and bring him to see the Clutters as enemies. Further, I believe that how Capote personally comes to this conclusion is much more complicated and personally involved and that this is where the drama of the novel really lies.

Capote’s diligent efforts to redeem Perry throughout the novel are a very odd focus for a supposedly nonfiction novel. This concept feels much more like a novel than a work of journalism because it is Capote’s hand in the matter as the author—albeit invisible—to decide such a thing and then impose it on the reader through his narration. The fact that Perry was always going to kill the Clutters and be killed in return is only the frame on which Capote then attempts an act of redemption for a killer that may not deserve it but to whom Capote himself desperately wants to give it.

The entire first section of the novel predicts the inevitable deaths of the Clutter family, and while these deaths are inevitable in the sense they have already occurred in reality, Capote highlights the idea that their deaths were unavoidable collateral damage on Perry’s path within the novel to play up the immutable power of fate. Perry’s turbulent, abuse-riddled childhood engenders in him a resentment for happy, successful people as well as an uncontrollable rage, which collide on the night they rob the Clutters resulting in four dead bodies, and this is all established very clearly—though not factually—by Capote in the novel. The Clutters’ deaths

then do not seem to be the central action of the novel, but act more to set the stage for the probing of Perry's psychological issues.

The Clutter family's fate parallels that of the Smith family in many ways, of whom almost all die young and in tragic ways. Perry's sister claims that she is "afraid of him" and "always [has] been," but is really unsure if "it [is] simply Perry she feared, or [if it is] a configuration of which he [is] a part—the terrible destinies that seemed promised to the four children of Florence Buckskin and Tex John Smith" (182-83). Capote seems to suggest that it is the same power that fulfilled these "promised destinies" as killed the Clutters even though Perry's brother Jimmy and sister Fern had both killed themselves, and he had become a criminal and a killer himself. Barbara—the only seemingly normal and happy of the Smith clan—felt that what made these suicides "so ominous" was that they both had "strong character, high courage, hard work" but "it seemed that none of these were determining factors in the fates of Tex John's children" but that "they shared a doom against which virtue was no defense" (185). This seems to indicate that the siblings share this fate but also that the Smith and Clutter families are connected in this way as well. Capote seems to make fate a universal power, equally affecting all of the characters in the novel by drawing such parallels, which allows him to push the idea of Perry's life being controlled by fate to an even higher degree.

The thematic use of fate throughout both the last days of the Clutters and the last years of the killers constructs a clear boundary around how Capote was using—and creatively construing—this information to a specific end. He establishes that "Perry was most respectful of his superstitions" and that "the compulsively superstitious person is also very often a serious belief in fate" as is the case with Perry (*In Cold Blood* 42). Adopting Perry's firm belief in fate or drawing from his own personal belief in it, Capote suggests that Perry arrives at the Clutters

“embarked on the present errand [of robbing and then killing the family], not because he wished to be but because fate had arranged the matter” (42). Fate for Perry and Truman is not a religious power that intervenes for good because Perry has a strong “aversion to nuns. *And God. And religion,*” but takes the form of a sort of secular predestination that is unchangeable and unaffected by good or bad behavior (132). Moreover, it seems to be a somewhat malevolent force that takes away freewill and draws its victims to their doom. This helps to explain why Perry was drawn to violence and murder when Capote was not; these are merely the hands they drew, and both of them deal with their given situations the best way they can but are ultimately barreling towards predetermined ends.

The setting of this frame shows Capote’s thematic intentions for the novel and ultimately provides much insight into how on the most basic level of recounting this event, he is creating much more a novel than a piece of journalism. The story of the multiple murders holds many themes, many stories, many lessons, yet Capote confines his version of the story to a very specific scope that is most interested in the emotional lives of the murderers. Gerald Clarke, Capote’s biographer, has mentioned this saying that “another writer might have laid emphasis on Holcomb’s small town closeness and the warmth and good-heartedness of its citizens. Truman chooses instead to pick up a thread from his fiction and to swell on its isolation” (Rance 81).

Whether or not this is the meaning that Capote initially intended to assign to the novel is unclear, but the introduction of Perry Smith—a character he was not initially counting on—changed the stage, and the novel became really a story about him more than anything. The concepts of superstition, fate, and ambition all lead Perry to the moment that he slits Herb Clutter’s throat. In a way this focus on Perry really downplays the importance of the Clutters’ murders and reduces the pity that we feel for them. The story began about how murder affects

small town life but ended up being about how a dejected, different, and dangerous man with larger-than-life dreams and ambitions is led to such a small town to commit such a heinous act. The town, the people, the Clutters, all become a backdrop to the melodrama of Perry's existence. Yet that this should resonate so clearly and strongly within a nonfiction novel is strange and surely questions such a novel's validity. It seems that a clear-cut account of the murders and their consequences, even if filled with emotional character development and depth, should not treat a single character so partially that it effects many other aspects of the story; Perry's life and his intellectual and emotional struggles come to dominate the novel both in page numbers and thematically, which I see as being the most complicating matter in terms of writing a nonfiction novel. While we feel bad about the Clutters' deaths and even feel like the killers deserve their punishments, we as readers find it hard to escape Perry's point-of-view because the novel seeks largely to justify if not forgive his actions, and this is because of the severe degree to which Capote identified his life, his problems, his differences, and his fate with those of Perry Smith.

I think that Truman was consciously very aware of the similarities between Perry and himself, but I also believe that it was at least partially subconscious that he wrote himself into the narrative and then unsuccessfully tried to absolve them both. I do not think that Capote—so self-consciously aware of himself as the narrator already would have allowed this sort of personal defense, but it is not so far-fetched that he might never have realized he was doing it until much later.

Even if not totally aware of this self-projection while writing *In Cold Blood*, this is no way negates its emotionally autobiographical tinge. Twenty five years after writing *Other Voices, Other Rooms* Capote finally admitted that this novel was “an attempt to exorcise demons, an unconscious, altogether intuitive attempt, for [he] was not aware, except for a few incidents

and descriptions, of its being in any serious degree autobiographical. Rereading it [later, he found] such self-deception unpardonable” (Clarke 150). It is, then, not a great leap to say that Capote continued to exorcise those demons the rest of his career, regardless of his awareness of it.

Further, I would say that his choice to increasingly ground such exorcism in reality makes sense; he may have felt that absolving his own creations of their abnormal behavior and otherness was an act of self-acceptance but that it did not reflect acceptance by society at large, which I believe he both craved and loathed. It had been his “impulse, from “A Tree of Night” to *In Cold Blood* to “accept and understand the ‘abnormal’ person” and it had further been “one of the main purposes of his writing to safeguard the unique individual’s freedom from such slighting classifications as ‘abnormal’” (Nance 16). This is exactly what he tries to do with Perry Smith. Capote lumps Perry’s dangerous behavior into that individuality and through the artful retelling of a series of true events tries to redeem Perry in a real world situation, which would be reflective of his own redemption and acceptance by society. Capote is so personally involved in achieving this goal that he seems to betray his original goal of creating a nonfiction novel based on immaculate factuality.

Capote first caught glimpse of Perry Smith in his and Dick’s first hearing and the first thing he noted about the man’s physical appearance was the fact that his feet did not quite touch the floor (Clarke). Upon excitedly noticing this attribute of Perry’s small stature, Nell Harper Lee, who was aiding him in his research in Holcombe because of her ability to make people feel comfortable in a way Capote could never hope to, remarked that she knew it was going to be “the beginning of a great love affair” (Clarke 326). Capote was interested in the point of Perry’s physical appearance because of his own diminutive size, which had set him apart his entire life.

Though in Perry's case, such modest sizing was confined to his lower half because, as Capote noted, "sitting, he [seemed] a more than normal-sized man, a powerful man, with the shoulders, the arms, the thick crouching torso of a weight lifter—weight lifting was, in fact, his hobby. But some sections of him were not in proportion to other. His tiny feet, encased in short black boots with steel buckles, would have neatly fitted into delicate lady's dancing slippers" and "when he stood up, he was no taller than a twelve-year-old child" (*In Cold Blood* 15). Capote's description in the novel does not possess the same excited quality of his private comment to Harper Lee, but it does give great emphasis to Perry's physical appearance and seems to play with the idea of opposite halves. His physical self embodies two totally opposing characteristics as it looks "strutting on stunted legs...grotesquely inadequate to the grown-up bulk" of his top half, and this seems to echo his inner self that balances both a severe sentimentality and rage. He physically manifests what Capote wants him to represent by the end of the novel: he has parts that are bad, but he also has parts that are good. Capote highlights those good parts in his attempt to redeem Perry and downplays the bad aspects of his person by diverting blame for them to Perry's parents, the nuns in the orphanage, the army sergeant, and finally psychological criminology. Though their bodies are small, for Capote, they also possess a mental strength that exceeds their physical size or evolves as a reaction to that size.

Another physical characteristic that both links Perry to Capote and displays the same duality as his body is his face. Perry, while confined to certain judgments about his body and over compensating for his small legs by having a hulking upper-body, "his own face enthral[s] him. Each angle of it induce[s] a different impression. It [is] a changeling's face, and mirror-guided experiments had taught him how to ring the changes, how to look now ominous, now impish, now soulful" and then "a tilt of the head, a twist of the lips, and the corrupt gypsy

became the gentle romantic” (15-16). Here again, Capote tries to balance Perry’s obvious negative, violent qualities with positive ones by suggesting one side of him is a “gentle romantic” and perhaps that he would have been purely so if external forces had not forced him to become something more ominous. This, however, does not negate the fact that such an appearance is merely affected, which seems to work against Capote’s motive for subtle vindication. On the other hand, the ability to change one’s impression at will is something that Capote would have been familiar with and that he may have admired as a tool for fitting in where one does not naturally belong. He was very much a social “changeling,” able to entertain and delight equally as well as he mocked and scorned in the circles of the social elite to which he was a favorite sort of pet for such antics. In this respect, it seems that perhaps Perry’s ability to affect impressions is a gift—something that sets them both apart, though places them together, and gives them the upper hand over their peers.

Further, Capote describes himself through the guise of Joel Knox in *Other Voices, Other Rooms* in the same language. The narrator here explains that “for long periods each day [Joel] studies his face in a hand mirror: a disappointing exercise, on the whole, for nothing he saw concretely confirmed his suspicions of emerging manhood,” and “it was a face with a look of innocence but none of its charm, an alarming face, really, too shrewd for a child, too beautiful for a boy” (*Other Voices* 207). Capote describes Perry repeating this exercise in *In Cold Blood* where similar conclusions are drawn; both figures discover that their own faces possess dual qualities. The only real difference is that Perry is aware of his power over these qualities and exploits them, while Joel is frightened by his own face and confused about what it might suggest about him, which in his case is his own homosexuality. This parallel between the fictitious Joel Knox and the factual Perry Smith shows how Capote embeds himself in his characters and map

the characteristics of earlier personas onto a real man who topically resembles them. It further elucidates the fine line that Capote walked—in his own life and on the page—between embracing and exploiting one’s own otherness and fearing ostracism for it.

Perry’s face continues to represent the same dichotomy of naivety and corruption as his body does. Marie Dewey—the wife of the lead detective of the Clutter case, upon viewing pictures of the killers for the first time, finds Perry to have “an arrogant face, yet not entirely, for there was about it a particular refinement; the lips and nose seemed nicely made, and she thought the eyes, with their moist, dreamy expression, rather pretty, in an actorish way, sensitive. Sensitive, and something more: ‘mean’,” (164) This further elucidates the dual qualities that his countenance embodies; Capote again and again tries to counter Perry’s dangerous, criminal behavior with descriptions of him as sensitive, idealistic dreamer. Again, when their German travel buddy Otto draws Perry’s portrait, he “perceive[s] not one very obvious aspect of the sitter’s countenance—its mischief, an amused, babyish malice that suggested some unkind cupid aiming envenomed arrows” (119). But even this description, which at first seems to reveal the malicious person behind that pretty, sensitive face, is qualified by being compared to a cupid and because his malice is referred to as “babyish,” which suggests a naïve, unintentional enmity rather than something more evil. The description of this portrait is further problematic because it is being described first hand by Capote, who is able to define Perry’s malicious expression in his own words and in such a way that it makes him seem less guilty and more redeemable.

A desire for such superiority is evident in the lives of both Perry and Capote; Capote seems to have seen himself as an insider to the corrupt lives of the American bourgeois and while he enjoyed their company and their significant generosity, he also used their lifestyles as material for his work. Holly Golightly—in addition to being a version of himself—is on the surface an

amalgamation of many of the high-spirited, low-minded women he knew from the city. Later, he took this humorous and somewhat malicious insight to their world to a new level, writing the Proust-inspired novel *Answered Prayers* that sought to take down the modern American elite as Proust took down eighteenth-century French aristocracy; even though he never completed this work, the parts that were published gravely offended nearly all of his friends and acquaintances. Such depictions of this class reveal how Capote saw himself as outside this group of people looking in as if in a social experiment where he held the upper hand and saw them for what they really were.

Perry too felt that he was better than everyone else. He knew he had been wronged and abused at every turn in his life, which had led him to be very poorly educated and socially unskilled, but he still believed himself smarter than those around him. This belief manifested itself in his dedicated use of large words like “thanatoid,” “omnilingual,” and “nescient”—just to name a few that he recorded in his personal dictionary—even when he was not able to use them in the correct context (146). This is why Andrew—the young man who calculatedly murdered his whole family and inhabited a cell on death row with Dick and Perry—makes Perry so mad; his “educated accent and the formal quality of his college-trained intelligence were anathema to Perry, who though he had not gone beyond third grade, imagined himself more learned than most of his acquaintances” (317).

Furthermore, Perry seemed to believe that he existed beyond the confines of normal society and would be vindicated in the end for abiding by his own set of principles. In his dream of being saved by “the yellow bird,” the bird becomes “an avenging angel who savaged his enemies or...rescued him in moments of mortal danger” in which everybody would be “sore as hell because [he] was free, [he] was flying, [he] was better than any of *them*” (266). While not

religious, this expresses a definite sense of spirituality that Perry used to believe that he would some day be freed from the victimization of his life. He sees his avian savior as a sort of salvation not only from the physical world but also from his otherness and ostracism. In being rescued by the yellow bird, it would be revealed that he was really better than “any of them” and that he had just been misunderstood and underappreciated from the start.

While Perry and Truman shared this sense of personal pride, Capote’s imposed self-importance also plays a significant role in his writing style, and helps to explain the use of such objective sounding language. He believed that because he was different, he saw through the façade of the elitist lifestyle that surrounded him, and when he wrote about this subject as he often did, the opinions he put forth and the conclusions that he came to were, in his mind, accurate and unbiased. But, of course, this belief is self deceptive because it is clearly informed by his feeling of being an outsider and the compensation he created for this in believing himself to be above the group he could never be a part of rather than below it. This seems to parallel Capote’s writing of *In Cold Blood* where he really is an outsider and once again believes that whatever conclusions he makes about the murder case are fair and accurate. Again this proves to be false advertisement on Capote’s part because the story he ends up telling and the moral lessons that the novel leaves its readers with are very biased toward Perry Smith.

Perry, like Capote, also saw himself as having an unique perspective on life that gave him the upper hand though one significantly different. This is evident with the novel as Perry insists—directly to Capote even though we do not see him—that he is special in some way. Perry pulls from his religious, inmate friend from Lansing to prove this point saying that Willie-Jay had “said [he] was a natural born ‘medium,’” and that he “had a high degree of ‘extrasensory perception.’ Sort of like a built in radar” and that he “[saw] things before [he saw] them. The

outlines of coming events” (90). This example shows Perry reaching for even paranormal means to explain and justify his superiority, and Capote corroborates this repeatedly in the novel by using the idea of secular predestination or fate to structure the stories events. Perry is able to see “the outlines of coming events” but is helpless to do anything about them because he was not and had freewill to choose a different path, he certainly would have—according to Capote. Capote tries to make the reader believe this as well by playing up the idealistic dreamer side of Perry and suggesting that if his doomed fate had been escapable, Perry would have moved to Mexico and become a treasure diver like he dreamed instead of murdering an innocent family and being hung for it. Capote suggests that Perry has some foresight of his predetermined condemnation, which seems to me an attempt on Capote’s part to excuse his lousy attempt to break his cycle of criminal behavior and make him seem merely the victim of his own fate.

Suggesting that Perry has foresight into the future, however, complicates Capote’s mission to clear his favorite killer of his misdeeds because if he knows what is going to happen, then Perry should be able to stop them or change the course of events. Here again Capote utilizes fate to clarify this important question. Perry being able to predict the future or Herb Clutter signing a double indemnity life insurance policy hours before his murder or Bonnie Clutter giving her most prized possessions away hours before her own are all examples of Capote orchestrating a careful illustration of fates that are unchangeable. He seems to suggest that the perfect Clutters were always slated to die and never had a chance in the same way that the cloud of doom had always hung over the antithetically pitiful Smith clan. Capote further portrays Perry as the factor that intersects the fates of these two families. It was Perry’s personal believe that “once a thing is set to happen, all you can do it hope it won’t. Or will—depending. As long as you live, there’s always something waiting, and even if it’s bad, and you know it’s bad, what can

you do? You can't stop living" (92). And even though this is Perry's supposedly personal belief, Capote seems to adopt it wholeheartedly and uses this as a sort of philosophical doctrine of fate within the novel.

Capote again leans on religious and seemingly reliable Willie-Jay as a sort of character reference in his own novelistic—and very one sided—trial of Perry Smith. Willie-Jay is never physically present in the story but is mentioned because it is his release from prison and Perry's dream of reconnecting with him that drives Perry to agree to help Dick rob the Clutters and thus break his parole in returning to Kansas. As Perry's ulterior motive, his role makes sense, but Capote seems to be fond of Willie-Jay for the same reason that Perry is and uses multiple letters from Willie-Jay to further support the sympathetic image of Perry that he is trying to establish. It seems obvious that Perry likes him so much simply because "only Willie-Jay had ever recognized his worth, his potentialities, had acknowledged that he was not just an undersized, overmuscled half-breed, had seen him, for all his moralizing, as he saw himself—'exceptional', 'rare,' 'artistic'" (45). While we can assume that Willie-Jay sincerely meant the things he says about Perry in such letters, he remains a not quite legitimate or fair witness of Perry's deepest and most basic human nature. He never knew Perry outside of the federal penitentiary where they met and where good behavior was strictly enforced, and as Perry seemed to feed off the flattery and acceptance that Willie-Jay offered him, it seems very likely that Perry tried to impress him.

Willie-Jay's testimony then appears rather skewed but is in line with Capote's agenda and becomes one of the primary sources used to establish Perry's character. Also, Capote himself could not seem to be analyzing Perry's mind and motivations so it is convenient that Willie-Jay did it for him. One examples of this is in Willie-Jay's farewell letter to Perry where he tells Perry

that he is “a man of extreme passion, a hungry man not quite sure where his appetite lies, a deeply frustrated man striving to protect his individuality against a backdrop of rigid conformity” (43). This “individuality” seems to be linked to his otherness and his criminal tendencies but with a more positive spin in suggesting that his being different is good and worth defending rather than violent and abhorrent. He believes Perry struggles to maintain that individuality against a “rigid conformity” while existing “in a half-world suspended between two superstructures, one self-expression and the other self-destruction,” which again makes it seem that his individuality is worth fighting for (43). In addition to meshing well with Capote’s view of Perry, this defense of Perry’s individuality might have particularly appealed to Capote due to its tendency to see otherness and individuality as a positive character trait rather than socially degenerate.

Of course, Perry’s individuality is hard to venerate because of his inclination to express it violently. Willie Jay says on this subject that while Perry is “strong,” there is “a flaw in [his] strength;” this flaw is his explosive rage and is again treated as innate to Perry’s being (43). His “unreasonable anger” is triggered by “the sight of others who are happy or content” because he thinks “they’re fools, [he] despises them because their morals, [and] their happiness is the source of [his] frustration and resentment” (44). This “flaw” in Perry’s strength seems to suggest a sort of genetic inevitability along with the suggestion of strong behavioral influences that have scarred him, both of which Capote uses simultaneously to try to explain and excuse Perry’s behavior. Behaviorally, this letter postulates that his feelings of rejection have resulted in irrational resentment towards those who have had easier, more happy lives. This again supports the idea that Perry has displaced blame for his violent behavior onto external sources that wrought in him that immutable sense of rejection and exacerbate his natural rage. In the context

of his inherent rage and learned resentment, his “emotional reaction out of all proportion to the occasion” seems at least explainable if not excusable (43-44).

Whether because this letter lends itself so well to this conclusion or because this is the version of Perry that he was trying to illustrate, Capote clings to this description. He wants to view Perry as a damaged good, but one that had no choice, so that when Perry does kill the Clutter family, we realize that that being confronted with the family who “represented everything people...really value and respect” would have triggered that rage (88). Even Perry verbally corroborates Capote’s version of this explanation saying that “they never hurt [him]. Like other people. Like people [had] all [his] life. Maybe it’s just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it” (290). This version of the story seems to suggest that the murders of this innocent family were in some capacity retribution or revenge, which seems like an impossible conclusion for an unbiased observer to even insinuate. Yet this insinuation fits into the well-established idea that all of these people are at the mercy of their own fates; however, I cannot help but feel that in this novel it seems that everyone is at the mercy of Perry’s fate rather than their own.

For Capote, it was important to bring fate or at least some sort of secular predestination into the story if he wanted to be able to create sympathy for Perry to ultimately find some redemption for him, but by taking away Perry’s agency completely and suggesting—even if only very subtly—that Perry had no choice but to kill those people or that he was always going to kill those people and that they were always going to be killed, is overstepping his boundaries as an impassive narrator. This is because he is not an impassive narrator; Capote acts more as an eulogizer sent to deliver Perry from defamation by an unjust system that does not recognize the good in those outside what it deems “normal.” Perry to him represents a person just like himself

that just happened to be assigned a worse fate, and Capote cannot blame him for his actions and behavior because he does not want to blame himself for his own.

Considering Capote's manipulation of the themes of fate and predestination to emancipate Perry from his guise of otherness and moral abnormality, it is clear that he felt linked to Perry by things that ran much deeper than physical appearances and devious demeanors. Both men experienced abusive and tragic childhoods that shaped the rest of their adult lives. It is true that "the early years of both Smith and Capote were nomadic. Both hungered to escape from poverty and obscurity. Both were estranged from their fathers, neglected, by their mothers. Both had talents which went unrecognized and therefore unencouraged" (McAleer 572), but it is the emotional scarring that these elements leave on each man that forges the closest bond between the two. Beyond biography and physical resemblance, Perry and Truman are kindred spirits, that have undergone similar experiences and feel that those experiences have made them who they are as adults, for better or worse. This largely manifests itself in the sentiment the two share concerning their sordid behavior, whether legal or not, which they ultimately blame on external sources. Capote seems firmly grounded in the idea that behavior and personality are formed in childhood based on one's physical environment and familial experiences. Both men's pitiful childhoods become the source for their unusual behavior and outsider status. In Capote's case, his literature seems to infer that the source of his homosexuality was a combination of genetic predisposition and a deprivation of love from his parents, a lack of male role models, and a general sense of displacement, which led to sexual exploration and other avenues of acceptance at a very young age. For Perry, similar feelings of rejection created a dangerous rage issue but also a heightened sentimentality and idealistic nature, and furthermore, Perry believes that what is wrong with him was "maybe a thing [he] was born with" (110). Both men became people that

they were not necessarily proud of but felt that they had never really had any choice because of their hereditary inheritances and past experiences.

This lack of agency is evident in Perry's own rhetoric in *In Cold Blood* but is even more evident in the way that Capote talk about Perry's situation. Obviously, Capote is not physically present in the story, but the ways in which he rewords Perry's feelings—or what he tells the reader are his feelings—are very telling of his own feelings. He is adamant that “[Perry] *did* give a damn—but [asks] who had ever given a damn about him,” which defers blame for Perry's actions and morals to all of the figures in his past that abused or neglected him (*In Cold Blood* 45). This supports the idea that Perry really cares quite a lot—so much so he craves acceptance—but that the denial of that acceptance has resulted in a potentially dangerous social disorder. Perry does not take ownership of his actions but instead blames others for any abnormal behaviors he has developed, and Capote as an objective and unbiased observer and researcher of Perry's life should not leave the explanation for his actions at that. Capote willingly removes Perry's agency because doing so makes him a more sympathetic character and more easily redeemed.

Furthermore, Perry clearly blames his parents for not encouraging what he viewed as superior talents that he naturally possessed. Perry still firmly holds onto the idea that he “had this great natural musical ability, which [his] dad didn't recognize. Or care about. [He] liked to read, too. Improve [his] vocabulary. Make up songs. And [he] could draw. But [he] never got any encouragement—from [his father] or anybody else” (133). Capote too felt a lack of encouragement and generally unappreciated by his father who he rarely had contact with and his mother who largely ignored him (Clarke).

Yet in the firm belief that he was a naturally gifted individual that “happen[ed] to have a brilliant mind,” Perry still feels a sense of otherness, which Capote is drawn to in him because I believe he too felt this way. On one hand, Perry feels “better than all of them” but at the same time he feels that because his talents were not encouraged, that he somehow went off track and became “not just right” and not quite normal (266, 111). Perry had “a brilliant mind and talent plus. But no education, because [his father] didn’t want [him] to learn anything, only how to tote and carry for him. Dumb. Ignorant. That’s the way he wanted [Perry] to be,” and this is the way he feels underneath the bravado (185). Though Perry concedes this fear of being somehow left of center, he never takes responsibility for the dangerous tendencies that make him “not just right,” and I do not think Capote wanted him to because Capote was committed to making it seem that such behavior was the product of rampant abuse in Perry’s youth or some genetically predisposed mental disorder. However, thoughts about his own otherness precede his criminal behavior because the “notion that he ‘might not be normal, maybe insane’ had troubled him ‘even when [he] was little, and [his] sisters laughed because [he] liked the moonlight’” (265). This both supports the image of Perry as the “gentle romantic” and works well in Capote’s personal defense of him due because it depicts a tormented child-version of Perry, creating additional sympathy for him. Perhaps Perry is insane but that would not be his fault and would have made his trial and execution unjust and cruel even, but even if Perry is sane enough, the fact that he feared for his own sanity at such a young age suggests emotional abuse and creates sympathy for him.

While he admits his own feelings of abnormality, this concession is blamed on external sources and Perry and Capote conspire to elaborately defer fault for their own unusual and social unacceptable behavior outside of themselves. This further creates sympathy for Perry, but it is

also instrumental in explaining—if not excusing—Perry’s ultimate abnormal act of murdering a family of four. Capote explains that for Perry “it was ‘painful’ to admit that one might be ‘not just right’—particularly if whatever was wrong with you was not your own fault but ‘maybe a thing you were born with,’” which clearly elucidates the idea that Capote wanted to explain Perry’s adult behavior and personality through a combination of nature and nurture—employing both genetics and childhood environment in his defense of Perry (110). He even goes so far as to suggest that Perry possesses an innate rage inherited from his Indian mother and Irish father—who were both stereotypically short-tempered—and that the “half-breed” offspring this union produced had a temper and source of rage that exceeded that of both his parents (45). Perry is “‘a natural killer’—absolutely sane, but conscienceless, and capable of dealing with or without motive, the coldest-blooded deathblows” (55). Under this understanding of his genetic history, his murderous behavior seems the inevitable product of his parents’ respective tempers.

It is this naturally imbued rage combined with painful emotions from his past that flood Perry’s mind right before he kills the Clutters, which illustrates how Capote uses both genetic and behavioral influences to explain how and why Perry is brought to commit such a heinous act. Perry kneels “down beside Mr. Clutter, and the pain of kneeling” and the “thought of that goddamn dollar [he had crawled on his belly to retrieve from under Nancy’s bed]. Silver dollar. The shame. Disgust. And [that] *they’d* told me never to come back to Kansas” all coalesce in Perry’s ‘tortured’ mind and he does not “realize what [he has] done till [he] hear[s] the sound. Like somebody drowning” (244). The painful emotions stirred by this event trigger his “natural” rage which leads him to a murder not motivated by its victim but rather by a series of separate memories. The *they* that Perry refers to and that Capote highlights by italicizing specifically refers to the Kansas State Court that stated in his parole that he was forbidden to return to

Kansas, but also seems to more broadly refer to all those people who had told Perry what he could not do or abused him in more severe ways, and Perry was very clear about his resentment toward those who slighted him. In speaking about the nun who had abused him at the Catholic orphanage he briefly occupied, Perry remains firm that her dismissal had “never changed [his] mind about her and what [he] wished [he] could have done to her and all the people who made fun of [him]” (275). This reinforces the idea that just before slitting Herb Clutter’s throat he was filled with a desire for revenge against all of those who had wronged him amalgamated into a single source of uncontrollable rage. This explanation tries to wipe the blood from Perry’s hands and place it on all of those other people that had made him the way he was. Capote is careful to include the fact that Perry “didn’t mean it” and that he had “meant to call [Dick’s] bluff, make him argue [Perry] out of it, make him admit he was a phony and a coward” when the flood of rage kicked in and he acted without knowing what he was doing (244).

Even the lead detective on the case Alvin Dewey buys into Capote’s casting of Perry somewhat and finds “it possible to look at [Perry] without anger—with rather, a measure of sympathy—for Perry Smith’s life not been no bed of roses but pitiful, an ugly and lonely progress toward one mirage then another” (246). He further believes that “the crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act” and that “the victims might as well have been killed by lightning,” but of course they were not killed by lightning and while psychological events were probably the immediate cause of the murder, it was definitely no accident (245). Perry was clearly a disturbed individual with enough emotional baggage and innate rage to kill someone, and this is exactly why he was included in Dick’s plan to rob the Clutters. Dick had “gradually decided that Perry possessed unusual and valuable qualities” and that he was a rare natural killer that he could use to pull off crime that might necessitate such a talent (55). Perry

then is specifically brought to the Clutters' house in the intention to kill them whether or not it was his intention or not. Even if it was true that he "didn't want to harm the [family]," he is still a criminal and still broke into their house, tied them up, and tried to rob them, which can in no way be construed as accidental. Whether Dewey's comments were produced under careful leading by Capote or express his genuine feelings is impossible to say, but Capote does not ignore this attempt to show that Perry's pitiful life stirred sympathy in even those who most wanted to convict him.

Capote further create sympathy for Perry by illustrating and highlighting Perry's apparent kindness or empathy shows toward his victims before killing them. Perry "had faith in Dick" and so "let [himself] be carried along," but always "hoped [they] could do it without violence," which is an especially strange comment next to the fact that Perry was the only one to commit any violent acts that night (234). He takes "a chair out of the hall and [sticks] it in the bathroom. So Mrs. Clutter could sit down. Seeing as she was said to be an invalid," which supports this vision of a gentle Perry trying to diffuse the situation (239). He then "tuck[s] [Nancy Clutter] in till just her head show[s]" and then chats with Nancy as she tries "hard to act casual and friendly" (242). Perry later said that he "really liked her. She was really nice. A very pretty girl, and not spoiled or anything," but this does not change the fact that he shoots her point blank in the head less than an hour later, yet Capote focuses on all of these moments of "fragmentary indications of ironic, erratic compassion" that Perry commits and largely glosses over the horror of the actual murders (241-42).

This novel was ostensibly to be about those murders and their resolution, but as the novel veers off course to bring Perry into the fold, the murders become an object in the path of his pathetic life and erratic criminal behavior. After the murders and his incarceration, Perry

“wonder[s] why [he] did it” and scowls “as though the problem [is] new to him, a newly unearthed stone of surprising, unclassified color” and admits that he does not know why “as if holding it to the light, and angling it now here, no there,” which shows a clear lack of remorse, but more importantly to Capote purposes it shows a clear mental dysfunction (290). Such a mental dysfunction becomes pivotal in the end of the novel because Capote’s last attempt to absolve Perry’s immorality is by explaining it as a result of a medical disorder; however, this description of Perry answering the question of why he murdered the Clutters, is more revealing of Capote’s own attitude toward Perry than of Perry’s attitude to the murders. All Perry actually says is that he wonders why he did it but does not know why; the linking analogy is proffered up by Capote presumably to give the answer more depth than it actually contained, but inadvertently describes how Capote himself viewed Perry. Perry is Capote’s “newly unearthed stone of surprising, unclassified color,” and he is fascinated how such a specimen came to exist, and how one so similar to him in so many ways, committed four gruesome murders.

Perry has no good explanation for why he committed those murders, nonetheless Capote goes to great lengths to provide one for him. Capote’s last attempt to redeem Perry appears as an in depth but impersonal psychoanalysis of his behavior. This is based on preexisting research in forensic psychiatry supplemented by Capote’s fervent advocacy on Perry’s behalf. While writing *In Cold Blood*, Capote himself did rigorous research into discovering how the minds of murderers functioned, but it seems that instead of informing his opinion of Perry, this research gets used as a tool to support Capote’s already firmly established opinion of Perry.

The one doctor—Dr. Jones—who actually gets to do a very brief psychological examination of Perry, does find that he “shows definite signs of severe mental illness,” but this diagnosis is based on Perry’s personal biography—also brief—but very little on any personal

interaction with him (296). This doctor seems to come to the same conclusion that Capote does: that his childhood “was marked by brutality and a lack of concern on the part of both parents” and that “he seems to have grown up without direction, without love, and without ever having absorbed any fixed sense of moral values” (296-97). This testimony seems to officially and medically blame Perry’s signs of mental illness on his parents’ rejection of him, which fits into Capote’s strategy exactly. Further, this doctor goes on to discuss what “features in his personality make-up stand out as particularly pathological” including his “paranoid orientation toward the world” and his “ever-present poorly controlled rage—easily triggered by any feeling of being tricked, slighted, or labeled inferior” (297). The language of this part of the diagnosis suggests that Perry’s behavior is genetic or hard-wired into him in some way but that these pathological traits are responses to behavioral conditions. This idea echoes Capote’s own inferences about Perry’s psychological reasoning and helps to ground his ideas in seemingly medical fact, but of course, the field of psychology remains highly based in theory even today—over forty years after Capote wrote this. Though Dr. Jones’s testimony actually had nothing to do with the case as it was not allowed to be presented in court, Capote includes it in the narrative to further his ideas about Perry and to suggest that their trial was not fair. Insinuating that Perry should not have been convicted but rather sent to a mental institution, Capote presents Perry as the victim of a flawed legal system and therefore wrongly killed, which makes the scene of his hanging all the more harrowing.

Capote further tries to connect Perry’s pathological behavior to the research of Joseph Satten, “a widely respected veteran in the field of forensic psychiatry,” and believes that Perry “represents a type of murderer described by him in an article,” but this seems entirely disconnected with the events of the novel and a nearly desperate attempt to legitimize Perry’s

mental dysfunction (298). Capote then catalogs the symptoms that this article elucidates are characteristic of this type of murderer including “severe lapses in ego control,” “severe emotional deprivation in early life,” and “a long standing, sometimes lifelong, history or erratic control over aggressive impulses” all of which aptly described Perry as he has been portrayed but also support Capote’s claim (299-300). Capote reports that Dr. Satten holds “that when Smith attacked Mr. Clutter he was under a mental eclipse, deep inside a schizophrenic darkness, for it was not an entirely flesh-and-blood man he ‘suddenly discovered’ himself destroying, but ‘a key figure in some past traumatic configuration’: his father? the orphanage nuns who had derided and beaten him? the hated Army sergeant [who sexually harassed him]? the parole officer who had ordered him to ‘stay out of Kansas’? One of them or all of them” (302). This encapsulates all of what Capote has been trying to infer about Perry and conveniently puts it in the mouth of a widely respected veteran of psychology—though not actually a quote. Capote wanders far away from the events of the story to include these psychological investigations, and finds that “by independent paths, both the professional and the amateur analyst reached conclusions not dissimilar” (302). Capote makes the point that the two doctors’ opinions corroborated one another as a way of strengthening his own argument, but it also seems to suggest that their opinions corroborate his own as well. Presumably the professional refers to Dr. Satten and the amateur to Dr. Jones, but the professional could just as easily refer to the doctors conjointly and the amateur to himself. Such an indirect reference to himself reveals too much of his involvement in this diagnosis away and makes him appear too eager to be right about Perry.

It was ultimately impossible for Capote to redeem Perry and on April, 14th 1965, society declared Perry’s life invaluable and hung him in a “bleakly lighted cavern cluttered with lumber and other debris” not “a setting of suitable dignity” (337). Before he was hanged, however, Perry

made a brief speech on the ethics of capital punishment saying, “I think...it’s a helluva thing to take a life in this manner. I don’t believe in capital punishment, morally or legally” (340). He then adds that “maybe [he] had something to contribute, something—,” but he does not finish this sentence, and maybe he realizes that he really does not have anything to contribute and that his only contribution to the world was four dead bodies (340). This apparent realization brings him to finally apologize for an act he feels no remorse over saying, “It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do. I apologize” (340). The only inappropriate thing about Perry saying this, however, is that fact that he did not say it and he did not mean it (De Bellis 532). This fabrication shows just how far Capote’s relationship with Perry throws the concept on the nonfiction novel into imbalance.

By the end of this novel, it was not Capote fighting for Perry’s life or dignity or memory because practically speaking, he needed Perry to die to finish *In Cold Blood*. It is instead Capote fighting for his own life, dignity, and memory. He had embedded so much of himself into Perry that I believe the line between where one stopped and the other began had become blurred in his mind. Capote saw Perry’s hanging as his own condemnation and falsely put apologetic words into Perry’s mouth because he would have apologized, and on some level this figure is Capote. Or perhaps it is really Capote apologizing to Perry by imposing remorse on him posthumously. He may very well have felt bad for using him for subject matter and then providing such an intimate and skewed portrayal of him, or he have felt guilty for defending his image—their shared image—but not his life. Whatever the specific reasons for this blatant deceit—and all the other more subtle deceits in the novel—they seem to have been personally motivated by Capote’s relationship to Perry. Further, while *In Cold Blood* is not a totally “true account of a multiple murder and its consequences,” it is ultimately this dominating personal relationship and the revelations about Truman Capote uncovered by this relationship that make *In Cold Blood* intriguing and worth reading.

IV Conclusion

Capote later acknowledged the true emotional and mental toll the experience of writing *In Cold Blood* had on him saying, “I would never do it again. I mean, if I had known what that book was going to cost in every conceivable way, emotionally, I never would have started it, and I really mean that” (Reed 61). This reflection supports the idea that Capote felt personally deflated by Perry’s condemnation and execution. He admitted he was “still very much haunted by the whole thing” and that he “had finished the book, but in a sense [he *hadn’t*] finished it” because “it [kept] churning around in [his] head. It particularize[d] itself now and then, but not in the sense that it [brought] about a total conclusion,” and this feeling of playing an unfinished role in the events of the novel is indicative that he felt personally involved.

He had been able to vindicate, at least to some extent, most of the protagonists in his works of fiction. Joel Knox of *Other Voices, Other Rooms* came to terms with his homosexuality and found a companion who understood him despite their otherness, and Holly is remembered fondly in the minds of all those who knew her despite her eccentricity. Yet, try as he did, he was unable to fully do so for Perry—and by extension himself—when set in the real world of the nonfiction novel. Moreover, because this conclusion for Perry was determined by real world factors rather than by the artist’s hand, I believe he felt condemned along with Perry—an idea supported by his lack of new work after *In Cold Blood*. His thematic journey for acceptance was over and he had ultimately failed to gain the acceptance he had been seeking.

According to Kenneth Reed, “his emotional relationships with the killers themselves made that interlude in his life all but psychologically debilitating,” and subsequently led to a

“dependency upon tranquilizers” (58). This self-medicating behavior further numbed the personal pain and sense of failure. His book saved not the Clutters, nor their killers, but more than this, he was disappointed in not being able to redeem Perry, who was so like him, in some way. He did not write much of anything new after the novel’s publication, and his sense of failure is all too evident in the shockingly revelatory fictionalized memoir *Answered Prayers* in which the Capote-narrator seems to simultaneously accept and condemn himself for his abnormal lifestyle.

Capote describe this novel as being “about four people who got exactly what they set out to get in life” and that “the title comes from something St. Theresa is supposed to have said: ‘More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones’” (Reed 67). This description furthers the tragic undercurrent of the novel because it suggests that these four people—all of whom in some way embody Capote’s ideals—all had goals that they reached but that made them ultimately more unhappy than if they had not reached them. This seems to be true to Capote’s life as well. He wanted to be a famous writer and to be part of the social upper-crust, but in the end found both that those people who seemingly adored him were not real friends and only accepted him when he was harmless and entertaining. He was their darling when he was successful and amusing, throwing extravagant parties like his Black and White Ball, but as he became emotionally unraveled and became increasing addicted to drugs and alcohol, he was held in less demand. This is an ideas supported by the fact that he became a social pariah after the publication of the four stories from *Answered Prayers* that contained “thinly disguised, deeply hurtful descriptions of themselves by the adorable little man they had come to think of as a favorite household pet” (Allan 10). But of course, a pet is only accepted into a family as long as he behaves properly, which is not real acceptance but only provision inclusion, and I think

Capote began to be aware of his temporary status after the destabilizing experience of writing of *In Cold Blood*.

In addition to his feelings of social ostracism followed by actual social ostracism, Capote felt his work failing him too. *In Cold Blood* was extremely successful, lucrative, and in general praised by critics, but when the novel failed to win the Pulitzer Prize or the National Book Award he “let the snub bother him much more than he should have done” (Allan 15). This sign of Capote becoming increasingly unstable was probably both caused by his sense of failure and added to it. He had literally poured himself into the novel, and the fact that it was not deemed good enough felt like a personal insult. Also, it may have made him feel as if he had undergone the psychological debilitating process of writing it for naught.

In many ways, *Answered Prayers* seems the final stage in Capote’s literary evolution in that it seems to project a more fully realized and less redeemable version of Capote. The protagonist and narrator of this unfinished novel P.B. Jones displays simultaneously self-acceptance and self-contempt for his unusual and immoral behavior. This figure embodies what Capote was left with after the emotionally draining experience of writing *In Cold Blood*, which illustrate his sense of failure and his loss of optimism about real love and acceptance. Capote abandons the portrayal of the idealistic dreamer in favor of a more pragmatically unethical individual. I believe that this is what he felt his life boiled down to when stripped away of his fantasy world he had so carefully manipulated earlier in his career.

As a projection and semi-autobiographical vision of Capote, P.B. Jones was abandoned as a baby and raised by Catholic nuns. Like in Capote’s earlier works, this rejection fuels the desire to find love and acceptance elsewhere, but instead of manifesting itself in a quirky but likeable character like Joel Knox or Holly Golightly, P.B. Jones seems much more in tune with

Perry Smith. He is devoid of morals and commits depraved acts, not of violence but of sexuality, to get what he wants. Like Perry he is never successful and moves from one exploit to another trying and failing to find success. In this way, this character seems to be an exaggeration of Capote's bad qualities without any of his positive aspects, like a successful writing career. In illustrating himself as this figure, it seems that he has given up hope of finding any real social acceptance or peace with himself, and in doing so, is forced to accept and admit how very similar he and Perry were and how really "other" they both were.

I believe it was feelings of personal failure and social rebuff that lead him to create the figure of P.B. Jones who seems wholly miserable and unredeemable. Jones narrates the stories in the novel from his tiny quarters at a YMCA, which clearly shows that at some point he gives up or is cast out of the social elite that had taken care of and pampered him his entire adult life and which reflects Capote's own feelings of social exclusion. He reflects positively even wistfully back on his earlier sexual and social exploits but these are thoroughly pathetic and repulsive attempts to find love and acceptance, and Jones seems ruefully aware of this as well saying things like "as if I *had* any morals," when an older man trying to pick him up is concerned about corrupting the morals of a minor (*Answered Prayers* 5).

The reflective narration of *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* is still evident, but seems more in line with *In Cold Blood* in that Jones "considers himself a reporter in [his life], not a participant, at least not an important one" (4). In this respect, he seems to be examining his own life with the same fine-toothed comb and critical approach that he applied to Perry's life, perhaps in order to see if he would draw the same conclusions. While he makes it impossible to know for sure what those might have been by never finishing the novel, the fact

that he did not complete it leads me to believe that those conclusions were not positive and not dissimilar from the ones he reached examining Perry.

If he felt condemned by Perry's condemnation, Capote could have only have felt more so as he tried to move on and write new material and found himself trapped by the emotional experience of writing *In Cold Blood*. He had tried to leave his interior world and ground the novel in reality, but despite that effort he had failed to really escape the demons of his childhood and his own human drama in dealing with those demons.

Trying to force the clashing ideas of the nonfiction novel together Capote acknowledged the limitations this posed to the imaginative scope but seems to have been liberated by the nonfiction format of the novel more than hindered by it—though such liberation comes at the cost of betraying the original intent of the novel. The presumed factuality of the novel allowed him to freely explore the inner mind of Perry Smith and by extension his own. He believed that he could accomplish both his goals of factuality and human drama, and “within those boundaries, [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 were thinking” (Rance 81). However, it seems clear that he betrays his primary goal of maintaining accuracy to a rather severe extent in exploring these areas where fact is so elusive. Further it seems impossible that he remained within the boundaries of factuality and objectivity when the “human drama” being explored was in large part his own.

Capote may not have consciously deceived the public with *In Cold Blood*, but if he did not then it was certainly self-deceptive to not see how much of himself was embedded in the character of Perry Smith. Capote once stated that “Perry always said that if [he] told any lies about him he was going to come back from the grave and kill [him],” and I believe that he ultimately

did. Perry essentially signed his own death warrant when he murdered the Clutters and Capote signed his when he wrote *In Cold Blood* at which time he became dependent on drugs and alcohol that would eventually kill him.

Capote's relationship with Perry paired with this severe substance abuse problem made Perry's condemnation seem his own. Capote had seen his fate and waited for it to be fulfilled because as Perry said: "once a thing is set to happen, all you can do is hope it won't. Or will—depending. As long as you live, there's always something waiting, and even if it's bad, and you know it's bad, what can you do? You can't stop living" (92). Capote knew it was bad, and while he did not stop living, he was done creating redeemable Capote-like characters because he realized through writing *In Cold Blood* that he could not change his own outcome and that it too was already set to happen.

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