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DEVIANCE AS REVEALED IN THE NONFICTION NOVEL

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## ABSTRACT

This project will explore representations of antisocial behavior and abnormal psychology as found in the classic work of literary nonfiction, *In Cold Blood* (1966). Beyond studying Truman Capote's portrait of criminal personalities, I will consider the ways in which language and metaphor help the reader to better understand social deviance as a cultural product. The finished project should enhance our understanding of Capote's text, but also of the capacity of art to address deviance as a complex social phenomenon.

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## Chapter 1

### The Context of *In Cold Blood*

Truman Capote took credit for inventing the “nonfiction novel,” in which he blended elements of journalism, nonfiction prose, and fiction.<sup>1</sup> In one of his most acclaimed works, *In Cold Blood* (1965), Capote uses elements of these genres in order to depict the 1959 murder of a Holcomb, Kansas family. Capote was initially interested in the murders due to the fact that the killers and their motivations were unknown. Once the murderers were apprehended, he interviewed the killers and residents from the town in order to create his narrative. The book depicts the Clutter family, the murders, and the trial and execution of the killers. My purpose in analyzing *In Cold Blood* is to examine the genre of the “nonfiction novel” and how it allows Truman Capote to best portray social deviance, poverty, and crime during a particular period in American history. This paper will also explore how Capote uses language and metaphor to better understand the social contexts that shape Perry Smith and Dick Hickock, the criminals responsible for the murders.

In order to understand Capote’s reasoning for creating *In Cold Blood*, one must first be aware of the time period and the contexts that surround the novel. The decade of the 1950s in America is often portrayed as a period of security, growth, comfort, and stability. World War II had just ended, and the nation’s focus shifted to family values

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<sup>1</sup> Although Capote took credit for creating the nonfiction novel, other writers, such as Lillian Hellman, Gay Talese, Norman Mailer, Gore Vidal, Lillian Ross, John Hersey, and Cornelius Ryan, incorporated many of the same techniques prior to *In Cold Blood*.

(Centanni par. 1). Families were now moving to the suburbs in record numbers due to new programs that the government offered to assist in home building, such as the Housing Act of 1949 and The GI Housing Bill (Centanni par. 2). The Housing Act provided money for the development of single-family homes in middle-income suburbs, and the GI Housing Bill provided financial aid to returning veterans and promoted the construction of suburban homes (Centanni par. 3). Because of these opportunities, many middle-income Americans moved to the suburbs to start families away from the crowds and crime of urban areas.

During the 1950s, the idealized family consisted of the man of the household, who worked, and the wife who was a stay-at-home mother. In addition to caring for the children, the wife cooked and cleaned. The image of the “idealized domestic lifestyle” includes comfortable and orderly households within a suburban neighborhood, with perfect children and a perfect marriage (Matheson 33). This “typical” suburban family was part of the middle class. The ideal middle-class lifestyle included “home, décor, and luxuries promoted within post-war consumer society” (Matheson 33). Many of the luxuries that magazine advertisements promoted after the war were domestic: kitchen appliances, clothing, and food. Women were targeted as the main consumers because they were the ones who bought the groceries and decorated the home. Because society encouraged distinct gender roles, advertisements increasingly promoted different goods for men and women (Centanni par. 1). Advertisements for business clothes and cars were targeted for men, while vacuums and ovens were intended for women. WWII ultimately interrupted this movement toward consumerism, which began in the 1930s;

however, after the war ended, American society was able to complete the transformation to a consumer society.

Popular culture of the 1950s supported and reflected the concept of the “ideal” family by reinforcing the importance of stability and comfort. Literature during the decade often depicted the ideal family, even if it acknowledged that no family was perfect without ambition and effort. Popular fiction during the 1950s included Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (1955), Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1958), and Ian Fleming’s *Goldfinger* (1959) (“Popular Books of 1955-1959”). Wilson’s *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* depicted what seemed to be an ideal family at the beginning of the book, but later exposed the problems that were prevalent within the family’s life. For example, when the husband, Tom, was away at war, he had an affair with another woman, Maria, because he did not believe that he would live through the conflict. However, he did survive, and he returned to his family after the war ended. The novel portrays the struggles that he faced when he returned, such as his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the need to find a better-paying job to support his family, and his learning that Maria had a baby after he left Italy. Throughout the book, the reader sees how Tom copes with these problems without telling his wife. He meets a man who was in the war with him who is in contact with Maria, and he asks Tom if he can send her money every month. At the end of the novel, Tom tells his wife Betsy everything, and at first she is furious and ready to leave him. However, by the end of the novel, they work through their problems and she stays, allowing Tom to send the money abroad and closing with a happy ending where the husband and wife are in love. Although this book presents the emotional struggles of a family during the 1950s, the story concludes with a

happy ending, reinforcing the idea that they will maintain the appearance and behavior of an ideal family.

Film also reflected the values of the 1950s by portraying the ideal family and the suburban comfort that its members enjoy. Similar to literature, film of the era focused on the threats to the stability of the “ideal” family. One film that became especially popular during the 1950s was Nicholas Ray’s *Rebel Without A Cause* (1955), starring James Dean (“Popular Films of 1955-1959” par. 1). This film portrayed a family that appeared to be ideal on the surface, but which seethed with problems beneath. The narrative revolves around the son, Jim Stark, who has had to transfer schools because of the trouble he caused his teachers and peers (Stephan par. 1). Since his parents fight constantly, he feels uneasy and displaced by both. Jim’s “weak-willed” father attempts to defend him, but his domineering mother overpowers his father, and she always wins the arguments (Stephan par. 1). Because his father cannot confront his mother, Jim feels betrayed by his father’s “lack of moral strength” (Stephan par. 1). As a reaction to the constant fighting at home, Jim gets into fights, drinks, and runs away. He meets a girl, Judy, and a boy nicknamed Plato with whom he gets into trouble; by the end of the film, Plato is shot by a police officer. However, this story ends happily with Jim introducing Judy to his family and his father promising to support him (Stephan par. 8). Even though this and other popular films portrayed the hardships faced by the ideal family, the narratives usually conclude with a happy ending that reinforces stability and comfort. However, in order for stability to be restored, outside forces that interrupt the ideal family—such as Maria from *The Man in a Grey Flannel Suit* and Plato in *Rebel Without A Cause*, must be eliminated.



Because of the focus on consumerism and surface-level "perfection" in popular film and literature during the 1950s, the pressure on families to consume luxuries and move to suburban areas mounted. Crime increased throughout the nation in response to these social and economic forces. In turn, some of the well-known crimes that were committed during the 1950s shaped the popular literature and film of the day. These sensational crimes and criminals illustrated the dark underside and a possible byproduct of an outwardly moral and stable society. For example, one criminal who infiltrated popular culture was Eddie Gein. Writer Robert Bloch created the novel *Psycho* (1959) in response to his crimes, and one year later the film director, Alfred Hitchcock, turned Bloch's novel into a film.

Eddie Gein's crimes began in the early 1950s, and he was caught in November, 1957, when a local hardware store owner, Bernice Worden, disappeared. Her son, Frank, was not able to find her at the store, but discovered a trail of blood leading from the front door to the back. He also found a receipt that belonged to her last customer: Eddie Gein (Schechter 192). When police went to question Gein, they found a woman hanging like a butchered deer in his "house of horrors" (192). Inside Gein's house were decorations made from human skin. The police found "soup bowls made from sawed-off top of human heads. Chairs upholstered in human flesh. Lampshades fashioned of skin. A boxful of noses. A shade pull decorated with a pair of women's lips. A belt made of female nipples. A shoe box containing a collection of preserved female genitalia" (192). Gein admitted to wearing women's skin, pretending to be his mother. Since Gein's mother's death in 1945, he had killed two people: Bernice Worden and a tavern keeper, Mary Hogan. However, the victims whose skin and body parts were used to decorate his

house were recently deceased locals buried in nearby cemeteries. After his mother died, Gein became a grave robber. Once he was captured, he was placed in several mental institutions. He died from cancer on July 26, 1984.

Not all crimes that created headlines during the 1950s were so gruesome and bizarre. Nonetheless, crime and social deviance played a significant role within this decade and influenced literature and film, such as Capote's *In Cold Blood*. Throughout the United States, several murderers became household names, such as Raymond Fernandez and Martha Beck, Nannie Doss, Leslie Irvin, Charles Starkweather, Harvey Murray Glatman, and George York and James Latham. These are just a few of the killers who impacted America during the years leading up to the Clutter murders in 1959.

Many of the sensational crimes that were committed during the 1950s involved criminal "teams" or pairings, popularly called a "gruesome twosome" (Schechter 64). Dick and Perry of *In Cold Blood* fit this model. Harold Schechter, a true crime specialist, discusses this kind of pairing as the *folie á deux* (64). Since the late 1870s, *folie á deux* has been translated to "insanity in pairs," "double insanity," "reciprocal insanity," or "collective insanity" (64). However, today the term is defined as "a pernicious bond between two people who bring out the worst in each other, egging each other on to engage in criminal acts that neither person, individually, would have the courage to commit on his own" (65). Therefore, Schechter is arguing that neither person in the pair would commit vicious crimes on their own. Instead, the competition between the two people motivates these criminals to kill. Criminals who killed in pairs during the decade included the Lonely Heart Killers, Starkweather and his girlfriend, and Latham and York: the last of whom appear in *In Cold Blood*. A brief survey of these pairings

will help set the stage for my discussion of Capote's treatment of Dick and Perry to come.

The first of this group, Raymond Fernandez and Martha Beck, struck America in the late 1940s. They were known as the "Lonely Heart Killers" (Olsen par. 1). Fernandez and Beck were lovers who killed innocent women together. Fernandez would write to women who placed "lonely hearts" advertisements stating that were lonely and looking for love. He would trick the women by making them believe that he was in love with them. In his letters, he would propose to them, and when Fernandez met these women, he would introduce them to his "sister," Martha. His "sister" would live with Fernandez and his "lover." Once the woman signed her property and bank accounts over to Fernandez, Beck and Fernandez would plot to kill her (Olsen par.3). Together, they killed an estimated twenty women (Olsen par. 1). Both Fernandez and Beck had reasons for targeting women. Fernandez had a hard life, and he was abused by his father. His mother put up with his father's alcoholism and abuse because she did not want to be alone. While his father beat him, his mother would sit by and watch, which could have influenced his hatred towards women. Beck also despised women. She held a grudge against other women possibly because she was overweight and felt inferior to others. She might have felt that she needed to compete with these women for Fernandez's attention, which is why she would help to kill them. Their killing spree lasted for a few years until they were caught in 1949, then executed in 1951 (Noe par. 62).

One of the most famous spree killers during the 1950s was Charles Starkweather. Together, Starkweather and his girlfriend, Caril Fugate, went on an eight day killing spree in December 1957 (Montaldo par. 1). At the time, the film *Rebel Without A Cause*

was popular, and Starkweather was a James Dean fanatic. He imitated his hairstyle, clothes, and mannerisms (Bardsley 2). Because of the trouble that Starkweather caused at school, he fought with his parents. He was kicked out of his house and Fugate's parents forbade her to see Starkweather. Furious, Fugate and Starkweather decided to run away together.

When his killing spree started in December 1957, Starkweather was eighteen and Fugate was fourteen years old (Montaldo par. 1). Starkweather's violence began in Nebraska with a man named Robert Colvert who refused to let him buy a stuffed animal at the gas station because he did not have enough money. Starkweather robbed, kidnapped, and shot Colvert in the back of the head. The next day, he told Fugate about his crime, but she did not end the relationship. Instead, they began killing together.

The next victims were Fugate's mother, father, and sister. Fugate's family did not like Starkweather, and they believed that she was pregnant with his baby (Montaldo par. 22). The young lovers went to her parents to make amends, but instead, ended up killing the entire family. Afterwards, they stayed in the house for six days for their "honeymoon." However, neighbors began to question Fugate's written statement that stated "Every Body is sick with the Flue" (Montaldo par. 25). Before the police arrived, Fugate and Starkweather had already left.

During their flight, they killed several people: a neighbor of the Starkweather family, a teenage couple with whom they hitched a ride, a family and their maid and dog, and another man who would not switch cars with Starkweather. Finally captured by the police, Starkweather was found guilty and was charged with first-degree murder. He was sentenced to die in the electric chair on June 25, 1959. When Fugate was captured, she

told police that she was Starkweather's hostage. When he heard this, he stopped trying to protect her, and he told the police that she killed two of the victims. She was found guilty, but because of her age, she was sentenced to life in prison (Montaldo par. 58).

The last pair of killers that will be discussed is James Latham and George York. These killers appeared in Capote's *In Cold Blood*, because Dick and Perry encounter them while on death row. Latham and York met in jail in 1961, after both were found guilty of an AWOL offense. They became friends, and frequently discussed murder. Their belief was that whomever they killed, they were doing them a favor (Capote 323). Together they escaped, stole a truck, and drove to York's home town in Florida before changing course for New Orleans. On May 29, 1961, they stopped at a gas station where they were asked for directions by two women, whom they led to desolate area and shot. During the next ten days, they shot a traveling salesman in Tennessee, two men in St. Louis, a grandfather in Kansas, and an eighteen-year-old maid of a Colorado motel (324). When they were asked why they committed the murders, they replied with, "we hate the world" (325). On July 22, 1965, Latham and York were hanged in Kansas (Worldwide Hangings par. 6). Just as the bizarre and grisly crimes of Gein had stirred the interest of the American public, so did the sensational crimes of such pair killers captivated the nation. Newspaper stories and crime magazines covered the stories extensively, and in short order influenced the literature and film produced during this era.

Before Capote created his "nonfiction novel," several other authors experimented with the genre by blending journalism with literary elements: among them were John Hersey and Cornelius Ryan. Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) portrays the lives and words of six persons on August 6, 1945, the day when the atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima, Japan.

In each of the six chapters, part of every character's story is included. We learn what they were doing before the bomb hit Hiroshima, how they were able to survive the blast, and what they encountered after the bomb detonated. The reader can tell when the chapter changes to a new perspective when the first letter of the word is bolded and increased in size and when there is an extra space between paragraphs. Below is a representative passage from *Hiroshima*:

Dr. Fujii hardly had time to think that he was dying before he realized that he was alive, squeezed tightly by two long timbers in a V across his chest, like a morsel suspended between two huge chopsticks—held upright, so that he could not move, with his head miraculously above water and his torso and legs in it. The remains of his hospital were all around him in a mad assortment of splintered lumber and materials for the relief of pain. His left shoulder hurt terribly. His glasses were gone. (15)

This passage shows how Hersey took a journalistic approach to his novel, in that he tries to replicate what these people went through that day without leaving out any details.

Hersey does not fabricate any of the stories to keep the reader interested, but instead reproduces what was related to him in the interviews with the survivors. Although the narrative is from the survivors' perspective, Hersey explains the entire story through his own voice. In contrast, Capote seems to adopt the voice of his characters, tries to fully understand their unique thought process, and includes a different style of dialogue for each personality. Capote himself commented on *Hiroshima*, stating "*Hiroshima* is creative—in the sense that Hersey isn't taking something off a tape recorder and editing it—but it still hasn't got anything to do with what I'm talking about. *Hiroshima* is a strict classical journalistic piece" (Plimpton par. 8).

In *The Longest Day* (1959), Ryan likewise combined journalism with literary elements. Not only did he include quotations from those he interviewed, but he added

more storytelling elements than Hersey. Ryan's text reads more like a narrative, depicting D-Day from both the Allied and German sides. The following passage shows Ryan's technique:

The statistics staggered the imagination; the force seemed overwhelming. Now this great weapon – the youth of the free world, the resources of the free world – waited on the decision of one man: Eisenhower.

Throughout the most of June 4, Eisenhower remained alone in his trailer. He and his commanders had done everything to ensure that the invasion would have every possible chance of success at the lowest cost in lives. But now, after all the months of political and military planning, Operation Overlord lay at the mercy of the elements. Eisenhower was helpless; all he could do was to wait and hope that the weather would improve. But no matter what happened he would be forced to make a momentous decision by the end of the day – to go or to postpone the assault once again. Either way the success or failure of Operation Overlord might depend on that decision. And nobody could make that decision for him. The responsibility would be his and his alone.

Eisenhower was faced with a dreadful dilemma. On May 17 he had decided that D Day would have to be one of the three days in June – the fifth, sixth, or seventh. Meteorological studies had shown that two of the vital weather requirements for the invasion could be expected for Normandy and on those days: a late-rising moon and, shortly after dawn, a low tide. (58)

From the passage, the reader can see that Ryan uses the facts in order to drive the narrative; however, he does not use as many quotations as Hersey. In this particular section, Ryan attempts to get inside Eisenhower's head while he is deciding when to send the Allied troops to attack. Not only does this passage show Ryan investigating Eisenhower's thoughts, but the reader also observes Eisenhower's emotions during the decision-making process. This technique is similar to how Capote exposes the reader to the minds of Dick and Perry, as well as to the thoughts of the other characters.

*The Longest Day* is divided into three sections: “The Wait,” “The Night,” and “The Day.” Each section contains several chapters portraying both Allied and the German perspectives. Some chapters focus strictly on one side, while other chapters included perspectives from both. Ryan used his quoted material similar to Hersey, but he also embedded quotations throughout the narrative, which was similar to what Capote would do in *In Cold Blood*.

Although Hersey’s and Ryan’s “nonfiction novels” differ from Capote’s, they all had the same idea of combining journalism with literary elements. However, Capote’s novel differs greatly from Hersey’s and Ryan’s in its style and structure. The novel is divided into four parts—“The Last to See Them Alive,” “Persons Unknown,” “The Answer,” and “The Corner” – which is different from Hersey’s structure but similar to Ryan’s. Each section is divided into different chapters as well. In Part I, the first few chapters alternate in focus from the Clutters to the murderers, Perry and Dick. Capote focuses on either the Clutters or the murderers in each section so that the audience grows familiar with all of the participants in the events of the night of November 15, 1959. In later chapters, when Capote introduces more characters, he continues to use this structure. Each chapter focuses on one person or group, such as Perry’s father providing background on Perry or investigator Alvin Dewey’s trying to solve the murder. The way Capote structures his book allows for the audience to understand which character is under discussion in each chapter and allows for deeper characterization. Since he constructs his novel in this way, Capote gives readers the opportunity to sympathize with all of the characters throughout the narrative.



Like Hersey, Capote uses quoted material effectively. However, Capote does not use the same technique in which only short quotes are provided. Instead, Capote constructs the novel as if he were writing a story, and throughout, includes several exchanges of dialogue between characters. Because he is not simply retelling the story, Capote tries to adopt the persona of each character and hypothesizes the emotions or thoughts that were going through the characters' heads. It seems as if Capote combines both Hersey's journalistic elements and Ryan's narrative techniques in order to create his "nonfiction novel." Below is a passage that illustrates Capote's approach to combining journalism and fiction:

Later, over cigarettes and coffee, Perry returned to the subject of thievery. "My friend Willie-Jay used to talk about it. He used to say that all crimes were only 'varieties of theft.' Murder included. When you kill a man you steal his life. I guess that makes me a pretty big thief. See, Don – I did kill them. Down there in court, old Dewey made it sound like I was prevaricating – on account of Dick's mother. Well, I wasn't. Dick helped me, he held the flashlight and picked up the shells. And it was his idea too. But Dick wouldn't shoot them, he never could've – though he's damn quick when it comes to running down an old dog. I wonder why I did it." He scowled, as though the problem was new to him, a newly unearthed stone of surprising, unclassified color. "I don't know why," he said, as if holding it to the light, and angling it now here, now there. "I was sore at Dick. The tough brass boy. But it wasn't Dick. Or the fear of being identified. I was willing to take that gamble. And it wasn't because of anything the Clutters did. They never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it." (290)

In Capote's writing, the reader might speculate about which lines were actually said by the characters and which lines Capote incorporated to enhance the literary effect.

Although he does not always direct the reader to who is speaking by stating the character's name, Capote provides the reader with different cues so that the speaker's identity is clear. While the work of Hersey and Ryan foreshadows *In Cold Blood*,

Capote's novel is different in that it is more literary than journalistic, which is why Hersey's and Ryan's stories read differently.

Capote's novel also differs from conventional writing during the time in that there is ultimately not a happy ending. As I explained earlier, literature and film during the 1950s often depicted the perfect family overcoming the conflicts in their lives. No matter how difficult the issues, the family is usually able to face the problems and work them out. However, in *In Cold Blood*, the narrative does not end happily in that the Clutters are not resurrected and the justice served is arguably unsatisfactory. The Clutter family remains dead, and Dick and Perry are hanged only after we first come to know and even sympathize with them. In the final scene, the reader witnesses the graveyard where Nancy Clutter's best friend, Susan, is visiting the family's graves. Susan explains to Dewey that she is doing well and that Nancy's old boyfriend, Bobby Rupp, is now married. It is important to note that many critics believe that Capote embellished the facts in order to enhance the narrative. Some have argued that this scene was fabricated and that it could be Capote's attempt to create a "happy ending" message that "life goes on" or that "time heals all wounds." However, my interpretation of this ending is that Capote wants to advance a lesson by showing readers what happens when the "two Americas" clash. Ultimately, society must learn a lesson from the Clutter murders in order to stop such tragic events from reoccurring.

By examining popular culture of the 1950s and works preceding Capote's *In Cold Blood*, one can see the social and literary forces that shaped the work. One can also understand the historical contexts of the novel and see how it emerged from a particular period in American life.

## Chapter 2

### The Difference Between the “Two Americas”

In many respects, Capote’s *In Cold Blood* was created in order to respond to and critique the social conventions of the time. Throughout the novel, the reader can see how Capote utilizes the ideal, perfect family of the 1950s. In particular, he draws a stark contrast between the ideal family and the not-so-perfect family. Capote focuses on the Clutters in Part 1, attempting to depict their normalcy and wholesomeness. These factors will contrast with the deviance and fissures found in the homes of Dick and Perry. In sum, the Clutters represent the ideal family and the American dream while social deviance, poverty, and crime are associated with the lives of Dick and Perry. This contrast allows Capote to exploit the division and differences between these “two Americas.”

In the first part of *In Cold Blood*, “The Last to See Them Alive,” Capote discusses the Clutter family—Herb, Bonnie, Nancy, and Kenyon—by detailing their characteristics and the importance of the family within the community. The Clutters were a well-known and admired family in Holcomb, Kansas. Capote begins by introducing Herbert Clutter:

Mr. Clutter cut a man’s-man figure. His shoulders were broad, his hair held its dark color, his square-jawed, confident face retained a healthy-hued youthfulness, and his teeth, unstained and strong enough to shatter walnuts, were still intact. He weighed a hundred and fifty-four—the same as he had the day he graduated from Kansas State University, where he had majored in agriculture. He was not as rich as the richest man in Holcomb—Mr. Taylor Jones, a neighboring rancher. He was, however, the community’s most widely known citizen, prominent both there and in Garden City, the close-by country seat, where he had headed the building

committee for the newly completed First Methodist Church, an eight-hundred-thousand-dollar edifice. He was currently chairman of the Kansas Conference of Farm Organizations, and his name was everywhere respectfully recognized among Midwestern agriculturists, as it was in certain Washington offices, where he had been a member of the Federal Farm Credit Board during the Eisenhower administration. (Capote 6)

From the passage, the reader learns that Herbert was a strong man. Although he was forty-eight years old, his physical structure had not changed since college. He was well built and confident in himself. He was very important and involved within his community and its surrounding areas because he held various positions for several professional and ecumenical organizations; therefore, he was very well known and respected within the town. He lived an active and thrifty life in order to support his family. From this passage, the reader gets a sense of who Herbert Clutter is as a person and his presence in Holcomb.

After this introduction of Herbert, Capote introduces the rest of the family. Herbert had married the woman of his dreams, Bonnie. Together they had four children—Eveanna, Beverly, Nancy, and Kenyon (6). In 1959, both Eveanna and Beverly were older and out of the house. Eveanna was studying to be a nurse and Beverly was engaged to a biology student (7). The only son, Kenyon, was fifteen, and Nancy, who was sixteen, was known as the “town darling” (7). At the time of the murders, Mr. Clutter, Mrs. Clutter, Nancy, and Kenyon were living in the house. The Clutter family, as represented in the novel, embodies the ideal family of the 1950s in that the family consisted of a mother and father and two children: a daughter and son.

Both of the children were considered normal and lived ordinary lives: Kenyon went to school and was interested in hunting and carpentry, and Nancy was a sweet,

helpful, and obedient girl. Her parents were very proud of her recent performance in the school play, *Tom Sawyer*, in which “she had done so well...a real Southern belle” (8). She had a steady boyfriend, Bobby Rupp, whom her father approved of but believed that she should not see so much. Nancy helped around the house and prepared most of the meals (9). Her brother, Kenyon, was already six feet tall, lanky, and strong. He was cursed with “a lanky boy’s lack of muscular coordination” and was unable to participate in team sports (38). However, he was skilled in carpentry. Together Kenyon and Nancy worked together to fix the den in the basement. Kenyon built shelves, tables, stools, and a ping pong table while Nancy sewed chintz slip covers for the couch and made curtains and pillows (38). Nancy had a horse, Babe, and several cats, and Kenyon had a dog, Teddy (13). Both of the children had a curfew in which they had to be home by ten on the weeknights and midnight on Saturdays. As one can surmise, the Clutter children were well behaved and experienced a wholesome childhood.

Capote does acknowledge some of the problems prevalent in their lives. For example, Bonnie had several health concerns and she was very different from Herbert and the rest of the family. Bonnie was quiet and remained in the house most of the time. She was “nervous” and experienced “little spells,” but most of the people knew about her condition and that she had frequently been a psychiatric patient (7). After Bonnie’s last treatment, she learned that her ailments were not in her head but in her spine. In order to fix the misplaced vertebrae, she would have surgery and be back to her “old self.” Although the family faced these problems, they were optimistic in overcoming these challenges. After the surgery, they believed, Bonnie would be back to being a “normal” wife and mother.

The house in which the Clutters lived was designed by Herbert and it seemed to represent the ideal house of the 50s, at least in Holcomb. The house was big, and according to Bonnie, “could accommodate twenty guests during the Thanksgiving holidays” (28). The following passage provides a description of the exterior and interior of the house:

Situating at the end of a long, lanelike driveway shaded by rows of Chinese elms, the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass, impressed Holcomb; it was a place people pointed out. As for the interior, there were spongy displays of liver-colored carpet intermittently abolishing the glare of varnished, resounding floors; an immense modernistic living-room couch covered in nubby fabric interwoven with glittery strands of silver metal; a breakfast alcove featuring a banquette upholstered in blue-and-white plastic. This sort of furnishing was what Mr. and Mrs. Clutter liked, as did the majority of their acquaintances, whose homes, by and large, were similarly furnished.  
(9)

This passage depicts the normalcy of the house and of the family. One can see that the Clutters were accepted by society in that their house was “pointed out by many.” The house was furnished similarly to others throughout the town, which represents its owners’ place in society and how they conformed in order to be labeled as normal. The way Capote describes the “handsome white house” and the green grass reflects the beauty of the home and the luxuries of their social class. This passage allows the reader to envision the home lives of the Clutters. The family did not deviate from the norm. Although they had their differences and personal challenges (a bad back, nervous disposition, or teen awkwardness), the Clutters were a standard family. Capote uses them to represent the ideal of the perfect, wholesome, comfortable family in middle class America.

Capote’s portrait of the Clutters is similar to the families presented in *Rebel Without A Cause* and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*. They had the perfect house and

were financially stable. They were living the American dream because they were able to support themselves and enjoy luxuries. Because of their security, the family was able to remain prosperous. The father owned his own property and worked, while the mother stayed at home. The children behaved, listened to their parents, and were well-rounded. The entire family was well known throughout the town and everyone respected them.

In contrast, Perry and Dick lived unstable lives marred by poverty, injuries, and constant movement. Because of their instability, one can see how these characters represent the “other America” that consists of crime, poverty, and deviance.

Dick’s family was always “semi-poor,” but his early childhood years were largely normal. His father was very strict and did not allow him to leave the yard and visit with playmates (277). Throughout school, he earned above average grades and had a girlfriend. After high school, he was offered scholarships to play ball, but he never continued his education. Instead, he worked for Roark Motor Company. A few months after working, he got into a car accident after which he suffered from fainting spells and hemorrhaged at the nose and ear (279). Shortly thereafter, he got married and moved from job to job until he decided to open his own garage. There he met a woman, Margaret, who was related to the woman from whom he was renting the garage. Dick began to see this woman frequently, and then his wife sued for divorce. After the divorce, Dick began drinking, neglecting his business, writing bad checks, and stealing. For these crimes, he was later imprisoned (279). Capote provides this information regarding Dick’s life in order to show how his life differed from the Clutters’ and from Perry’s. As the reader can see, Dick experienced a normal life with some challenges; however, these challenges did not influence his deviant actions. Rather, much of his

deviant behavior grew from a sickness he suffered from throughout his life: pedophilic tendencies. Although he blamed his car accident for his deviancy, I will later explore how he was born a deviant.

Perry's home life was very different from Dick's and the Clutters'. Perry had a brother, Tex Jr., and two sisters, Fern and Barbara. The children lived with both their mother and father and moved several times to Alaska, California, and Nevada (273). He was exposed to violence and alcoholism. His mother was drunk throughout most of his childhood, and because she would spend most of the money the family had on alcohol, food was scarce. When his parents would fight, his father would beat his mother. He also beat her for "entertaining" other men. His father and mother both beat Perry as punishment for getting into trouble and wetting the bed (274). Perry's brother was given a BB gun, and his brother had shot a horse with it. Perry held the gun to his brother's head once and yelled "BANG." From this episode, the reader can see early on that Perry was affected by his environment. Because Perry grew up in a violent family, he adopted the physical aggression he experienced and used it while interacting with his own family members and peers. His perspective on violence was influenced by his childhood, and he admitted that those experiences affected him mentally and emotionally in adulthood.

Perry's parents divorced during his teenage years because his mother was sleeping with a black man, which his father would not tolerate. After the divorce, Perry moved to California with his mother. His mother continued to drink, and because she was unfit to care for the children, Perry was in and out of detention homes from which he would escape. When he was sent to another detention home, he used to wet the bed every night. The "cottage mistress" at the home would beat him and make fun of him in



front of the other boys (275). As one can see, Perry did not grow up with a “normal” family. When he was with his parents, they fought constantly, and when he was not with his family, he traveled to various orphanages where he was also abused.

When Perry was sixteen he joined the Merchant Marines, and later in 1948, he joined the military. During his time in the army, he realized the importance of education, which only enhanced his hatred for others. Perry was jealous of what others had – family, love, money, and education. During this period, he was involved in several fights and began stealing. He was court-martialed for demolishing a Japanese café and stealing a taxicab. Ultimately, he was rotated back to the United States. When he returned, he was in a serious motorcycle accident that crippled him for life, scarring his legs and making it difficult for him to walk. He also committed a burglary in Phillipsburg, Kansas, which led to his first prison sentence. He was sentenced for larceny, burglary, and jailbreak (276). Capote’s readers can see how Perry’s childhood affected his adolescence. Even when Perry was trying to make himself better, his actions kept him from excelling. He was arrested on several accounts introducing him to criminals, such as Dick, who influenced the deviant decisions that he would make later in life. Perry’s childhood, even more than Dick’s, reveals the circumstances facing the underclass in America, the “have nots” whose daily experiences and relationships stand in stark contrast to the comfortable and secure world inhabited by the Clutters.

Capote’s use of the concept of “two Americas” reveals how one’s home life and upbringing can influence one’s future. Capote shows the differences between two types of families, and in doing so comments on some of the origins of social deviance: poverty,

substance abuse, absentee parents, and an unstable home life during one's formative years.

## Chapter 3

### An Examination of Dick and Perry

In Capote's nonfiction novel, he deviates from standard journalism, which is usually composed of quotations and facts. Instead, he provides the thorough characterization of Dick and Perry by including their innermost thoughts and dreams. By exposing their inner lives, he allows the reader to better understand and even sympathize with the killers. This method is enhanced by his use of figurative language and by his engaging stylistic approach.

Both Dick and Perry are obsessed with the "other America" full of prosperity and stability, to which they know they do not belong. Dick and Perry want to be "normal," and are unhappy with being deviant, even if they often relish breaking social rules. Although they may attempt to convince others that they are normal, Dick and Perry are aware of their deviancy and lash out as a result.

Throughout the novel, Dick insists that he is "a normal." He does not want to be seen as deviant or different. After the murders, Perry states that there must be something wrong with them to have killed the Clutter family. Dick replies, "Deal me out, baby...I'm a normal" (108). In Dick's mind, he actually believed that he was largely normal, especially when contrasted with Perry, of whom he thought that there was "something wrong" (108).

Although Dick claimed that he was "normal," he was embarrassed by his pedophilic tendencies. He knew that if people were aware of his desires they would not

think of him as a typical American man. Capote's narrative reveals that Dick seduced young girls "eight or nine" times, and tried to convince himself that most men harbored the same desires (201). During one of Dick's and Perry's journeys, Dick comes into contact with a young girl who is about twelve-years-old. Dick "was sorry he felt as he did about her, for his sexual interest in female children was a failing of which he was 'sincerely ashamed'" (201). However, he blamed his car accident for his attraction to young girls—it was a way for him refuse that he had a problem (279).

Although Dick continues to blame his sickness on his accident, he finally admits to the overpowering nature of his pedophilic tendencies near the end of the book (279). He confesses to a psychologist, "Before I ever went to their house I knew that there would be a girl there. I think the main reason I went there was not to rob them but to rape the girl. Because I thought a lot about it" (278). His interest in money was only secondary. During the murder, Dick told Perry he was going to "bust that little girl," and if it was not for Perry, Dick would have carried out his plan. Because Dick was the one who arranged the crime, if he did not have these intense desires for young girls, the Clutters would have remained alive. The novel therefore portrays Dick as a man driven by his deviant desires to commit an array of criminal and immoral acts. Although he wishes to appear "normal," he cannot ultimately tame or escape his true self.

Capote approaches Perry's character differently. By analyzing Dick, one understands that he was born a deviant; by contrast, Perry is more complicated. Perry understands and even says that there is something wrong with him and Dick to have killed the Clutter family. Capote spends a great deal of time focusing on Perry and his thoughts, and even attempts to manipulate the reader in order to sympathize with this

character. Capote is interested in Perry because he was made a deviant by societal pressures and neglect. His actions show him lashing out in anger and pain at a “normal” world that rejects him. In order to understand his character and his deviant actions, Capote attempts to get inside Perry’s head.

Several times throughout the novel, Capote mentions Perry’s reoccurring dream. The dream returns when Perry is stressed, nervous, or unhappy. We learn that he has had the reoccurring dream since he was a child in the orphanage, when the nuns would torment him:

I’m in Africa. A jungle. I’m moving through the trees toward a tree standing all alone. Jesus, it smells bad, that tree; it kind of makes me sick, the way it stinks. Only, it’s beautiful to look at—it has blue leaves and diamonds hanging everywhere. Diamonds like oranges. That’s why I’m there—to pick myself a bushel of diamonds. But I know the minute I try to, the minute I reach up, a snake is gonna fall on me. A snake that guards the tree. This fat son of a bitch living in the branches. I know this beforehand, see? And Jesus, I don’t know how to fight a snake. But I figure, Well, I’ll take my chances. What it comes down to is I want the diamonds more that I’m afraid of the snake. So I go to pick one, I have the diamond in my hand, I’m pulling at it, when the snake lands on top of me. We wrestle around, but he’s a slippery sonofabitch and I can’t get a hold, he’s crushing me, you can hear my legs cracking. Now comes the part it makes me sweat even to think about. See, he starts to swallow me. Feet first. Like going down in quicksand. (92)

This passage not only reflects Perry’s innermost thoughts but it also illustrates his thought process, particularly before the killing. Because the dream is reoccurring and prevalent in Perry’s mind, it could parallel his mental state before committing crimes. He knows that there is a consequence to taking the diamonds and also to killing and robbing a family; however, he wants wealth and the comfort and achievement it represents more than he fears the consequences, which results in a deviant action. Because society is

concerned with money and luxuries, the impoverished and injured Perry's only hope of having money is stealing it because he cannot hold a job.

At the end of Perry's dream, a bird that is "taller than Jesus and as yellow as a sunflower" slaughters his punishers as "they plead for mercy" and swoops down to take him to "paradise" (93). Because his dreams occur when he is in predicaments, the imprisoned Perry half-believes that he will be saved and taken to "paradise" as in his dream. Perry's "paradise" world would possibly consist of a place where he is a "normal" and a member of the other America: a place free from his restraints, and where everyone loves him. His legs would work to their full potential and he would live his dream of becoming a musician.

The bird in Perry's dream helps depict how he sees those people who are part of the other America. The bird takes revenge on all of those who have hurt Perry throughout his life, such as the bullies in school or the mistress from the orphanage. In Perry's dreams, these people suffer for their abuse. In some respects, that dream world is associated with Perry's real-life murder of the Clutters. After years of pain and misery, Perry lashed out and killed an innocent family who never caused him any harm, because they stood as representatives of an oppressive society he both admired and reviled. During the trial, Perry admitted that "they [the Clutters] never hurt me. Like other people. Like people have all my life. Maybe it's just that the Clutters were the ones who had to pay for it" (290). By killing the Clutters, Perry was hurting and "getting back" at the people from the other America that caused him agony his whole life. Therefore, not only is Perry jealous of the people who are part of the other America, but he also despises them.

Theorist Michel Foucault discussed dreams in relation to madness in his book *Madness and Civilization* (1965). In the chapter “Passion and Delirium,” Foucault states that passion—feelings and emotions that move people to action, such as lust, anger, and envy— can lead to madness. One aspect in Foucault’s argument that is significant to *In Cold Blood* and the character of Perry regards dreams. Foucault suggests that dreams and madness are made of the same substance (102). Both include the same mechanisms, “the same movement of vapors and spirits, the same liberation of images, the same correspondence between the physical qualities of phenomena and the psychological or moral values of sentiments” (103). In madness, dreams are not associated with positive phenomena, but rather with the waking dream, which includes hallucinations, memory, predictions, restlessness, and negativity. In this state, man cannot negotiate the difference between fantasy and reality (103). Madness occurs when the madman deceives himself about his dream-like images, which make sense in the madman’s distorted world: Foucault refers to this state of consciousness as “delirium.” Yet if dreams lead to confusion and deceit, they are not without value. In dreams, Foucault says, the imagination forms “impossible things and miracles,” constructing lifelike figures “by an irrational method.” Other theorists argue that in dreams there are no errors and nothing insane (105). As a result, madness occurs when “the images, which are so close to the dream, receive affirmation or negotiation that constitutes error” (105). Foucault helps us to understand the associations between dreams and madness and how dreams are represented in the madman’s mind.

In light of Foucault's ideas, one can better understand Perry's dreams. From his dreams, the reader might consider Perry to be a madman insofar as he/she sees how Perry carries out his dreams in real life. Before the murder, Perry knew that killing the family was wrong, but he desired the money more than he feared the consequences, similar to the diamonds presented in his dream. His dreams show that Perry also suffered from his abusive past, because he would often dream of times when he was abused or unhappy in life. While murdering the Clutters, Perry seemed to be in a state where he was unaware of what he was doing. Perry states, "I didn't realize what I'd done till I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning. Screaming underwater" (244). From this passage, the reader can see that Perry was in a state of unconsciousness where he might have been suffering from hallucinations. Because Capote provides Perry's inner-most thoughts and dreams, he helps the reader to better understand how Perry's environment led him to be deviant.

Beyond Perry's dreams, the "nonfiction novel" genre allowed Capote to incorporate techniques that would not be included in either a standard novel or newspaper article. We have already looked at how the genre allowed him to get inside the heads of the murderers, which allowed for better characterization through his use of figurative language. In turn, in the last chapter, "The Corner," Capote includes written psychological evaluations of Dick and Perry, as well as conclusions from a physiological study and other murderers' case studies. The technical language included in this chapter differs from that found elsewhere in the novel, and it is important to consider why Capote would include these passages within the narrative.

One purpose of the clinical evaluations is to offer another voice within the novel. In this chapter, Capote grants an expert room to speak and offer his opinion of the



murderers' psychology. Dr. W. Mitchell Jones's statements were not shared during the trial, so Capote is offering the reader information that was unknown to the jury. Moreover, the doctor's analysis reinforces Capote's claim that he is not writing fiction. Many of the nonfictional elements that are included prior to this chapter take the form of quotations and dialogue drawn from his interviews with various people involved in the murder investigation. These psychological evaluations are another form of writing altogether, adding to the complexity and sophistication of the narrative. Therefore, the statements that he included from Dr. Jones, and his formal analysis, reveal how Capote has combined genres in order to create a new form of writing.

These evaluations also support the argument that Dick is a born deviant, whereas Perry is a deviant created by society. Dr. Jones gives separate evaluations of both Dick and Perry. These evaluations provide a brief explanation of the murderers' mental states. The following passage is an excerpt from Dr. Jones's evaluation of Dick:

Richard Hickock is above average in intelligence, grasps new ideas easily and has a wide fund of information. He is alert to what is happening around him, and he shows no signs of mental confusion or disorientation...Although I did not find the usual signs of organic brain damage—memory loss, concrete conception information, intellectual deterioration—this cannot be ruled out. He had a serious head injury with concussion and several hours of unconsciousness in 1950—this was verified by me by checking hospital records. He says he has had blackout spells, periods of amnesia, and headaches ever since that time, and a major portion of his antisocial behavior has occurred since that time...Hickock does show signs of emotional abnormality. That he knew what he was doing and still went ahead with it is possibly the most clear-cut demonstration of this fact...He does not seem to be capable of learning from experience, and he shows an unusual pattern of intermittent periods of productive activity followed by patently irresponsible actions...His self-esteem is very low, and he secretly feels inferior to others and sexually inadequate. These feelings seem to be overcompensated for by dreams of being rich and powerful, a tendency to brag about his exploits, spending sprees when he has money, and dissatisfaction with only the normal slow advancement he could expect from his job...Although he possesses usual moral standards he seems obviously uninfluenced by them in his actions. In

summary, he shows fairly typical characteristics of what would psychiatrically be called a severe character disorder. (295)

In this passage, Dr. Jones considers both positive and negative aspects of Dick's behavior in order to explain his personality and disorder. Dr. Jones uses the same structure when he evaluates Perry in the following passage:

Perry Smith shows definite signs of severe mental illness. His childhood, related to me and verified by portions of the prison records, was marked by brutality and lack of concern on the part of both parents. He seems to have grown up without any directions, without love, and without ever having absorbed any fixed sense of moral values...Two features in his personality make-up stand out as particularly pathological. The first is his 'paranoid' orientation toward the world. He is suspicious and distrustful of others, tends to feel that others discriminate against him, and feels that others are unfair to him and do not understand him. He is overly sensitive to criticism...and frequently may misinterpret well-meant communications...Akin to this first trait is the second, an ever-present, poorly controlled rage—easily triggered by any feeling of being tricked, slighted, or labeled inferior by others. For the most part, his rages in the past have been directed at authority figures—father, brother, Army sergeant, state parole officer—and have led to violent assaultive behavior on several occasions...When turned toward himself his anger has precipitated ideas of suicide...He has poor ability to organize his thinking, he seems unable to scan or summarize his thought, becoming involved and sometimes lost in detail, and some of his thinking reflects a 'magical' quality, a disregard of reality...He has had few close emotional relationships with other people...This emotional detachment and blandness in certain areas is other evidence of his mental abnormality. More extensive evaluation would be necessary to make an exact psychiatric diagnosis, but his present personality structure is very nearly that of a paranoid schizophrenic reaction. (298)

From Dr. Jones's evaluations, the reader can gain a professional perspective on the personality of the murderers and what has caused them to be deviant. In Dick's evaluation, Dr. Jones focuses on Dick's personality. In the second chapter of my thesis, I touched on Dick's apparently "normal" childhood. His deviance results less from his upbringing than from an innate condition. Dr. Jones explains that Dick is aware of his actions, but he does not learn from them. He also states that Dick feels "sexually

inadequate” compared to others, which could be associated with his sexual attraction to young girls. Although Dick blames his behavior on his car accident, he had behaved similarly prior to the event. Whether or not the accident caused Dick’s deviance, Dr. Jones’s evaluation leaves little doubt that he suffers from a disorder. In contrast, Jones focuses heavily on Perry’s childhood during which there was an absence of parental guidance and love. Because he was mentally and physically abused by his parents, Perry developed a grim outlook on life and on himself. Dr. Jones also concentrates on the relationships Perry has had with others, in which Perry is quick to expect others to misunderstand or betray him. Jones helps one see how Perry’s environment has shaped him to become a deviant.

In terms of language, too, the passages provided by Dr. Jones read differently than the rest of the text. “The Corner” is comprised of clinical language and includes less conversation than the reader experiences elsewhere. Jones provides the readers with clinical terms, such as “paranoid schizophrenic” and “severe character disorder” in order to diagnose Dick and Perry. These technical terms are not seen prior to this chapter because Capote is not a psychiatrist, so he is unable to diagnose Dick and Perry with an illness. Before introducing these terms, Jones presents the murderers’ actions and personality in order to explain how they fit into the two categories to which he has assigned them. For example, when describing Perry, Dr. Jones states that his rage is “easily triggered by any feeling of being tricked, slighted, or labeled inferior by others. For the most part, his rages in the past have been directed at authority figures—father, brother, Army sergeant, state parole officer—and have led to violent assaultive behavior on several occasions” (297). From this passage, the reader can see that Dr. Jones is being

precise and giving concrete details when explaining what triggers Perry's anger as well as against whom Perry directs his anger. By providing these details in terms that the reader can understand, Jones is able to illustrate how Dick suffers from "severe character disorder" and Perry as a "paranoid schizophrenic."

Another way that the doctor's language differs from Capote's is through the lack of dialogue. Not only is Jones presenting technical language that varies from Capote's, but his voice is the only one heard at this time. Dr. Jones provides his own interpretation of Perry and Dick across several pages. All of the material is quoted from him, so the reader is aware that Capote is not paraphrasing or interpreting Jones's psychiatric evaluations. For example, when Dr. Jones describes Dick, the reader knows who is talking and how knowledgeable Dr. Jones is of the killers. In the passage where Dr. Jones states, "[Dick] had a serious head injury with concussion and several hours of unconsciousness in 1950—this was verified by me by checking hospital records," the last phrase "this was verified by *me* by checking hospital records [italics added]" is new to the reader of *In Cold Blood*. Throughout the rest of the novel, Capote does not inform the reader of how he obtained information about Dick and Perry. However, in this passage Dr. Jones tells the reader specifically how he acquired this information, which enhances his credibility, and by association, the credibility of Capote. By analyzing the doctor's language, one can see how it differs from Capote's own style of writing and how Capote included techniques from different genres.

Within the last chapter, Capote not only includes clinical evaluations from Dr. Jones, but also details about the background and behaviors of other spree killers, such as George Ronald York, James Douglas Latham, and Lowell Lee Andrews. Because he

includes the stories of other murders and killers, Capote shows that the Clutter murders are not unique and that they are part of a larger anatomy of American crime.

One murderer that Capote pays particular attention to is Lowell Lee Andrews, who killed his family in hopes of inheriting his father's land. Andrews was a quiet, average eighteen-year-old boy who weighed three-hundred pounds and was a sophomore biology student at Kansas University. But he also possessed a second personality that was hidden from the rest of the world. His innermost dreams included the various ways he could kill his family. Inside Andrew was a criminal who wanted to wear "gangsterish silk shirts and drive scarlet sports cars; he wanted to be recognized as no mere bespectacled, bookish, overweight, virginal schoolboy" (312). From the background provided of Andrew, one can see that he was similar to Perry in that his deviance was produced by societal influences. Although Andrews's family was not as poor as Perry's and did not witness or suffer from physical and emotional abuse, his being a murderer meant that he would be seen differently by others. According to Andrews, he was doing what he had to in order to become a "cooler" person (313). He wanted wealth and materialistic things that are often associated with deviance and independence, which he most likely learned from the popular culture of the day. By describing several murderers and analyzing their motivations, Capote shows the larger context of American crime and how social pressures influence one to behave deviantly.

Ultimately, in order for Capote to create *In Cold Blood*, he had to produce the genre of the "nonfiction novel." The "nonfiction novel" permitted Capote to incorporate techniques from several genres, including fiction, literary nonfiction, journalism, clinical and psychological analyses, and criminal case studies. This complex mode of writing

allows Capote to demonstrate that deviance is a product of society, illustrated through Perry's character especially. The book leaves little doubt that his environment affected his personality and shaped him to be a dangerous deviant.

## Chapter 4

### Capote's Fascination with Perry

Thus far, I have discussed Dick as born deviant and Perry as a social product. Because Capote focuses on Perry, who is arguably the novel's protagonist, readers are more likely to remember and recognize his brand of deviance. Perry's behavior is also interesting to readers due to the fact that he was made into a monster through his experiences, environment, and society: a society that all American readers share, to some extent. Since Perry is a product of society, Capote manipulates the reader to sympathize with him. Although Capote confirmed that he represented each killer as they existed in real life, many critics have disagreed, arguing that Capote did not represent them accurately. Since most of the book is factual, the "real" information can easily be found by those willing to investigate.

One aspect of the novel that has attracted critical attention are the last words of Dick and Perry before their execution. Critics believe that Capote fabricated Perry's last words in order for the reader to empathize with Perry and view him in a more positive light. It would make sense that Capote would want the reader to feel bad for Perry, considering his portrait of Perry as a product of a harsh and often uncaring society. Before Dick is hanged, he shakes the hands of the men who were responsible for his capture and conviction and said, "I just want to say I hold no hard feelings. You people are sending me to a better world than this ever was" (339). My research suggests that these were indeed Dick's final words. However, after Dick's execution, Capote writes

that Perry stated, “It would be meaningless to apologize for what I did. Even inappropriate. But I do, I apologize” (340). When Perry suggests that his apology is “meaningless” and “inappropriate,” the reader might become sympathetic to him because he is acknowledging that the decisions he made were wrong and he knows that there is nothing he can do to bring the Clutters back. Nevertheless, he is sorry for his actions. By having Perry apologize during his last few breaths, the book leads the reader to believe that Perry truly regrets his actions. Some may even forgive him, believing that society is ultimately responsible for Perry’s actions.

Critic Jack De Bellis argues in his article, “Visions and Revisions: Truman Capote’s ‘In Cold Blood,’” that Capote was not accurate in his portrayal of characters in *In Cold Blood*, especially Perry. Bellis writes:

Witnesses at the execution offered different opinions about Smith’s last words. None of the other reporters, editors, or wire-service representatives recorded that Smith said, as Capote indicated, ‘I apologize.’ Detective Dewey told Tompkins he was unsure what Smith had said. Nor did he know how Capote got his information. And yet Capote told the scene through Dewey’s eyes, taking pride in his artistic ability to do so. But these witnesses agreed that Capote was out of earshot during Smith’s final words. Capote himself has said that during Smith’s last speaking moments all he could hear was ‘the roar of blood in my ears.’ Later Capote stated that Smith was ‘upset that he *didn’t* have any conscience’; elsewhere he noted that all multiple murderers he had ever interviewed admitted that ‘they couldn’t care less.’ Tompkin’s discovery that Smith’s pathetic plea for sympathy never occurred and Capote’s virtual admission that Smith did not feel the apology he records in *In Cold Blood* suggests that the revisions concerning Perry Smith contain the ‘poetic altitude fiction is capable of reaching’ rather than ‘the persuasiveness of fact.’ (Bellis 533)

In this passage, Bellis shares insights from others who were at the execution and who were in a closer proximity to Perry than Capote. He provides specifics in order to prove that Capote altered the character of Perry. Bellis believes that Capote’s “personal involvement” with Perry is the main reason for the numerous modifications to Perry’s



character in the novel (533). Bellis quotes Capote as saying that, “Perry was a character that was also in my imagination....[He] could absolutely [have stepped] right out of one of my stories” (533). From Bellis, we find Capote admitting that he could have created a character like Perry who could (and perhaps did) advance Capote’s artistic and social vision.

Another critic, Jon Tuttle, believes that some of Capote’s characters stemmed from Flannery O’Connor’s short story, “A Good Man is Hard to Find.” Tuttle compares both Dick and Perry to the Misfit in O’Connor’s story, arguing that the murderers from both stories kill a family for no apparent reason and believe that they are doing the family a “favor” by murdering them (194). O’Connor created her story twelve years before Capote wrote *In Cold Blood*, and Tuttle believes that Capote drew on her work in order to “enrich his own creative efforts” (194). From these two critics, one can see how Capote might have altered some of his characters in order to create a round character who was interesting and sympathetic in the eyes of the reader. Such a character would make the reader aware of how society creates deviance. Through the character of Perry, Capote shows how societal influences create deviance, as well as the tragic consequences.

Because Capote focuses most of his book on Perry, critics might question why Capote chose to end the novel with the Clutters’ gravestone instead of with the murderers. As I showed in an earlier chapter, most popular narratives of the 1950s utilized the technique of concluding stories, no matter how severe the obstacles presented, with a happy ending. Adhering to that model, Capote would have wanted to close the book with a happier ending than Perry’s execution. Although the novel bucks convention by ending at a graveyard, Capote leaves the reader with a sense of hope

through Nancy's old best friend, Susan Kidwell. The book concludes with Dewey and Susan conversing about their lives after the trial. Susan tells Dewey that she is studying art at the University of Kansas and that Nancy's old boyfriend, Bobby, has married a "beautiful girl" (342). Although the beginning of the book and the description of the murders and murderers is extremely grotesque, Capote leaves the reader with a bittersweet ending, reinforcing the idea that justice has been served and that life will find a way to move on.

Yet on a deeper level, another reason for ending the novel with the Clutters is to illustrate that while the America of the Clutters, Kidwells, and Rupps retains its comfort and security, that world is haunted. Dick and Perry wanted to be part of this America, and the Clutters wished to remain. But the tragic clash of these characters ultimately left them all dead and gone. The novel ends with Dewey walking away from the graveyard, "leaving behind him the big sky, [and] the whisper of wind voices in the wind-bent wheat" (343). By ending the story with what might be read as the voices of the dead, Capote suggests that America will continue to be haunted by the Clutters, Dick, Perry, and other murderers and families who have been killed. The graves are a reminder of the social tensions and tragedies that will emerge from a divided nation.

## Chapter 5

### Last Words

When I first started researching for my thesis, I was unsure how to begin or create a strong argument about *In Cold Blood*. I had an abundance of research, and I was not sure how I would link all of my findings together because they seemed to point in a number of directions. I have found that most of my argument derived from my reading literature contemporary with Capote's. I did not expect to read as many works as I did in order to prepare for my thesis, nor did I think that the words of other authors would help me with my argument. However, I found that the books I read, *Hiroshima*, *The Longest Day*, and *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit*, helped shape my argument about Capote's style and provided me with a strong foundation. After I read these works, I had a better understanding of how Capote was able to create the "nonfiction novel" and how *In Cold Blood* differed from the literature produced prior to 1965. As for other research, I looked at Capote's biographical information, newspaper articles of the Clutter murders, and theories from other critics.

If I had more time to research and write, I would include research from other fields. In my proposal, I initially thought that I would be able to include more aspects from cinema, journalism, behavioral science, and law; however, for the sake of keeping my thesis focused, I ultimately concentrated on the novel, other theorists, and the psychology presented in the novel. One idea that I think would be interesting, and that I might explore should I revise this work for graduate studies, is how the work's

interpretation varies from its film adaptations. It would be interesting to discover if the films of *In Cold Blood* reflect what Capote was trying to accomplish in his novel, and whether a close analysis of the films would prove to be rewarding. Also, I might look at whether the book led readers to call for changes to political and social measures, or for changes to welfare or the judicial system.

Every author has a purpose or intent for creating a piece of art. Capote was well aware of the popular culture of the 1950s and the literary world. When most critics discuss Capote, they discuss his creation of the “nonfiction novel.” However, I am just as interested in his focus on the deviancy of the killers. After reading the novel, I found that Capote focused most of his narrative on the character of Perry, and I wanted to explore this focus. My thesis argues that Capote was interested in Perry more than Dick because Perry was a deviant who was created by social expectations, poverty, and an abusive environment. Therefore, the novel employs Perry as a way to criticize society for its creation of social deviance. America is the victim of its own uncaring disposition.

In order to prove my interpretation, I analyzed the lives and language of both Dick and Perry and their obsession with the American dream. Although Dick and Perry had no personal motivation for targeting the Clutters, the family members had to pay for how conventional society treated Dick and Perry in the past. I used the term “two Americas” to illustrate a key point of my argument, the divide between the two groups of the novel: the Clutters and the murderers. The Clutters represent the “American dream” in that they are stable and a “normal” family, whereas Dick and Perry represent the other America marred by poverty, instability, and social deviance. By contrasting the “two

Americas,” I showed that differences in the home life, abuse, and neglect can affect one’s future—at least within the logic of the novel.

The next aspect of Dick and Perry that I focused on were their thoughts and motivations for the killing, which stemmed from their formative experiences. In this chapter, I analyzed their inner thoughts and language, and took their background into consideration. Dick was a pedophile and claimed his desires were caused by his car accident, but there is no proof that his accident caused his pedophilic tendencies. In contrast, Perry was greatly influenced by his childhood and home life. He suffered from nightmares, hallucinations, and emotional instability which caused him to lash out at others. From Dr. Jones’s psychological evaluations that Capote included, we learn via technical language that Perry was created by his society and what it denied him.

As a symbol of socially-created deviance, Perry is the key focus of Capote’s argument. Although Capote may have concentrated on the character of Perry because he was interested in his type of deviancy, Capote and Perry also had a close relationship. Capote saw himself in Perry because they both suffered from negative childhoods. Scholars have suggested that because of their similar pasts, Capote and Perry connected and became friends. While Perry was in jail, Capote would visit and write to him constantly. Capote was also the reason that Dick and Perry were able to receive numerous re-trials in which new juries were appointed. With the help of Capote, Perry wrote letters to the state confirming that the trial was unfair due to a biased jury and judge. One of Perry’s letters was accepted and a lawyer was appointed to Dick and Perry’s case so that they could have a fair trial without any prejudice.

In part because of the bond Capote and Perry shared, Capote manipulated the reader to empathize with Perry. He included all of the struggles that Perry faced throughout his life and altered some of Perry's language to make him seem more sympathetic. At the end of the novel, Capote goes so far as to have Perry apologize for the murders before his execution. All told, Capote built *In Cold Blood* around the character of Perry Smith because he found him to be a perfect, tragic example of the dark side of American life and the failures of the American dream. Without creating the "nonfiction novel," Capote would not have been able to include elements from journalism, fiction, nonfiction, and psychiatry. *In Cold Blood* reveals the extent to which innovations in literary genre can produce powerful social critiques.

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# **ACADEMIC VITA**

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## **Education**

B.A., English Literature, May 3, 2013, Penn State Erie, the Behrend College,  
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## **Research Interests**

I will attend the University of Pittsburgh where I will receive my Teaching Certification, Special Education Certification, and Master's Degree in Education.

Upon graduation, I am required to complete research. I plan to research different disabilities that I will encounter while teaching. For example, one disability I am interested in studying is autism. By researching autism, I will learn how to better accommodate students with special needs.