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The Aesthetic Function of the Document / The Documentary Value of Literature: Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*

In the context of literary accounts of true crime, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* (1965), a famous book about the Clutter family killings in Holcomb, Kansas, in 1959, stands out as a pioneering work with a powerful effect on readers, which results from the inscription of a factual story into literary conventions, both novelistic (emplotment, characterization, and focalization) and poetic (metaphorisation of discourse). The novel explores the disturbing social phenomena epitomized by the Clutter murder, and at the same time it highlights the mythical meaning of the crime described.

In Truman Capote's own words, his aim was to create a new art form by blending "the persuasiveness of fact" with "the poetic attitude fiction is capable of reaching" (Plimpton 3). His definitions of *In Cold Blood* reflect this ambivalent quality: "non-fiction novel," "creative reportage" are, in fact, oxymoronic concepts. However, such concepts echo the ideas that lay at the foundation of the British novel; as John Hollowell and Jerzy Durczak point out, the entire body of American nonfiction of the 1960s can be seen as a further development of the "combination of periodical journalism and storytelling" (Hollowell 33) that characterized Daniel Defoe's or Charles Dickens's literary techniques (Hollowell 33, Durczak 6). This paper aims to account for the status of Capote's book as an American literary landmark by examining the writer's ways of evoking the literary traditions first established by Defoe (empiricism) and Dickens (realism) and of creating the conjunctions between the real (a true murder case) and the fictive (storytelling). Thus, the paper addresses the question of the compatibility of the conventions of fiction and document. Additionally, it discusses the ways in which Capote inscribes the crime into a wider social context, depicting it as a symbolic case in American social history.

With regard to narrative presentation, *In Cold Blood* unfolds chronologically: the effect of the account's truthfulness derives in part from the presumption of the inherent trustworthiness of chronology. Since Capote's ambition was to prove "that journalism, reportage, could be forced to yield a serious new art form: the non-fiction novel" (Plimpton 1), *In Cold Blood* adheres to the journalistic method of documenting events, yet at the same time relies on plot structure following the realistic mode insofar as it contains

a clear exposition (“The Last to See Them Alive”), development (“Persons Unknown” and “Answer”), and resolution (“The Corner”). Capote chose to tell the story in the voice of the third-person extradiegetic narrator – a literary equivalent of the actual “new journalist” type of the all-knowing reporter, who, according to Tom Wolfe’s prescriptions for “saturation reporting,” should “saturate himself in a particular environment in order to record accurately the scenes and dialogues as they occur. The method frequently requires the reporter to follow his subject around for days or even months and years with a sensitivity to certain people and events and often to a special atmosphere” (Hollowell 32). Capote’s research for *In Cold Blood* lasted for six years, during which time he interviewed the relatives, friends and neighbors of the Clutter family, reconstructed the escape route of Hickock and Smith from the crime scene, but also, which was perhaps his greatest success, gained access to the murderers themselves (Hollowell 70). The variety of documents incorporated into the narrative is indeed impressive and can be divided into three groups. The first comprises legal documents, including witness testimonies and police info on the suspects, collected during the investigation. The second category contains personal documents, mostly letters and entries from diaries. The third group includes what might perhaps be called public documents, that is extracts from newspaper editorials on the crime.

The documents in Capote’s text function primarily as signifiers of the “real,” they are the evidence that the novel is a truthful reconstruction of an actual crime. Hence, Capote frequently abandons narratorial omniscience for the more authoritative personal insight into events and uses the documents as means of figural focalization, as when Mrs. Ashida recalls her last conversation with Herbert Clutter, Bobby Rupp relates his last meeting with Nancy Clutter, Susan Kidwell tells about herself and Bobby in the aftermath of the crime, Nancy Ewalt describes the horror of finding Nancy Clutter’s body, and Perry Smith recounts the details of the murder. In all these instances, Capote achieves the two aims of his new art form: while it is a novel because the documents constitute the novelistic strategy of focalization, this novel is nonfiction because all the cases of focalization are witness testimonies.

Capote introduces a distinction between the witnesses’ statements and the murderers’ testimonies in the novel: the former are integrated with the chronology of the actual events, the latter are retrospectively subordinated to the chronology of the plot. The difference between the two lies, therefore, in their respective temporal frames. Each testimony possesses a dual function: on the one hand, it is a document (spoken or written testimony presented to the investigator); on the other hand, it is a narrative (the witnesses’ version of events). In the case of witness testimony, the time frame of the document (the moment when a piece of information was conveyed the investigators) and the

time frame of the story contained in the document coincide. Capote's interest in the Clutter case was triggered by a newspaper article and "with an impulsiveness not untypical of him, Capote left New York for the Kansas plains with such haste that he reached his destination in time to witness the mass funeral of the murder victims" (Reed 102). Capote was collecting the documentary evidence at the time when the investigation was gaining momentum, hence the testimonies of the friends and neighbors of the Clutter family, as well as of the police investigators, are simultaneously the story of the crime. Yet, in the case of the murderers' testimonies, the temporal frame of these texts as documents is much later than the temporal frame of their narrative: the confessions of the murderers, as well as their diaries and letters would not be available to Capote until the trial. In his finished novel, Capote adopts a strategy of backdating the testimonies. Let us consider the use of quotations in the following fragment from the section "Persons Unknown":

Of course, Perry could have struck out on his own, stayed in Mexico, let Dick go where he damn well wanted. Why not? Hadn't he always been '*a loner*' and without any '*real friends*' (except the gray-haired, gray-eyed, and '*brilliant*' Willie-Jay)? But he was afraid to leave Dick; merely to consider it made him feel '*sort of sick*,' as though he were trying to make up his mind to '*jump of a train going ninety-nine miles an hour*.' The basis of his fear, or so he himself seemed to believe, was a newly grown superstitious certainty that '*whatever had to happen won't happen*' as long as he and Dick '*stick together*.' (124, italics mine)

The information about Perry's inability to leave Dick belongs, chronologically, to the stage of their escape in the immediate aftermath of the murder. In terms of speech representation, Capote uses free indirect discourse to convey Perry's thoughts. Yet, within this free indirect discourse, certain phrases are marked by inverted commas – they are singled out as quotations from Perry's conversations with Capote which belong to a period later than the events of the subplot wherein they are embedded in the book. Basically, we have three chronologies intertwined in the text: the extra-textual chronology of the real events as they happened, the extra-textual chronology of events as imagined by Capote (it should be remembered that he arrived in Holcomb in time for the funeral of the Clutter family and had no knowledge who and why had committed the murders), and finally the intra-textual chronology of events in the novel – the way the author constructs the temporal dimension of the plot. In Capote's fusion of these three chronologies, we see the blending of the "authentic" (journalistic account) and the "fictive" (narrative technique). Capote's technique may be defined as a reconstruction of the

chronology of the real events by way of the incorporation of the chronology of his own experience into the intra-textual plot chronology.

By choosing the realist mode, Capote inscribed an individual act in a social context; in general terms, the subject matter of the novel is the crisis of the American society in the late 1950s and early 60s. The crisis is presented in terms of confrontation of two distinct worlds: one represented by the Clutter family, and the other epitomized by Richard Hickock and Perry Smith. In accordance with the realist conventions, *In Cold Blood* commences with an introduction of the setting and the main protagonists. The setting is the village of Holcomb in Kansas. The description begins with a bird's-eye view of Holcomb, "an aimless congregation of buildings divided in the center by the main-line tracks of the Santa Fe Railroad, a haphazard hamlet bounded on the south by a brown stretch of the Arkansas River, on the north by highway, Route 50, and on the east and west by prairie lands and wheat fields" (3). The view subsequently switches to the main locations of the town: a former dance-hall, a former bank converted into a block of flats, the depot, the post office and the school. Finally, the reader is presented with a close-up of the Clutter house: the River Valley Farm is first described from the outside: "the handsome white house, standing on an ample lawn of groomed Bermuda grass," and then from the inside: "the liver-colored carpet," "the resounding floors," "an immense modernistic living-room couch" (9). This gradual narrowing down of the perspective, beginning with the landscape at large and ending with specific elements of a particular interior, follows the typical realist strategy of using "composite places and object systems" and creating a predetermined trajectory of description from landscape to town to district to home to room to furniture to menu to meal (Hamon 173).

The Clutters' house is primarily the authentic crime scene. Interestingly, when Capote worked with the makers of the film adaptation of his book, he insisted that the house be the location: "much of the Clutter furniture was still in home. Herbert Clutter's Stetson was perched on a hatrack. Nancy Clutter's sheet music remained open at the piano, and her brother Kenyon's glasses rested on a bureau" (Reed 117). Symptomatically, in the novel, the description of this authentic site is embedded in the novelistic conventions, which use spatial features as a means of social characterization. First, the presentation of the house defines the Clutter family as a typical Holcomb family: "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). Second, it signifies Mr. Clutter's superior social status in Holcomb: "[the house] had been built in 1948 for forty thousand dollars (The resale value was now sixty thousand dollars)" (9). There is an additional "semantic charging of space" (Jahn N6.5) insofar as the descriptions of both the landscape and the Clutter house foreshadow the events to follow. The narrator enu-

merates the “normal nightly Holcomb noises... the keening hysteria of coyotes, the dry scrape of scuttling tumbleweed, the racing, receding wail of locomotive whistles” (5), and all these sounds echo the sounds of the crime – the “hysteria” of the victims, the “scraping” of the murderers’ feet in the house, the “racing, receding wail” of their car as they were escaping. The interiors of the house are likewise marked by significant details: the “liver-colored carpet” (9), a hint that blood that will be shed, is a characteristic example of the way Capote selects seemingly neutral objects and places them in a context which endows them with ominous significance typical of the Gothic novel. Finally, if “representations of space should always be related to the story’s underlying narrative situation” (Jahn N6.6), Capote’s emphasis is on the divergence of place and event: “until one morning in mid-November of 1959, few Americans – in fact, few Kansans – had ever heard of Holcomb... drama, in the shape of exceptional happenings, had never stopped there” (5); “Mr. Clutter seldom encountered trespassers on his property... it was not a place that strangers came upon by chance” (13). In this way, Capote transforms the setting into an ideologically invested stage for the confrontation of social normality and social deviation, developed on the level of characters.

Herbert Clutter’s life story suits the paradigm of the American dream: his forefathers immigrated to America from Germany in 1880, and ultimately changed their name from Klotter to the more American-sounding “Clutter” (6). Herbert, a farmer’s son, started out as a simple assistant to the Finney County agricultural agent in 1934. After “just seven months” he got promoted:

the years during which he held the post – 1935-1939 – encompassed the dustiest, the down-and-outest the region had known since white men settled there, and young Herb, having, as he did, a brain expertly racing with the newest in streamlined agricultural practices, was quite qualified to serve as middleman between the government and the despondent farm ranchers. (11)

One should note the explicit association of Herbert with the American pioneer in this passage, followed by the “rags to riches” story. After resignation from the post, Herbert Clutter “on land leased with borrowed money, created in embryo, River Valley Farm,” the success of which was much doubted by “Finney County conservatives” (11); yet “after a decade Mr. Clutter’s domain consisted of over eight hundred acres owned outright and three thousand more worked on rental basis” (12). In addition to the success story, there is a tale of the (almost) happy family, with daughter Nancy, the “the town darling” (7), who was a perfect housekeeper and a perfect student, and son Kenyon, fascinated with inventions “the newest of which was an electric deep-dish frying pan” (38).

The only serious tension in the apparently model family is caused by Bonnie Clutter, who suffers from depression. By juxtaposing the images of young Bonnie, “the only daughter of a prosperous wheat grower.... The adored sister of three older brothers, she had not been spoiled but spared, led to suppose that life was a sequence of agreeable events” (26) and Bonnie in her later years, marked by the constant “mood of misery... that lingered like a cloud that might rain or might not” (27), Capote transfigures an authentic person into a recognizable literary type, an unbalanced woman reminiscent of Tennessee Williams’s Blanche from *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). Another interesting parallel can be established through a reference to Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie*. On the one hand, Bonnie Clutter has a lot in common with Amanda Wingfield as an ageing belle, but on the other, in her invalid state, she resembles crippled Laura Wingfield, not to mention her attachment to her “doll-house teacups, anchored to a diminutive tray” (26). This is an emblem of her nostalgia for the past, bringing to mind Laura’s glass figurines, the sign of her remoteness from real life.

The murderers seem to occupy the opposite side of the social spectrum. They emerge as “others” who unthinkingly and ruthlessly destroy a peaceful family life. Their “otherness” is initially suggested by their appearance:

the imperfectly aligned features [of Dick’s face] were the outcome of a car collision in 1950 – an accident that left his long-jawed and narrow face tilted, the left side rather lower than the right, with the results that the lips were slightly aslant, the nose askew, and his eyes not only situated at uneven levels but of uneven size, the left eye being truly serpentine, with venomous, sickly-blue squint that although it was involuntarily acquired, seemed nevertheless to warn of bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature.... Perry, too, had been maimed, and his injuries, received in a motorcycle wreck, were severer than Dick’s; he had spent half a year in a State of Washington hospital and another six months on crutches, and though the accident had occurred in 1952, his chunky, dwarfish legs, broken in five places and pitifully scarred, still pained him so severely that he had become an aspirin addict. (31)

The imperfections in their appearance are the consequences of accidents, thus signifying the authentic, yet the narrator imposes a literary interpretation: Dick’s squint is “venomous,” which reflects the “bitterness” of his nature, while Perry’s dwarfish posture is seen as bespeaking general freakishness. This type of characterization harks back to the realist and naturalist novels which, in order to achieve absolute “transparency of meaning,” would “strive to reduce the imbalance that exists between the being and the appearance of objects and characters” (Hamon 178). Capote’s preliminary conventional opposition

between the “perfect” family and the “evil” murderers centers primarily on Herbert Clutter and Perry Smith. In the course of Mr. Clutter’s characterization, it is mentioned that “he touched neither coffee or tea [for breakfast], he was accustomed to begin the day on a cold stomach” (10). When introducing Perry, the narrator states “like Mr. Clutter, the young man breakfasting in a café called the Little Jewel never drank coffee” (14). This comparison is a primary narrative manipulation – by means of the single word “like,” Capote creates a frame for presenting a multi-faceted confrontation between Clutter and Smith. They constitute two extremes in terms of the development of individual personalities: Herbert Clutter was a loved child and became a loving husband and father, Perry was a misfit and sociopath with a personal history of victimization in the orphanage, school and army. Hence their contrasting psychological profiles: the former is a realist-dreamer who realizes a progressive agricultural project, the latter is a fantasy-dreamer who collects maps of and books about foreign places, longing for the adventure “of drifting downward through strange waters, of plunging toward... a Spanish galleon – a drowned cargo of diamonds and pearls, heaping caskets of gold” (17). They are racial opposites: Herbert is a white Protestant, while Perry has native ancestry, his mother having been “a full-blooded Cherokee” (16), as much as social opposites: the farmer belongs to the comfortably-off middle class, and the criminal is a jobless delinquent. In presenting the facts of the homicide through the prism of the opposition of the two social spheres represented by Herbert Clutter and Perry Smith, Capote accomplishes the didactic aim of the realist novel, as formulated by Guy de Maupassant:

[whereas] life leaves everything on the same level, precipitates things or lets them drag on indefinitely, [Art] by contrast, consists of invoking precautions and preparations, of setting up clever and hidden transitions, of fully illuminating, simply by the skill of composition, the essential events and giving all the others the degree of prominence they deserve according to their importance in order to produce the profound sensation of the special truth one wants to know. (47)

Capote focuses on Perry because he wants to convey a message about the social reality; for the same reason, he disregards Hickock who, unlike Perry, had a stable family background. Hickock’s unthinking ruthlessness contrast with Smith’s guilty conscience after the killing or his repulsion at sexual molestation. Hickock has a “bitter sediment at the bottom of his nature,” thus his off-putting looks reflect an internal flaw of character, whereas Smith’s freakish, childlike appearance is an external defect, a consequence of injuries inflicted on him by the family, army and church. In the light of the family theme,

Smith's life is an illustration of one of the traditional plots of realist fiction where the absence of the father determines the character's criminal proclivity.

Whereas realist writers gave their characters names reflecting certain personal features or social properties, Capote seems to have encountered a case which, with respect to meaningful names, virtually conforms to the realist pattern of narrative presentation. For instance, "Hickock" onomatopoeically resembles "hiccup" which denotes, among others, a slight problem. More significantly, "Clutter" and "Smith" trigger off a chain of subversive connotations. On the one hand, the name "Clutter" is very ominous, as this word may be used to describe bodies lying about in a heap. Furthermore, "clutter" also means "assemblage" and "confusion," this combination of terms suggesting Herbert Clutter's mistaken existential priorities. The Clutter family stand for Protestant values, while Mr. Clutter alone is "all work" and his wife is "all religion." As Diana Trilling points out, Herbert Clutter "was a man without connection with his inner self, living by forced intention, by conscious design, programmatically, rather than by happy disposition of natural impulse" (258-259). Herbert is the product of the course of American history which started as a religious project and subsequently underwent far-reaching secularization. In turn, Bonnie Clutter embodies the other extreme: she lives a spiritual life without hard work, which proves detrimental to her condition. Together, they epitomize America's decay at the very roots of society and culture. Paradoxically, Perry Smith, with his common surname signifying "everyman," stands for a corresponding phenomenon of social disintegration.

The meaningful names illustrate the interlacement of several narrative levels in Capote's novel: journalistic documentation, realist presentation, and mythopoeic structure. This combination is discernible not only in the overall textual macrocosm, but also in the microcosms constituted by smaller descriptive units. For example, from the introductory description of Herbert Clutter one learns about his teeth, "unstained and strong enough to shatter walnuts," his weight "a hundred and fifty-four," his height "just under five foot ten," and his finger "once mangled by a piece of farm machinery" (6). Such details could perhaps be found in a coroner's post mortem, especially the teeth and the finger as distinguishing physical marks. In other words, this description sounds like a literary act of resurrecting the dead; Capote speaks of the protagonist as if the latter were already a corpse. The same strategy is adopted in the presentation of the other family members, who are shown as victims at the points in narrative time when they are still alive: "Tonight, having dried and brushed her hair... she set out the clothes she intended to wear to church the next morning; nylons, black pumps, a red velveteen dress – her prettiest, which she herself had made. It was the dress in which she was to be buried" (56). In this way Capote produces the effect of overlapping temporal planes and images: the past and

the present, Nancy alive and Nancy dead. This admittedly morbid method allows Capote to establish an authentic context – the level of the “real” (the Clutters portrayed as victims). It is upon this level that he imposes the level of the “realistic,” arranging the facts about the family in such a way as to depict them as social types, which echoes the conventions of the realistic novel. Finally, the third level is the mythical, accomplished through metaphorization. On the last day of his life, Herbert Clutter goes out to “examine the morning”:

It was the ideal apple-eating weather; the whitest sunlight descended from the purest sky, and an easterly wind rustled, without ripping loose, the last of the leaves on the Chinese elms. Autumns reward western Kansas for the evils that the remaining seasons impose: winter’s rough Colorado winds and hip-high, sheep-slaughtering snows; the slushes and the strange land fogs of spring; and summer, when even crows seek the puny shade, and the tawny infinitude of wheatstalks bristle, blaze. (10-11)

Mr. Clutter seems to be visiting the temple of nature, with nature being both pure and harsh, innocent and destructive. Nature is described as the meeting ground of life and death: the autumn is the season when the process of decay begins, an omen for Mr. Clutter who virtually stands on the threshold of death. Capote transforms the authentic Kansas landscape into a mythical space delimited by the earthly profanity and the heavenly sacredness.

The recurring image in the first section of the novel is the sky: it is mentioned in the very first paragraph: “the countryside, with its hard blue skies and desert-clear air” (3). When Mr. Clutter walks out in the morning, he sees “the purest sky” with “the whitest sunlight” (10). Elsewhere, Mr. Helm sees Kenyon and Nancy for the last time: “The chill of oncoming dusk shivered through the air, and though the sky was still deep blue, lengthening shadows emanated from the garden’s tall chrysanthemum stalks” (40). Finally, when Mr. Erhart burns the blood-stained clothes and carpets, he wonders “How was it possible that such effort, such plain virtue, could overnight be reduced to this – smoke, thinning as its rose and was received by the big, annihilating sky?” (79). The sky, described through meaningful qualifiers that explore the symbolism of the colors blue and white (see Chevalier 102-103, 1105), becomes an emblem of the duality of existence where life and death are irrevocably intertwined; at the same time, the sky is the “supraterrestrial” realm above the earth, the domain of fate, the “annihilating sky” which strikes blindly at the Clutter family. Interestingly, the question asked by Erhart echoes the ponderings that may be found in some naturalist texts, notably in Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat,” where the possibility of drowning is seen by the characters as the

injustice of fate (Crane 735). Mr. Clutter's achievements ultimately amount to nothing: to paraphrase the words of Crane's famous poem, the fact that Clutter existed did not create a sense of obligation in the universe. As Hollowell notes, "[Capote's] account invites us to see the fates of the Clutters, like the destinies of Smith and Hickock, as a contemporary tragedy about which we know very little and over which we have so little control" (86).

In Cold Blood is so compelling a narrative in part because, to use Aristotle's differentiation, Capote relies on the dramatic "showing," instead of the epic "telling"; in other words, the narrative comprises a succession of dynamically alternating subplots. According to some critics, Capote's method owes a lot to cinematic techniques: "[Capote] uses intercutting of different story strands, intense close ups, flashbacks, traveling shots, background detail, all as if he were fleshing out a scenario" (Hollowell 69). Capote's idea of a neutral description without authorial commentary reflects the principles of camera-eye narration. He strives to achieve the effect of simultaneity through the occasional use of the present-tense: "Dewey is driving the lead car, Perry Smith sits beside him, and Duntz is sitting in the back seat. Smith is handcuffed" (232).

The apparent neutrality of camera-eye narration is perhaps best seen in the parts where the narrator's role is limited to quoting dialogue and narrating events by means of active verbs. In other words, camera-eye narration is essentially conterminous with the external and impersonal focalization. Characteristically, Capote frequently abandons neutrality for the sake of dramatic suspense. The emotional impact of Capote's text derives from what might be called plot disjointment, which in turn creates the conditions for, to use a dramatic term, the superior audience awareness. In the part entitled "The Last To See Them Alive," the subsections about the Clutters are interwoven with smaller narrative units showing Perry Smith and Richard Hickock on their way to Holcomb:

They left the highway, sped through a deserted Holcomb, and crossed the Santa Fe tracks. 'The bank, that must be the bank, now we turn west – see the trees? This is it, this has to be it.' The headlights disclosed a lane of Chinese elms; bundles of wind-blown thistle scurried across it. Dick doused the headlights, slowed down, and stopped until his eyes were adjusted to the moon-illuminated night. Presently, the car crept forward. (57)

Capote uses here a series of active verbs, all of them neutrally conveying the car movement, except for the meaningful last phrase "crept forward," which evokes an unusual association so as to create an eerie atmosphere. The dramatic quality of this phrasal verb resides in the reader's knowledge of the subsequent events. Superior awareness endows seemingly casual statements and innocent facts with a sense of tragic anticipation.

The second part of the novel, entitled “Persons Unknown,” describes the beginning of the investigation simultaneously with the murderers’ escape. Capote plays with the meaning of the phrase “persons unknown”; Dewey meditates “how two individuals could reach the same degree of rage, the kind of psychopathic rage it took to commit such a crime.... It doesn’t add up. It doesn’t make sense. But then, come right down to it, nothing does” (83), while the reader receives a detailed account of Perry’s past. Thus, whereas Perry is a “person unknown” to Dewey, he becomes someone familiar to the reader. Capote’s shifts of perspective from the story of the investigators to that of the murderers places the reader in a morally ambivalent position where the reader acquires the knowledge of facts which remain unknown to the detectives. The reader is the first to hear Smith and Hickock’s confession. The narrator and the reader form an alliance, sharing the kind of omniscience which is unattainable to the characters.

When writing about the details of the murder, Capote often uses witness focalization instead of omniscient narration, primarily because third-person impersonal relation would reduce the crime to its sensational aspect. Varied focalization filters the murder through a complex of highly emotional reactions. For example, Larry Hendricks’s testimony shows how the macabre crime become a part of a personal experience: “That wonderful girl - but you would never have known her. She’d been shot in the back of the head with a shotgun held maybe two inches away. She was lying on her side, facing the wall, and the wall was covered in blood” (62). Due to the form of presentation, this personal statement acquires the quality of documentary authenticity. Interestingly, in the very description of the murder, based on Perry’s confession, Capote uses overlapping focalization and combines Perry’s and Dewey’s points of view:

Dewey’s ears ring with [the noise of the shotguns] – a ringing that almost deafens him to the whispery rush of Perry’s soft voice. But the voice plunges on, ejecting a fusillade of sounds and images.... Kenyon’s head in a circle of light, the murmur of muffled pleadings.... Nancy’s room, Nancy listening to boots on hardwood stairs, Nancy’s eyes, Nancy watching the flashlight’s shine seek the target (‘She said, ‘Oh, no!, Oh, please. No !No! No! Don’t! Oh, please don’t! Please!’ ...); the dark hall, the assassins hastening toward the final door. Perhaps, having heard all she had, Bonnie welcomed their swift approach.... The crime was a psychological accident, virtually an impersonal act; the victims might as well have been killed by lightening. Except for one thing: they had experienced prolonged terror, they had suffered. And Dewey could not forget their sufferings. (245-246)

Importantly, the strategy of filtering the events through a subjective consciousness in order to induce the readers’ empathy dates back to the origins of the realist novel.

Capote's combination of two epistemological discourses – journalistic and novelistic – raises a plethora of questions, for instance about the construction of an impersonal narrative, which was the writer's declared aim:

My feeling is that for the nonfiction-novel form to be entirely successful, the author should not appear in the work. Ideally. Once the narrator does appear, he has to appear throughout, all the way down to the line, and the I-I-I intrudes when it really shouldn't. I think the single most difficult thing in my book, technically, was to write it without ever appearing myself, and yet, at the same time, create total credibility. (Plimpton 7)

The prerequisite for impersonality is the narrator's covertness, the principle undermined by Capote's use of quotation marks for the inclusion of documentary evidence, which discloses the presence of the interrogator. Furthermore, Capote's narrator leaves his traces all the instances of prolepsis, visibly marked by brackets. Narratorial presence manifests itself in the cases of paralepsis, understood as "an infraction caused by saying too much; a narrator assuming a competence he/she does not properly have" (Jahn N3.3.15). Last but not least, the use of figurative language is a sign of the narrator's discursive presence.

Guy de Maupassant coined the term "illusionism" to define the conventions of the realist novel, which translates the chaos of life into a pattern of causal relations (47). For Capote, there seems to be no conflict between truthfulness and literariness: "You can say that the reportage is incomplete. But then it has to be. It's a question of selection, you wouldn't get anywhere if it wasn't for that... I make my own comment by what I choose to tell and how I choose to tell it" (Plimpton 7). Such a conception allows for manipulating the documentary material, like in instances where accuracy is abandoned for the sake of suspense. The testimonies quoted in the book are not only coherent and well-accomplished pieces of narration, but they also usually have intensely dramatic conclusions.

One might conjecture that Capote's flamboyant personality undermined the allegedly impersonal account. Capote belongs to the generation of American journalists who in the 1960s changed the character of the profession, striving to attract the public attention to their own opinions, experiences, achievements. As Hollowell puts it, Capote's appearances on TV talk-shows or quarrels with other writers helped him to accomplish "an artful cultivation of his public image" (55). Not only did Capote publicly promote *In Cold Blood*, but he also revealed his methods in the famous 1966 interview conducted by George Plimpton, "The Story Behind a Nonfiction Novel." Endlessly hovering over the

boundary between fact and fiction, reality and literature, authorial selflessness and self-concern, the book raises questions about the capacity of existing literary conventions to come to grips with the most challenging aspects of human nature and social reality. Paradoxically enough, in interrogating the journalistic as well as novelistic conventions of representing the reality, *In Cold Blood* attests to the relevance of both types of conventions.

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